

**ROMANS
&
GALATIANS**

by

Rousas John Rushdoony

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1. Introduction

To write about Paul's letter to the Romans is not an easy responsibility, and I have delayed it for many years. When I wrote the *Institutes of Biblical Law*, I had kept my convictions in some abeyance for many years. This was not for lack of any belief in the validity of the law. As an Armenian whose family background was in a very old and conservative part of Van Province, I grew up into an acceptance of God's law as man's way of life. I have always found it strange that people who call themselves Christians can be so casual in dismissing God's law. Diet is a minor aspect of the law, but even here God calls the unclean animals an *abomination*, i.e., filth, a religiously banned, abhorred and idolatrous thing. However, I waited many years before writing on the law.

I have been no less certain that the meaning of *Romans* has only been scratched heretofore, but I have waited until I have aged more than a little before saying so. I do *not* disagree with the liberating power of the Reformation interpretation, but I believe that it provides simply the beginning of our understanding of *Romans*, not its conclusion. I have waited many years, because time often (and, hopefully in my case) gives more understanding, learning, and patience, and I trust I have gained, by God's grace, a measure of these.

The great problem in the church's interpretation of Scripture has been its ecclesiastical orientation, as though God speaks only to the church, and commands only the church. The Lord God speaks in and through His word to the whole man, to every man, and to every area of life and thought. The Bible is God's word for man in his family life, in church, state, school, business, the arts and sciences, law, economics, politics, and all things else. We cannot claim to affirm God's sovereignty, or believe in the lordship of Jesus Christ, if we limit God's word to the church. This is box theology, and it is blasphemous. To assume that the triune Creator of all things is in His word and Person only relevant to the church is to deny His lordship or sovereignty.

If we turn loose the whole word of God onto the church and the world, we shall see with joy its power and glory. This is the purpose of my brief comments on *Romans*.

2. Paul The Ambassador (Romans 1:1-7)

In his introduction to Luther's *Lectures on Romans*, Hilton C. Oswald remarked, "The one chief topic of Romans for Luther is 'The righteousness of God,' that is, the righteousness by which God makes sinners righteous through faith in Jesus Christ."¹ To prepare ourselves for all that *the righteousness of God* means, it is important to remind ourselves of Girdlestone's comment on the meaning of *righteousness*:

It is unfortunate that the English language should have grafted the Latin word *justice*, which is used in somewhat of a forensic sense, into a vocabulary which was already possessed of the good word *righteousness*, as it tends to create a distinction which has no existence in Scripture. This quality indeed may be viewed, according to Scripture, in two lights. In its relative aspect it implies conformity with the line or rule of God's law; in its absolute aspect it is the exhibition of love to God and to one's neighbor, because love is the fulfilling of the law; but in neither of these senses does the word convey what we usually mean by justice. No distinction between the claims of justice and the claims of love is recognized in Scripture; to act in opposition to the principles of love to God and one's neighbor is to commit an injustice, because it is a departure from the course marked out by God in His law.²

Girdlestone is right, but there is a problem with the use of *righteousness* also; its meaning has been limited to ecclesiastical doctrines and considerations, so that men forget that righteousness means justice, justice which must govern every area of life and thought, God's justice.

Paul begins his letter to the Romans with this salutation:

1. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,
 2. (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures),
 3. Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;
 4. And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:
 5. By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:
 6. Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:
 7. To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (Rom. 1:1-7)

¹ Hilton C. Oswald: introduction to *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, p. x1. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972

² Robert B. Girdlestone: *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 101. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans (1897), 1976.

Paul uses two words of self-description: *doulos*, servant, and *apostolen*, apostleship. *Doulos* has reference to bondage, to slavery. He was fully subordinate to someone else. Paul thus begins by declaring that he is the property and possession of Jesus Christ. The slave, however, sometimes had a very high status if his master were of an exalted station. The emperor's slaves at times married important freeborn women, because such a slave often held an administrative position of power and with economic security. He was less subject to problems than a freeborn administrator, because he was by ownership a lesser member of the imperial family.³ Paul in declaring himself to be the servant or slave of Jesus Christ, tells us that he is God's property, and also that he is a member of the household of "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). There is another factor: slaves in Rome were normally taken captive in wars; Paul had been taken prisoner on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-22).

Paul also speaks of his apostleship. An apostle is an envoy or an ambassador, and Paul declares that by God's grace, he is an apostle. Paul thus stresses his credentials. He is the family bondservant or slave of Jesus Christ, and also His ambassador. As Luther noted, because Paul is the servant of "such a great Lord he is to be received with the same reverence as if he were Christ Himself."⁴ Paul says what he does is in terms of Luke 10:16, our Lord's declaration, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

There is no false humility about Paul: he knows his commission and authority in Christ. In v. 9, Paul says, "For God is my witness," or, as Luther noted, "His is the role of a sworn deponent;" God Himself testifies to Paul's credentials.⁵ This, as Calvin noted, was an oath, and, as he added, "For since an oath is nothing else but an appeal to God as to the truth of what we declare, most foolish is it to deny that the Apostle used here an oath."⁶

What Paul sets forth concerning himself must be noted. The apostles were inspired by God, and, as religious teachers setting down the word of the Lord, infallible (John 14:26; 16:13). They could work miracles (Matt. 10:8, Acts *passim*). By the laying on of hands, they could communicate power to others (Acts 9:15, 17, 18; 19:6). They ordained pastors and exercised a general jurisdiction over the churches (Acts 14:23, etc.; 1 Cor. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 10:6, 8, 11; 1 Tim. 1:20).⁷

³ Sarah B. Pomeroy: *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity*, p. 196. New York, New York: Schocken Books, 1975.

⁴ Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 3. J. Theodore Mueller, translator. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 53. John Owen translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

God's calling of Paul is "concerning his Son" (v. 3). "This is the Gospel."⁸ Paul in these few verses tells us much about Jesus Christ: He is the Son of God, yet also a descendant of the royal Davidic line "according to the flesh." That phrase, "according to the flesh," makes clear that Jesus Christ has two natures, human and divine. Paul writes with a knowledge of the virgin birth, but he stresses the great, shattering fact that none could cope with, Christ's resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was God's attestation of Christ's deity and office. Jesus was David's Son "according to the flesh"; He was the divine Son of God "according to the Spirit of holiness" (vv. 3-4).

Hodge gave us a clear sense of the meaning of "the obedience of faith" in v. 5:

The obedience of faith is that obedience which consists in faith, or of which faith is the controlling principle. The design of the apostleship was to bring all nations so to believe in Christ the Son of God that they should be entirely devoted to his service.⁹

Precisely. For Paul, God's justice is cosmic in scope; to affirm that the "just shall live by faith" (Heb. 2:4; Rom. 1:17) is to declare that all men and nations have a duty and an obligation to live in terms of God's righteousness or justice. Paul says in effect, "We have received a mission among all nations."¹⁰ It is "obedience to the faith among all nations" (v. 5).

This, Paul adds, applies to you who are in Rome, "the called of Jesus Christ" (v. 6). They belong to Christ because He has called them. The word *called* sets forth sovereign choice. It echoes John 15:16, where our Lord says,

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Paul, the called and chosen ambassador and household servant, declares here that the *called* believers, i.e., those called of God rather than self-willed, are also of the imperial household of the Great King of kings, Jesus Christ. To all such, he brings grace and peace from the throne.

All this is a prelude to the great affirmation, *the just shall live by faith*. It is here that the great roadblock to an understanding of Romans is to be found. Luther's words are a necessary starting-point as he declares:

⁷ See Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 2. New York, New York: S.C. Armstrong, 1893.

⁸ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian looks at Romans*, p. 22. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

⁹ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 30f.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

The righteousness of God is the cause of our salvation. This righteousness, however, is not that according to which God Himself is righteous as God, but that by which we are justified by Him through faith in the Gospel. It is called the righteousness of God in contradistinction to man's righteousness which comes from works. This human righteousness of works Aristotle clearly describes in the third book of his *Ethics*. According to his view, righteousness follows man's works, and is brought about by them; God's judgement, however, is different, for according to it righteousness (*justification*) precedes works and good works grow out of it.¹¹

All this is true, but it places a serious limitation on the text. Scripture does *not* say, in *Habakkuk* or in *Romans* that the just are *saved* by faith, but, rather, that they *live* by faith. The word *live* is broader and more inclusive. Very clearly, it includes, and in its plain implication, begins with salvation, but it includes much, much more. Luther reduced the meaning or here limited his text to mean salvation when it means far more, and he limited the meaning of righteousness or justice to justification. Justification and salvation are the starting point and are clearly meant as such. Paul says that the justified do more: they *live* by faith. By limiting this sentence to mean that it refers only to being saved, we get the John 3:16 preaching, which only preaches for conversion but not for sanctification, dominion, and the totality of life.

By stressing God's sovereign grace in man's justification and salvation, the Reformation was a great liberating force. As, however, later theologians more and more restricted Romans 1:17 to salvation, Protestantism has become a retreating and restrictive movement. It has fallen into pietism, limited the meaning of the Great Commission, and lost its relevance to the world around us.

Paul wrote this letter as the apostle or ambassador of Jesus Christ, the King of Creation. To confine its meaning to the church is to misread it.

¹¹. Luther, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

3. “The Just Shall Live By Faith” (Romans 1:8-17)

8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.
9. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;
10. Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.
11. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;
12. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.
13. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.
14. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.
15. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.
16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.
17. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:8-17)

The personal comments in the preface to *Romans* are longer than in most of Paul's letters. It is necessary to ask why Paul took time to speak about the church in Rome, and his desire to minister to the believers there. Paul had not yet been in Rome, i.e., as a Christian. He says of this church “that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (v. 8). We must take Paul seriously here. Rome was the capital of the empire, and hence Christians of an important status could carry no small influence on imperial policies. We know from Philippians 4:22 that there were more than a few believers in “Caesar's household.” The word “household,” *oika* in the Greek, refers not merely to the dwelling but to the members thereof. The likelihood is that these were important officers of the emperor. Clearly, Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:2) were merchants of wealth and note. We meet them in Acts 18:1-3,26, in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul, writing from Philippi apparently, sends greetings to the Corinthians from this couple; and they appear again in 2 Timothy 4:19. More could be said about the believers in Rome. It is sufficient to take Paul's word for it that their faith had attracted widespread attention.

For this reason, Paul felt that it was urgently necessary that he have the opportunity to minister to the Christians in Rome, to strengthen their faith

and to increase their understanding, “to the end that ye may be established” (v. 11).

The believers in Rome were both Jews and Gentiles. They included both “the wise, and ...the unwise” (v. 14), and Paul acknowledges his debt to all. As one who first was a persecutor of the faith, he had, as he came into the church, been blessed and instructed by a variety of men. He is thus their “debtor” now discharging his debt by his ministry. Hence his eagerness to preach in Rome.

“The gospel of Christ” (v. 16) “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.” The word translated as “power” is *dunamis*. As Mills commented:

The word for “power” in the Greek means omnipotent power — strength, energy, authority. It is so used in Matthew 26:64, Luke 22:69 and Mark 14:62. It also means miraculous power, and it is so used in Mark 5:30, Luke 1:35, and in many other places. The word is also translated “miracle” in Matthew 11:20, 21 and elsewhere.¹

The gospel manifests this power “to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (v. 16). The Jew knew the power first of all: it came to him first. We must remember that, by the end of the first century, according to some estimates, there were about half a million Christians within the Roman Empire, and very many of these were Jews. The Jewish influence long remained in the church; well into what we call the medieval era, some popes and bishops were from Jewish families. While Judea officially rejected the Christ, many Jews did not. Because of their background in God’s law, they, as Christians, began with a very great advantage and a moral superiority. However, Paul adds, the power of God now works in the non-Jewish world also.

This power is from “faith to faith” (v. 17). Earlier, Paul says it is “to every one that believeth” (v. 16). The first reference is to *persons*; “from faith to faith” is an abstraction to stress the necessary gift in the person. Although faith only exists in a person, Paul abstracts faith from the person to stress the fact that it is a supernatural power in us which works in others.²

This righteousness or justice of God which is so revealed is that “the just shall live by faith” (v. 17). The use of the word “righteousness,” *dikaïosune* in the Greek, is startling and also important. The natural expectation of anyone reared in evangelical theology is that Paul would say that, not the righteousness but the *grace* of God is revealed in His sentence, The just shall live by faith. Clearly, this salvation is called *justice*, although it is all of grace. It is justice in two very important senses. *First*, it is justice because the

¹ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 35f. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

² R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 78. Columbus, Ohio: Wurtburg Press, 1945.

fact of our salvation is made possible by Christ's atoning death as our substitute. We as sinners were under the penalty of death, but Christ's vicarious sacrifice redeemed us. Justice therefore requires our release as members of Christ and our inclusion in His new humanity. Our salvation is both an act of grace and the full satisfaction of justice. *Second*, it was a covenant act. In a covenant, both parties swear to be faithful unto death to the terms of the covenant, to the law or justice, or righteousness, of the covenant. Man broke the covenant law, thereby incurring the death penalty, but God was faithful to the covenant, and hence the fact of John 3:16: the Lord God gave God the Son to be our substitute, to satisfy the covenant requirement of faithfulness and death. As very man of very man, Christ took upon Himself our death penalty. As very God of very God, He demonstrated His faithfulness to the covenant unto death.

Therefore, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). Habakkuk 2:4 says, "The just shall live by his faith." In Galatians 3:11, Paul makes clear that no man can do what Christ did; the sinner cannot produce righteousness or justice: "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith." In Philippians 3:9, Paul stresses the fact that our own righteousness or justice cannot save us; as sinners, we cannot be faithful to God's law. We are saved "through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." This makes clear the meaning of "from faith to faith" in Romans 1:17; it is from the faith manifested by the incarnate one, Jesus Christ, which is communicated to us.

In Hebrews 10:38, the use of "the just shall live by faith" has reference to sanctification. In *all* these instances, the word is *live*, not *be saved*; it is thus more inclusive. We must remember also, as I pointed out in *Salvation and Godly Rule*, that the very word salvation is inclusive of far more than simply being assured of heaven; it means health and victory, here and now and forever more.

Luther, in his commentary, declared, "The righteousness of God is the cause of our salvation."³ This is most emphatically true, but we cannot limit the meaning of Romans 1:17 to justification. It is justification and more.

In 1520, Luther wrote "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate." The letter was an attack on the papacy, and Luther in particular concentrated at one point on the papal states: "The pope should restrain himself, take his finger out of the pie, and claim no title to the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily. He has exactly as much right to that kingdom as I have, and yet he wishes to be its overlord."⁴ With this statement we can agree, but not with a

³. Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 25. J. Theodore Mueller translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

preceding conclusion: "How can a man rule an empire and at the same time continue to preach, pray, study and care for the poor?"⁵ These words are not in conformity with Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Why should a man not be able to rule a realm and at the same time be able to preach, pray, study and care for the poor? If the just shall live by faith, they will manifest that faith in every legitimate calling. Civil authorities, according to Paul, are God's ministers (Romans 13:1ff.). This is no small calling, and it is a calling because the justified man, in whatever station he may be, must live by faith. Our Lord declares, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

In Galatians 5:1, Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." The apostle here was apparently "using the legal formula for the emancipation of slaves."⁶ We are not emancipated to do nothing but contemplate our emancipation, after the manner of navel-watchers of old. We are made free, we are justified, *to live*, and we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

⁴. Martin Luther: *Three Treatises*, p. 55f. Philadelphia, Pa.: The Muhlenberg Press, 1947.

⁵. *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁶. Gonzalo Baez-Camargo: *Archaeological Commentary on the Bible*, p. 252. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984.

4. Suppressing The Truth (Romans 1:18-21)

18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

19. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:18-21)

“The just shall live by faith” is, as we have seen a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4; the speaker there is God Himself. To understand what *faith* means, we must look at the Hebrew word used in Habakkuk 2:4. It is *emauh*, meaning faithfulness, stability, steadfastness; the word used in Romans 1:17 is the Greek *pistis*, which has the same meaning.

To live by faith means to live by faithfulness to God and His covenant, a covenant of law given as an act of grace by God the Lord.

This is an important and basic fact. It tells us that the opposite of faith is *not* unbelief or atheism as is commonly supposed. The Bible does not take atheism as a serious position. We are told by Psalm 14:1, “*The fool* hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’” and then the psalmist tells us that this opinion is a product of man’s fall and the filth or abomination of his imagination. Psalm 53 restates this fact. Psalm 10:4 says, “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.”

Romans 1:18-21 tells us that the knowledge of God is *inescapable knowledge*. Every atom of man’s being witnesses to and is revelational of the Creator. Men hold or suppress the truth in unrighteousness. What men will know fully and naturally in the state of glory is suppressed in the state of sin. The content of this knowledge is a full one: God’s invisible qualities, His eternal, omnipotent power and His deity are revealed in all creation and in man’s mind and being. Men refuse to acknowledge this inescapable knowledge, and hence the ‘unbeliever’ is called a fool. His atheism is an intellectual pretension to cover up his sin, *unfaithfulness* to God and His covenant of grace and law. It is worthy of note that the Death of God movement of the 1970s did not say, God is dead, but that “God is dead *for us*,” i.e., whether He lives or not is for us irrelevant; we do not choose to acknowledge His existence.¹

¹. Thomas J.J. Altizer: *Mircea Eliade and the Dialectic of the Sacred*, pp. 13, 23, 25f. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963.

In brief, the Scripture views atheism as a fraud; the man who pretends to hold that view is a fool, and he is trying to cover up the fact of his sin, his filth and corruption in the sight of God, with a pretended intellectual problem and conclusion. Because of his unrighteousness or injustice, he suppresses or holds back the truth.

These unfaithful men, Paul tells us, were not thankful; they were vain or useless in their imaginations or speculations. In Verkuyyl's rendition of the latter half of v. 21, "Instead (of praising God), they indulged in their useless speculations until their stupid minds were all in the dark." Fallen man is self-blinded; he prefers anything and everything to the truth.

As a result, the wrath of God from heaven is manifested against all such men. There is judgment in history as well as at the end of history. God's anger is against men who wage war against His law or justice. "Wickedness is a force opposed to truth which, if unrestrained, would expand in justice."² God's truth, if unrestrained by unfaithfulness and rebellion, does indeed expand into not only justice but dominion as well. Paul in Romans 1:5 speaks of himself as an apostle or ambassador to the end that there be an "obedience to the faith *among all nations*."

The word *ungodliness* in 1:18 is *asebeia*, meaning impiety, wickedness, lawlessness, and has reference to mental outlook and also to deeds. It is to be contrasted to *eusebia*, godliness, which has the connotation of consistency of life with God and His covenant.

In 1 John 3:4, we are told, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." There are two words in the Greek for sin which are here used: *hamartia*, missing the mark; and *anomia*, lawlessness. In this verse, the reading is as follows: "Every one who practices sin (*hamartian*), also practices lawlessness (*anomia*), and the sin (*hamartia*) is lawlessness (*anomia*)."

Habitual failure to keep a law is lawlessness *and* ungodliness.

We can now see that, basic to faith and the life of faith is God's covenant law and grace. We are called to live in faithfulness and thankfulness, obeying God's covenant law and thanking God for His grace.

The opposite of this faith or faithfulness is unfaithfulness. God's covenant law and grace are despised; the inescapable knowledge of God suppressed in unrighteousness or injustice, and man's desire to be his own god given full sway. Men's problem with respect to God is not unbelief but unfaithfulness. The so-called intellectual problem masks the moral rebellion and waywardness.

² Joseph L. Lilly, 'Romans,' in *Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, The Catholic Biblical Association: A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 415. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association, 1942.

Paul refuses to see atheism as the problem it pretends to be, i.e., a problem of knowledge or epistemology. When he says, “they knew not God,” the word is *ginosko*, to take in knowledge; ungodly men refused to know God. Everything in them and around them testifies to God, but they reject the testimony of all creation, and of their own being. Psalm 19:1 tells us, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.” Man is no less revelatory of God, so that, to deny this revelation is for man to deny his own being.

As a result, Paul concludes, “they are without excuse.” Instead of being thankful, they are arrogant and unfaithful. Although all creation is revelational of God, Paul tells us that God has made a witness *beyond* that in every man’s being. In v. 20, we read, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen.” As Hodge noted, “This divine revelation has been made ... *from the creation of the world, not by the creation.*”³ This revelation is an aspect of God’s being, covenant, and grace.

Men thus are willfully ignorant; they are ignorant of God simply because they choose to be, because they suppress knowledge and wisdom and choose blindness and ignorance. Instead of knowing God, such men say, “know thyself,” because their premise is Genesis 3:5, that every man is his own god, determining his own law. Hence, to ‘know thyself’ is to know one’s god or idol. The suppression by man of his inescapable knowledge of God is a moral suppression, and it leads to inescapable judgement.

It should be clear by now that what the Bible means by faith has little relationship to modern “easy believe-ism.” *To believe* now means simply to say yes, to agree with, whereas in Scripture it means a changed life of faithfulness to the Lord and His covenant grace and law. The New Testament words translated as belief, believers, believe, are forms of *pistis*: pisteuo and pistos.

In two verses especially, we see what our Lord means by faith:

And Jesus said unto them,...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Matt. 17:20)

And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. (Luke 17:6)

In both verses, the word *faith* is *pistin*. Our Lord says, “nothing shall be impossible unto you.” In Matthew 19:26, we are told, “with God all things are possible.” This miraculous power to do “all things” is the prerogative of God alone, and yet it is tied to faith by our Lord, and the power to move trees and mountains. Where there is a concurrence of purpose of man with

³. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 55. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong (1882), (1893).

the purpose of God, there miraculous power is in clear evidence. Thus, the more that the just live by faith, in faithfulness to the Lord and His covenant grace and law, the more clearly is God's power manifest in all their works. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, victory, and dominion to all who believe, to all who live by faith.

5. The Unjust Shall Live by Unfaithfulness (Romans 1:22-32)

- 22. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,
- 23. And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.
- 24. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves:
- 25. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.
- 26. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:
- 27. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.
- 28. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;
- 29. Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
- 30. Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
- 31. Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:
- 32. Who knowing the judgement of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Romans 1:22-32)

The just shall live by faith, but those who are “covenantbreakers” (v. 31) live by another principle: the unjust live by unfaithfulness. No man can break with God and still retain the character and integrity of God’s covenantkeepers. It is true that we can find, in more than a few converted men a standard of life, prior to their conversion, which manifested remarkable traits and directions. We must remember that in all such men God’s prevenient grace, the grace which goes before and leads to conversion, is at work. Paul here describes the logic and direction of unfaithfulness. The ungodly do not simply reject God and then live a life of wholeness and morality apart from Him. The unjust, he declares, profess in their rejection of God to be wise, but in fact they become fools.

Certain things then follow. God is an inescapable and necessary Being; if He is rejected, God-substitutes are created, man-made creatures and principles of ultimacy. These are often naturalistic facts, the heavenly bodies, birds, animals, and the like, all used to symbolize some divinized

aspect or energy in the natural order. In becoming the god-maker, man becomes himself the source of ultimacy, the god behind the gods. In doing this, men profess or pretend to be wise, but they are fools.

As a result, God gives men up to the logical conclusion of unfaithfulness. Paul here echoes the law and the prophets concerning the conclusion of sin. The Talmud, in Shabbath 104a, summarized it thus: "Every fulfillment of duty is rewarded by another, and every transgression is punished by another."¹

Luther said, "He who rejects the Creator needs must worship the creature."² Luther saw four steps or stages in this perversion. The *first* step in idolatry is ingratitude toward God. *Second*, there is vanity, a vain imagination. The *third* step is blindness in all man's being. The *fourth* step is man's total departure from God and the practice of all forms of vice and shame.³

Three times Paul tells us that God gives such men up to or over into "uncleanness," "vile affections," and to a "reprobate mind" (vv. 24, 26, 28). The focus of this plunge into unfaithfulness is physical: it has to do with the body. Christian Scientists may call the body an illusion, but all men know they have bodies; their lives on earth are tied to their bodies, and their bodies are a constant reminder of mutability and death, two great concerns of pagan thought. Instead of prizing their physical lives, the ungodly abuse themselves at this point. They "dishonor their own bodies" (v. 24). This is how Paul describes homosexuality; it is a self-inflicted degradation. As he describes it in vv. 24-27, Paul says that all such receive "in themselves that recompense of their error which was not" (v. 27). Verkuyl rendered this verse in these words, "and similarly the men forsook their natural relationships with women and burned up with their lust for one another, men committing shamelessness with men and so acquiring in their persons the penalty that was coming to them on account of their wrong behavior" (Berkeley Version). The word "burned" in v. 27 is *ekkaio*, *ek*, out, *kaio*, burn. Homosexuality is thus the burning out of men and women; it is an end of the line situation. What they burn out is their own persons, themselves. They receive in their own persons recompense (*antimisthia*, *ante*, in return; *mistos*, wages) or wages which are due. There is thus the wages of sin, which Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 is death. This is a death which affects both the physical and spiritual being of a man or woman. We do *not* know the medical history of homosexuality in antiquity, but there

¹. Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 45. New York, New York: American Board of Mission to the Jews, 1971.

². Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 29. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

³. *Ibid.*, p. 29f.

is no good reason to believe that it was not accompanied by the diseases which mark that perversion today. Paul's words certainly suggest as much.

God gives the unfaithful, the covenant breakers, over to the logical devolutions of a reprobate mind. They do those things which are not "convenient" or fitting (*kathekeo*) for God's image bearers, but they do so because of their reprobate minds. A *reprobate* mind (*adokimos*) is a mind that cannot stand the test; it is a moral failure.

Paul then describes the marks of a reprobate or failed mind. A *whisperer* is a "clandestine slanderer."⁴ *Debate* means quarreling. Paul tells us that perversion in one area of our lives means perversion in all areas.

Moreover, all these vices are practiced in opposition to God's law and justice. They overturn deliberately the moral order. As Calvin said, "wretched men, having cast away all shame, undertake the patronage of vices in opposition to the righteousness of God."⁵ The same point was made from the perspective of existentialism by Camus: "Since God claims all that is good in man, it is necessary to deride what is good and choose what is evil."⁶

In v. 32, Paul returns to the fact of the inescapable knowledge of God. These reprobates know the judgement of God on homosexuality, or contempt for parents, on all who despise His law, "that they which commit such things are worthy of death." Paul here re-affirms the Old Testament death penalties unequivocally. These ungodly ones, however, not only practice these offenses "but have pleasure in them that do them" (v. 32).

Just as the godly, the justified, will live by faith, the unjust will live by unfaithfulness and covenant breaking. As Camus stated it, the choice of evil is in opposition to God. Man, as his own god, affirms that he can choose evil and live. We see this today in the planned destruction by humanists of the Biblical family; we see it in the insane insistence by some homosexual spokesmen that their way is the way of health, life, and freedom. The unjust believe that they can *live* by unfaithfulness; God declares that they shall die by it.

As we have seen, the reprobate are those who fail the test. Their sin is more than *hamartia*, missing the mark; it is *anomia*, lawlessness, deliberately going in the opposite direction. The reprobate are perverse and deliberate in their failure. Their course is suicidal and manifests a will to death and hell. Theirs is not the sin of the man who moves ever closer to God but stumbles at times on the path; rather, they are anti-God and

⁴ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 65. New York, New York: Armstrong, 1893.

⁵ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 83. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

⁶ Albert Camus: *The Rebel*, p. 47. New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1956.

anti-law. Abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, and like causes manifest a suicidal intent and a reprobate will.

A reprobate culture will be suicidal. In its personal and civil policies, both domestic and foreign, it is wilfully perverse and determined to fail. Hence its anti-family impetus; its homosexuality; its destruction of community and society, its maliciousness, and more (Rom. 1:26-32).

The “drop-out” mentality of the 1960s and early 1970s courted reprobation, because it was hostile to God’s law and dedicated to the pursuit of suicidal courses, personally and legislatively.

6. Hypocrisy (Romans 2:1-16)

1. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.
2. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.
3. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?
4. Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
5. But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God:
6. Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
7. To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
8. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,
9. Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
10. But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:
11. For there is no respect of persons with God.
12. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;
13. (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.
14. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:
15. Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)
16. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (Romans 2:1-16)

The indictment of Romans 1:18-32 is in a very real sense directed against all men and yet is in particular written with the Gentiles in mind. In vv. 18-21, the excuse that some Gentiles would offer, namely, that God had no right to judge them since His revelation had been made to Israel, is sharply negated. Man's inescapable knowledge of God renders all such men "without excuse" (1:20). These men have made themselves fools (1:22) and sinners (1:23-32). Therefore all men everywhere, whoever they may be are without excuse (2:1).

Now, in Romans 2, Paul calls attention to the sin of the Jews. In Romans 1:16, he cites the privileged position of the Jews, and also in 2:10; at the same time this privilege leads to greater judgment (2:9,17-24). Ezekiel (36:20) indicted Israel, because they maligned and profaned God's holy Name by their speech and conduct as they were dispersed among the nations. Paul now cites Ezekiel's charge and applies it to the Jews.

The charge is *hypocrisy*. The covenant people of God must represent God's grace and justice, not injustice. What the Judeans represented was thus not covenant-keeping but covenant-breaking under the facade of the covenant. This is the key to this chapter and more. Paul's indictment is not racial but *religious*. What he says here about the Jews *must* be applied to nominal Christianity of our time, just as Paul applies it to the nominal covenant-keeper of his day, the Jew. To be a true Jew, i.e., a covenant man, is *not* racial but religious and covenantal, Paul declares (2:28-29).

Paul begins by condemning mere profession, or easy-believism: to judge another man for doing the same thing we do, simply because he is a non-"believer," is hypocrisy (2:1). "He who condemns in others what he does himself, does thereby condemn himself."¹

The argument Paul attacks is that the national covenant covered all Israel; Paul insists that the covenant is not only with a chosen community but with the individuals therein. To be an unfaithful member only increases the personal guilt. Abraham's faith does not save every or any blood descendant, any more than to be in the congregations of Peter and Paul can save any man. Noah's ark carried his entire family, but Ham was ungodly and reprobate in spite of the temporary respite from judgment.

We should recognize too that Paul accuses the hypocrite of being judgmental. He addresses "whosoever thou art that judgest" (2:1). Mills cited the remark of H. A. Ironside, "When you point a finger of accusation at another person, three of your fingers are pointing backwards at yourself."² Luther observed,

... while the righteous (*true believers*) make it a point to accuse themselves in thought, word and deed, the unrighteous (*unbelievers*) make it a point always to accuse and judge others, at least in their hearts. For this (*fact*) there is an explanation. The righteous invariably try to see their own faults and overlook those of others. Again, they are eager to recognize the good things in others and to disregard those of their own. On the other hand, the unrighteous look for good in themselves and for evil in others.³

¹ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 70. New York, New York: Armstrong, 1893.

² Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 54. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

³ Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 36. J.T. Mueller translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

The hypocrite seeks to gain virtue by means of self-righteous judgments.

In v. 2, Paul says, everyone knows that the judgment of God is “according to truth.” Judgment, as Hodge noted, is not according to “national and ecclesiastical relations.”⁴ No man, Paul says, is saved by being a son of Abraham, and, we can say today, by being a Catholic or Protestant. This is a “sure” fact. How then can we think or *reckon* that any who do such things can escape the judgment of God? (2:3).

Luther gave an excellent illustration of living by hypocrisy rather than by faith:

Today we may apply the Apostle’s words first to those (*rulers*) who, without cogent cause inflict exorbitant taxes upon the people, or by changing and devaluating the currency, rob them, while at the same time they accuse their subjects of being greedy and avaricious. Even worse are the blinded ecclesiastical rulers who commit similar, if not greater wrongs as everyone knows. Guilty of excesses, vainglory, pomp, envy, covetousness, gluttony, and other iniquities, they yet regard themselves as beyond judgment. We may apply the passage also to those who judge others, either in their hearts or with their mouths, condemning them even though they themselves are as bad as those whom they judge. Or we may refer it to those who look upon themselves as holy, although they are guilty of other sins than those which they judge, just as though they were righteous for not committing all the wrongs which others do. But to teach and correct such sinners is a most difficult task.⁵

With these words, Luther takes us to the heart of Romans, the unity of faith, law, and life, of grace and works, of love and obedience, and more.

God is good to us, patient and forbearing, to lead us to repentance (2:4). If we despise God’s patience, we are storing up judgment for ourselves (2:5). Both Bernard and Calvin said, as Hodge summed it up, “The wicked will be punished on account of their works, and according to their works; the righteous will be rewarded, not on account of, but according to their works” (v. 5-11).⁶ Paul is here speaking of the law, of justice. Because there is “no respect of persons with God” (v. 11), men will receive judgment in proportion to their responsibility. Our Lords sums it up thus: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). For this reason, Paul says, both honor and judgment went to the Jew first (2:9,10,17-24); this same principle applies now to churchmen; they will be judged all the more severely, according to their responsibility.

In Romans 2:12ff., we come to an important Pauline usage, “sinned without law” (*anomos hamarton*). Understanding this is basic to

⁴ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁵ Luther, *op. cit.* (Mueller translation), p. 37.

⁶ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

understanding what Paul is saying. The people “without law” was a Jewish term for Gentiles. Paul in Romans 1:18-21 makes clear that all men know God’s law but hold it down or suppress it in unrighteousness or injustice. Israel, as God’s covenant people, saw itself as the people of the Law, and the Gentiles as “without law.” Speaking now to his fellow Jews, Paul uses this term. These people outside the covenant Law are not a part of the community to whom the written Law was given. All the same, their heart and conscience witness to the Law. Paul is *not* saying that this Law which the Gentiles know differs from that which is revealed in Scripture. As Paul uses the word *law* in 2:12 and following, he means, as Hodge noted, “a written or supernaturally revealed law.”⁷ In 1 Corinthians 9:20-21, Paul again uses the terms “under the law” and “without law” to signify the Jews and the Gentiles, i.e., those with whom the covenant was made and to whom the written law was given, and those to whom it was not given as a written covenant. God, Paul says, will judge every man, “not according to his privileges, but according to his works and the knowledge of duty which he has possessed. On these principles, it is his very design to show that no flesh living can be justified.”⁸ For this reason Paul begins by stressing the fact that all men are without excuse (1:20; 2:1).

Mills, a Hebrew-Christian commentator, has called attention to the Talmud’s statements that Gentile good deeds are valid only if accompanied by a wish for admission into Judaism; also without circumcision, if a Gentile kept the whole law, “it would avail him nothing.” His prayers and repentance would not help, and his alms would not count.⁹ More than a few churches have had like opinions about the necessity of membership in their communion, or their form of church government, baptism, and so on. *We miss the point* of Romans 2 if we do not apply its judgments to the church.

By restricting this account of hypocrisy to Paul’s fellow Jews, churchmen miss its meaning and invite judgment upon themselves. Paul is plain-spoken: “there is no respect of persons with God” (2:11). This is a loose citation of Deuteronomy 10:17, “For the LORD your God is a God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward.” We cannot equate church membership, any more than racial status, with a privilege before God. Rather, any such status marks responsibility and culpability. The law is the standard for all men; judges are most judged by it, as are authorities in every field, and then all covenant members. No man, however, can justify himself by any works of the law (Rom. 3:20). The just are those who are redeemed by Christ’s atonement and who *live* by faith, who by their steadfast

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 61f.

faithfulness manifest that Christ has redeemed them and made them a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

7. The Life of Faithfulness (Romans 2:17-24)

17. Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
18. And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
19. And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
20. An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
21. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
22. Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
23. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?
24. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. (Romans 2:17-24)

Paul here lines up two sets of facts. On the one hand, he lists the facts and claims concerning the Jews and their privileged place in the covenant. Then, next, he files certain charges against them.

He begins by citing a central privilege: “thou art called a Jew” (v. 17). This was “a name of honor in virtue of divine favors granted the race.”¹ As Lenski noted, “Even when they became Christian they clung to the added title ‘Jew’ and frequently had it engraved on their tombs.”² Their essential point of excellence was the covenantal relationship with God. This gave them an advantage over other peoples. The Jews were the most literate of all peoples, also the most disciplined. These things led to resentment and hostility, because men usually resent superiority in others. At the same time, the fact of an obvious superiority can be a corrupting fact to a person or nation. The few hints we have from antiquity seem to indicate a respect on the part of the nations for the Hebrew peoples. With the rise of Phariseeism, problems of resentment and hatred also arose. Paul as a Jew is speaking here out of a concern and a deep love for his own people.

First, Paul lists the claims and facts concerning the Jews, an impressive list, and intended to be so, because it lends weight to his indictment. Paul says that the Jews rely on God’s law and are instructed out of it. They pride themselves in God (not in some national glory). They know God’s will; they seek to be a light to those peoples who are in darkness, and they regard

¹. Joseph L. Lilly, “Romans,” in Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 417. Kansas City, Missouri: Catholic Biblical Association, 1942.

². R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 178. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

themselves as a guide to the blind. They know the vital things of the faith, and are instructors to the foolish, and to babes. They have the form of knowledge, and they know the truth of the law. They teach others and are proud of their heritage of law. They are against such sins as theft, adultery, and idolatry.

This is an impressive list, and it is meant to be, although it is not without its irony and Paul's edge of incipient indictment. Paul is again stressing the privileged position of the Jews and their status as recipients of God's favors. "These favors are enumerated: possession of the safe guidance of the revealed Law, the glory of being the chosen people of God, knowledge of God's will through the prophets, and thus enabled to discern what is good and pleasing to God."³

Second, Paul indicts his fellow Jews of certain sins. One is hypocrisy, teaching others what they themselves will not do. They are thieves, adulterers, sacrilegious, and generally law-breakers. They dishonor God and are the cause of the Gentiles dishonoring God. This last charge is an echo of Isaiah 52:5.

At this point, it is necessary to analyze what Paul meant by his charges. On the surface, we would have to say that there was less theft, adultery, and the like offenses in Judea than any other place of the time. Why then such a charge? Our Lord, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Matt. 10:30-37), spoke bluntly against a faith without works. The priest and the Levite, despite their profession, were shown to be faithless. Paul's great affirmation in Romans is that the just shall *live* by faith, and the Good Samaritan is an instance of faithfulness in living. Asaph, in Psalm 50:16-21, indicts faith without works, false faith:

16. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?
17. Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.
18. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.
19. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit.
20. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son.
21. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.

Asaph here says that God is addressing "the wicked" who "take my covenant" in their mouth. By their silence with respect to sin, they become parties to the act, and accessories in the sight of God. God indicts both the thief and the adulterer, and also those who protect such evils or wink at them. Of adultery, we are told, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his

³. J.L. Lilly, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

clothes not be burned?" (Prov. 6:27). The Berkeley Version renders Proverbs 8:26 thus: "For a harlot seeks only for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife stalks a priceless soul" in adultery. Our Lord, in the Sermon on the Mount, says

27. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Matt. 5:27-28)

We must remember that what Paul says about the Jews he says about the covenant people. These words therefore now apply to Christians, to members of the renewed covenant in Christ.

The Jews were a superior people, *humanly speaking*, as are Christians today. The problem lies not in human status but in our relationship before God. Our Lord's purpose in the Sermon on the Mount is not to make life more trying and difficult for the covenant people, but *to make dominion easier*. In the parable of the houses built on the rock and on sand (i.e., on Christ, the Rock, and man, the sand), the word *house* is *oikia*. This word, then as now, has a metaphorical meaning: it can mean our lives, work, and more. The test of every edifice is judgment.

We are required to have the strong foundation of Christ in order to withstand life's storms and judgments and to prevail. The way of justice or righteousness is the way of dominion and victory. The covenant of God calls us to a great task, and the law and faithfulness thereto both prepares us for the task and gives us the program for victory.

To be superior in relationship to other men is not enough. The Jew was superior, and was set aside. The Christians of the West are superior, and they too will be set aside if they are not righteous *before God*. The goal of too many churchmen is minimal Christianity.

The New Testament word, translated as unlearned, ignorant, or rude is *idotes* (as in 1 Corinthians 14:16,23,24). For a believer to remain in this condition is to become what the English form of the word today means, an *idiot*. An idiot is incapable of any major growth in understanding. The believer who remains an *idiot* is incapable of dominion. He has sold his birthright for the status of a fool.

We have been called, neither to idiocy, nor a position of superiority over others, but to exercise dominion to the end that the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord, and His Christ (Rev. 11:15). To live by faith mandates establishing God's justice and dominion.

One final point: v. 17 speaks of the Jews resting or *relying* on the Law, and priding themselves on God. In other words, Paul says that he and other Jews were aware of their privileged position because of *the covenant*. The

Law was the law of God's covenant, and it was the glory of Israel to have the Law because it was the sign of God's covenant and grace.

The condemnation of the church is of necessity more severe than that of Judea, because both the Law and the covenant have been separated from grace. The Jews tended to separate grace from, or diminish grace in relation to, the law and the covenant, so that a works religion developed. The church has separated grace from the law and covenant and stressed an antinomian and non-covenantal grace. For this God is blasphemed among the ungodly.

8. Profitable Circumcision (Romans 2:25-29)

25. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is make uncircumcision.

26. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

27. And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

28. For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. (Romans 2:25-29)

The common interpretation of these sentences warps their meaning. Supposedly, Paul begins by saying that men can be *saved* by circumcision if they keep the law to perfection; since none can do so, none can be saved by the law, nor by circumcision. Calvin said,

They (the Jews) thought that circumcision was of itself sufficient for the purpose of obtaining righteousness. Hence, speaking according to such an opinion, he gives this reply—That if this benefit be expected from circumcision, it is on the condition, that he who is circumcised, must serve God wholly and perfectly. Circumcision then requires perfection. The same may be said of our baptism: when any one confidently relies on the water of baptism alone, and thinks that he is justified, as though he had obtained holiness by that ordinance itself, the end of baptism must be adduced as an objection; which is, that the Lord thereby calls us to holiness of life: the grace and promise which baptism testifies (*testificatur*) and seals, (*obsignat*), need not in this case be mentioned; for our business is with those who, being satisfied with the empty shadow of baptism, care not for nor consider what is material (*solidum*—substantial) in it.¹

These are excellent comments, but are they relevant to this context? They do relate to v. 28-29, but less to v. 27. A Catholic commentary gives a similar statement: “circumcision without the observance of the entire Law availed nothing; one might as well have been without the circumcision.”² Again, this is very true, but does it explain the text? A Lutheran commentator, Lenski, said of this verse, “there is no help for sin from moralism: thus the gospel alone saves.”³ True also, but what of the text?

¹ John Calvin: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 109. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

² Joseph L. Lilly, “Romans” in Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 417f. Kansas City, Missouri, 1942.

³ R.C.H. Lenski: *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 194. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

As we have seen, Paul does *not* say that the just shall be *saved* by faith, but, rather, they shall *live* by faith. This is a much broader meaning; it is inclusive of salvation but means more. In Romans 2:25, *Paul does not tell us that either circumcision or the law can save us, but simply that circumcision and keeping the law are profitable or beneficial.* The word translated as “profiteth” is *opheleo*. It means beneficial, advantageous, or profitable. The context tells us that Paul is talking to Roman Christians, people who were both Jews in background, and also Gentile. In describing those outside the covenant and reprobate, he is writing to correct and to instruct those who declare themselves to be in the covenant. When he writes here of the Jew, he has his Christian readers before him.

Outward status, Paul declares, is meaningless without the life of the covenant. He says that faith without works is dead, as does James (James 2:14-26); he does not use faith to void the law, but to establish the law (Rom. 3:31). Mills in his comments on v. 25, is clearer, and to the point: “But if ‘thou be a transgressor of the law, thy circumcision is become no circumcision,’ and is, in the final analysis, condemnation. Thus, by not keeping the law, ‘circumcision is become uncircumcision’.”⁴

What Paul is saying is simply that the covenant man lives by the covenant law: it is his way of life. If we are in the covenant, we find the covenant rite a sign of a new life, and the law a means of blessing (Deut. 28; Matt. cf.5-7). Instead of seeing God’s covenant law as a limitation or an infringement on life, we see it as the way of life and blessing. Then our covenant membership “profiteth,” i.e., it is beneficial, advantageous, or profitable. Paul does *not* make void the covenant and its law (Rom. 3:31); rather, he tells us it is the life of blessing.

In v. 26, we come to a problem in the church. Paul did not require circumcision of the Gentile believers; they were baptized, the mark of the renewed covenant. The Judaizers objected to this, among other things. How could the uncircumcised church members be regarded as just or righteous? It was an insult for one Jew to call another “uncircumcised,” because it placed him outside the covenant and outside both the justice and grace of God.

Paul makes clear that circumcision (and baptism, for that matter) is not the covenant itself but the sign of the covenant. The covenant is God’s act of grace and is marked by His law; faithfulness to that covenant law, and the manifestation of covenant grace, establish the validity of the covenant sign and affirm our membership in it. To possess a certificate of circumcision (or of baptism) but to manifest ungodliness instead marks a man as uncircumcised (or unbaptized) in the essential sense.

⁴. Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 74. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

Let us remember that Paul, a few sentences later, declares “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). He is not now suggesting that any other way of salvation exists or ever existed other than atonement. At this point, Luther was clearly in the right in declaring,

Here the Apostle speaks of the heathen who believe in Christ, and he puts them in opposition to the Jews who boast of their righteousness. Otherwise (*without faith in Christ*) they would not keep the Law rightly. Only he is a genuine Jew who is one inwardly (v. 29), that is, who believes in Christ.⁵

In v. 27, Paul tells us, “the obedient uncircumcised heathen would be better off, he would stand on higher ground, than the disobedient circumcised Jew,” according to Hodge.⁶ This comment is valid only if we read “heathen” as Gentile Christians, using the word as Luther did.

As Mills noted, “circumcision is subordinate to the keeping of the Law itself.” Paul’s thinking is faithful to the Old Testament, for Israel is told by God that circumcision is of the heart, and condemnation for lawlessness affects Israel just as it does Edom, Ammon, and Moab (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; 9:25).⁷

The true Jew, Paul tells the Judaizers and all the church, is one who is a Jew inwardly, whose circumcision is of the heart, not merely of the flesh. Paul thus answers a problem in the church, and, at the same time, tells us what it means to live by faith. He does *not* negate or undermine the covenant signs: he insists that mere externalism is a mark of the profane, those who are reprobate and do not meet the test. The plain implication is that true baptism is of the heart and in the spirit. No more than circumcision can mere baptism save us, if we fail to live by faith. Baptism is beneficial and advantageous if it is from the heart and we keep God’s covenant law. Apart from that, our baptism becomes unbaptism. For the truly circumcised or baptized, Christ is Lord and Savior, and from the heart we love and obey Him and His covenant law.

In the foregoing, we have spoken of the *covenant*. The term used by Paul to designate covenant man is *the circumcision*. In the language of the day, and still in some Jewish and Moslem circles, the terms used are not “covenant men” nor “believers in Islam” but, more commonly, *the circumcised* as against *the uncircumcised*. This is also Biblical usage in cases too many to cite. (In Judges 14:3 and 15:18, “the uncircumcised” is the term used for men outside the covenant, for example; Jeremiah 9:25 speaks of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised to refer to covenant and non-covenant men.) Thus, Paul says, in v. 25, “For the *covenant* verily

⁵ Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 47. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954 (Mueller translation).

⁶ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 99. New York, New York: 1893.

⁷ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 74f.

profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy *covenant status* is made *non-covenant*.”

Cranfield called circumcision “a token of the covenant made by God with Israel, and a pledge of the covenant blessings (cf. Gen. 17; Rom. 4:11).”⁸

Paul’s statement here is in line with an important strand of Jewish thought. E.H. Gifford said:

St. Paul is not here (v. 25) stating the necessity for an exact fulfillment of the whole law, and the effect of an individual act of transgression; he supposes in the one case an habitual practical regard to law, and in the other an habitual transgression of it. He is describing, not the condition on which a Jew could *earn* righteousness, but that on which he might hope for a promised blessing. The nature of this blessing is explained afterwards (iv. 11; ix. 4). The effect of habitual transgression is that the covenant is annulled; circumcision has thereby become uncircumcision, so far as any benefit from it is concerned. St. Paul’s words of course bear this figurative meaning, but similar language is used in a literal sense by the Rabbis: “Let not heretics, apostates, and impious men, who are Israelites, say, ‘Since we are circumcised, we go not down to hell.’ What then does the Holy and Blessed God? He sends an angel, and turns their circumcision into uncircumcision, so that even they go down to hell.” (Schemoth Ravv. apl. Schottgen.)⁹

Then as now men have reduced the faith and covenant status to a rite: circumcision, baptism or a form of baptism, “going forward” in a revival meeting, or some like ritual. Paul is not discounting the importance of a God-ordained rite. He does say that the test of the covenant man is life in terms of the covenant faith and law. “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

Paul is writing *to the church*. He tells churchmen then and now that true “circumcision (or covenant status) is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter,” and that circumcision, or baptism, or church status “verily profiteth, *if thou keep the law*” (vv. 25, 29). It is important to understand what “not in the letter” means. The “letter of the law” required circumcision then as it does baptism now. The mere performance of the rite does not make us a new creation nor assure us of salvation. To say so reduces the faith to a humanistic externalism. To keep the letter of the law here, i.e., to circumcise the male child, or to baptize, means to acknowledge that we are the Lord’s property and possession, as are our children, and we therefore serve Him with all our heart, mind, and being, and give Him all that is His, everything. This is God’s commandment in Deuteronomy 6:5,

⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 171. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

⁹ E.H. Gifford, “Romans,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 79f. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

and Leviticus 19:18, and of our Lord (Luke 10:27). Paul does not preach another gospel.

9. The Objector Answered (Romans 3:1-8)

1. What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?
2. Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.
3. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?
4. God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.
5. But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)
6. God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?
7. For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?
8. And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just. (Romans 3:1-8)

Certain things are by now apparent. Paul is contrasting two groups who claim to be *the covenant people*, i.e., those chosen and saved by God's covenant grace. Paul here and elsewhere uses the term "the circumcision" to refer to the covenant people of the old era, but he has his eyes also on the new covenant people, the baptized. The covenant people in Paul's day were also spoken of as the people of the Law, and Gentiles as those outside the Law, or, outside the covenant. A like usage, to a lesser degree, exists today, in that the covenant people speak of themselves as Sovereign Grace men. Paul has corrected the view of the covenant or circumcision, as well as of the law, by making clear that there is no approach to God by the circumcision or the law of the covenant apart from the grace of the covenant.

Paul later makes clearer how the covenant man shall live, or, more accurately, how *the chosen* shall live, because the initiative, choice, and power which makes one a covenant man comes from God. The chosen are the predestined, not the meritorious. Any other view takes away the grace of God and His sovereignty.

What then is *the advantage* in being a Jew, or what profit or benefit is there in the circumcision? The question can be made pertinent to the present by asking, what is the advantage of being born into the Christian covenant community and in being baptized? (v. 1)

Paul's answer is, much, in every way (v. 2). Paul raises the question of verse 1 because he has already answered it from one perspective. There is no advantage insofar as a personal or national self-aggrandizement is

concerned. On the other hand, the advantage is very great if seen as a *responsibility*. To be God's chosen people, or, within the ranks of the covenant, to hold a position of some power, is not to be seen in terms of *status* but in terms of *office*, as a *function*. Unto Israel the word of God had been committed, a great function. As Calvin stated it,

Now the oracles were committed to them, for the purpose of preserving them as long as it pleased the Lord to continue his glory among them, and then of publishing them during the time of their stewardship through the whole world: they were first depositaries, and secondly dispensers.¹

Jews and Christians have sought to exploit their covenant "status," to treat it as *an advantage over other men rather than a responsibility under God to all men*.

With this in mind, let us look again at Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." If we reduce *live* to *save*, then we make ourselves the end of salvation and of God's covenant. We turn the God-centered nature of the covenant into a man-centered one. The moral universe is then turned upside down, and we convert God's covenant grace from a gift of salvation to responsibility into a privileged sanctuary from judgment. Salvation then becomes fire and life insurance, not a commission to be more than conquerors.

The theories of Sigmund Freud have done marriage little good and, in fact, much harm, but Freud, in his own way, was in favor of marriage. He saw it as the best solution to the sex problem! By reducing marriage to a convenient sexual outlet, men destroy their marriage. Similarly, if we reduce salvation to our personal status with respect to heaven and hell, we negate the meaning of salvation. Sex is a part of marriage, just as heaven is a part of salvation, but the greater meaning of both is denied by such reductions. Calvin was right: we receive from God in order to dispense to men. As our Lord says, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). Salvation thus confers upon us responsibilities.

In verse 3, Paul cites the objections of some who ask, Why should the unfaithfulness and unbelief invalidate the faithfulness of God? God has made certain promises to Abraham; are these promises not irrevocable? Is the covenant dependent upon our, i.e., Jewish, moral character? Does a change in man require a change in God?

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 114. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

Later on, Paul will tell us that the covenant is irrevocable with God, but that Israel is set aside, and a new Israel, the Christian peoples, are grafted in. For the present, Paul's meaning is well stated by Hodge:

Their (the Jews) great objection to Paul's applying his general principles of justice to their case was that their situation was peculiar: "God has chosen us as his people in Abraham. If we retain our relation to him by circumcision and the observance of the law, we shall never be treated or condemned as the Gentiles." Traces of this opinion abound in the New Testament, and it is openly avowed by the Jewish writers. "Think not," says our Savior, "to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father," Matt. iii. 9. "We be Abraham's seed," John viii. 33. Comp. Rom. ii. 17, ix. 6, and other passages, in which Paul argues to prove that being the natural descendants of Abraham is not enough to secure the favour of God. That such was the doctrine of the Jews is shown by numerous passages from their writings. "If a Jew commit all manner of sins," says Abarbanel, "he is indeed of the number of Sinning Israelites, and will be punished according to his sins; but he has notwithstanding a portion of eternal life." The same sentiment is expressed in the book of Torath Adam, fol. 100, in nearly the same words, and the reason assigned for it, "That all Israel hath a portion in eternal life." This is a favourite phrase with the Rabbins, and frequently occurs in their writings. Justin Martyr, as quoted by Grotius in chap. ii. 13, attributes this doctrine to the Jews of his day: "They suppose that to them universally, who are of the seed of Abraham, no matter how sinful and disobedient to God they may be, the eternal kingdom shall be given."²

We can find a like phariseism in the church, and Arend ten Pas has documented even worse statements among contemporary churchmen.³

The objector to Paul is asking, Is God's covenant without effect? In v. 4, Paul denies this vigorously and bluntly. He uses the image of a courtroom, with God on trial before and by all men. At issue is the truth of God: is He faithful to His covenant word?

Paul's words, "God forbid," imply that the question is blasphemy, and, in the Hebrew, this is evident.⁴ Truth, says Paul, is inseparable from the person, nature, and being of God. Truth is not an abstract idea or universal as in Greek thought but God Himself (cf. John 14:6). As Gifford wrote,

It is not enough to reject with righteous abhorrence the thought that the unbelief of some could make void God's faithfulness to others. God's truth is absolute and independent; it cannot be impaired, even if man's foolishness be universal.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 108f. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

³ Arend ten Pas: *The Lordship of Christ*. Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978.

⁴ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 80. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

Nay more, God's truth is the only truth: it will be found in the end that He alone is holy and righteous, and every man, in himself, is unholy and unrighteous. So let it be: "*let God be true, but every man a liar.*"

The last clause, expressed in the exact words of Ps. cxvi. 11 (Septuagint), is an essential part of the argument, that truth must be ascribed to God, and none but God.

St. Paul adopts the apt words of the Psalmist to express his own thought, and this is why for "*unbelief*" and "*faithfulness*" (v.3) he now substitutes the correlative ideas "truth" and "falsehood": these again give place to "righteousness" and "sin" in the quotation which follows from the 51st Psalm.

It is clear from the objection introduced in v. 5, that St. Paul quotes the words of David as a declaration that man's sin serves to establish God's righteousness.⁵

This latter point Thomas A. Kempis, in *The Imitation of Christ*, summed up thus: "Man proposes, but God disposes." In Judaism, a Yiddish proverb makes a like point: "A man plans, and God laughs."⁶

In v. 5, Paul emphasizes this fact. The mind of man cannot comprehend the vast complexity and perfection of God's government and purpose. Paul's expression, "I speak as a man," is the Hebrew idiom "according to the language of the children of men."⁷

Paul says that these antinomians who hold that covenant status is sufficient to eliminate penalties for sins are in effect saying that God should reward and bless us. In Lenski's words, "Well, Paul says, that sounds as though God ought to reward us for being unrighteous by proving false to His Word, reward us even beyond the ones who are faithful."⁸

The premise of God's judgment of the world is justice or righteousness. Genesis 18:25 declares, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" God shall "judge the world in righteousness" (Heb. 6:2, Acts 17:31). If God's justice does not govern His judgments, how can He judge the world? Paul asks in v. 6. The rabbinical method often meant answering a question with a question.⁹ The second question required the first questioner to face up to the implication of his position.

In v. 7, Paul's objector says, if my lie furthers God's glory, why am I then judged? "The antithesis of a truth is a lie. Nothing illustrates and reveals the

⁵ E.H. Gifford, in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible with Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 83. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

⁶ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 220. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

⁹ Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

truth more than a lie; nothing is more contrary to God's nature and righteousness than a lie."¹⁰

The people who are on the side of this objector accuse Paul of teaching, "Let us do evil, that good may come" (v. 8). The result is a contradiction. The antinomian begins by denying that the law, i.e., faithfulness to God's covenant law, is related to salvation. Paul holds that faith without works is dead, and therefore the faith of these objectors is really unfaithfulness and reprobation. Their "damnation is just." A man's salvation does not rest on an outward membership in the covenant but on the circumcision of the heart, on the covenant being basic to all our being by God's grace. The covenant man is the *chosen*, or "the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:6). The objectors then hold that: if our salvation is of God's election, then the law is meaningless; we should not be judged as sinners, and we can do evil, because, inescapably, God brings good out of all things (cf. Rom. 8:28). Thus, the antinomians in effect charge Paul with antinomianism because he sets forth God's sovereignty and God's sovereign grace in man's salvation.

As Lilly pointed out, these verses give us four objections to Paul's position, and Paul's four answers. *First*, in vv. 1 and 2, the objector says, if the requirement of circumcision is no advantage to the Jew (or baptism an advantage to the Christian), then what advantage is there to a covenant status? Paul's answer is that the advantage is great, because the revealed Law was given to them. (The advantage is thus a gift of responsibility.)

Second, in vv. 3-4, the objection is that some Jews have not believed (or, some baptized members are unfaithful). Paul answers that this in no way alters or weakens "the absolute fidelity of God." The Lord manifests His faithfulness in His justice. We can add that God's faithfulness is to His nature and to His covenant; to be true to Himself, God must judge the sinner.

Third, in vv. 5-6, the objector says wickedness has an advantage: it manifests God's justice. Paul simply states that sinners must be condemned. How God uses their sin to bring forth His good is another matter.

Fourth, in vv. 7-8, the objector says that whatever brings forth good does not merit punishment. This position confounds all morality and reduces it to an absurdity, because its logic means that we should do evil that good may come from it. This, in fact, is the conclusion of some, and yet they charge Paul with it!

Paul was well known in his day for his strong insistence on justification by God's sovereign grace through Jesus Christ. For this reason, the antinomians are insisting that Paul is in their camp, while also attacking him for teaching amorality. Thus, Paul, before going to Rome, wants to strike at this duplicity and the evil it represents. At issue is the question,

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

what makes a man a covenant man? Certainly, the covenant rite, circumcision and the later baptism, is “the letter” and important, but it is rendered null and void if we do not *confirm* it.

This need for confirmation very early led to the Bar Mitzvah in Judaism, and to confirmation in the church.¹¹ Whatever weakness in practice confirmation has at times had, the premise is Biblical that, if we are truly in the covenant, our lives confirm that fact in our faith and practice.

Paul strikes at both legalism and antinomianism, because they are essentially the same. We have legalism where man’s law replaces God’s law, as in contemporary statism, or where God’s law is used for justification rather than sanctification. In either case, we have antinomianism, because both are denials of God’s covenant. God’s law must have God’s meaning.

Paul does not hesitate to regard his objectors as sinners, and he calls for their condemnation. Man’s problem with God is not intellectual nor metaphysical but moral. He is a sinner whose sin leads him to blind himself willfully against God’s truth. As a result, in Lange’s words, “All want of a proper knowledge of sin on the part of man obscures the word of God, and leads to the misconception of His judgments.”¹²

The essence of the objector’s position is to find loopholes in God’s logic and to use God’s promises against God. Paul sees this for what it is, blasphemy. It is also a kind of insanity in that it refuses to be logical! The effort to use God’s covenant word to undermine God is a remarkable perversity; the attempt is made to use God’s own words to render Him and His judgments null and void. We can say, however, if there is no God, there is no man. All creation rests on the absoluteness of His government, justice, and law-word. He is the foundation which cannot be destroyed or shaken.

¹¹. See W.K. Lowther Clark, *et al.*: *Confirmation, or The Laying on of Hands*, vol. I. London, England: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 1926.

¹². John Peter Lange: *Romans*, p. 124. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint of 1869 edition.

10. Autonomous Man (Romans 3:9-18)

9. What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved (or, charged) both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;
10. As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:
11. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.
12. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.
13. Their throat is an open sepulcher; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:
14. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:
15. Their feet are swift to shed blood:
16. Destruction and misery are in their ways:
17. And the way of peace have they not known:
18. There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:9-18)

Paul now openly states what he had previously implied. He says, in fact, that he has proven or charged that both Jews and Gentiles are alike fallen and incapable of any justice without God. *The just* are those who *live* by faith. The *just* (*dikaioi*) are those who know and practice justice or righteousness. Paul, in Romans 3:1-18 has shown that there is neither justice nor life apart from God. To talk about law and justice as categories, universals, or realities which are apart from God and independent of Him is nonsense. Not only were all things made by God, “and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3), but the only concepts and possibilities which can exist are from God. When we talk about justice, therefore, we are talking about God whether or not we admit it. The standard thus is God and His law word, not Jews nor Christians (v. 9). If we begin with status on the human scene, we never escape the resulting humanistic premises and standards.

Paul says, therefore, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (v. 10). By declaring none to be righteous or just, Paul is indicting not only their behavior, but also all men’s autonomous concepts of justice. He quotes David in Psalm 14:1-3:

1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.
2. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.
3. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy (or, stinking): there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

This corrupt state of mankind begins by saying *in our hearts* that there is no God. David does not speak here of the avowed atheist, an obvious case, but the practical atheist, the man who, whatever his verbal profession, lives, *not*

by faith, but as though there were no God. All such, David says, are corrupt and “have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.” In David’s day, the avowed atheist was a rarity; the practical atheist was commonplace. Paul retains this meaning. The Lord, viewing this scene of practical atheism on the part of covenant men, found that “all are gone aside, they are all together become filthy (or, stinking): there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

What David and Paul both give us is God’s perspective on men who, while nominally covenant men, are in reality not of the covenant *because they have an autonomous idea of law and justice*. They profess to be of the covenant, but there is no law, justice, nor goodness apart from God. Men cannot be the source of justice, nor can nature nor nature’s law. Whenever we seek an independent doctrine of law, justice, and goodness, we cannot do good, only evil. Paul’s use of David’s words is governed by David’s meaning.

“The just shall live by faith” (1:17). This means that the just, those who are the redeemed of God through Christ’s atonement, now abandon their law and justice, and their idea of goodness, because their new life is derived from Christ’s regenerating power, and so too their world and life view and their actions. Man knows in Christ that he *must* live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).

Paul, in 3:10-12, quotes David’s psalm, 14:1-3. He is talking about more than mere verbal profession: he speaks of *living* by faith. In Romans 3:13, he continues to quote David, this time Psalm 5:9: “For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue.” He also quotes David’s words in Psalm 140:3: “They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders’ poison is under their lips.” The poisonous nature of the tongue of the ungodly is obviously stressed, but the comparison of the throat to an open sepulcher introduces more openly the association with death. The tongue of the evil is deadly, but the poison they spew comes from the jaws of death, from the throat as a sepulcher. Hodge said that the comparison is to the stench of an open grave. Calvin called it “a gulf to swallow up men.”¹ Luther stressed the surface faith or nominal covenant status of the men here described:

... The Apostle shows how such (*unrighteous persons*) sin also against others. As they themselves have turned away from God, so they seek to draw to themselves and away from God other people. As the sepulcher takes the dead, so their throat or doctrine devours those who already are so completely dead that there is no more hope that they might be reclaimed from damnation, unless by a special act of His

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 126. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

power God should intervene. Their throat is an “open” sepulcher, because they devour and mislead many, as we read in II Timothy 2:17: “Their word will eat as doth a canker.” Such (*wicked deceivers*) devour also righteous persons. But as they cannot pervert their faith, they destroy them in their bodies (*by persecution*). Their throat therefore is truly an open sepulcher. They devour ever so many by teaching false and deceitful doctrine; and they proclaim their false doctrine in such a way that it appears to be holy, full of salvation, and coming from God.²

All this is true. We must add, however, that Proverbs 8:36 is very much in line with Paul’s statement. Solomon says that Wisdom declares, “he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.” It is the love of death which the reprobate, those who fail the test, manifest. Their gospel is therefore death.

If men have no atonement in Christ, they will seek self-atonement in sado-masochism, in ways which are marked by an invocation of death. Guilt requires atonement, and those who are guilty before God seek to invoke disasters on themselves and others to bring about atonement. Steward Brand, creator of *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, has said:

We have wished, we ecofreaks, for a disaster, or for a dramatic social change to come and bomb us into the Stone Age, where we might live like Indians in our valley, with our localism, our Appropriate Technology, our gardens and our homemade religion, guilt-free at last.³

Paul, in describing the fact that all men are sinners, and that no people, race, or culture has any status before God apart from God’s grace, cites a number of forms in which this practical atheism manifests itself. There is a refusal to understand God’s word, or to seek after Him. Their lives are unprofitable, and they cannot do good. The death in their being pours out in their speech. Their hatred of God means a hatred of life, so that “their feet are swift to shed blood.” In thought, word, and act, they are death oriented, and “destruction and misery are in their ways.” They know neither peace nor God, nor the fear of God (vv. 10-18). Paul again quotes David, both Psalm 10:7 and 36:1; he also cites Proverbs 1:16.

Paul thus cuts the ground out from under the objector. *There is no justice, law, nor good apart from God.* To seek law in man or nature is to war against God; we must first see His law, and then we can understand its echoes in man and the world around him. The just can only be justified and made just or righteous by the triune God, because there is no other justice. The just can live only by faith in God’s every word (Matt. 4:4), because any

² Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 56. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954; Mueller translation.

³ Herbert I. London: *Why Are They Lying to Our Children?*, p. 151. New York, New York: Stein & Day, 1984.

independent word concerning law, justice, goodness, grace, mercy, or love is a lying word and spells death. In any sphere, an autonomous word means death.

Thus, Paul declares, all men “are all under sin” (v. 9) when they are outside of Christ and under their autonomous word. The heart of all autonomous words is Genesis 3:5, man’s great quest for independent and autonomous status, his desire to be his own god, determining good and evil *in every sphere* for himself.

The supposed covenant man who does this, who seeks to live by an independent word, turns his circumcision into uncircumcision, or his baptism into unbaptism.

One final note: David, in Psalm 51:4, says, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight.” Since God alone is the lawgiver, every offense is essentially against God; this does not mean that a crime against us does not offend or harm us, but it is God’s law and God’s justice which is broken, not a law of our making.

11. The Law as Knowledge (Romans 3:19-20)

19. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

We must begin by noting Paul's words, that the purpose of the law, as it speaks to all men, is "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (v. 19).

We must remember that Paul begins this letter by setting forth the fact of man's inescapable knowledge of God. Men know the things visible and invisible concerning God, in whose image they are created. They know the law of God, because they cannot escape knowing God, and the law is the expression of God's being. They are therefore without excuse (Rom. 1:18-23). Paul speaks of the law stopping "every mouth," and "all the world" rendered guilty before God. Paul clearly means the law as revealed to Moses and written by Moses; he means equally plainly that this law is known by all men and condemns them all. All men hold or suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness or injustice.

Men know that no works of law can save them. As Luther said, "For we are not righteous because we act according to the Law, but because we are first righteous, therefore we then fulfill the Law."¹

The law speaks to those who are under the law. Calvin said that this means "especially" the Jews. It would be a serious error, albeit a common one, to restrict the term "under the law" to Jews, and to Christians. The law is covenant law, made with all men in Adam and Noah. All men are either covenant keepers or covenant breakers, but in both cases they are governed by God's law. All covenant breakers will be judged by God's law. Thus, the law is for all men, and all men are under the law. The covenant man, because of Christ's redemption, is no longer under the law as an indictment and a condemnation, but he is under the law as God's way of life for him.

All men in Adam are fallen. They are not capable of keeping God's law. The premise of fallen man's life is Genesis 3:5: man's will to be his own god and his own law, to know or determine good and evil for himself. Thus, fallen man is in the heart of his being at war with God. The goal of humanistic history is a kingdom of man under man's law. Thus Paul says, "therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (v. 20). Nothing fallen man can do can justify him, because he is in enmity to

¹. Martin Luther: *Lectures on Romans, Luther's Works*, v. 25, p. 30. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

God. The “good” which he does represents a standard of goodness which is alien to God. If at times man’s idea of the good has a superficial coincidence with God’s, it is still at heart at variance. Thus, Freud’s approval of marriage as a good solution to the problem of a sexual outlet gives us a radically different morality than does the Biblical doctrine.

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (v. 20). If this is true of God’s law, how much more so of man’s law! All humanistic law orders are attempts at establishing justice *without God*. The Soviet Union, with its mass murders, tortures, and monstrous evils is a law order whose goal is Marxist justice, which, in the sight of God is evil and injustice. The United States and Western European countries, with their “equal rights” for homosexuals, and their practice of abortion, are seeking to establish “liberty and justice for all,” but they are in fact legislating injustice, or unrighteousness.

The doctrine set forth by Paul is Old Testament teaching. David, whom Paul cites often, is the source of Paul’s statement in v. 20. In Psalm 143:1-2, David says,

1. Hear my prayer, O LORD, give ear to my supplications; in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.
2. And enter not into judgement with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

In Ecclesiastes 7:20, we are told, “For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Proverbs 20:9 tells us, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?” Solomon in I Kings 8:46, says “there is no man that sinneth not” (cf. 2 Chron. 6:36). Paul in Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and 1 John 1:8 tells us, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Therefore, Paul makes clear, “there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (v. 20). As Hodge said, “*To justify* is a forensic term; that is, it expresses the act of a judge. Justification is a judicial act.”² To justify means that either the person is not condemned, or the law declares itself satisfied because restitution or satisfaction has been rendered. Christ’s atonement renders satisfaction for us; as very man of very man in His incarnation, He makes restitution or satisfaction for us, and we are *justified*. Justification is not pardon; it is more. It declares that there can be no punishment because the penalty has been assessed on the person of our representative, Jesus Christ, and the court is satisfied, and we are justified.

We are not justified to resume our course of lawlessness but to assume the law as now our way of life.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 126. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

It we cannot justify ourselves by God's law, how much less can we justify ourselves by apostate man's autonomous law? For the church to be content with humanistic laws in the state is blasphemous. Neither the state, the church, nor any other sphere can know the good life in terms of man's law. *There is no good apart from God; there can therefore be no good law apart from God.* There is no independent realm of goodness which man can appropriate and use. To assume that there is a neutral realm of the good, the true, and the beautiful which judges both God and man, and which both God and man can use, is impossible and absurd, and also blasphemous.

This Paul tells us: "for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (v. 20). How does man know what is good and evil? From God, who expresses it in His law. How does man know what is sin? He knows what is sin because he knows God's law. Our inescapable knowledge of God means our inescapable knowledge of good and evil, our knowledge of God's law.

It is absurd therefore to limit God's law to telling me that I am a sinner. That it does, but it also tells me thereby what justice is. When the law of God tells me that I shall not kill, steal, or commit adultery, it also tells me to regard life on God's terms, use property as a stewardship and to be content with what is lawfully in my trust, and also to regard marriage as the only God-ordained sexual relationship, one which establishes a community of faith and life. The law gives me knowledge of sin, and at the same time it gives me knowledge of justice, of righteousness. In so doing, it gives me knowledge of God.

12. "We Establish the Law" (Romans 3:21-31)

21. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:
23. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
26. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
27. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.
28. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.
29. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:
30. Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.
31. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. (Romans 3:21-31)

Paul, in writing to the Romans, has in mind a number of practical problems facing the churches in Rome. Among these were, *first*, the problems created by Judaizers, who held that the Gentile members had to become Jews first in order to become Christians. They saw in Judaism a necessary status before God. *Second*, there were "the strong"; people whom Paul accused of being puffed up in the case of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 4:18ff.). "The strong" were antinomians; they had rejoiced in the case of incest as evidence of their freedom, and Paul cites their slogan, "All things are lawful for me" (1 Cor. 6:12), and quietly demolished it. "The strong" were antinomians. John C. Brunt sees this group as precursors of the later gnostic cults:

Thus we conclude that at Corinth there was a group of gnostic-type individuals who made claims to knowledge and freedom and were enthusiastically oriented. Their freedom included a certain license with regard to sexual immorality and the right to eat food offered to idols. These individuals wrote to Paul and asked him about the practice of eating idol meat, probably (for reasons that are not evident from the text) defending their practice.¹

¹ John C. Brunt, "Love, Freedom, and Moral Responsibility: The Contribution of 1 Cor. 8-10 to an Understanding of Paul's Ethical Thinking," in Kent Harold Richards, editor: *Society of Biblical Literature 1981 Seminar Papers*, p. 21. Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1981.

In 1 Corinthians 4:10, Paul sarcastically calls himself one of “the weak,” by which he indicates his need for the law which these men despise, as well as himself. The Judaizers had, like many of the Jews of the day, replaced atonement with works of law; when the Temple was destroyed, there was no great feeling that now they were without atonement. Atonement had given way to status and works. Thus, Paul faces two problems, a misuse of the law on the one hand, i.e., a conversion of it from a sanctifying to a saving instrument, and an abandonment of it on the other. Paul’s concern is to re-establish the law in terms of God’s purpose.

Still a *third* group were the Hellenizers, who were usually in the “strong” group and essentially one with them.

In v. 21, Paul makes clear that what he teaches is what the law and the prophets always taught: Now, he says, in Christ’s atonement (vv. 24-26) “the righteousness of God without the law (or, apart from the law) is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Paul says that there is one doctrine in all of Scripture; this the Old Testament set forth, and Christ now manifests it. Paul refers to this unity and continuity many times. Romans 1:2; 9:25-33; 10:16-21; 11:1-10,26-29; 15:8-12; 16:26. In fact, Paul insists, “Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom. 15:9). It is important for us to remember that for some time Christians had a Bible without our division into Old and New Testaments. It was originally seen as all one revelation, and, given the large percentage of Judeans who were members of the church, this was easy to do. Marcion’s heresies led to a defense of the canonicity of the New Testament writings and thus their segregation.

Paul, in the next chapter of Romans, turns to Abraham and to David to demonstrate the unity of Scripture. The just are redeemed and live by faith in all times. The plan of salvation is the same. Now, in v. 21, Paul sets forth this fact clearly. His concern is to correct the false premises of the believers in Rome. Cranfield calls v. 21 one of the great “hinge sentences” of the epistle. Paul tells us that “the law and the prophets” together witness to God’s plan of salvation as being apart from works of the law. Mills commented:

The Law shows man what righteousness is. It also shows him that sin is the separating factor between man and God. The entire preceding portion of this Epistle has been correcting man’s concept of himself.²

God’s righteousness or justice has been manifested. On this Paul is emphatic. This justice is revealed in and through Jesus Christ. It is the same for all who believe, whether they be Jew or Gentile: “there is no difference”

² Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 91. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

(v. 22). With this insistence, Paul bars any division between the Old and New Testaments: it is the same God, the same covenant, and the same plan of salvation. This salvation, once set forth typically in the sacrificial system, is now set forth in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, in propitiation through His atoning blood (vv. 22, 25-26).

In what sense can the Death of Christ be said to demonstrate the righteousness of God? It demonstrates it by showing the impossibility of simply passing over sin.³

The penalty for sin is death. Man broke God's covenant, and all men are by nature sinners. The premise of their being is Genesis 3:5, their desire to be their own god and their own source of law. God, in His faithfulness to the covenant bond with man, is also faithful to the covenant law, which requires both faithfulness unto death and yet also death to the covenant-breaker. Jesus Christ is both very God of very God and also very man of very man. As God, He reveals His faithfulness to the covenant; as man, sinless man, He is our substitute and assumes the death penalty for the chosen of God. Because "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," only Christ can make atonement (v. 23).

This is a free act of grace by God through Jesus Christ (v. 24). It is "unto all and upon all them who believe" (v. 22). We are told, not only that all men have sinned, but also that they have "come short of the glory of God" (v. 23). The rabbis used to speak much of the glory of God. The reflection of the Divine Glory brightened Adam's face, they held.⁴ Both Cranmer and the old Geneva Bible rendered this verse, "For all have sinned, and are destitute of the glory of God." Wycliffe translated it, "For all men sinned, and have need of the glory of God."⁵ Christ's salvation begins our restoration into God's glory, because it makes us partakers of Christ. Calvin wrote,

When therefore we are justified, the efficient cause is the mercy of God, the meritorious is Christ, the instrumental is the word in connection with faith. Hence faith is said to justify, because it is the instrument by which we receive Christ, in whom righteousness is conveyed to us. Having been made partakers of Christ, we ourselves are not only just, but our works also are counted just before God, and for this reason, because whatever imperfections there may be in them, are obliterated by the blood of Christ; the promises, which are conditional, are also by the same grace fulfilled to us; for God rewards our works as perfect, inasmuch as their defects are covered by free pardon.⁶

³. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 89. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968, Fifth edition.

⁴. Mills, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

⁵. E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 89. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

⁶. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 138f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

When Paul writes, in v. 25, that Jesus Christ is our *propitiation*, the word literally means, in the Greek, “whom God has set forth to be a Mercy-seat, by His own blood, through the faith.” The Mercy-seat in the Holy of holies, the throne of God, was the place, which on the Day of Atonement, was sprinkled with the blood of atonement. Jesus Christ is now the Mercy-seat opened to all.

This tells us, *first*, “It is only faith in Christ, not faith as such, which makes a man a Christian.”⁷ A man can accept as true every word of the Bible, but it is faith in the person of Christ as our Mercy-seat which is the crux. Christ is more than a teacher or a prophet: He is the great High Priest, the sacrifice, and the Mercy-seat.

Second, Paul tells us that faith in Jesus Christ is faith in His sacrifice, His atonement. “Faith in a sacrifice is, by the very force of the terms, reliance on a sacrifice.”⁸ Faith is thus not merely believing. It is a reliance on Christ’s sacrifice, whereby atonement is made for us, and we are restored into the covenant to keep God’s law.

Third, faith thus stresses the justice of God; the fact that God takes the covenant law so seriously that it requires the death of the second person of the Trinity tells us that the law is serious to God, and therefore must be to the believer. Hence, Paul says, “Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (v. 31).

Paul now draws some conclusions in vv. 27-31. He makes clear that all self-glorying is excluded. All boasting in human status is made invalid. “By what law?” Paul asks, and he answers, not the law of works, but of faith (v. 27). The meaning is made clear by our Lord’s words, “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29), and again, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15; cf. 15:1-17). Faith makes us rest in Christ’s sacrifice, work in faithfulness to God’s law-word, and trust in His grace and love rather than anything we are or do. Faith replaces boasting and status with the covenant life.

Hence, Paul says, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (v. 28). Hodge sets forth the meaning of this very simply: “To be justified without works, is to be justified without anything in ourselves to merit justification.”⁹ Paul does *not* say that the covenant man is without works but rather that he is “*justified* without works,” a radically different meaning. Our works are separated from justification, *not* from our covenant life, our sanctification. This is why boasting is excluded.

⁷ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 138. New York, New York: Armstrong, (1882) 1892.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

There is one God, Paul says, and hence one plan of salvation for Jew and Gentile alike. God is the God of all, Jew and Gentile alike. Both the "circumcision and the uncircumcision," here used in the sense of Jews and Christians, have the same plan of salvation. Hence, we can say, again citing Hodge, "We Gentiles may now look up to heaven, and confidently say, 'Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and though Israel acknowledge us not.'"¹⁰ This too is why Paul is so insistent that Christians are the seed of Abraham by faith (Gal. 3:6-9). Paul strongly attacks any separation of the church from the Old Testament, Abraham, or the law.

This is why efforts to turn Paul into an antinomian are so absurd. The able Gifford, in commenting on Romans 3:31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."¹¹ To say, as Gifford did, that Paul merely referred the idea of law, to "that which is common to all law, its essential character and principle," is insane. Was Paul concerned with affirming or establishing Roman law, Buddhist law, natural law, or humanistic law? Was not the whole question the nature of the validity of God's law? Paul denies that the law justifies; he does not deny it as the way of life for the covenant man. Calvin saw the law differently. Of the "ceremonial" laws which were ended with Christ's sacrifice, Calvin said, "they are in reality confirmed by him," i.e., they gained their truest meaning in Christ.¹² He said also, "I therefore take this defense of Paul, not only as to ceremonies, nor as to the commandments which are called moral, but with regard to the whole law universally."¹³ In some very real sense, this was obviously Paul's meaning; it was his triumphant conclusion.

The law of God expresses the righteousness or justice of God. It is therefore an immutable law.

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹. Gifford, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹². Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

¹³. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

13. The Unity of The Faith (Romans 4:1-8)

1. What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
 2. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
 3. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
 4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
 5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
 6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
 7. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
 8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.
- (Romans 4:1-8)

We miss the whole point of Romans if we fail to see that Paul teaches that the religion of the Old Testament and the religion of Jesus Christ are both one faith. To hold to the Old Testament and to deny Christ is false religion, and to attempt to hold to Christ without the Old Testament is again false religion and a denial of Christ. Both aberrations are in effect a denial of the living God.

Paul's opening statement is a question: what kind of justice or righteousness did Abraham find? Was it by works or by faith? "Pertaining to the flesh," or, humanly speaking, what kind of justice did Abraham find or discover? Abraham did not seek an abstract justice or righteousness, nor did he look for it in the statesmen, philosophers, educators, sociologists, or religious leaders of his time. Abraham looked only to one source for justice, the Lord God.

Paul seeks to eliminate every possible source of justice other than the Lord. If there is but one source of justice, then Jew and Gentile must alike seek it from that source and on His terms. Moreover, justice cannot be apprehended and isolated from the God of justice. Since justice is not an abstract universal, it cannot exist apart from God. There can be no justice or righteousness found or discovered by Abraham which differs from the justice known to Paul, Luke, and Timothy. There may be a variety of ideas *about* justice, but there is only one kind of justice, the justice which is manifested in the being of God.

In v. 2, Paul continues by assuming we are agreed that there is only one possible justice, one true justice, the righteousness of God, the God Who spoke to Moses and was incarnate in Jesus Christ. If Abraham found a means to become justified by his own works, intellectual and moral, then

he could indeed glory in that fact, “but not before God,” or, as Gerrit Verkuyl rendered it (in the Berkeley Version), “but there is no such thing before God.” There is no independent justice or justification before God. Such a thing is an impossibility. Every apostate man and culture seeks to define justice and justification in non-theistic terms, in radical independence from the triune God. They begin by defining themselves, implicitly or explicitly, as God, and hence they feel competent to express their own ideas about justice.

There was a strong current in Judaism, and Paul was aware of it, which held that Abraham was justified by works. Jub. 23.10 states, “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life”; in Kidd. 4.14, we are told, “Abraham our father hath performed the whole Law before it was given.”¹ To answer this, as well as to show the unity of God’s word and revelation, Paul cites, in v. 3, Genesis 15:6, “And he (Abram) believed in the LORD, and he counted it to him for righteousness.” The word translated from the Hebrew as *believed* is *aman*, often used in the Old Testament for *believe* and related to our *amen*. Abraham said *Amen* to God; he trusted wholly on God’s way as justice, although he was often bewildered and uncomprehending. It was not his way but God’s way that Abraham gave assent to. It was not because of such a faith that Abraham was saved but that through this faith Abraham could know God’s ways and grace. As Hodge stated it, “We are said to be saved by, or through faith, but never on account of our faith, or on the ground of it.”² Paul, in Romans 10:17, says, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Thus, what God said to Habakkuk (2:4) was God’s way with Abraham, and it is His way with the church. There are no changing dispensations or varying plans of salvation, nor is the law justice for Israel and injustice for the church, because the law is the expression of the God who says, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Mal. 3:6).

Paul continues, in Verkuyl’s words or translation, “Now, to a workman wages are not credited as a favor but as an obligation” (v. 4). Work gives us a claim; someone is indebted to us for the work we do for them. Paul calls attention to the difference between *gifts* and *rights*. Man has no *rights* or claims he can make against God. He is totally God’s creation and therefore God has a total claim on man. This is what our Lord says in Luke 17:7-10, as v. 10 makes clear:

¹ Cited in C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 227. Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 170. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded of you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

In brief, we can make no legitimate demands of God. Hence, our proper relationship to Him is prayer, i.e., petition and a recognition that we depend on His grace. The fact of prayer is a denial of works and of all independence from God.

In v. 5, Paul says, to quote Verkuyl's translation again, "while to the person who has not worked by Law, but whose faith rests on Him who makes the ungodly righteous, to him faith is accounted for righteousness." This is not an uncommon rendering. However, the literal, word-for-word translation does not include the word "law." It reads, "but to him that does not work but believes on Him that justifies the ungodly is reckoned his faith for righteousness." The reference to the law by Verkuyl is not in the text. The reference is to trying to save oneself by humanistic efforts, which can mean the law, humanistic law, mysticism, intellectualism, or any other attempt at self-justification. As opposed to those who try to save themselves are those whose faith rests on Him who justifies the ungodly and who gives them the grace of faith to trust in the Lord. Paul cuts the ground out from under all attempts at self-justification. Man cannot be just or effect justice before God on his own terms; he cannot establish any claim against God in terms of his own self-righteousness.

Again stressing the unity of the Old Testament with all that Christ and the apostles represent, Paul quotes from David:

1. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. (Ps. 32:1-2)

David speaks of the blessedness of forgiveness, of those whose sin has atonement. There is for him no imputation of iniquity or guilt. Sin is not reckoned to his account by the judgment of the Throne, God the Lord. The verses give us the first beatitudes of the psalter. Three words are used for the offense: transgression, sin, and iniquity. These refer to man's rebellion, his waywardness, and his depravity. Forgiveness is described, in Kirkpatrick's words,

- (1) as the taking away of a burden; cp. John i.29, and the expression 'to bear iniquity'; (2) as covering, so that the foulness of sin no longer meets the eye of the judge and calls for punishment; (3) as the cancelling of a debt, which is no longer reckoned against the offender: cp. 2 Sam. xix.19.³

What David and Paul say is stated also by Solomon and by John:

³ A.F. Kirkpatrick: *The Book of Psalms*, p. 162. Cambridge, England: University Press (1902) 1906.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

The contrast is between man's way and God's way. There is no reference here to a division of dispensations in God's plan. It would be a radical distortion of the text so to read David and Paul. There is no change of meaning in Paul's usage. Rather, Paul is stressing the unity of the faith from Abraham, whom he calls "our father," the father of believers in God's atonement in times before and after Christ. These are the men, says David, in whom "there is no guile." Alexander said of this word,

Guile, deceit, including self-deception as to one's own character and dissimulation in the sight of God, the attempt to palliate or conceal sin instead of freely confessing it, which is an indispensable condition of forgiveness, according to the doctrine of both testaments (Prov. xxviii.13, I John i.8-10).⁴

Paul would have pleased both the Judaizers and the Hellenizers if he had set the Old Testament faith against the gospel of Jesus Christ. Both would have felt justified in their own positions. Paul, however, insisted on the unity of God's revelation.

This is not all. We have already seen hints that point ahead to Paul's stress on predestination. This is another way of declaring the sovereignty, glory, and priority of God. In a religion in which salvation is central, however much Christ is named, we have the triumph of humanism. Men go to Christ then for fire and life insurance; having the "assurance" of heaven, they go their way. Such a religion is of necessity antinomian; the goal of religion is salvation, and, having this, man feels free to live his life. In churches governed by an insistence on religion as salvation, the attraction of the church is that it offers an attractive insurance policy on easy terms. People crowd into such churches. Because the emphasis is on man and man's salvation, the church is ruled by man. Either the pastor is ruled by petty and backbiting members, or he arbitrarily rules over them.

However, if the goal of the Christian life is not man-centered, then, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states it, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Salvation then is not the *goal* of faith but its *starting-point*. Where the glory of God, and our sanctification in His service, is primary, there the law is necessary. Predestination means the priority of God; it means that man must serve God. Man does not then

⁴. Joseph Addison Alexander: *The Psalms, Translated and Explained*, p. 137f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint of 1864 edition.

make salvation the be-all and end-all of religion but rather the starting-point of the service, obedience, and enjoyment of God.

Paul says, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31). How then can men make an antinomian of him? How, in view of Romans 9, can they deny predestination? How can they claim to be heirs of the Reformation? It was Luther who wrote on *The Bondage of the Will*, the classic statement on predestination, followed by Calvin's "A Treatise on the External Predestination of God," and "A Defence of the Secret Providence of God."

The Bible does not offer us a buffet table, from which we can assemble a smorgasbord religion and call it Christianity. The unity of the faith requires us to affirm its integrity and its wholeness.

Paul calls Abraham "our father Abraham." Such references to Abraham are common in Romans, especially Chapter 4; there is a reference in 2 Corinthians 11:22, many in Galatians 3, as well as one in Galatians 4:22, in Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter. Nor is Moses neglected; there are many references to him by our Lord, by the apostles in Acts, and in the various epistles. The division is not between Abraham, Moses, and Christ, but between the Judaizers and the Hellenizers. In Paul's day, the Judaizers were a more important group. Since then, the Hellenizers have triumphed, in exegesis, theology, and philosophy, and the faith has suffered.

14. The Promise (Romans 4:9-17)

9. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

10. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

11. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

12. And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

13. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15. Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

16. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17. (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

(Romans 4:9-17)

St. Paul is the major writer of the New Testament. What he has to say is thus of particular importance, because all the major doctrinal themes come to focus in his letters. The church has usually felt uneasy about Paul, and non-Christians have slandered him freely. No other writer in the New Testament is more Jewish than Paul, but both Jews and Christians have tended to see him as anti-Jewish.

Paul strikes out against the institutionalization of the faith. In this respect, he is at odds with both old Israel and new, with the Jews and with the church. The question he now raises, in v. 9, is simply this: Is circumcision necessary for justification? Stated in ecclesiastical terms, the question is this: Is baptism necessary for justification? Now Paul respected the rites of circumcision and of baptism; he was opposed to the belief that they were the necessary conditions preceding justification. When Abraham, in Genesis 15:6, was declared righteous by God, he was not yet circumcised. In fact, his circumcision came twenty-nine years later, when

he was ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:1ff.).¹ Paul is striking out against ecclesiasticism, both Jewish and Christian. As Luthi observed,

With all respect to circumcision, Baptism, Communion, and preaching of the Word, God founded both synagogue and Church so that we should use them. But we are misusing them when we in the Church impose conditions for salvation. And so Baptism and Communion are not conditions of salvation. Circumcision follows after, like a seal that confirms salvation. And so Baptism and Communion are not conditions of salvation, but subsequent confirmation and a seal of the certainty of salvation.²

Obviously, circumcision on the eighth day preceded salvation in time but not in the order of soteriology. Calvin called attention to the false use of circumcision, noting,

We must ever bear in mind, that circumcision is here mentioned as the initial work, so to speak, of the righteousness of the law: for the Jews glorified not in it as the symbol of God's favour, but as a meritorious observance of the law.³

The fallacy of ecclesiasticism is that it gives priority to what man does rather than to what God does. It associates salvation with circumcision, or baptism, or going forward in a revival meeting, and so on. In brief, the church or man binds God by an act, whereas the true order is that our rites acknowledge either what God has done or what God requires. It is God's act and order which gives efficacy, not what man does. Hence, the rite cannot take priority over God's sovereign act but must rather seek to be faithful to God's mandate and requirement. We can see why the church has tended to be uneasy where Paul is concerned. Paul does not discount or deny the necessity of what institutional religion must do, i.e., what the synagogue required and what now the church requires, but he did deny their priority.

We can speak of the difference in these terms. There is a faith foundation to all things rather than a ritual foundation. That faith foundation means that man's strength comes from God, not from rites performed in the name of God. The moral and religious power at work in a society is God's act of grace and blessing, not the church's creation. The faithfulness of the church is an aspect of God's grace, power, and mercy at work.

An analogous illustration from the realm of the state may be helpful. In a republic, elections are important and necessary to the life of the state. Elections, however, are not the salvation of the state. A corrupt electorate

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 235. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

² Walter Luthi: *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 53. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press (1955) 1962.

³ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 163. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

can produce corrupt leaders. The faith, character, and intelligence of the people pre-determine the nature of an election, who the candidates will be, and what the key issues are. In brief, there is a faith foundation, not a ritual or electoral one.

This is what Paul writes about when he asks, in v.9, Is circumcision (or, baptism) necessary for justification? His answer is clear: "faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness." Abraham said amen to God; he recognized that God as the Creator and Judge could justly take his life and Isaac's; he trusted in God's justice, and he also trusted in God's covenant mercy. Abraham's faith was so manifested years before he was circumcised (v.10). By so saving Abraham, God cut off the possibility of justly ascribing salvation to external signs or rites, to men, or to religious institutions. At the same time, we *must* remember that the signs, baptism (and circumcision before it), and the church, were ordained and instituted by God. If we depreciate these things, we depreciate history, which is itself an act of God, and we fall into Hellenism. Circumcision, and then later baptism and the church, cannot be depreciated without denying the covenant and the purposes of creation. Such a depreciating view leads to regarding salvation as a purely spiritual concern and leads to a neglect of the meaning of the resurrection of the body and the renewal of all things.

In. v.11, Paul calls circumcision a *sign* or *seal*, an identifying mark. In the synagogue, it was called an *ordinance* and a *seal*, as in the prayer at the circumcising of a boy: "Blessed be He who sanctified His beloved from the womb, and put His ordinance upon His flesh, and sealed His offspring with the sign of a holy covenant."⁴ "The true descendants of Abraham were not so much those who imitated his circumcision (i.e., all Jews whether believing or not), but those who imitated his faith (i.e., believing Jews *and* believing Gentiles)."⁵ God so delayed Abraham's circumcision to give priority to faith *and* to make Abraham "the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also" (v.11).

Thus, Paul says, God justified Abraham before he was circumcised. God's purpose, *first*, was to make clear the universality or catholicity of salvation, that it is to all peoples, and that it rests on God's act, not man's. This is true in every field. Whether in politics, education, economics, or any other field, the springs of human action must have a faith foundation in order to produce justice or righteousness. In every area of life and thought, man must *live* by faith. A mechanical or naturalistic solution in any field will lead to disaster, because man, created in God's image, cannot live by bread alone but must live by the every word of God (Gen.1:26-28,

⁴ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 107. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

⁵ *Idem*.

Matt. 4:4). On the other hand, a spirituality which separates man from the physical world denies the relevance of God and faith to all things.

The *second* reason why Abraham was circumcised was thus to transmit the faith in history, to be “the father of circumcision” to his seed after him. We have a duty of transmission: this is the calling of institutionalized religion. To be “the father of circumcision” meant to have a long-term view: the faith was not to begin nor end with Abraham. Where men do not *live* by faith, they devour the future with a present-centered religion, and with politics and economics which concern themselves with exploiting the present at the expense of the future. Circumcision and baptism set forth the obligation of transmission. The circumcision of the male child on the eighth day, and the baptism of children (on their eighth day in the early church), set forth the obligation to transmit the faith to the generations to come and to work for the fullness of God’s Kingdom. The goal is that all should “also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised” (v.12). In this last clause, Paul again stresses the fact that God’s justifying grace preceded circumcision. It should be remembered that the rabbis regarded Abraham as the father of all the world.⁶ The problem was that the Gentiles were required to become Jews first to receive Abraham’s heritage.

In v.13, Paul refers to “the promise,” a key fact in Biblical faith. The reference is to the promise to Abraham, that his seed would be as numberless as the stars, that his seed would inherit Palestine, and that he would be the father of many nations (Gen. 15:5-7, 18-21; 17:1-8). As Paul summarizes it, this is a promise that Abraham’s seed “should be the heirs of the world” (v.13). This promise is in the law, i.e., in Scripture, God’s covenant law book. However, in James Moffatt’s version, “The promise made to Abraham and his offspring that he should inherit the world did not reach him through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith” (v.13). Thus, while the promise is a *part* of the Law, it does not come to us *through* the Law but rather *through* the righteousness of faith. “Paul shows in answer that the promise was not contingent upon the Law.”⁷ The Law records the promise; it does not deliver it. The Lawgiver alone can do that.

A note is in order here. The Law promises curses and blessings, for disobedience and for obedience. The Law does not deliver any of those things: God does. The law is neither a person nor a machine. It is the expression of God’s being, and it is God who gives the law, and who brings curses and blessings upon us. The pagan views of the world, as well as

⁶ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 122. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

⁷ Joseph L. Lilly, “Romans,” in *The Catholic Biblical Association: A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 421. Kansas City, Missouri: The Catholic Biblical Association, 1942.

modern scientism, have made the world into a non-personal being capable of originating action as well as determining it. This is an amazing fallacy. Israel had tended to the same error with respect to the Law. All such views depersonalized the nature of God and man. "The righteousness of faith" is not impersonal, because it refers to God's justifying act of atonement. Faith is not mere belief, nor is it a simple knowledge of God; "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). Faith is the gift of God, and faith rests on the atoning blood of Christ who pays the death penalty for us, justifies us, and makes us a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

In v.14, Paul tells us, "For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect." Lilly commented,

When this promise was made the Law did not exist. If the promise is conditioned on the Law, then the faith of Abraham would be rendered useless. It was faith, not the observance of the Law, that brought about his justification.⁸

But Paul does not rest his argument on the fact that the Mosaic enscriptured word had not yet been given. He rests it on the nature of God, the law, and the promise. Gifford said, "The argument rests on the assumption that "law" and "faith" are opposite principles which exclude each other."⁹ If the law expresses God's righteousness, how can it be in opposition to faith? I have two eyes, two arms, two ears, and two feet; is each one opposed to the other? *The promise*, Paul says simply, was made to *faith*, and it would void faith if the promise were attached to the law. Note that *here the law is seen primarily as circumcision*; it is human transmission as against God's justifying grace. If the promise were not to faith, then Abraham was not justified, because his justification *preceded* his circumcision. Secondly but still necessarily, Paul's reference to the law in v.14 refers to the whole of the law, as his expansion in v.15 makes clear.

The law, says Paul, "worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression" (v.15). The law plainly states that it brings forth both God's wrath or curses, and also God's blessings. Is Paul denying this fact? On the contrary, Paul is fully aware that the law contains many promises of blessings (Lev. 26; Deut. 28, etc.), as he says, in Ephesians 6:13,

1. Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.
2. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise;
3. That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

⁸ Lilly, *op.cit.*, p. 421.

⁹ E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cooke, editor: *The Holy Bible, New Testament*, vol.III, p. 105. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

What Paul says is that “the law worketh wrath,” i.e., judgment and condemnation, to transgressors, to covenant-breakers, but he does not deny that it has promises for covenant-keepers. The observance of the law cannot save, but it does sanctify the saved. As Lilly, said, “Law merely indicates what must be done, what avoided. It does not of itself supply the inner strength required for its observance.”¹⁰ When Paul adds, “for where no law is, there is no transgression,” he does *not* say that, before Moses, there was no sin. He has already said that *all men*, whether Jews or Gentiles, before and after Moses, “have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22). Paul is rather telling us that, because God’s law is known by all men, there is therefore universal transgression, so that all men are without excuse (Rom. 1:18-20).

In. v.16, Paul links faith, grace, and the promise, not in opposition to God’s law, but in distinction from it, as the way of salvation. Abraham’s faith rested, he adds in v.18, on two examples of divine and omnipotent power: “(a) God’s power to give life to the dead; (b) His power to call non-existent things into being.”¹¹ Clearly, the people of the Old Testament believed in the resurrection. Note also that God did not tell Abraham that he would *become* the father of many nations, but “*I have made thee* the father of many nations.” These peoples were already in God’s predestined plan, and Abraham was already their father.

Paul affirms the total determination of God in Abraham’s calling and justification, and in Abraham’s place in history as the father of those who are heirs of the world (Ps. 37:11,22; Matt. 5:5). He does not declare Abraham justified in order to free him from God’s law of justice but to empower him to faithfulness. The purpose of justification is to free men in history from the power of sin and death and the condemnation of the law in order that men might freely serve and obey their covenant Lord. From being a death sentence, the law becomes to the justified God’s way of life, and the way of blessings.

The promise of inheriting the world cannot be separated from the *promise* of blessings for faithfulness to God’s law. Only the justified move within the world of *promise* in all its ramifications. Paul began this passage with the words, “cometh this blessedness,” and he continues by speaking of “the promise.” He has the dominion mandate in mind, and justification is the necessary prerequisite to any attainment of *the promise*.

¹⁰. Lilly, *op.cit.*, p. 421.

¹¹. *Idem*.

15. Abraham our Father (Romans 4:18-25)

18. Who [Abraham] against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21. And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24. But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25. Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:18-25)

Paul writes *against* the misuse of the Old Testament, and *for* its unity. Hence, his emphasis on our relationship to Abraham, "our father." He stresses the need for the right kind of faith, a faith like Abraham's.

He begins, in v. 18, with an oxymoron, a combination of opposites: Abraham "against hope believed in hope." When, humanly speaking, a son by Sarah was an impossibility, he believed that he would have a son. He believed this, not because he wanted to believe it, because faith does not mean believing in our own wishes, but because he believed in God's promise. Sarah had been barren all her life and was now past the menopause. Because Abraham knew God to be the living and omnipotent Lord and Creator, Abraham trusted God's word. Abraham's faith was not in his personal hope but in God's promise and purpose; to confuse the two is deadly to faith. God had promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations, and this Abraham believed.

In. v. 19, we are told how hopeless the situation seemed. Abraham was about a hundred in age, and both he and Sarah were past the capability of begetting a child. In. v. 20, the fact is stressed again. Faced with a hopeless situation, humanly speaking, Abraham continued "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Paul's stress here needs to be noted. It is a thoroughly Hebraic emphasis. To speak so plainly about a matter of sexual impotence because of age was, in the Greco-Roman culture, a subject for satire, pornography, or ridicule. It was not a subject for a theological discussion. Paul makes it precisely that, a very different emphasis than Gentile readers or listeners would expect. Gentile converts in later years insisted that such a history had to have a

higher, allegorical, or symbolic meaning. So material a concern on the part of revealed history and writing was disconcerting. For Greco-Romans, the subject matter of low comedy was not good material for theology. Pauline thinking compelled the church to view things Hebraically, although with difficulty. St. John Chrysostom, in his *Homilies* on Romans, dealt forthrightly with the matter, as did Augustine in *The City of God*. Hellenism did creep out in Augustine's comment on Abraham's later marriage to Keturah: "Far be it from us to suspect him of incontinence, especially when he had reached such an age and such sanctity of faith." It was in line with neo-platonism to insist that faith and a happy delight in marital sex are incompatible.¹ Paul forces Gentile Christians to think in non-Gentile terms; this has always been resented.

Paul now brings the issue to a head: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (v. 20). Because we are accustomed to the Bible and its language, we often fail to see its radical character. The climactic point of Paul's argument has to do with a nomadic herder's faith that God would give him an heir through whom he would be the father of many nations. There are some very telling differences here from the writings of all other religions. *First*, the basic texts of other religions often give us general philosophical abstractions, vague noble sentiments, not law. Apart from some ritual requirements, there is no all-encompassing law for man and society. Non-Christian religions preserve their "nobility" by being above politics and law. *Second*, if they claim to give history, the texts of other, non-Biblical religions give essentially the divine ancestry of the rulers and legends connected with their god-ancestors. This is true of the Japanese *Kojiki* and *Vikongi* as well as the Greco-Roman tales of the gods. *Third*, where men are dealt with, it is to exalt them as heroic. The candid account of Scripture, which gives us Abraham the man in all his ways, is alien to other religions. The pagan view of religion came into clearest focus, although carried to its ultimate nonsense, in Wagner's operas. Both men and gods in his tales are seen in the dim haze of a heroic masochism.

Paul says, in v. 21, that Abraham was fully persuaded that, what God had promised, God was also able to perform. The emphasis moves us from Abraham to God. Abraham awaits patiently God's miracle; he is an old and impotent man. Only God's miracle could alter that fact. Because God's miracle was so rejuvenating, after Sarah's death, Abraham remarried and fathered six more sons by Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2). This fact troubled St. Augustine; perhaps he felt that Abraham, having fathered Isaac, the promised Messianic forefather, should have forsaken the world for the life of a monk until death. God, however, had blessed Abraham, for the

¹ Augustine: *The City of God*, Book XVI, Chapter 34.

Messiah's sake and for Abraham's sake, and God gave him years of vigor and pleasure. The church fathers, however, tried to turn Keturah into an allegory. C.I. Scofield also had to turn Keturah into a symbol of the natural Israel's fertility. What was wrong with Abraham's blessing? Can not God give to his man of faith the happiness of a late marriage?

Calvin said, of v. 20,

All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God. He promises immortality; we are surrounded with mortality and corruption: He declares that he counts us just; we are covered with sins: He testifies that he is propitious and kind to us; outward judgments threaten his wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.²

Very true, and we must bear in mind the psalmist's statement, "He shall choose our inheritance for us" (Ps. 47:4). Abraham was not wedded to his will, but to God's. If God is glorified, as Augustine said, after Paul, through faith, hope, and love, He is also insulted, as Luther reminded us, by unbelief, despair, and hatred.³

In v. 22, Paul uses the word *impute*, and again in v. 23 and 24; the word is *logizomai*, to reckon, to put to a person's account. Paul then tells us, in vv. 24-25, that Jesus Christ made atonement for our sins; He died in our stead, taking our death penalty upon Himself. He arose from the dead to affect by His death and resurrection our atonement. Sanday and Headlam cited the meaning of the resurrection to St. Paul. *First*, the resurrection demonstrated Christ's deity (Acts 17:31; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:14,15). *Second*, it confirmed the atoning nature of His death. He was not only very man of very man but very God of very God (1 Cor. 15:17). *Third*, the resurrection completed the atonement, because it showed that God accepted the sacrifice and replaced judgment with acceptance (Rom. 3:25-26; 6:7-10). *Fourth*, Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 2 Cor. 4:14; Rom. 8:11; Col. 1:18). *Fifth*, the resurrection for us has two aspects, our *future* rising again in the body, but our *present* rising from the death of sin to the life of righteousness or justice (Rom. 6:1-11).⁴

Paul unites us to Abraham, and Abraham to Christ. Paul seeks to prevent the division between the Jewish and the Gentile believers. Almost all the New Testament writers are Jews who write with a full acceptance of the Old Testament. Their quarrel with their people was, *first*, their failure to acknowledge their own Messiah, Jesus Christ; *second*, their break with

² John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 180. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

³ Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 71. J.F. Mueller translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

⁴ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 116f. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895, 1968).

the trust in the law for justification rather than sanctification. The Jewish Christians above all other Jews felt they knew the meaning of the sacrificial system of the Temple; they continued to attend the Temple, and Paul himself was party to this (Acts 21:17-28). *Third*, the apostles were intensely concerned that Israel be saved. Paul says, in Romans 10:1, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” The apostles did not see themselves as heretical Jews; rather, they pleaded with Israel not to fall into the heresy of denying their own prophets, rejecting their own Messiah, and being cut off from the true Israel of God. Abraham’s other seed was coming into the Kingdom. Would Israel not come in?

16. Our Victorious Peace in Christ (Romans 5:1-11)

1. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
 2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
 3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
 4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
 5. And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
 6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
 7. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
 8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
 10. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
 11. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.
- (Romans 5:1-11)

Paul tells us that faith has consequences. Our justification by God's sovereign grace through Jesus Christ means, *first*, that we have peace with God. *Second*, we enjoy His present favor and have the assurance of future glory. *Third*, our afflictions and burdens, instead of being inconsistent with God's favor, are made to work for good and to confirm our hope. *Fourth*, the Holy Spirit expresses in us God's love and favor (v. 1-5).¹ Because God is at peace with us, we have inward peace.²

But this is not all. We are told that creation fell under the curse because of man's sin (Gen. 3:17f.). After the Flood, the curse deepened, and man's life expectancy declined as a result. With the beginnings of the new creation in Christ, the way is re-opened for the increase of life expectancy and the restoration of the earth as promised in Isaiah 65:20ff. Justice causes a land to flourish. Proverbs 11:19 tells us that "righteousness tendeth to life," or, *brings* life. In Proverbs 12:28, we are told, "In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof is no death." To seek justice is thus to seek life, and only those in Christ are able to seek it faithfully in His Spirit and by obedience to His law-word. Again, "He that followeth after

¹. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 204f. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

² *Ibid.*, p. 205

righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour” (Prov. 21:21). God tells us that heaven and earth shall vanish, but never His righteousness or justice, i.e., His law (Isa. 51:6). His righteousness is eternal (Isa. 5:8).

All things must be brought into captivity to Christ and under God’s justice. Our justification is God’s mighty act for the restoration of justice upon the earth.

In chapter 5, Paul begins a new subject on the foundation he has laid. He speaks now of *peace with God*. This peace is not to be confused with either humanistic or a pietistic peace of mind. It has reference to the fact that God’s death sentence against men is now invalid because of Christ. All who are members of Christ now enjoy His peace with God and must, like Christ, do the work of the Father (John 9:14; 14:12). Our peace is to serve God in faithfulness to His law-word. The peace of which Paul speaks, however, is first of all the objective cessation of warfare against God and His wrath against us. It is thus not a subjective peace but an objective fact. Only as we rest on that objective fact and serve Him whom we warred against can we know inner peace.

Because we have been justified, “we Christians then ought to enter upon our privileges.”³ This is the privilege of membership in the new humanity of the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-50). It is the privilege of being working members of a new community. Justification redeems the individual and makes him a member of a new society, the Christian community.

Membership in the new humanity brings fresh problems. To be a member of the old and fallen humanity of Adam has its share of problems also, but they are hopeless ones. Paul stresses hope as basic to the new life. We have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 1), but this can mean very severe war with the people around us, whether we want it or not. However, we have a standing in God’s grace and joy “in hope of the glory of God” (v. 2). The reason for this is an amazing fact. A cynical observer commented some years ago that life brought an ever increasing accumulation of problems. The problems of adolescence gave way to those of maturity with the obligations of work and marriage, then children, then age, and, finally, dying. Paul tells us that we can glory in the problems. Our tribulations give us patience. Luther said of this,

Those people talk nonsense who attribute their bad temper or their impatience to that which causes them offense or suffering. For suffering does not make a person impatient but merely shows that he has been or is still impatient.⁴

³ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 118. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

⁴ Martin Luther: *Lectures on Romans*, vol. 25 of *Luther’s Works*, p. 288. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

Justification has remarkable consequences and privileges, Paul tells us. Our tribulations give us patience, our patience produces experience, and our experience increases our hope, a hope which cannot shame us (vv. 3-5). In this process of growth, we learn that it is they who wait upon the Lord who renew their strength (Isa. 40:31). As Hodge saw, “Since our relation to God is changed, the relation of all things to us is changed.”⁵

Paul now goes on to say that, at the right moment in history, Christ came to redeem man. It was “in due time” or, at the right time, that “Christ died for the ungodly” (v. 6). This is a theme Paul stressed elsewhere (Gal. 4:14; 2 Cor. 6:2; Rom. 3:26; Eph. 1:10; 1 Tim. 2:6; 6:15; Titus 1:3). God’s timing is perfect. As Isaiah 28:16 declares,

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Only the man of God can afford to wait.

Christ came in the right time when men were “without strength,” *asthenes*. Paul says that humanity was morally and religiously bankrupt, without strength. History had reached a dead end, and only God could give it a new beginning.

The new life God gave to humanity is a remarkable fact. Men hesitate to die even for a good man, but, while we were still sinners, at war with God, “Christ died for us” (vv. 6-8). By this means, God demonstrated beyond doubt His love for us. Now that we are His own, He will most certainly protect and care for us. We who were covenant breakers and at war against God have been saved by His grace. We are now the subjects of His grace, protection, and care. This fact was very beautifully set forth by the poet Thomas Washbourne (1606-1687):

Come, heavy souls, oppressed that are
With doubts, and fears, and carking care.
Lay all your burthens down, and see
Where’s One that carried once a tree
Upon His back, and which is more,
A heavier weight, your sins, He bore.
Think then how easily He can
Your sorrows bear that’s God and Man;
Think, too, how willing He’s to take
Your care on Him, who for your sake
Sweat bloody drops, prayed, fasted, cried,
Was bound, scourged, mocked and crucified.
He that so much for you did do,
Will do yet more and care for you.

⁵ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

For this reason, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us” (v. 5). This is not merely an inner experience. Like God’s outpouring grace, the love of God in our hearts becomes an out-going power. We love our neighbor because God’s law-word requires it, and it is our joy to obey the Lord. We work in that love to bring all things under Christ’s dominion. God’s regenerating power in our lives makes us a regenerating power in society to bring peoples and institutions under His Kingdom and government.

Because we are justified by Christ’s atoning blood, we are saved from the wrath of God (v. 9). This is not “the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10) but God’s anger here and now primarily. Thus, while our future is secure, so too is our present. Therefore, all things do work together for good for us who are in Christ (Rom. 8:28).

God reconciled us to Himself while we were yet enemies, and He did this by the atoning death of His Son. This great act of salvation was *the beginning* of His care for us. Hence, “much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (v. 10). This phrase, “saved by his life,” is a striking one. Christ’s death redeemed us from death, sin, and guilt, from the wrath of God. Now His life in power, at the right hand of God as our intercessor and mediator, is totally efficacious in saving us from the problems of our holy warfare. We are plainly told that, in this struggle, we have not, because we ask not (James 4:2). Because the love of God through Christ is so great, the great work of saving us from our enemy and God’s continues after the atonement: we are “saved by his life.”

But this is not all: “we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (v. 11). The word *joy* is *kauchaomai*; it means exulting or glorying. The atonement is our emancipation proclamation. Our exultation is in God, in Christ, the source of our victory. A little later, Paul tells us that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37). The reference is to the triumphal marches of Roman generals and emperors. Their victory and power are slight compared to ours. The Roman conquerors could only kill and destroy, whereas we are called to a victory which means making all things new in Christ, exercising dominion in His name, and becoming the heirs of all creation (Rom. 8:15-18). Ours is a victorious peace with God in Christ.

17. Adam and Christ (Romans 5:12-14)

12. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

13. (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

14. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. (Romans 5:12-14)

In the course of my travels, I often encounter persons who tell me that they could agree with theonomy but for some particular text, which they see as a bar to it. I do not attempt to answer their comment, because I have learned, *first*, that in the main such people want an argument, not a comment; *second*, they have *not* read what I have written, nor do they intend to! One such text often cited is Romans 5:12-14.

It must be admitted that this is not an easy text. On the other hand, it must be recognized that this text precludes antinomianism. It does not allow us to think of the world as having never been without God's law.

First, Paul in Romans 1:18-31 makes clear that all men know God's law and God Himself, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). To know God is to know His righteousness and law. Paul cites then the violations of the law by these men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness or injustice (Rom. 1:18, 22-31).

Second, as I John 3:14 tells us, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law," or, more literally, every one who practices sin (*hamartian*) also does lawlessness (*anomia*); and the sin (*hamartia*) is lawlessness (*anomia*). Paul tells us here death is the penalty for sin; all men have sinned, and "so death passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12). Before the giving of the Law, "from Adam to Moses," obviously all men therefore sinned. Since Paul is so emphatic that all men know the invisible things of God, and that their sin is therefore *without excuse* because they cannot be ignorant of God's law, obviously God's death sentence is just.

Third, we are told that "sin is not imputed where there is no law," and "until the law sin was in the world" (Rom. 5:13), meaning that before Moses there was sin because men still knew the law. Sanday and Headlam said, "St. Paul would not say that the absence of written law did away with all responsibility. He has already laid down most distinctly that Gentiles, though without such written law, have law enough to be judged by (ii. 12-16); and Jews before the time of Moses were only in the position of

Gentiles.”¹ There is no room here for antinomianism, for, if their logic were correct, men should not have died before God gave the Law to Moses on Sinai, and after that only the Hebrews and any other to whom the law might be taught should suffer death. The logic of this view would also require us to be Pelagians of a radical sort and to say that Adam broke God’s verbal command and therefore died, but all his descendents should now be *outside* the covenant, its law, and its penalties, and therefore immune to death. Adam would in effect have “freed” his posterity from God’s covenant at the price of his life and given them freedom to be their own law (Gen. 3:5).

Fourth, as we shall see later, Paul is not trying to eliminate the law from a segment of history but to call attention to the *transmission* of sin by Adam to his posterity. Rebellion against God was now the nature of Adam’s humanity; Adam’s seed did not sin as Adam did, in direct, personal violation of God’s verbal command or law, but, because they were Adam’s seed, they manifested his rebellion against God. It was their nature now to say, my will, not God’s, be done, for my will is my law. This point is important to Paul, because he is establishing what Adam’s single act did in order to set forth what Christ’s act of obedience and atonement did. Both the first and last Adams determined the nature of the humanity born from them. Sin and death were transmitted by Adam; justice and life are transmitted by Christ to all who are born again in Him. Paul tells us that there is a universal prevalence of sin and death; this tells us of Adam’s significance. In telling us that all men have sinned, Paul tells us that all men in Adam are at war against God and His law. They are not ignorant of it but at war against it. Therefore “death reigned from Adam to Moses” (Rom. 5:14).

Fifth, there is a difference before and after Moses. “Sin is not imputed where there is no law.” The word *imputed* is *ellogao*, and it means charge to one’s account. Obviously, something was charged to the account of all men from Adam to Moses, because all men were sentenced to death. Paul is here stating a general premise: there is no crime if there is no law. However, if men *are* sentenced to death, we must assume there was a law. Is not Paul saying that, before Moses and the written law, there was a law, because men were being sentenced to death? In v. 14, he comes to the point: men did sin before Moses, and “death reigned ... over them.” However, their sin was *not* “after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” (Rom. 5:14). The word “similitude” or “likeness” (*homoioima, homoiomati*) means to be of the same character. Adam’s sin was unlike that of his posterity, because Adam “is the figure of him that was to come, even Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:14). Adam’s “transgression” (*parabasis*) or, breach of the law was unique because its

¹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 134f. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

penalty affected all men. In this, Adam was the figure of Christ, whose obedience and atonement affect all who are members of His new humanity. Paul is not concerned with downgrading the law. Rather, his concern is the uniqueness of the two Adams. Their relationship to God and His covenant law was direct, verbal, and personal. Both had a determinative role in history in their effect on their seed. All men from Adam on have sinned, but not in the trans-personal way that Adam did. Paul's concern is thus to stress the uniqueness of Christ as the father and creator of the new humanity, as the last Adam. Before Moses and after Moses, all men sinned and paid the penalty of death. Adam's sin, however, had more than personal consequences, even as Christ's righteousness had more than personal consequences.

Cranfield rightly comments, "The relevance of the reference to the law at this point lies in the fact that it is the law which makes manifest the full magnitude of sin and so also at the same time the full magnitude of the triumph of grace."² Adam's work, his sin, was determinative for all who are members of the first humanity. Christ's work is determinative for all members of the new humanity. The written law, by spelling out plainly the meaning of sin, which our Lord stressed in the Sermon on the Mount, makes all the more vividly plain the scope of God's grace in Christ. "Human death is the consequence of human sin."³ Our justification and life are the consequence of Christ's righteousness and atonement as our new Adam. In speaking of the era after Adam and before Moses, "What St. Paul wishes to bring out is that prior to the giving of the Law, the fate of mankind, to an extent and in a way which he does not define, was directly traceable to Adam's Fall," so commented Sanday and Headlam.⁴ This is very true, but all men in this era and after sinned, Paul stresses (v. 12), and therefore they died as true heirs of Adam. John Gill called attention to the fact that this doctrine of man's depravity in Adam was not new with Paul. He echoed Old Testament and rabbinic teachings which later Judaism denied.⁵

The sin of Adam had legal consequences for all men in his humanity as did the atoning death of Christ for all in His new humanity. We are legally and biologically children of Adam. We are also legally and biologically because of our rebirth members of Christ. There is a unity of the many in Adam, and a unity of the many in Christ. This is Paul's concern. He tells us, *first*, in Adam the inheritance of death and a sinful nature, a warfare against God, is inherited by all men. Adam transmits this to all his

² C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 270. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

⁴ Sanday and Headlam, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁵ John Gill: *Gill's Commentary*, vol. VI, p. 34. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980 reprint.

posterity. *Second*, “The death of Christ does not *precisely reverse* the effects of Adam’s sin, it *overpowers* them by greater gifts,”⁶ said Gifford. It would be better to say that Christ’s work and regenerating power not only nullified the effects of Adam’s sin but opened the door to power and dominion in Christ. *Third*, the death of the body is the first stage in the greater judgment of all who are in Adam. Sin and death not only enter the world by Adam’s sin but “passed upon” or passed through to all men. As Lilly noted, Paul’s purpose here is “to prove that all mankind have sinned in Adam,” and Adam was “the moral as well as the physical head of the human race.”⁷

Has Paul here voided the law? Such an idea was not in his mind. What Paul undermined was any belief that man in any era is capable of overcoming his inheritance in Adam. Any attempt to renew man and society apart from Christ is inescapably plagued by the fact of sin and death. Before there can be works of law which benefit society there must be regenerate men in Christ. The fact of depravity conditions and governs the human scene. A valid sociology must begin with this fact. But this is not all. More than one tyranny has been established on the recognition of man’s sin. The politics of the welfare state and of socialism appeals to man’s greed and his desire to steal from others legally in order to benefit himself. More than a few successful careers have been built on the recognition of man’s depravity and the “necessity” of gratifying it. To neglect the nature of man in the political process is a deadly fact: it invites great disasters.

The sociology of justification by God’s sovereign grace will recognize fallen man’s depravity and the need for justification and regeneration in order to establish a good society. The law then provides the way of justice.

⁶ E.H. Gifford, “Romans,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, A Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 116f. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

⁷ Joseph L. Lilly, “Romans,” in The Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 423. 1942.

18. The Triumph of Grace (Romans 5:15-21)

15. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

16. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

17. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

18. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

19. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

20. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

21. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.
(Romans 5:15-21)

Having established the uniqueness of Adam and Christ, each as covenant head of a humanity, Paul now draws the implications. Paul does not speak against God's law but in terms of it. Davies' comment about the New Testament is valid when he writes, "Christianity is a protest *against* Judaism in favour of the Old Testament."¹ As against the current religious individualism in Greco-Roman culture *and* in the Judaism of his day, Paul asserts covenantalism. All men are in Adam, or they are in Christ. In Adam, we beget children of Adam who are born to sin and die unless we give them to Christ, and He receives them in His grace and mercy. As Luthi noted, "A new year is never new, because even though a new calendar year may have begun, we have not ceased to be descendants of Adam."²

This passage of Romans has been called "the despair of the translator."³ The reason for this is that Paul, at one and the same time, gives us a comparison and a contrast, both the similarity between Adam and Christ and their dissimilarity. They are alike in that each is the covenant head of his humanity, his human race; they differ in what they give to their humanity. Adam gave sin and death to his humanity. Christ's gift is far greater, Paul says in v. 15. Paul describes Adam's sin as an offense, trespass,

¹ W.D. Davies: *The Gospel and the Law*, p. 377. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1974.

² Walter Luthi: *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 69. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press (1961) 1962.

³ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 366. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

or transgression. Our Lord's gift is, literally, "the charisma," a gift coming out of God's grace. This gift covers the totality of our endowment in Christ. Adam's trespass led to death; Christ's work of grace leads to a new life and to heirship in Him. The reign of death is superseded by the reign of life.

In v. 16, Paul tells us that, whereas Adam's one sin led to death, Christ's redemption saves us from countless sins. Moreover, as Hodge noted, "Christ does much more than remove the guilt and evils consequent on the sin of Adam."⁴ He not only removes our original sin (Gen. 3:5), but he also makes atonement for us and redeems us from all our particular sins. Moreover, we are made a new creation in Him (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who are sons of Adam are born to sin and die; their works add up to innumerable towers of Babel, all doomed to confusion. Our works in Christ adds up to *justice and dominion*. The world has no future apart from God's justice and dominion according to His law word. This goal is impossible outside Christ. The great fact of justification establishes man in a new course, and into the power of God towards justice and dominion.

In v. 17, Paul stresses this fact. The necessary consequence of our justification by Jesus Christ is that we shall, "by the gift of righteousness (or justice) reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ." The word *reign* is *basileuo*, from *king*, *basileus*. It is a word which modern man has cheapened and spiritualized away. It was a dangerous word in the Roman Empire because it meant a rival power, another ruler than the emperor. We can appreciate its meaning better today if we could imagine believers in Marxist Russia declaring that they are called to be tsars under the Tsar of tsars, Jesus Christ. We are asked to see on the one hand the universal prevalence of death in Adam; much more must we recognize that, by the gift of justice, we now shall reign in life by Jesus Christ. This gift of righteousness or justice is ours, *first*, because we have been justified by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, and, *second*, we are instructed by His law, now written on the tables of our heart (Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 32:39; 24:7; Ezek. 11:19; etc.), how to establish justice and dominion. When Christ reigns over us, we reign in our appointed place.

This passage tells us how far reaching the Hellenic spiritualization of Scripture has gone. Greek philosophy saw *ideas* as most important and hence was given to abstraction. In terms of this, the Bible has been routinely read in terms of a "higher" or "spiritual" meaning abstracted from its language and history. But, in any possible exegetical sense, *king* and *reign* could not then be seen as "spiritual" in meaning. The charge which led to our Lord's execution was that He had been hailed publicly as the royal Son

⁴ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 258. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

of David (Matt. 21:9; 27:37; John 19:12,15,19; etc.). Christians very early were seen as a seditious group because they saw Christ as Lord or King, and themselves as kings in and under Him. To spiritualize Paul's language here is to pervert the faith.

Calvin applied our inheritance from Adam and from Christ to our children, concluding, quite logically,

Hence, in order to partake of the miserable inheritance of sin, it is enough for thee to be man, for it dwells in flesh and blood; but in order to enjoy the righteousness of Christ it is necessary for thee to be a believer; for a participation of him is attained only by faith. He is communicated to infants in a peculiar way; for they have by covenant the right of adoption, by which they pass over unto a participation of Christ. Of the children of the godly I speak, to whom the promise of grace is addressed; for others are by no means exempted from the common lot.⁵

In the baptism of children, we who are in Christ acknowledge that we and all our possessions and children belong to Christ, and we return our children to the Lord, for Him to make them His own also.

In v. 18, Paul's reference to the righteousness or justice of Christ has reference to the totality of His life and work, to His atonement, His total and perfect obedience, and His complete faithfulness to God's every word (Matt. 4:4). Adam's one act of sin is contrasted to the total justice of Christ. However, in one sense, Adam's work had a totality. In v. 17, Paul tell us that "death reigned" after Adam; now the believers in Christ *reign*. As total as death is, so total is our reign in Christ ordained to be. We cannot limit our calling to dominion. The Kingdom of God must reign as universally as death has reigned since Adam. Moffatt's rendering of v. 18 brings out the intended contrast clearly:

Well then, as one man's trespass issued in doom for all, so one man's act of redress issued in acquittal and life for all.

This helps to bring forth more clearly what "justification of life," a remarkable phrase means: in Adam, we are sentenced to death; in Jesus Christ we are sentenced to justified life. We are declared just by the atoning blood of Christ, and we are released to do justice in Christ. This is a legal sentence, and it is an aspect of our acquittal in Christ. We are not justified to walk away and enjoy peace of mind in our ways but to do justice under God. This is our remarkable sentence from the court of God.

In v. 19, Paul restates covenantalism. Adam's sin and nature governs all his humanity, and Christ's *obedience* makes His people righteous or just before God, and it remakes their nature to be a people of justice. All men

⁵ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 210f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

face God either in Adam or in Christ. No man can gain life and justice in the true sense apart from Christ: Adam's inheritance will govern his work and activities.

In v. 20, Paul returns directly to the law. All men know God and His law in all their being (Rom. 1:18-31; 2:14-15). They are without excuse when they sin. The written law entered history, not only to set forth God's justice more clearly, but also to make the offense abound, to make it all the more inexcusable. The law spells out the consequences of sin, of injustice, as in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, so that, when men sin they know what sin leads to all the more clearly. Their trespass is made more fearful thereby. On the other hand, great as are the consequences of sin, the consequences of grace, of justification are far greater. We cannot see the two consequences as equivalent, because the results of sin cannot equal the cosmic results of justification.

In v. 21, Paul again refers to the dual reign, of sin and death on the one hand, and of righteousness and eternal life on the other. The triumph of grace renders the results of sin insignificant by comparison. Despite misrepresentations to the contrary, Calvinists have stressed the magnificence of the triumph of grace, and also the number of the redeemed. Joseph Bellamy, in *The Millennium*, looking ahead to the great population of the earth in the years ahead, and to the world-wide triumph of Christ's Kingdom saw, that, even if one assumed all to be lost before then, "yet if all these should be saved, there would be above seventeen thousand saved, to one that would be lost."⁶ Much later, Charles Hodge said mainly the same thing:

That the benefits of redemption shall far outweigh the evils of the fall is here clearly asserted. This we can in a measure comprehend, because, 1. The number of the saved shall doubtless greatly exceed the number of the lost. Since the half of mankind die in infancy, and, according to the Protestant doctrine, are heirs of salvation; and since in the future state of the Church the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, we have reason to believe that the lost shall bear to the saved no greater proportion than the inmates of a prison do to the mass of the community. 2. Because the eternal Son of God, by his incarnation and mediation, exalts his people to a far higher state of being than our race, if unfallen, could ever have attained. 3. Because the benefits of redemption are not to be confined to the human race. Christ is to be admired in his saints. It is through the Church that the manifold wisdom of the redemption of man is to be the great source of knowledge and blessedness to the intelligent universe.⁷

⁶ Joseph Bellamy, "The Millennium," in *The Works of Joseph Bellamy*, vol. I, p. 457. Boston, Massachusetts: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society (1850) 1853

⁷ Charles Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

It is sin to understate the power of God unto salvation, and the scope of His declared purpose.

Calvinists, until recently, had a clear perspective on these things. It explains in part the very great power of Calvinism historically, and also the intense hatred and misrepresentation of it. Calvinism was a revolutionary force without equal. Lutheranism and Anglicanism were made subservient to the state. Catholicism had been previously controlled by the major states and, after the Reformation and Counter-Reformation waned, was even more controlled. Calvinism was an uncontrolled and revolutionary force until it was tamed by neoplatonic influences and spiritualizing “exegesis.”

19. “Newness of Life” (Romans 6:1-4)

1. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?
2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?
3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?
4. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)

Paul draws an analogy between Adam and Christ; each communicates to his humanity an enduring inheritance. Adam’s seed inherits sin and death. Christ’s new humanity gains from Him life, justice and dominion. They reign in and under Him.

Paul is not alone in seeing this analogy. One of the boldest statements comes from our Lord’s cousin after the flesh, John, who compares our rebirth through Christ to the miracle of the Virgin Birth:

11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:11-14)

There are some textual scholars who hold that “were” in v. 13. should read “was” and that this is a direct reference to the Virgin Birth. As the text now stands, it is an indirect affirmation of the Virgin Birth and affirms that our rebirth in Christ is, like His own birth, a miraculous and supernatural one. Paul’s own assumption is that the births of the two covenant heads, Adam and Christ, were alike the handiwork of God in a special way.

Because of our miraculous new creation and our justification, sanctification must necessarily follow, Paul says. Thus, antinomianism is precluded.

In v. 1, Paul asks, how can we dare assume that grace gives us any excuse to linger in sin? The assumption of antinomians is that grace is triggered or released by sin: therefore, “continue in sin, that grace may abound.” But it is not sin that brings forth grace but God’s covenant mercy and faithfulness. Sin invokes rather God’s wrath and judgment. It is an evil concept which sees God as necessarily obligated to forgive man. Heine’s words on facing death were, “The good God will pardon me, for that’s His

job.”¹ This notion is all too prevalent. Men assume that forgiveness is God’s business, and sin turns on the tap of grace.

Note that Paul says, “shall we *continue* in sin, that grace may abide?” The word *continue* is *epimeno*, remain, or, abide. Shall we see salvation as justification without any *resulting* good works or sanctification? Our salvation is by God’s sovereign grace through Jesus Christ, but this does *not* mean that our salvation does not produce good works! To assume so is blasphemous. Hodge noted,

The act which in its nature was a dying to sin, was our accepting of Christ as our Saviour. That act involves in it not only a separation from sin, but a deadness to it. No man can apply to Christ to be delivered from sin, in order that he may live in it.... How can a Christian, which is but another name for a holy man, live any longer in sin?²

Paul tells us that man must be redefined in Christ; in Him we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Hence, he says, in v. 2, “God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Our lives now have a new motive and direction. We are “dead to sin” in that in Christ’s death we are dead men; we have received the death penalty for our rebellion against God. We are thus juridically dead. We are also dead to sin because the motivating and governing force and direction in our lives is Jesus Christ. Despite our many transgressions, our direction is away from sin towards righteousness. Then, we are finally dead to sin in the world to come. Our death to sin is thus judicial, personal, and eschatological.

Calvin said,

The state of the case is really this, --- that the faithful are never reconciled to God without the gift of regeneration; nay, we are for this end justified, --- that we may afterwards serve God in holiness of life. Christ indeed does not cleanse us by his blood, nor render God propitious to us by his expiation, in any other way than by making us partakers of his Spirit, who renews us to a holy life. It would then be a most strange inversion of the work of God were sin to gather strength on account of the grace which is offered to us in Christ; for medicine is not a feeder of the disease, which it destroys.³

In v. 3, Paul develops the analogy to Christ; our baptism into Christ is also into His death. Hodge’s comment here is particularly telling:

And this baptism has special reference to the death of Christ; *we are baptized unto his death*. That is, we are united to him in death. His

¹ “Ilico” (Nathaniel Michlem): *No More Apologies*, p. 76f. London, England: The Religious Book Club, 1941.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 391, 392. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong (1882), 1893.

³ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 219. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

death becomes ours; ours as an expiation for sin, as the means of reconciliation with God, and consequently as the means of our sanctification. Although justification is the primary object of the death of Christ, yet justification is in order to sanctification. He died that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. If such is the intimate connection between justification and sanctification in the purpose of God in giving his Son to die for us, there must be a like intimate connection between them in the experience of the believer. The very act of faith by which we receive Christ as the propitiation for sin, is spiritually a death to sin. It is in its very nature a renunciation of everything which it was the design of Christ's death to destroy. Every believer, therefore, is a saint. He renounces sin in accepting Christ.⁴

Good works do not save us, but, if good works are separated from salvation, we have neither salvation nor good works. The just are *saved* by faith, and they *live* and *work* by faith.

Paul, in Galatians 3:27, says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ." They are now *clothed* with Christ, i.e., have become family members of Christ and have taken on His character. Their old status, whether a Jew or Gentile, is rendered useless and void, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Gal. 6:15). The Judaizers wanted to use old wineskins; Paul insists that their own Scriptures nullify their nationalistic wineskin.

In v. 4, Paul stresses the radical break with the old humanity which Christ represents. It is "newness of life." It is only comparable with death and resurrection. It is a new birth and more, because it is a rebirth into God's creation as His called and chosen new man. Baptism signifies more than our death in Christ, and more than our cleansing from sin by His atonement. It means also our resurrection. It means that "we, being dead to ourselves, may become new creatures. He (Paul) rightly makes a transition from a fellowship in death to a fellowship in life."⁵

The "burial" in baptism is not to be construed as requiring immersion any more than "planted" in v. 5 requires any literal planting of ourselves.⁶ Paul's concern here is to establish the fact that sanctification must follow justification and that works must follow faith. As Hodge said,

Justification is in order to sanctification. The two are inseparable. There can be no participation in Christ's life without a participation in his death, and we cannot enjoy the benefits of his death unless we are partakers of the power of his life. We must be reconciled to God in order to be holy, and we cannot be reconciled without thereby becoming holy. Antinomianism, or the doctrine that the benefits of the atonement can be enjoyed without experiencing the renewing of

⁴ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

⁵ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁶ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

the Holy Ghost, is therefore contrary to the very nature and design of redemption.⁷

Paul pushes every image beyond its limits because none can compare to the reality he seeks to convey. The figure of baptism tells us not what baptism is, but what “newness of life” is; baptism signifies that new life, but the reality is greater than the image. E.H. Gifford said, “By ‘newness of life’ is meant ‘newness’ of the element of life, of the living animating principle, not the life that is lived day by day (*bios*), but the life which liveth in us (*ζωή*).”⁸ The word *life* (“newness of life”) is *ζωή*; it refers, as Gifford indicated, not to the life we live day by day, but to life as God created it, life in the absolute sense. We are reborn to walk in this newness of life. “Newness” is *kainotes*, it has reference to quality; it means that this life is of a different character. This different character is ours by our membership in Christ’s new humanity. We have been created a new race appointed to reign in justice and with dominion. “Newness of life” requires us to bring our whole life and our world into conformity to the life and law of our covenant King, Jesus Christ.

⁷. *Idem*.

⁸. E.H. Gifford, “Romans,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible...with Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 126f. London, England: John Murray, 1881

20. The Two Humanities (Romans 6:5-11)

5. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:
6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.
7. For he that is dead is freed from sin.
8. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:
9. Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.
10. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.
11. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:5-11)

Paul is a remarkable writer; his style seems cramped and very technical; it is a highly rabbinical approach. Behind his cautious and meticulous wording, however, there is a sledge-hammer power. Men prefer to go to Paul for selected verses to vindicate themselves; a systematic study of Paul is devastating to most theologies.

Paul begins by stating that, because we have been planted together in the death of Christ, our vicarious sacrifice, we are also alive in terms of His resurrection (v. 5). We now have, because of our death in Christ, a new life, a life which shares in the results of the resurrection. This means we have a victory over sin, guilt and death.

The purpose of Christ's birth, life, atonement, death, and resurrection is to end the life of Adam in us, i.e., our bondage to sin, guilt, and death. Whatever man does in Adam is a reproduction and repetition of that fallen nature. In Romans 8:2, Paul calls this "the law of sin and death." The whole of human life under Adam is governed by that iron law. The religion, politics, sociology, and total life of the humanity of Adam is governed by that law, the fact of sin, and the guilt and death sin results in. The purpose of our deliverance, says Paul, is to destroy that bondage so that "henceforth we should not serve sin" (v. 6).

Death is a great dividing point. We are born into the humanity of Adam, and in Christ we die to that race, to be reborn into a new mankind, the humanity of Christ. This has a great consequence, "For he that is dead is freed from sin" (v. 7). By this fact, a new force enters history, one not bound by sin nor by its consequences, guilt and death. Rather, righteousness or justice and life now govern and motivate us.

In vv. 8-9, Paul states the logical conclusion: to be dead with Christ means to be alive with Him, and this requires an amazing conclusion. Christ having been resurrected has overcome the power and hold of death

and can die no more; "death hath no more dominion over him" (v. 9). His death is the death of death for us.

Death is a decisive fact. For the humanity of Adam, it is the ugly end of all its hopes and plans; it is a standing offense to all its dreams of a humanistic paradise. For us in Christ, death is no less a decisive fact, but a very different one. First, we die to sin, i.e., we are judicially dead in Christ's death, our sin-bearer, and we are resurrected or regenerated in Him. Second, we die physically at the end of our life here to enter into heaven. Third, with the resurrection of the body at the end of history, we see the total death of death, and the fullness of life and justice.

It is important now for us to analyze what Paul is telling us. He gives us with great clarity and power the sociology of justification by faith. He also tells us what the alternative to this is; it is the sociology of sin. The humanity of Adam is fallen, and it has a will to sin summed up in Genesis 3:5, the will of every man, and his nature, is to be his own god determining good and evil for himself and thus being his own law-maker. The motive force in the humanity of Adam is thus sin, and this sin is to play god, to control other men and things. This means that the purpose of religion in Adam's world is the control of man and nature, and this too becomes the purpose of humanistic science. True education leads a person into growth under God and in knowledge of the reality of God's creation. Humanistic education aims at controlling people in order to establish a realm in which the masses are ruled by philosopher kings. Any humanistic educational program will thus be a menace to freedom under God. Its goals will be manipulation and control.

The politics of Adam will be no different, only more potent in its applications. In 1915, Franklin Hichborn described such politics in his study of "The System." He dealt specifically with the details of "the system" in San Francisco, the interlock between politics, capital, labor, and crime to control the civil order and its peoples. During the 1940s and 1950s, I had personal experience with "the system" in two states, and its details were told to me by some honest officials who worked vainly against it. To cite a specific example, I was told of the method used against a "problem" person who posed a threat to "the system." A careful check on his home made it possible for men to enter it when no one was there. Every aspect of every room was carefully photographed in color. The man was later told quietly to drop his proceedings, otherwise two homosexuals were prepared to testify that, on a given night, when his wife and children were elsewhere, they had been there to engage in homosexual acts with him. They would be able (from the photographs) to describe the house in detail. The two homosexuals were men who some time before had been caught molesting very young boys. Their confessions had been gained in exchange for immunity from prosecution *on the condition* that they would subsequently

be ready to testify as instructed. These proceedings came “from above,” and all the police knew was that no prosecution ensued. The same kind of pressure was used in other cases by using prostitutes, under-age girl delinquents, and so on. On occasion, such tactics are also used against churchmen by “the system,” as I know from experience. The net result is to either compel surrender by any person who threatens the system, or to isolate them and make them ineffective. The press, incidentally, is often a part of “the system.”

Something like this may have been at work in the Watergate scandal. Jim Hougan, in *Secret Agenda* (1984) alleges, and with considerable evidence at points, that, behind Watergate was prostitution and blackmail, and the attempt to gain control of key files for such purposes.

On every level of politics, “the system” operates by using sin as the instrument of control. If the controlled man plays the game and does as he is told, he can be made into a “great statesman” and one of the controllers. Evidence of the operation of “the system” has been found in antiquity, going back to the times of Abraham and Moses.

Attempts at reforming “the system” are futile as long as the people are children of Adam. However great the facade of loving virtue and justice, such men are dedicated to playing god, and, whether it be the sexual realm, or the religious, the economic, educational, or political, the results are the same. Paul calls this “the law of sin and death” as against “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2).

Paul declares that “the just shall *live* by faith” (Rom. 1:17). Their motivating force is not the will to be gods (Gen. 3:5), but to seek first the Kingdom of God and the justice thereof (Matt. 6:33). Their faith propels them into the world as “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37). The politics of justification is the politics of justice under God and according to His law. Whereas the politics of sin is the politics of death, the sociology of justification, of the Kingdom of God, is compared to Christ’s resurrection. In every realm, we are told by Paul, the goal is to establish the implications of our great liberation in Christ: “death hath no more dominion over Him” (Rom. 6:9), and therefore no dominion over us because we are in Christ.

21. The Reign of Sin (Romans 6:12-14)

12. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

13. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

14. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:12-14)

We again encounter a key word, *reign*. Another word, used in Romans 6:9 and 14 is *dominion*, *kurieuo*, related to *kurios*, lord. Another important word is *lusts*, the plural of *epithumea*; in English, it has come to mean a sexual urge, whereas in the original it means a strong desire. The word is at times used of good or wholesome desires; it is so used in Luke 22:15, when our Lord says, "With *desire* I have *desired* to eat this passover with you before I suffer." In Philippians 1:23, Paul writes, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a *desire* to depart, and to be with Christ..." Again, in I Thessalonians 2:17, Paul says, "But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great *desire*." The context determines the meaning. However, it is imperative to remember that the word "lusts" or "desires" is itself neutral.

How then shall we understand it in v. 12? The meaning seems obvious enough: we are not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies in order to obey its desires. Note however that it is sin, *hamartia* which is the problem. The desires or lusts of sin can be various. We may desire things forbidden by the law, but sin, ruling in us, can lead us to demand things good in themselves but not good as a governing motive. We may want certain things which are perhaps important and godly, but, when it is a case of "my will be done," they are expressions of the reign of sin. We may desire peace and quiet, better circumstances, and other things which are good in and of themselves, but never to be goals of life. We are plainly told, however, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov. 16:4). We are not our own; we are here because of God's purpose, not our own, and to make our will more important than His purpose is sin. No doubt Jeremiah would have *desired* other results from his service to the Lord, but God did the choosing. In brief, our otherwise "innocent" desires can be evil if they rule us. We must serve God on His terms, not our own. To read "lusts" as referring only to "bad" goals is to warp Scripture and to deny the God-centered emphasis Paul stresses. The traditional interpretations thus seriously alter the meaning and pave the way to antinomianism.

Again, the reference to “your mortal body” is wrongly taken in a Hellenic sense to mean our physical life, seen as evil, as against our spirit, which is seen as good, as a Platonic idea or form. Cranfield is correct that the reference cannot be limited to the physical body but means “the whole man in his fallenness. It is not only the physical body that is mortal: the whole man, as the fallen human being that he is, is subject to death.” Moreover, the rule of sin is over our total life, and every area of life without any exception.¹ At this point, Calvin, Luther, and others have gone astray.

In v. 13, Paul declares that Christians cannot *yield*, or, literally, *present* their members, limbs, or assets to sin as *instruments*, i.e., *tools* or *weapons*, of *unrighteousness* or *injustice*. Man’s view of life is egocentric; he sees his life as his own, to be lived in terms of self-generated objectives. If they are good objectives, we demand that God back us up and further us in our goals. God’s purpose is, *first*, that we live in terms of His priorities, not our own (Matt. 6:33). *Second*, God requires us to see this world as a battlefield between good and evil, God’s covenant and law as against covenant-breakers, and between the old humanity of Adam and the humanity of Jesus Christ. In that struggle, our lives are *weapons* on one side or another. If we live in terms of our goals and hopes, life becomes a “rat race,” because we cannot create either the meaning of life nor its realization. We are thus weapons, tools, either God’s or against God’s order. If we live in terms of our own goals, our lives become weapons of sin.

Paul says that we must present ourselves unto God, answer His call to arms all the days of our lives, “as those that are alive from the dead.” The miracle of our salvation, our resurrection from the death of sin, must make us people of the resurrection. This means that our being is now God-centered, not self-centered. It means that we present ourselves unto God as His weapons for justice.

To be *weapons for justice* means something very different from concentrating on our inner spiritual state and the false holiness of pietism. It means rather that the holiness of God rules us. In a recent issue of American’s most prominent evangelical magazine an article was titled, “When Police Work is a Cop-out.” The author’s wife had long sought his conversion. When this policeman was converted, he made what he regarded as a fine Christian decision:

And recently, on my 10th anniversary with the police force, we made a decision. I turned in my badge. It meant giving up the security of a

¹. C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 317. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

good salary and benefits and a job I enjoyed. But we are now fully free to do God's work, something I enjoy far more.²

First, the identification of full-time Christian service with church work is Biblically unsound. Every area of life and thought must be made an area of Christian vocation. The perspective of this ex-policeman involves a desertion of duty under God. Are we to have a world in which only the unregenerate are in law enforcement, politics, and other callings? *Second*, the ex-policeman denied by his statement one of the basic doctrines of the Reformation, the priesthood of all believers. He limited freedom to do God's work to the church. That such decisions are given publicity as praiseworthy examples tells us how far the church has fallen.

One aspect of the reign of sin is that it leads us to see our lives as our own; another aspect is that it leads us into false doctrines of holiness.

In v. 14, Paul declares, "For sin shall not have dominion (or lord it) over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." We are not under *nomos*, law. Paul in the original does *not* say, we are not under *the law*; i.e., the law given to Moses, but that we are not "under law;" we are not under indictment. To be an *outlaw* is to be a fugitive from justice because we are *under* the law, on the wrong side of it. We are no longer under indictment, under law, because Christ's death and resurrection liberates us from the death penalty which was over us. We are *under grace*; we now have a new relationship to God through Christ.

Christ did not free us from our death sentence to give us renewed freedom to despise God's law. Because we are now *under grace*, we have the power to become faithful sons of God.

To be *under the law*, supremely, means to be born into the humanity of Adam, to be a member of the old human race. It means to be "in bondage" (Gal. 4:3). Paul says,

4. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
5. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,
6. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (Gal. 4:4-6)

Here it is clear that to be "under the law" means to be under sentence of death as a member of Adam's fallen race. Jesus Christ born of the Virgin Mary, was "under the law" because He was "made of a woman" who was a member of that doomed humanity. Although Himself sinless, Christ in His humanity was linked to that race and "under the law." He came to redeem us who "were under the law" and to make us sons of God by adoption.

² Bernie Elliott as told to Anne Fitzpatrick, "First Person: When Police Work is a Cop-out," in *Moody Monthly*, September, 1984, vol. 85, no. 1, p. 120.

We are now dead to the law as an indictment against us; we are alive to it as the way of holiness. The law is now in us as our way of life, not a threat hanging over our heads, *because* we are *under grace*.

We must therefore not allow sin to reign over us. This reign becomes a reality if we see ourselves in any way “freed” from God and His covenant law. The law of God requires us to live for God and according to His purpose. We can be moral people in the sense that we do not violate the “second table” of the Ten Commandments, but, if our lives are not God-centered, sin reigns over us, and it has dominion in us. We are then using our morality as a means of buying immunity for living our lives for our own purposes. Such living, however moral, places us in the suburbs of hell.

22. The Alternatives (Romans 6:15-23)

15. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.

16. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

17. But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

18. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

19. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

20. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:15-23)

The word translated in these verses as *servants* (vv. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22) is *doulos*, and it refers to someone in bondage, a slave or a bond-servant. All men without exception, Paul declares, are bond-servants, either to sin or to justice. Men are not gods; they are not autonomous, nor are they free to establish the conditions of the universe. They serve something, because they are creatures, and, as our Lord tells us, "No man can serve two masters" (Matt. 6:24).

The implications of this must be faced by all men. For all too many, churchmen and non-churchmen, life is like a buffet-table, and the choice belongs to man. A nationally prominent woman, often on television, professes to believe the Bible from cover to cover; she also believes in re-incarnation and other such notions. This woman of impeccable sexual morality, kindly, gracious, and thoughtful, assumes that in the realm of faith her choice is determinative. Many people, when challenged for their adherence to some anti-Christian article of faith, respond by saying, "Well, I like it, and I believe it," as though their will determines reality.

The lovable artist, Renoir, hated atheism, believed firmly in the Virgin Birth, and saw the world as divided between those who rejoiced in the Creator's work, and those who proudly sought to overthrow it. At the same time, he saw no reason why Hindus should not go to heaven.¹

Behind such attitudes lies the implicit fact of Genesis 3:5, every man as his own god. Many churchmen believe in the Bible from cover to cover,

but their belief is no incentive to action, any more than having insurance policies incites a man to action. For them, God, Christ, and heaven are solid facts, but they are merely certain facts in a universe of facts, *not* the central and governing fact which determines all things. For them, there is no doubt that God is real, and so is the stock exchange and their labor union, but none of these “real” things should bother their time away from work or worship.

In pagan antiquity, men went to the temples of the gods not to worship in any Biblical sense but to buy protection and insurance in exchange for certain gifts or premises. Paul’s letter is a long assault on this position: the just shall and must live by faith, and this faith has a total governing power. Our faith must not only save us but totally govern us.

In v. 15, Paul makes clear that Christ does not save us to give us freedom to sin. It is the penalty of the law, its death sentence, which is abrogated, not the law. In Calvin’s words, the only thing removed is *the curse* of the law, its death penalty against us:

As the wisdom of the flesh is ever clamorous against the mysteries of God, it was necessary for the Apostle to subjoin what might anticipate an objection: for since the law is the rule of life, and has been given to guide men, we think that when it is removed all discipline immediately falls to the ground, that restraints are taken away, in a word, that there remains no distinction or difference between good and evil. But we are much deceived if we think, that the righteousness which God approves in his law is abolished, when the law is abrogated; for the abrogation is by no means to be applied to the precepts which teach the right way of living, as Christ confirms and sanctions these and does not abrogate them; but the right view is, that nothing is taken away but the curse, to which all men without grace are subject. But though Paul does not distinctly express this, yet he indirectly intimates it.²

The Christian is a free man in Christ, but, in the summary of Sanday and Headlam, “Christian freedom consists not in freedom to sin but in freedom from sin.”³

In v. 16, Paul strikes out again at the notion of man as free and without a master. It is a delusion for man to believe in an autonomous freedom, and such a belief is a product of original sin. It manifests the delusion of Genesis 3:5, that man can be his own god and lawmaker. On the contrary, Paul says, *first* the power which men obey is the power which holds them slaves.

¹. Jean Renoir: *Renoir, My Father*, pp. 146-149. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown (1958) 1962.

². John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 234. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

³. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 167. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

Second, there are only two alternatives for men and none other, the slaves of sin or the slaves of righteousness or justice.⁴ It should be noted that Paul does *not* say that the contrast is between bondage to Satan vs. bondage to God. However, true this is in an ultimate sense, man moves in history and views things historically. As a result, he either serves sin, or he serves justice. In his sinning, Satan means nothing to him, whereas enforcing his own will is everything, and this is sin. Those who serve justice or righteousness will be more self-conscious of what and whom they serve.

In v. 16, Paul spells out the contrast. To be the bond-servants or slaves of sin results in death. To be the servants of obedience results in justice. Thus, the primary form of the contrast is *between sin and obedience*. Later, Paul *contrasts sin and justice*. It should be clear from what Paul says, in Mills' words, "God's standards are not lowered in the New Testament. They are identical to those of the Old Testament."⁵

In v. 17, Paul turns to the Romans specifically. He thanks God that they, who were once the slaves of sin, have now "obeyed from the heart" the instructions in Christian faith which had been delivered to them. Paul speaks of "that form of doctrine" given to them, i.e., the norm of life to which a Christian must conform in all his being. The logic of life, he continues in v. 18, is that, having been freed from sin, they were now the servants of righteousness or justice. They had been rescued from one power by another and greater power and were now God's bond-servants in Christ.

Paul uses the very familiar facts of slavery and bond-service to make his point. No one in his day could be ignorant of his meaning. In v. 19, Paul says that he uses this human analogy to drive home the truth to their weak nature, (all too prone to evade the truth). They had previously presented themselves as servants of vice or uncleanness and lawlessness or iniquity. Now, the reverse is true: they present themselves as servants of justice unto holiness. Since the contrast here is between iniquity or *anomia*, lawlessness, and justice, i.e., the law of God, it is clear why Paul begins by stressing *obedience* (v. 16).

To be servants of sin means to be free from justice or righteousness (v. 20). The sociological implications of this are clear: a society of antinomian people will be an unjust society, and antinomian churches have a very great responsibility for our contemporary lawlessness. Although men are not honest enough to admit it, when they are in bondage to sin they prefer and foster an unjust society. Men may be resentful of injustice when it affects them, but fallen men commonly prefer such injustice because it is agreeable to their life-style. In the 1950s, a man was made chief of police of a Western

⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield: *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 322. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

⁵ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian looks at Romans*, p. 199. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

city of about 40,000 people and a business center. Local corruption was driving people to other cities, and the substantial income from regional towns, ranches, and farms was waning. The new chief was ordered to "clean up the city," which he did. Gambling, prostitution, and other evils were to all practical effect wiped out, for which the chief was fired, one police commissioner telling him, "We didn't mean that clean." Freedom *from* justice is a veiled priority of the ungodly society. In the Soviet Union, to report corruption is criminal.⁶

The result of the service of sin, Paul reminds the Romans in v. 21, is nothing but shame. They cannot look back on their past without dismay. Had they persisted in their old course, the end would have been death.

Now, however (v. 22), they are free from sin, are in God's service, are consecrated to Him, and they have a new end, eternal life. On the part of any man, sin's wages are always death, whereas God's gift through Christ is eternal life (v. 23).

Paul has closed the door on man's dream of autonomy. This delusion, born in and of the Fall, leads men to assume that life can be lived on man's terms. Religion in such a view becomes a support system, not a command system. Christianity is good if it makes life livable and provides a support to man. Such a view is anathema to Paul. It represented an aspect of paganism which had infiltrated Judaism and now the church. It saw faith as something useful to man and thus was in conformity to the Roman view of religion as social cement. In such a perspective, the state governs religion. In the Biblical perspective, men are to be governed in every area of life and thought by the law word of God. Between the two faiths, there can be no compromise. The premise of the Fall of man, that man can be autonomous and function as his own god and lawmaker is no alternative at all: it is a delusion, and a deadly one.

⁶ See Michael Voslensky: *Nomenklatura*, p. 196f. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984.

23. Paul and the New Testament

At this point in our study of Romans, it is necessary to take time to survey the direction of Paul's thinking and at the same time to examine its context.

Earlier (in Chapter 12, "We Establish the Law"), we saw three possible groups in Rome whose perspectives led to problems. *First*, there were the Judaizers, of whom we shall have more to say shortly; then, *second*, there were those who styled themselves as "the strong," who were "gnostic-type" antinomians. *Third*, there were the Hellenizers, usually essentially one with "the strong." These were people, however, for whom Greek thinking was particularly important in establishing a framework.

Paul indicts these perspectives tellingly, but he does not separate nor differentiate between them. He refers to an emphasis on circumcision; he cites the perspective of the strong, and so on, but he treats all these views as a common error. Theologically, he was right; was this also true historically?

The key question is this: how Hebraic were the Jews, or, how faithful were they to the Old Testament? One of the most serious errors with respect to New Testament studies is the assumption that the Jews and the Judaizing Christians were champions of the law as against the church. If this is true, then Jesus and the Gospels are wrong. The Gospels tell us that Jesus came as the champion of the Old Testament and its law as against a Judaism that had forsaken it. Our Lord charged that the law of God had been rendered void, "of none effect," by their traditions (Matt. 15:1-9). He declared Himself to be dedicated to establishing the validity of the law and that He had come to fulfill or to put it into force (Matt. 5:17-19). Moreover, the Old Testament, He said, pretold His sufferings, death, resurrection, and exaltation (Luke 9:22-44; 17:25; 13:33; 24:7; 18:31-34; 22:37; 24:25-27; 24:44-49; etc.). Moreover, He declared that the Old Testament foretold the world mission to the Gentiles (Luke 24:27; 4:25-27), and that the Old Testament also foretold the general resurrection of the dead (Luke 20:37).¹

In brief, our Lord held that Judaism had abandoned the Old Testament faith, disregarded God's law, and substituted its own wisdom for the wisdom of God. They had substituted nationalism for religion. If this was true, we cannot maintain, as the antinomians do, that, between the resurrection and Pentecost, Judea suddenly returned to the law. Such a view does violence to the facts.

The fact is that Judea was at one and the same time the center of Jewish *nationalism* and the Greco-Roman culture. Jerusalem and all Judea had

¹. See Charles H. Talbert: *Luke and the Gnostics*, p. 35f. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1966.

been the center of great financial outlays by its successive foreign rulers in order to appease the Jews. The Greeks, then the Romans and the Herods, made Judea a showplace of aqueducts, theaters, gymnasiums, magnificent public buildings, and more. Colonnades, paved roads, and more made Judea a magnificent land. Josephus tells us of the glories of the realm. The anger of Rome in the Jewish war of A.D. 66-70 was in large part due to the fact that Rome bitterly resented Jewish "ingratitude." Judea had been a favored and privileged province, and its reaction was seen as the basest treason. Nationalism, not religion, marked Judea. Not only were the religious leaders, whom our Lord indicted, but the common people also were wayward. Their reaction to the miraculous feedings was an attempt to force Christ to be their king (John 6:15).

What then shall we think of the Judaizers in the church? Their emphasis on circumcision Paul had to deal with again and again. Had they become converts to the law, or was there another reason for their position? Paul tells us plainly in Galatians 6:12,13 that these Judaizers in the church had no desire to keep the law. Their Judaism was pragmatic:

12. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

Paul here tells us, *first*, that the reason advanced for circumcision was strategic, i.e., to avoid persecution. Jewish faith had a legal status in Roman law and special immunities. The Judaizers, whether Jewish or Gentile, advocated circumcision as a means of evading persecution for the cross of Christ. Christianity as a separate faith had no legal status; as a Jewish cult, it was legal. The requirement of circumcision by Gentiles, i.e., of becoming formally a Jew before becoming a Christian, made the church legal in Judea as well, because it thereby placed the church under the Temple as a Jewish cult. Thus, circumcision, Paul tells us, sidestepped persecution, but, in the process, it sidestepped Christ. It meant placing confidence in and glorying over an external fact instead of the cross of Christ.²

Second, Paul says, the demand of these so-called Judaizers was on the law only with respect to a formal adherence, circumcision. These people, Paul points out, have no desire to keep the law. Their "Christianity" was a cowardly affair at best. They wanted the advantage of having a foot in both camps; hence, they had no commitment to anything, certainly neither to the law nor to Christ.

² Walter Schmithals: *Paul and the Gnostics*, p. 39. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1972.

Moreover, the evidence is clear from the epistles and from non-Biblical writings that libertinism was commonplace among the gnostics and had been brought into the church.³ Paul repeatedly deals with this problem.

Neither the gnostics nor the Hellenizers had strong objections to libertinism. For them, the body was of matter and hence an inferior realm morally. Hence also their disbelief in or indifference to the doctrine of the general resurrection. These groups were receptive to the Judaizing Christians, who were in turn receptive to them. We have no account of any consequential conflict between them. The reason for this was their common perspective on such offenses. The Judaizing churchmen had a pragmatic faith, not a Biblical one.

None of this should surprise us. It is simply historically untenable to posit a golden age in the past. Today, heresies abound even among those who call themselves orthodox. I have heard people who define themselves as practicing old-fashioned Catholics, or as good fundamentalists or Calvinists, tell me that they believe in the occultist Cayce's views, or to express a variety of alien doctrines. I have heard people define themselves as good Jews who believe in neither God nor His law, only in loyalty to their Jewishness. We live in a better era than the first century, A.D. Why should we assume, despite our Lord's testimony, that Judaism then held to the law, or that the early church represented an ideal order?

Next, let us remind ourselves again that; against the prevailing syncretism of his day, Paul insists on the absolute claims of the triune God. The just are not merely *saved* by faith; they are required to *live* by faith, in terms of God's every word (Matt. 4:4; Rom 1:17). To *live* by faith means to live in terms of God's law. Hence, Paul declares, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). Moreover, Paul says, there are only two alternatives, two ways, sin or obedience, and obedience means justice. There is no question that some of the earliest Christian writings such as the *Didache* and *Barnabas*, represent a low level of theological awareness. At the same time, they had learned clearly from Paul the doctrine of the two ways. No other alternatives exist. *Barnabas*, for example, tells us, "Loose every bond of injustice, untie the knots of forcibly extracted agreements," free the downtrodden, "tear up every unjust contract," feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the homeless, treat the lowly with respect, and so on.⁴ We are also told that Christ's work was not to create a new covenant but a new people.⁵

When we recognize these things, we see the essential agreement of Paul and James, both emphatically given to stressing the Old Testament roots of

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 111 ff.; 157; 159 f., 231.

⁴ Robert A. Kraft, translator, editor: *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. III, The Didache and Barnabas*, p. 86f. New York, New York: Thomas Nelson, 1965.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 94.

the New Testament faith. James in 2:10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," gives us a Christian use of a Jewish precept.⁶ For James, faith and works cannot be separated; they must be a unity to gain God's justice among men. Paul's stress on righteousness or justice is similar.

In brief, *Romans* is not an abstract theological treatise. Its concern is that the just shall live by faith and manifest the righteousness or justice of God in every area of life and thought.

Paul does not break with the Gospels, nor with James. To misread Paul and see him as opposing what our Lord came to fulfill is to pervert Scripture.

Gnosticism was, as Schmithals noted, very adaptable; it found it easy to adopt circumcision and to re-interpret it to suit its own purposes.⁷ Moreover, Gnostics were averse to making any stand which led to persecution; they were consummate compromisers. As a result, when the "Judaizing" Christians promoted circumcision as a means of evading persecution, the Gnostics readily allied themselves to this convenient facade.

Paul, however, forces the antithesis. At every point, he insists on the clear distinction between the two faiths or ways. Man must *live* by faith, not by compromise. We cannot serve sin, our own autonomous will, but only God and His justice. We are the just because we are the justified who live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:14).

⁶ Martin Tibeluis, revised by Heinrich Greeven: *James*, p. 18. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1976. (Tibeluis would not agree with us, of course, with respect to Paul.)

⁷ Schmithals, *op. cit.*, p. 29ff.

24. Dominion and Power (Romans 7:1-6)

1. Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?
2. For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.
3. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.
4. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.
5. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.
6. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:1-6)

Before studying this text, it is well to bear in mind that the details of parables and illustrations cannot be pushed to bear an alien meaning. Thus, in our Lord's parable concerning the beggar Lazarus, we are told that the rich man in hell looked up and saw Lazarus in heaven with Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). This parable does not give us the right to conclude that people in heaven and hell can view one another; the purpose of the parable requires the dramatic use of such a viewing, and our Lord's purpose and meaning are set forth in Luke 16:29-31. Otto A. Piper, in *The Christian Interpretation of Sex* (1941), followed the Montanists in seeing certain texts as forbidding the remarriage of widowed persons; in so doing, he was reading Scripture with purposes alien to the text. The same is true of Romans 7:2, "For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth." Paul is not saying that there is no divorce; the passage has no such meaning in mind. Rather, its purpose is to say that a legal claim is normally binding on us until death. The law has claims on all under debt to the law. Paul does not say that the law is dead but that a dead man is dead to the law, and the law has no claim against him.

At issue is the claim of the law against a man. Every man born of Adam is sentenced to death by the law. This is the law's claim on him: his person is under a death penalty. With Christ as our vicarious sacrifice and substitute, we are dead to the law, *but the law is not dead*. At the same time, as members of the new humanity of Christ, we are legally alive in Christ to the law, now our way of life, not a sentence against us. Thus, we cannot say, as Kasemann did, that Paul sees the law as belonging "to the old aeon."¹

Such interpretations, common in both Catholic and Protestant circles, warp the meaning of the faith and serve antinomianism. The prophetic utterance of Zacharias on the birth of John the Baptist gives us a declaration of the triumph of God's justice in the Christian era, i.e., it tells us that God's law shall be fulfilled or put into force:

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

70. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71. That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72. To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73. The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,

74. That he would grant us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,

78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,

79. To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:68-79)

Either God deluded the Virgin Mary and the priest Zacharias, or they knew more about the meaning of the Christian era than do our antinomian commentators. Very obviously, Mary and Zacharias did not see God's law set aside but, rather, their vision is of the realization of the order set forth in the law and the prophets through Jesus Christ.

E.H. Gifford was closer to the truth in comparing the union of Christ with the believers to a second marriage. Paul gives us three stages: "(1) the dissolution of the former marriage; (2) the new marriage; (3) its fruits."² Men in Adam are married to sin and are dead before the law, sentenced to death. By dying in Christ, their old marriage ends, and the death penalty has no claim on them. The antinomians pervert the meaning of the cross; as they read it, Christ, instead of dying to save His new humanity from sin and death, died to save them from the law, to deliver them from the need to be righteous or to further justice. This idea is blasphemy. Sanday and Headlam set forth clearly the meaning of the cross:

¹ Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 186. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980.

² E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 134. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

The Christian takes his place, as it were, with Christ upon the Cross, and there has his old self crucified. The 'body' of Christ here meant is the 'crucified body'; the Christian shares in that crucifixion, and so gets rid of his sinful past.³

Cranfield correctly summarizes Paul's meaning: Christians "are free from the law's condemnation."⁴

In using the analogy of marriage, Paul does not set aside nor thereby comment on Biblical laws and references relative to marriage, i.e., Gen. 1:27; 2:21-24; Lev. 10:10; Deut. 24:1; Matt. 5:27-32; 19:3-9; Deut. 24:4; Gen. 25:1; Ruth 1:9, etc. He does, however, use the place of a woman in marriage for his analogy, not a man's place. His reason is to call attention to a fact of life in the Roman world, the inferior status of women. She was bound to a degree that men then were not, and Paul seeks to illustrate the position of being under the law as power over our lives. The Roman husband controlled his wife legally; even more, the law as a death penalty has a legal hold on us.⁵

Thus, Paul compares the place of a woman in Greco-Roman marital law to the place of all men, male and female, first, to sin and the legal death penalty for sin; and second, to our status in Christ and in subordination to His authority. This is summed up in v. 2 in the phrase "the law of her husband." In v. 1, we are told that the law as a death sentence "hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." In vv. 4-6, we are reminded that we are now under the dominion of Jesus Christ. *At no point are we not under dominion, either the dominion of sin and death, or, the dominion of Jesus Christ.* The dominion of sin means the dominion of the law as a sentence of death. In Paul's analogy, our first "husband" is the old man in us, our life as a member of Adam's humanity. The death of this first husband (v. 4) is our crucifixion in Christ, so that the "old man" in us dies, and we become a new person in Jesus Christ. This new relationship brings "forth fruit unto God" (v. 4), not "fruit unto death" (v. 5). We are saved to "serve in newness of spirit" (v. 6). We are not to serve "in the oldness of the letter" (v. 6). Paul here does not oppose the law and the Spirit, because he stresses the fact that the law is *spiritual* (v. 14). The term "letter" is not equivalent to law, as Cranfield points out. "Letter," says Cranfield, refers to the misuse of the law in separation from the Spirit.⁶

In 2 Corinthians 3:6, Paul says, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." The word translated as *letter* in this sentence as well as in Romans 7:6

³ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 174. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968

⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 331. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

⁵ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 444. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

⁶ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 339f.

is *gramma*. This word can mean the individual letters of the alphabet, or it can mean papers, letters, or documents.⁷ Paul is not contradicting what he has said earlier. "The letter" for him is the documentation of our death penalty by the law.

Previously, Paul stressed the fact that man had only two ways or alternatives, and his imagined alternatives are without substance. Now Paul tells us of our subordinate status in God's plan. Because of sin, the law as a death sentence has dominion over us. In Christ, we are under the dominion of the Spirit and of Christ.

Men as sinners seek to be their own god (Gen. 3:5). As such, among other things, they seek to be their own source of law, determining good and evil for themselves. Another facet of our original sin and the will to be our own god is the lust for power. God is omnipotent and absolute power, and fallen man seeks power for himself with a religious intensity. At times, this quest for power is sought through legitimate means which are often socially productive, i.e., through the accumulation of wealth and status, however personally destructive. Very commonly too the lust for power seeks lawless means.

At the same time, this lust for power is directed against persons. God rules over a humanity created in His image. The power hungry man or woman seeks to impose an imagined image on those under him. Such a man, as a husband or wife, will work to break those under him to a radical submission to his or her will. This lust for power will extend to employees, relatives, and in-laws. The power lusting person seeks at the same time to humiliate and degrade, because evil enjoys nothing so much as the degradation, humiliation, and suffering of those in subordinate status. By sheer gall and brazenness, such people seek to gain submission or compel others to face a vicious tantrum.

Andropov of the U.S.S.R. was an example of this. He was affable only in triumph of others. After contributing to the destruction of Hungary's brief freedom in 1956, he had Sandor Kopacsi and his wife arrested and brought to him. Kopacsi had been until then chief of police in Budapest. Andropov greeted them cordially and waved a smiling good-bye as they were driven off to prison.⁸ George Orwell came to understand this aspect of political power clearly. Men were to be broken unless they made "the act of submission" to humanistic powers who required it as "the price of sanity."⁹

⁷ R. Mayer, "Scripture, writing," in Colin Brown, general editor: *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. III, p. 483. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1971) 1979.

⁸ Michael Voslensky: *Nomenklatura, The Soviet Ruling Class*, p. 366. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984.

⁹ George Orwell: *1984*, p. 252. New York, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanich, (1949) 1977.

It was held by Orwell's O'Brien that only "slavery is freedom," and that "power is power over human beings." (p. 267) Power becomes an end in itself; hence, the ultimate image of a boot stamping on a human face forever. O'Brien said, "The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake." Power was held to be the end, not a means. "The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power."¹⁰

Humanism is a closed and limited system. There are no values external to man to say that power must be subservient to moral ends. Fallen man's law and value is the tempter's premise of Genesis 3:5. This enthrones power as an end in itself, as the necessary expression of man's godhood. The consequence of this will to power is death for those who exercise it and those who submit to it.

The dominion of Christ over us makes us dominion men in another sense, to "serve in newness of spirit" (v. 6). We now "bring forth fruit unto God" (v. 4), not "fruit unto death" (v. 5). Every aspect of our being, and every exercise of power, is brought step by step into submission to the glory of God. Humanistic power ends up in death. Our Lord sums up God's law, and our exercise of power, in two commandments:

37. ...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.
(Matt. 22:37-40)

Instead of death, the exercise of godly power furthers life.

One final note: Paul in v. 1 says, parenthetically, "for I speak to them that know the law," or, that know law. The reference is to law in general. Two things must be noted here as they apply to the Christians in Rome. *First*, as Christians they were the people of the Book, then simply the Old Testament. The Jewish believers knew the law, and Christian preaching then was out of the Old Testament, setting forth Jesus Christ as the realization of all the law and the prophets. Biblical faith was for them as inseparable from God's law as from Christ. *Second*, Rome was unusual as a civilization in that it established its state and empire on law, however humanistic that law clearly was. When Paul says, "I speak to them that know law," he was exactly right. Moreover, his argument rests on their appreciation for the force of law. To interject an antinomian meaning onto Paul takes away the force of his reasoning. When Paul adds, "the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth" (v. 1), every Christian in Rome

¹⁰. *Ibid.*, p. 266f.

heard or read this with agreement and with a common presupposition with Paul. Paul thereby was able to lay the foundation for a sociology of justification.

25. “Ordained to Life” (Romans 7:7-12)

7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

8. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.

9. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

10. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

11. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

12. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. (Romans 7:7-12)

We need to begin by examining again certain words. We again find Paul using the word *lust* (v. 7), the Greek *epithumeo*, and the context in this sentence makes obvious that *lust* here means to *covet*, and the same word, *epithumeo*, is used. In other words, Paul says, I had not known covetousness, but for the fact that the law said, Thou shalt not covet. In v. 8, in English we have the word *concupiscence*, which, like *lust*, has come to have a restricted and sexual meaning. In the Greek, it is the same word as *lust* and *covet*, *epithumeo*, and the reference to the Tenth Commandment makes clear that its meaning is to *covet*. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, this is the word used in Exodus 20:17, “Thou shalt not *covet* thy neighbor’s house, thou shalt not *covet* thy neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor’s.” The reference is to a desire for a godless dominion and power over those things and persons who are either our neighbors or their possessions.

Paul tells us in v. 7 that sin dwells in us, not in the law. The law, like a floodlight, reveals us to ourselves, because the law is the justice or righteousness of God. The law at one and the same time gives us knowledge of sin, our sin and sin in general, and also knowledge of God, because it sets forth the justice of God. As E.H. Gifford said, “Throughout this passage St. Paul’s purpose is to vindicate the Law of Moses.”¹ According to Meyer, it is the law which makes us to know sin as sin, because we insist on seeing it as our self-expression:

The *hamartia* (sin) is *sin as an active principle in man* (see vv. 8, 9, 11, 13, 14), with which *I have become experimentally acquainted* only through the law, so that without the intervention of the law it would

¹ E.H. Gifford, “Romans,” in F.C. Cooke, editor: *The Holy Bible, A Commentary, The New Testament*, vol. III, p. 137. London: John Murray, 1881.

have remained for me an unknown power; because, in that case it would not have become active in me through the excitement of desires after what is forbidden in contrast to the law.²

In other words, we do not sin out of weakness but out of desire to play god, to exercise lawless power, and our confrontation with the law of God aggravates and incites our will to power.

Man is perverse, says Paul in v. 8. In Solomon's words, "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Prov. 9:17). Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:26), so sin without the law is dead. Adam and Eve sinned against God's plain commandment (Gen. 2:16-18); no lack of anything nor any need occasioned their sin. Their sin represented a deliberate distrust of God's law word and a trust in their own will. Adam's sin was a self-conscious act against God's law. In terms of Genesis 3:5, every man as his own god and lawmaker, *the goal of sin is lawlessness*. Sin is a self-conscious affirmation of autonomy. A popular song of today has a woman asserting that she left a man who loved her and whom she loved to seek promiscuous sexual experience because "I had to be free" and to "find my place in the sun" by lawlessness. It is this that Paul speaks of when he says that "without the law sin is dead" because sin presupposes a revolt against God's law order. We must remember that Paul uses the word *covet*, because in a sense the Tenth Commandment sums up all ten, because its focus is the *desire* to violate God's order.

God's law places limits on our lives which are designed to enhance life and preserve true freedom. Man's revolt against God leads to a denial of the very conditions of life, God's covenant law, in favor of an anarchic lawlessness which is death. Hence, "he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). The law thus provides the dynamics of sin, because sin is the attempt to negate the law of God as the condition of life.

In v. 9, Paul says, I was living without the law at one time, i.e., as a Pharisee I was living without a true knowledge of the law. "When the commandment came," i.e., when it began to be truly understood, "it discovered to Paul how great depravity abounded in the recesses of his heart, and at the same time it slew him."³ Calvin had also this to say: "Sin's death is man's life: conversely sin's life is man's death."⁴ The law made Paul aware of God's death penalty.

Thus, Paul says in v. 10, although the law "was ordained to life," it was death to the man in sin. Hodge commented:

² Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 268. Peabody, Massachusetts: Henrickson Publishers (1883) 1983.

³ Gifford, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 255f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

The law was designed and adapted to secure life, but became in fact the cause of death. Life and death, as here opposed, are figurative terms. Life includes the ideas of happiness and holiness. The law was designed to make men happy and holy. Death, on the other hand, includes the ideas of misery and sin. The law became, through no fault of its own, the means of gendering the apostle miserable and sinful. How vain therefore is it to expect salvation from the law, since all the law does, in its operation on the unrenewed heart, is to condemn and to awaken opposition! It cannot change the nature of man.⁵

The commandment to the redeemed man is ordained to life, because it is the way of justice. To the unjust man, it is a sentence of death. The law was not given to Adam in Genesis 2:16ff. as Adam's way of salvation but as the means of protecting and furthering Adam's life in God. Now, as redeemed men, we do not take the law as our plan of salvation but as the God-given way to protect and develop our lives and to be blessed of God.

It is sin, not the law, Paul says in v. 11, which kills us. Sin uses the law as a means of attacking God by breaking His law. By the wilfull violation of God's law word, sin seeks to supplant God's order for life with man's plan as his own lawmaker. In Meyer's words, "*Sin has by means of the commandment* (which has for its direct aim my life) deceived me, inasmuch as it used it for the provocation of desire."⁶ The desire it provoked was to supplant God and His law. Paul is writing with great care and a governing purpose. In Calvin's words (on v. 12), "He thus defends the law against every charge of blame, that no one should ascribe to it what is contrary to goodness, justice, and holiness."⁷ Paul's conclusion is clear-cut: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (v. 12). As Cranfield notes, "God's commandments are just, both in that they require just conduct among men and also in that, being merciful and not burdensome, they bear witness to God's own justice."⁸

Paul thus declares that the law as a whole is marked by holiness; it is the expression of God's justice and will. It is just or righteous and it requires justice of us in order that we may live in freedom and prosperity. It is good, because it is beneficial to man, being "ordained to life" (v. 10).

Man's problem is not the law but his sin. Man begins by coveting the place and power of God (Gen. 3:5), and he continues by coveting everything that belongs to his neighbor. The lust for power is basic to the society of men in Adam. The goal is to play god and exercise power over men. It is thus, in terms of Proverbs 8:36, a society with a will to death. It

⁵ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 352f. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

⁶ Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁷ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 353f. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

creates a murderous and suicidal realm. In the French Revolution, Marat spoke of taking “a million heads” and declared that the hungry have the right to “eat” the well-fed.⁹ Igor Shafarevich described socialism as a war against freedom, property, religion, marriage, man, and life itself. Its results will be “the withering away of all mankind, and its death.”¹⁰

Any and all attempts to build a society apart from the triune God and His law-word are invitations to assured judgment and death. The just cannot live by faith apart from God’s justice, His law. In Christ, we are brought to life, and in His law we are “ordained to life.”

⁹. Alexander Solzenitsyn, “Repentance and Self-Limitation in the Life of Nations,” in A. Solzenitsyn, editor: *From Under the Rubble*, p. 125. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown, 1974.

¹⁰. Igor Shafarevich, “Socialism in our Past and Future,” in Solzenitsyn, *ibid*, p. 61.

26. Ordained to Death (Romans 7:13-20)

13. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

14. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15. For that which I do I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that do I.

16. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

18. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

19. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

20. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (Romans 7:13-20)

It should be apparent by now that Paul has been seriously misrepresented. This misrepresentation is common to all of Scripture, in that Hellenistic categories are applied to Biblical thought. Jesus Christ by His total ministry made clear that He came to renew the covenant and to re-establish the law of the covenant, yet He is portrayed as ending the law, and Paul as anti-law.

To understand this perversion, we must remember that the ancient world was dialectical in its thinking. Greco-Roman thought saw the world conflict behind the facade of appearances as a war between two kinds of being. Man's problem thus was seen as metaphysical, as a conflict between two substances, matter and mind or spirit, whereas in Scripture the conflict is moral and religious. This dialectical tension was carried into the church by all too many converts, and the Bible was re-read in terms of it.

In the modern era, this problem has been aggravated by the influence of Hegel. According to Hans Conzelmann, who sees it favorably, the pioneer of modern scholarship was Ferdinand Christian Baur, who interpreted Paul in terms of Hegel.¹ In terms of Hegel, flesh is an antithesis to spirit, mind to matter, law to grace, love to judgment, and so on, and the antithesis is dialectical, not moral, in its essence.

Paul sees no dialectic. For him, all things were made by God, and hence all men have an inescapable knowledge of God which they suppress in injustice or unrighteousness. Because men seek to be their own god and law (Gen. 3:5), they sin with presumption against God. When men rebel against

¹. Hans Conzelmann: *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 156. New York, New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

God, they do two things, as Conzelmann, on better ground here, notes: *first*, they pervert worship and worship the creature, and, *second*, their morality becomes corrupt, reflecting their false and man-centered religion. In Romans 1, Paul does not directly call man's immorality and perversion sin, although he sees it as sin, but more as "punishment for the one primal sin of perverting the worship of God."²

Paul has already absolved the law as the cause of sin; now he opposes the belief that the law is the cause of death. The law pronounces the penalty, but the cause of death is sin.³ Paul recognizes that men want to blame God for their moral predicament, and his concern is to indict sin, man's rebellion against God. Men seek to blame God's law or justice. Being in sin, they, "not content with the evil which it is in itself ... must needs turn to evil that which was at once Divine in its origin and beneficent in its purpose."⁴ The two latter clauses of v. 13 make clear that God uses man's sin to vindicate His law and to overthrow sin completely.⁵ Not the law, but sin, as Calvin noted, "converts life into death."⁶

In v. 14, Paul stresses the fact that the law is *spiritual*, *pneumatikos*, whereas men are *carnal*, *sarkikos*. Our word spiritual tends to mean ethereal, whereas in Scripture the connotation is that of power. Thus, Paul says the law is powerful because the law is of God and is the great invisible and governing power. By contrast, men are physical and limited; they are flesh and blood, frail and corruptible, and, in Adam, corrupted. Paul is contrasting the power of God's law with the sickly weakness of sinful man.

To understand v. 15 and that which follows we must remember Romans 1:17-20. Paul is not giving us a dialectical or Platonic view of man made up of two warring substances in metaphysical conflict. For him, because all men are created by God, all men are revelational of God in all their being. Every atom of man's being witnesses for God and to the truth of God. As a result, when man is in sin, he is at war with himself. Everything in man witnesses to the truth of God's covenant law, but, as a child of Adam, man is determined to be his own god and law (Gen. 3:5).

It is wrong to read this as autobiography; it is Paul's description of God's fallen creature, man. Man's whole being witnesses to God, but his fallen ego demands that he be god, and the result is schizophrenia. Those who insist

² *Ibid.*, p. 246

³ Joseph L. Lilly, "Romans," in The Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 42f. The Catholic Biblical Association, 1942.

⁴ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 181. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 355. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

⁶ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 258. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

that Paul's description cannot apply to fallen man simply do not know man nor the doctrine of creation.

Paul, in v. 16, says that man's sin and conflict confirms God's law. The conflict witnesses to the fact that man is God's creation and God's justice cries out against man in all his being. The conflict, guilt, and misery witness to the fact that the law is good and that sin leads to death. Gifford called attention to the fact that such Romans as Plautus Petronius, Seneca, and Pindar witnessed to this conflict in man, but they had no solution.⁷

In v. 17, Paul says that, when men sin, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Paul does not hereby diminish man's responsibility. Rather, he says that sin diminishes man and depersonalizes him when it gains dominion over him. Tolstoy began with an entirely false premise in *Anna Karenina*, when he wrote, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." The presupposition of such a perspective is that man is most truly human when he is in revolt against God, whereas in reality sin diminishes man. It is the godly man who realizes his particular potentiality, because he moves in the freedom of God's law.

When a man becomes a narcotic addict, it is his addiction, his sin, which rules him, not he himself. It is of this that Paul speaks in v. 17.

In v. 18, Paul speaks of the problem still further. In man, in man's flesh and blood, there is no good thing; man is not an autonomous being and thus cannot be an autonomous good; he is only good when he is in Christ and the Spirit, and faithful to the covenant law. As God's creature, man knows what is good, but he is unable to perform the good, being fallen. By his sin, by living in terms of Genesis 3:5, original sin, man makes himself and his will the source of good, but in his living day by day he cannot perform God's good nor even his own imagined good. To be a sinner is to be a failure because the universe is God's creation, not man's. Paul is not excusing man but rather calling attention to man's helplessness; because of sin, man, the "I" or ego, is not in control of himself. Sin is a murderous and killing addiction.

Because of the schizoid nature which sin creates, it follows, as Paul says in v. 19, "For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." Man in revolt against God is at war with himself because he is in all his being a part of God's order. To go against God's law is to go against himself also; the war against God leads to an inner war as well, since our very lives and being are God's creation and allies.

Thus, Paul says in v. 20, man hopes by his revolt against God to be his own god and to govern his own life by his own law word. Instead of ruling,

⁷ E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, A Commentary; New Testament*, vol. III, p. 141. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

he is ruled by sin. Instead of reigning on his own autonomous throne, man becomes a throne on which sin reigns oppressively, and which death threatens.

Such is Paul's meaning. We cannot understand Romans 2-7 and more without Romans 1:17-20. The knowledge of God is inescapable knowledge. The just can only live by faith, and by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

The commentators on Romans who neglect to remember Paul's starting point give us alien and antinomian meanings.

Apart from the covenant law and the creator God who redeems us in His sovereign grace, men are by their sin ordained to death in self-contradiction.

27. The Conflict (Romans 7:21-25)

21. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

22. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

23. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

(Romans 7:21-25)

Much controversy has been generated by these verses. Is Paul speaking about regenerate or unregenerate man? Origen and others of the Greek fathers referred these verses to the unregenerate. Augustine in time applied them to the regenerate, and most churchmen have since agreed with Augustine.

We have seen the centrality of Romans 1:17-20 for Paul's letter to the Romans. The knowledge of God is inescapable for all men, regenerate and unregenerate. No man living is born or lives without a heart; it is even more impossible for any living man to escape the knowledge of God. Suppression is not escape; it is a futile evasion. All men then clearly fit Paul's statement, which he does not limit to either the regenerate or the unregenerate, which is itself a significant fact. Sin in any man leads to a suppression of God's truth; this suppression is a way of life with the unregenerate, but, with the regenerate, growth in sanctification is accompanied by a growth in the inner expression of the knowledge of God.

Curiously, commentators are sometimes eager to say that Paul's references here to "the law of God" do not mean the Mosaic law! Sanday and Headlam found such a meaning "linguistically intolerable."¹ What other law would Paul be speaking of? When he refers to the law in v. 21, it is clear that he means the law of God, and he says so in vv. 22 and 25. It is the law which makes man recognize God's justice, and the need to obey it, and it is the law which reveals to him the fact that "evil is present with me" (v. 21). The law acts as a searchlight.

In vv. 23 and 25, Paul speaks of the "law of sin." Cranfield says that *law* is here used metaphorically "to denote exercised power, authority, control"

¹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 182. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1893) 1968.

i.e., as exercised by sin.² God's law is a power in us, and the law of sin, or sin as a governing power within us, is a power or law.

We again have a reference to man's subordinate status. He is not autonomous, and he has two ways, or two powers, to live under, the power or law of God, and the power or law of sin. Both involve subjection. The power or law of God subjects us to life and freedom, and the power or law of sin subjects us to guilt and death.

Because of this subjection, man has no autonomous freedom. In the state of innocence, man had the freedom to do good, but with the possibility of sin. In the state of the fall or depravity, man is free from the good and is only capable of sin. In the state of grace, man is capable of sin, but his basic motive is to do good. In the state of glory, man can only do good, and is perfectly sanctified. In history now, the second and third estates of man prevail. Hence, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me" (v. 21).

The question raised by some comes into focus in v. 22. Can this be true of the unregenerate as well? "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Over the years, I have had occasions to meet with people who were sometimes in agony over their dilemma. Although unregenerate, they knew the law of God in their hearts, and they knew it as the way of life, and sometimes admitted this briefly. On the other hand, because of their sin, they were also suicidal and were at times terrified by their will to death. It is an illusion to believe that the conflict between good and evil exists only in the regenerate, and such an opinion denies the fact of creation by the triune God.

The conflict is very real. In v. 23, we find the word *members*, used to describe the limbs of the body, and, elsewhere, the members of Christ. The word in Greek is *melos*; it has reference to our functioning parts, i.e., our body in action. There is a law or power in our members at war with "the law of my mind." Law is *nomos*; mind is *nous*, consciousness, or reflection, and it has reference to sober and careful judgment. We must not read *members* and *mind* as two alien substances. What Paul has reference to is the human habit of saying, "I know it doesn't make sense to do this, but I want to do it, and I'm going to!" Against our better judgment, we do things we know are stupid or wrong, and which we shall later regret. This is not a Greek struggle between mind and matter but a moral struggle in man, who has the inescapable knowledge of God combined with self-will. Kasemann was here on sound ground in commenting, "we do not take part

² C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 364. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1978.

in the conflict independently but only as those who belong to a lord and his rule.”³ We are either ruled by God’s law or the law of sin.

Paul has made clear the fact of rule or power over man. No man can escape the witness of God in all his being. His every atom cries out against him in witness to God. At the same time, to the degree that he is still a son of Adam, either wholly as unregenerate, or partially as regenerate but not perfectly sanctified, he is under the power of sin; he is not fully free in Christ.

But is life a perpetual St. Vitus dance? Is there no deliverance from this conflict? Paul asks this question in v. 24: “who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” To the extent that we are not perfectly sanctified, we are in a sense still occupied territory. To be the arena of warfare is a form of death. The Christian life, however, is not frustration but victory, and Paul turns to this fact at once. We dare not see frustration as life.

In v. 25, Paul says, our flesh, our physical existence in time, still serves “the law of sin,” or disordered human nature. The disorder of the fall is not cancelled overnight; it is a fact of history, but not the governing or permanent fact. Now that we are in Christ, we “serve the law of God” with our mind; our judgment is governed by Christ to bring all things into captivity to Him. The extent of that captivity of all things to Christ is set forth in Romans 8. Now Paul thanks God “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 25), or *because* of Jesus Christ. He is the Lord. Our captivity is to Him, and our freedom is in Him, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4). Paul prepares us to hear the glorious fact that, whatever the problems and frustrations, when we are in Christ we do serve God. The God we serve makes *all things* to work together for His glory and our good when we are in Christ (Rom. 8:28).

³. Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 208. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1980) 1982

28. “No Condemnation” (Romans 8:1-2)

One of the problems of modern scholarship is its over-specialization. Much can be said to commend the very extensive and more intensive research that goes into many studies. The problem, however, is that a unified whole is arbitrarily divided into a variety of parts. A man cannot live if he is arbitrarily reduced to a heart, muscles, digestive system, or bones. All of these belong to an essential unity. Similarly, to divide theology into systematic theology, Biblical theology, and so on is to create arbitrary and false divisions; any theology which is not all of these things and more is false. Biblical studies are divided into Old and New Testament departments, and, if more funds and more students were forthcoming, more divisions would be made. Too often, professors in the New Testament department refuse to discuss matters relating the Testaments one to another because it would take them out of their “field.” Not surprisingly, the unity of Scripture is broken.

With this in mind, let us look at Romans 8:1-2:

1. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

For a man who supposedly was determined to free us from the law of God, Paul certainly talks much about the law, *nomos*. Moreover, Paul very plainly uses the language of the courtroom. Those who look down on God’s law should remember this. *Condemnation* is in the Greek *katakrima*; it refers to a sentence passed, a sentence with an implied judgment. It is a legal term, and it implies a court of law. Thus, Paul says in v. 1 that, because we are in Christ Jesus we have an altered relationship to the court and its Judge. No sentence is passed against us; we are acquitted because the sentence has been passed and executed on our representative, Jesus Christ. We are in Christ and free from condemnation when we manifest the life of Christ: we live, not in terms of our old fallen nature derived from Adam but “after the Spirit.”

“No condemnation” means that we are declared justified by the Court. Calvin described man’s new situation in Christ in these words:

There is then, &c. After having described the contest which the godly have perpetually with their own flesh, he returns to the consolation, which was very needful for them, and which he had before mentioned; and it was this, --- That though they were still beset by sin, they were yet exempt from the power of death, and from every curse, provided they lived not in the flesh but in the Spirit: for he joins together these three things, --- the imperfection under which the

faithful always labour, --- the mercy of God in pardoning and forgiving it, --- and the regeneration of the Spirit; and this indeed in the last place, that no one should flatter himself with a vain notion, as though he were freed from the curse, while securely indulging in the meantime in his own flesh. As then the carnal man flatters himself in vain, when in no way solicitous to reform his life, he promises to himself impunity under the pretence of having this grace; so the trembling consciences of the godly have an invincible fortress, for they know that while they abide in Christ they are beyond every danger of condemnation. We shall now examine the words.

After the Spirit. Those who walk after the Spirit are not such as have wholly put off all the emotions of the flesh, so that their whole life is redolent with nothing but celestial perfection; but they are those who sedulously labour to subdue and mortify the flesh, so that the love of true religion seems to reign in them. He declares that such walk not after the flesh; for wherever the real fear of God is vigorous, it takes away from the flesh its sovereignty, though it does not abolish all its corruptions.¹

Calvin's point is a valid one. Justification leaves us without condemnation before the court of God, but it does not leave us perfected nor entirely out from under the Fall and its curse. It is at this point that a critical problem is in view. Those who are acquitted can take one of two courses. *First*, over the centuries a great many have sought to bring their sanctification or personal holiness in line with their justification by pursuing sanctification directly. The result has been a variety of ascetic practices, pietism, retreats, endless soul searching and self-flagellation, and the like. This method is common to all churches. *Holiness* is made the direct goal, as though holiness were a fixed point on the map of life. But holiness is less a goal and more a by-product, and the direct quest for holiness can border on blasphemy. We would be justly suspicious of a person who declared that it was their intention to be a saint. For example, some of those who in our lifetime have been described as *saintly* include Mother Theresa of India and the late Toyokika Kagawa of Japan. With both, a zeal to serve God has been paramount.

This means, *second*, that holiness is a by-product of a life of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord, to His law, and to His calling. We become holy by saying, Not my will, but Thine be done (Matt. 26:42). Our Lord says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Again, "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. 12:50).

The Lord's Prayer is both a petition for and a program in outline of the way of sanctification. To hallow God's name, to pray and work for His

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 275f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

Kingdom, to acknowledge His providential care, to manifest grace and forgiveness, and more is the way of holiness. Nothing is said about devotional exercises for a life on a higher plane. The law of God is the way of holiness.

Then, in v. 2, Paul says that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” Kasemann is an example of the strange extremes scholars can pursue. He says of v. 2, “The law of the Spirit is nothing other than the Spirit himself in his ruling function in the sphere of Christ. He creates life and separates not only from sin and death but also from their instrument, the irreparably perverted law of Moses.”² In terms of this, for him Paul says, “God’s will is learned only through the Spirit.”³ If Paul is so hostile to the law, why does he twice use the word *law* in this one sentence? Did Paul believe that the law given to Moses was obsolete, and that some vague other law floated in space, to be revealed to us by the Spirit?

Paul rather believes that the expressed word of God is His law and expresses God’s justice or righteousness. When we break God’s covenant law, it is sin and death to us; the law of sin works in us, because our rebellion against God leads us into the pursuit of death (Prov. 8:36). In Christ, however, the law is in harmony with and expressive of the Holy Spirit of life, and it gives us covenant blessings.

Marcionism in the early church held that two gods were represented in the Bible. The god of the Old Testament was the god of law, justice, wrath, and hate, and the god of the New Testament the god of love and mercy. In modified form, Marcionism entered the church and still survives. Thus, the Catholic scholar, Joseph L. Lilly, held that “the Law itself was abrogated (as well as its “penalties”) by the death of Christ.”⁴ Goppelt called attention to the revival of a Marcionite attitude towards the Old Testament, which he said, “may have resulted from a distortion of the law/gospel dialectic of traditional Lutheranism.” This point was made also by C.E. Braaten in *History and Hermeneutics* (1968). Goppelt cited also evidences of a strong Marcionite vein in G. Klein, one of Bultmann’s pupils.⁵

We must approach Romans, not in terms of Marcion, but in terms of Jesus and Paul, not seeking to divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) into contradictory sections, but seeing it as the one word of the triune God. The word that gives us “no condemnation” must not be condemned or wrongly divided by us!

² Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 215f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁴ Joseph L. Lilly, “Romans,” in The Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 428. Catholic Biblical Association, 1942.

⁵ Leonhard Goppelt: *Typus*, p. xi. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982.

29. The Required Walk (Romans 8:3-8)

3. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
4. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
5. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.
6. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.
7. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.
8. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:3-8)

One of the deadly aspects of antinomianism is that it undermines God's plain word concerning the way of life. The law tells us that there is a way of blessings or life, and of curses, or death (Deut. 28). Paul emphasizes these two ways. When our Lord, in the Sermon on the Mount, says, "I say unto you," He speaks as the Lawgiver who gave the Law to Moses and who now interprets it and corrects false teachings. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and the Law expresses the righteousness of God's being, i.e., of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Moses received direct revelations from God (Ex. 3:6-10; 14:15-18; Deut. 1:5-8, 34-40, 42-45; 2:2-8, 9-13, 16-25). To despise "Moses' law" meant "death without mercy under two or three witnesses" (Heb. 10:28). Michael the archangel had charge of Moses' body on his death, an unequalled honor (Jude 9). The great song of triumph in heaven is called the song of Moses and of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, because the great victory is their work, and Moses is the Great Forerunner of Christ, the Great Prophet (Deut. 18:15-22). Hence, the song of triumph bears both their names:

3. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are they ways, thou King of saints.
4. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest. (Rev. 15:3-4)

Now, if Moses, to whom God spoke directly, and whom God described as the forerunner and type of Christ, is repudiated by God in due time, and the law set aside, why should God not repudiate all of us in due time? If God sets aside *His* law, and the minister of *His* law, why should He not, in an age to come, set aside *our* faith? We often grow weary of one another. Why should God not grow weary of us, who are wearisome creatures, after a few thousand years and drop us? His answer is clear-cut: "I am the LORD,

I change not.” (Mal. 3:6). Because He is the unchanging Lord, His law is unchanging, Moses is secure, and we are secure.

Paul, in v. 3, says that the law could not save man, because “it was weak through the flesh.” In so speaking, Paul does not negate or diminish the law. The law, he makes clear in Romans 1:17-21, is not only God’s revealed and written word, but it is also so essentially a part of all God’s creation, that it is known to all men. Men, as fallen and rebellious creatures, hold down that witness in their injustice. Thus, Paul says, whereas an Adam could hear God’s law in all his being, Adam’s seed hears but will not listen. The word *weak* is *asthenei*, impotent, without strength. As Cranfield notes, “the fault was not in the law but in men’s fallen nature.”¹ Sanday and Headlam stated it thus: “The Law points the way to what is right, but frail humanity is tempted and falls, and so the Law’s good counsels come to nothing.”²

It is important to note here that this verse and many more are *seriously misread* if they are seen with salvation as the goal. Rather, the purpose is that we be restored into the service of God, so that “the righteous (or, justice) of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4). Both Luther and Augustine recognized this fact. The law has no power to justify; it tells men what God requires of them. Man’s fall does not absolve man of the duty to serve and obey God with all his heart, mind, and being; that mandate remains, despite man’s impotence. Christ comes to remedy that incapacity. By His incarnation, He becomes one of us. He breaks the bonds of impotence, keeps God’s law perfectly, makes vicarious atonement for our sins, as our substitute, to satisfy the death penalty against us, and then regenerates us. We are made a new human race in Him and are now freed to serve God and to exercise dominion for Him.

We are saved (v. 4) “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” The word *fulfilled* is *pleroo*, here *plerothe*, executed, or put into force. The justice of the law is to be made full, perfected, or executed in us. This is only possible in those “who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” The word “*walk*” is *peripateo*, to tread all around, i.e., it refers to those who apply God’s justice across the boards to all of life. It has reference to the exercise of dominion. Dominion man executes or puts into practice the justice of God.

The Bartian, Walter Luthi, cites a play, Durrenmatt’s *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi*, in which “a drunken man who proclaims the Grace of God is the personification of justification by faith alone.” The playwright contrasts to him Mr. Mississippi, “the public prosecutor, who makes the

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 379. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

² William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 192. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

mad claim that he will save mankind by the Law.” Luthi saw this as setting forth the faith of Paul in *Romans*!³ Such warped readings of Paul are all too common.

In v. 5, Paul again reminds us of the two ways. On the one hand, we have all who are governed by their flesh, i.e., by the supposed autonomy and self-sufficiency of man and humanity. On the other side, we have all who are ruled by God’s Holy Spirit. If our assessment of life’s issues is in terms of our humanity rather than God’s law-word, we are walking “after the flesh.” We must remember that Paul summons us to *walk*, i.e., to cover the ground, to tread all around, and to exercise dominion. We cannot profess faith justly when we view our lives, problems, and duties humanistically rather than theologically.

This has consequences, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (v. 6). The word *minded* is *phronema*, and it refers to thinking. Paul tells us that we are either governed in our thinking by the Holy Spirit or by our human nature. To be “carnally minded” is to think in terms of man-centered considerations, or egocentric goals; its result is death. The government of our minds by God’s Spirit and His law-word is life and peace.

The humanistic and egocentric mind prefers its own way, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (v. 7). Paul brings us back again to man’s fall, his revolt against God. Its premise is that man is his own god and law (Gen. 3:5). Hence, its inevitable, logical, and inescapable drive is for independence from God. It refuses to be subject to the law of God, nor can it be, because it is now by its fallen nature dedicated to its own law. Paul is thus contrasting man’s law with God’s law, and man’s spirit with God’s Spirit.

His conclusion is clear: “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (v. 8). To please, *aresko*, is to be acceptable. Man is only acceptable to God in Christ. Man in Christ works to execute God’s law, to put into practice God’s justice, and to exercise dominion under God.

The rebels against God hate God and His law; they refuse to submit to it and are by nature unwilling to submit and not capable of doing so.⁴ It is their fallen nature and drive to be their own god and law. There is no life, Paul makes clear, apart from Christ and outside His ordained *walk* for us. We are to cover the earth with our walk or tread, and we must exercise dominion over every sphere of life and thought. This is the way of life and of blessedness. In Calvin’s words on v. 6, “The minding of the Spirit he calls *life*, for it is life-giving, or leads to life; and by *peace* he designates, after the

³ Walter Luthi: *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 97. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, (1961) 1962.

⁴ Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

manner of the Hebrews, every kind of happiness; for whatever the Spirit of God works in us tends to our felicity.”⁵

⁵. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 286. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans, 1948.

30. Our Praxis in the Spirit (Romans 8:9-15)

9. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

10. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

11. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

12. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:9-15)

Paul has much to say again about the *flesh* and the *Spirit*, i.e., our humanity after the first Adam, and our renewed humanity in Christ, our new Adam, and in His Spirit. The *flesh* is the realm of weakness, sin, and death; it belongs to the world of failure. The Spirit is the power of God, working in us and in our world. The Old Testament sees the Spirit as the power of God, working mightily in this world. The spiritual man is the man of power. The modern equation of spirituality with an ethereal and impotent nature is radically false. The prophets are men of power because the Spirit of the Lord is upon them. Pentecost endowed the apostles with the power and the gifts of the Spirit, and they worked miracles. Spirituality in Scripture means power; the flesh means weakness and death. Hence, Paul summons believers to move from the realm of impotence and death into the kingdom of spirituality, of life and power.

Believers must realize that they are not in the flesh but in the Spirit (v. 9). This is only true if God's Spirit dwells in us. It is not our verbal profession that marks us as Christ's members but the Holy Spirit in us. The mark of the Spirit is godly power. False doctrines of spirituality associate it with mousiness and harmlessness. The two great examples of spirituality in the Bible are Moses and Elijah, the two who met with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3). Moses and Elijah, with their blazing power, were hardly comfortable men to be near, but they were men uniquely filled with the Spirit. Both had weaknesses many mousy churchmen lack, but they also had the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, Kasemann is right in stating that Paul knows no Christ who is localized in heaven, but only a cosmic Christ at work everywhere. If we have had a true baptism in Christ, we now have been clothed with a permanent power (Gal. 3:27). However, as Kasemann adds, we misunderstand Paul if we see our gain in power as the primary focus "instead of on the reign of Christ."¹ Godet saw the contrast in v. 9 as one between the dominion or reign of our old humanity as against the dominion and reign of Christ in us, over us, and through us.²

Paul in v. 9 uses the terms "the Spirit of God" and "the Spirit of Christ." As Hodge noted, "Both expressions designate the Holy Ghost," who is also called the Spirit of Christ in Galatians 4:16, Philippians 1:19, and I Peter 1:11. This clearly indicates that there is no subordination of the Son to the Father in the Trinity. As Hodge said, commenting on the Western Church's defense of the filioque clause,

For this the gratitude of all Christians is due to the Latin Church, as it vindicates the full equality of the Son with the Father. No clearer assertion, and no higher exhibition of the Godhead of the Son can be conceived, than that which presents him as the source and possessor of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit proceeds from, and belongs to him, and by him is given to whomsoever he wills. John 1.33, xv. 26, xvi. 7, Luke xxiv. 29, &c.³

As Mills pointed out, v. 9 (like so much before) is a denial of anti-nomianism. "Works are always the *result* of salvation. To this end salvation always presses (Ephesians 2:10)."⁴

In v. 10, Paul tells us that our old humanity, being condemned to death, requires the death of the body we inherited in Adam. However, if Christ is in us, even though our body shall perish, we have life because the Holy Spirit is now within us, our own spirit is now one of righteousness or justice and life, not sin and death. Godet observed, "As the body dies because of a sin which is not ours individually, so the spirit lives in consequence of a righteousness which is not ours."⁵ The Spirit in us is both a regenerating and resurrecting power, as well as a sanctifying one.

In v. 11, Paul tells us, "The present possession of the Spirit of God is an assurance that even in the body life shall at last triumph over death."⁶ The

¹ Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 222f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1980) 1982.

² Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 304. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications (1883) 1977.

³ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 405. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong (1882) 1893.

⁴ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 247. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

⁵ Godet, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

⁶ E.H. Gifford, in "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, A Commentary, New Testament*, vol.III, p. 151. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

power of death over our lives was broken by Christ in every realm save one, our bodies. Now Paul tells us that, even as the Holy Spirit raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, so shall He also resurrect our mortal bodies by His indwelling power. The Holy Spirit is now forever associated with us, and therefore He will raise our bodies from the grave. He works in us to destroy the power of sin and death and then brings this work to a culmination in our resurrection. Hodge noted, "If the dead are raised by the Holy Ghost, then the Holy Ghost is of the same essence with the Father and the Son, to whom, elsewhere, the resurrection of the dead is referred."⁷

Then, in v. 12, Paul continues, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh." The word *debtor* is the Greek *opheiletes*, and it means what it says, literally one who owes money or some like thing to another, and, metaphorically, a person who is under obligation. We are no longer under obligation or bound to the humanity of Adam, to act in terms of its nature. We are now debtors to the Spirit; we are under obligation to serve the living God. "Everything in the Bible is opposed to antinomianism. Paul teaches that justification and sanctification cannot be disjoined."⁸

Thus, we face a necessary conflict. To be in Adam is to be at war with God. To be in Christ and His Spirit is to be at war against sin and death and at work to establish Christ's reign in ourselves and our world. Neoplatonism sees our conflict as essentially an inner one between two aspects of our being. Scripture sees it as between two humanities, two kingdoms, and it requires us to serve the Lord.

The consequences are obvious, says Paul in v. 13, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live." *Mortify*, *thanatoo*, means to put to death; *deeds* is *praxis*, an action in progress. The neoplatonists here read Paul to say that we through the Spirit must mortify or put to death the deeds of our personal flesh. Paul does not say this. Granted, many so read Paul, but it is not what Paul says. Paul is not saying, as some do, that our body is the battleground.⁹ The *body*, *somatos*, is by synecdoche, not only the man but humanity. Although our own bodies belong to a world ordained for death, they also belong to the world of the resurrection, to the realm of Christ. The action in progress is the mortification or destruction of the city of man, the world of Adam. By the power of the Spirit, we seek to occupy (Luke 19:13) all things for Christ and to reconstruct all things in terms of God's law word. Our *praxis*, our work in progress, is to destroy the *praxis*, the work in progress of fallen man. It means destroying the world of Genesis 3:5, every man as his own god and lawmaker, by setting forth and implementing the

⁷ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁹ Kasemann, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

crown rights of Christ our King over all creation. Only so are we Christ's; only so shall we live.

All who do so are led by the Spirit of God and are the sons of God (v. 14). There is a likeness; we do the works of our Father in heaven. As Cranfield so beautifully states it, "The life which God promises is not a mere not-dying; it is to be a son of God, to live as a son of God, both now and hereafter."¹⁰

The spirit believers receive is not that of bondage or slavery, or servitude. Such a spirit means a servile and fearful person. We have, rather, received the Spirit of adoption and can cry out in joy, Abba, Father (v. 15). Adoption was a legal fact in Greece and Rome, but it appears in Scripture prior to Paul in such texts as Genesis 15:2-4; Exodus 2:10 and v:22f.; Esther 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 28:6; Psalm 2:7, 89:26f.; Jeremiah 3:19; and Hosea 11:1. In referring to God as *Father*, Paul has the Lord's Prayer in mind as the pattern, but he means also that the Spirit prays within us (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit leads us to look at the source of our glorious liberty in Christ, God the Father, to rejoice in our sonship, and to seek strength in our praxis, our work in progress.

¹⁰. C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 396. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

31. The Power of His Resurrection (Romans 8:16-23)

16. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

19. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

20. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope,

21. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

23. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. (Romans 8:16-23)

For St. Paul, history and eternity are closely related. This is true in the obvious sense that the godly go to heaven, and the ungodly to hell, so that our lives have consequences, and the consequences of time are in eternity. It is also true in that the structures of our eternal life are developed in history, and the movements of history move to a climax in time and in eternity. Very specifically, for example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is our resurrection from the death of sin. We are the people of the resurrection. The whole of creation looks forward to its great redemption. One area of life after another is captured by the power of the resurrection until, finally, the one remaining and last enemy, death, is destroyed, and the fulness of the resurrection world begins (1 Cor. 15:23-27).

We know that we belong to this world of the resurrection when the Holy Spirit bears “witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (v. 16). It is not simply our own feelings which determine this fact, but the Holy Spirit, who gives us a new life and a new center, so that our lives now focus on the Lord and His Kingdom. We have a security in knowing through the witness of the Spirit where we belong, because our hearts cry out for the living God (Ps. 84:2). The witness is a joint-witness linking the Spirit and the believer.

In v. 17, Paul speaks now of joint-heirship in and with Christ. As members of His new humanity, we are co-heirs with Him of the Kingdom of God. Leenhardt noted that the *first* privilege of adoption is to be able to call God *Father*. The *second* privilege is that the Father’s wealth is made

available to the son.¹ However, there is another aspect to our heirship, to suffer with Christ. In 2 Timothy 2:11, Paul says, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." His suffering does not require martyrdom. It means rather facing the hostility of the old humanity of Adam, and its reproaches, because of our separation from it. Sanday and Headlam said of this clause, "This is another instance of the Biblical conception of Christ as the Way. (His Life is not merely an example for ours, but in its main lines presenting a fixed type or law to which the lives of Christians must conform.)"²

The struggles we now face cannot compare with the glory which shall be revealed in us (v. 18). This glory already exists in Jesus Christ; it shall exist also in us. Meanwhile, faced with the *necessity* of a struggle against a world in revolt against our Lord, we have three sources of comfort, according to Paul. *First*, there is the hope of glory to which all creation looks forward (vv. 18-25); *second*, there is the present help of the Holy Spirit (vv. 26-27); and, *third*, there is the all-embracing purpose of God's sure love (v. 28ff).³ Our sufferings separate us from the fallen world around us and prepare us for our coming glory. "In fact, it is nothing short of an universal law that sufferings mark the road to glory."⁴

In v. 19, Paul says, it is the eager and intense expectation of all creation that the sons of God be revealed. All creation has a yearning more powerful than gravity for the unfolding of God's purpose and, in particular, "the manifestation of the sons of God." This is an important fact when understood. With millions upon millions of professing Christians, what is creation waiting for? Does it not recognize these people? The word *manifestation* is in the Greek *apokalupsis*, a revelation, an uncovering, a revealing. In other words, Paul says that the sons of God have not revealed themselves! What is this apocalypse of the sons of God?

In Bede's *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, we are told of Cuthbert's way as a bishop:

He delivered 'the poor man from him that was too strong for him, the poor and the needy from him that despoiled them'. He took care to comfort the sad and faint-hearted and to bring back those that delighted in evil to a godly sorrow. He strictly maintained his old frugality and took delight in preserving the rigours of the monastery

¹ Franz J. Leenhardt: *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 214, 216. London, England: Lutterworth Press (1957) 1961.

² William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 204. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

³ E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 154. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

⁴ Sanday and Headlam, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

amidst the pomp of the world. He fed the hungry, clothed the destitute, and had all the other marks of a perfect bishop.⁵

Edduis Stephanus, in his *Life of St. Wilfred*, tells us that Wilfred was zealous to convert the ungodly, and to care for widows, orphans, and the infirm. Moreover,

He cared for the poor, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, welcomed strangers, brought back captives, and protected the widow and orphan, all so that he might win the reward of eternal life amid the choir of angels with Jesus Christ our Lord.⁶

At Wilfred's election as bishop, it was said, "We therefore elect him in his prime of manhood to teach the law of God."⁷ The apocalypse, manifestation, or revelation of the sons of God is their exercise of godly dominion over all things, bringing all things into captivity to Christ. It is thus wrong to sit back and wait for God's apocalypse if we do not effect our own where God requires it.

In v. 20, Paul continues to develop this point. As Leenhardt so beautifully stated it:

Since man has not fulfilled towards creation the ministry with which he was entrusted, creation, for lack of guidance and control, is not evolving towards the end that was assigned to it; it moves purposelessly in the void; life leads nowhere except to corruption and death. *Mataiotes* stresses this futility of existence, its essential vacuity or lack of substance and meaning. It is man who is responsible for the subjection of creation to this condition which is contrary to its destiny, for it is man who has failed to direct it towards ultimate meaning.⁸

The liberation of all creation awaits the apocalypse of man, man's assumption of his dominion mandate, "Because the creature (or, creation) itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (v. 21). This *corruption* (*phthora*) means a state of decay, an inferior condition to a natural one. The natural condition of creation as God made it is *very good* (Gen. 1:31). Its present fallen estate is an unnatural one because sin and death prevail. Man, by pushing back the realm of sin, increases the realm of life. Then, at the end, God's mighty act destroys death forever. In speaking of that culmination, Calvin called attention to its totality, while disapproving of speculations which sought to learn more than Scripture says:

⁵ J.W. Webb, translator: *Lives of the Saints*, p. 105. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books (1963) 1981.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁸ Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

v. 21. But he means not that all creatures shall be partakers of the same glory with the sons of God; but that they, according to their nature, shall be participators of a better condition; for God will restore to a perfect state the world, now fallen, together with mankind. But what that perfection will be, as to beasts as well as plants and metals, it is not meet nor right in us to inquire more curiously; for the chief effect of corruption is decay. Some subtle men, but hardly sober-minded, inquire whether all kinds of animals will be immortal; but if reins be given to speculations where will they at length lead us? Let us then be content with this simple doctrine, – that such will be the constitution and the complete order of things, that nothing will be deformed or fading.⁹

Godet noted, “Paul does not say that nature will participate in the *glory*, but only in the *liberty* of the glory of the children of God. Liberty is one of the elements of their glorious state.” This power “expresses the unchecked development of the free expression of all the powers of life, beauty, and perfection, wherewith this new nature will be endowed.”¹⁰ Meyer’s comment is also telling:

Observe, ... how Paul has conceived the catastrophe, of which he is speaking, not as the *destruction* of the world and a new creation, but, in harmony with the prophetic announcements, especially those of Isaiah (Isa. xxxv, lxv. 17, lxvi. 22), as a *transformation* into a more perfect state. The *passing away* of the world is the passing away of its *form* (1 Cor. vii. 31), by which this transformation is conditioned, and in which, according to 2 Pet. iii. 10, fire will be the agent employed. And the *hope*, the tenor of which is specified ..., might, in connection with the living personification, be ascribed to all *nature*, as if it were conscious thereof, since the latter is destined to become the scene and surrounding of the glorified children of God.¹¹

There is a vast difference between seeing the end of the world as only *destruction* as against the view of it as a *transformation*. Post-millennialism sees it as transformation, and the transformation includes our regeneration, our dominion work of sanctification, and more.

Luther said, of v. 21, that Paul says two things:

First, that the creation will be set free, namely, from vanity, when the ungodly have been condemned and taken away and when the old man has been destroyed. This liberation is now taking place every day in

⁹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 305. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

¹⁰. Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 315. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications (1850) 1977.

¹¹. Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 325. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers (1884) 1983.

the lives of the saints. Second, that it will not only no longer be vain but also it will not be subject to corruption in the future.¹²

Paul continues, in v. 22, calling attention to the fact that “the whole creation” groans and is in travail like a woman in childbirth, awaiting the great consummation. Creation is not to be superseded; it is to find fulfillment together with us. In v. 23, Paul says further that we who are in the Spirit groan also, sigh and pulsate, waiting for the fullness which comes with the redemption of our body. Again citing Leenhardt, “It is not merely a question of the liberating power of death; it is a question of the redeeming action of God aimed at endowing humanity with a new status of existence, by bringing the believer to share in the power of Christ’s resurrection (Phil. 7:10).¹³

The power of Christ’s resurrection means that a redeeming force and people are now at work in history, bringing all things into captivity to Christ. The scope of the resurrected Christ’s redeeming power is cosmic and eternal.

¹². *Luther’s Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 363. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1972.

¹³. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

32. The Spirit and Hope (Romans 8:24-28)

24. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth ye yet hope for?

25. But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

26. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:24-28)

In these verses, we have, *first*, in vv. 24-25, the hope and expectation of the new humanity described. Faced with the fallen and evil world of the old humanity, we who are in Christ look expectantly for the victory and glorification which awaits us. *Second*, the Holy Spirit, who works to remedy our weaknesses, is basic to our hope and expectation, and He prays in us and for us (vv. 26-27). *Third*, God's perfect purpose ensures the inevitable realization of our hope and our triumph in and through all things (vv. 28-30). God's design and predestination uses all things to accomplish His purpose and our good in Him.

In v. 24, the word *hope*, *elpis* in the Greek, cannot be confused with the non-Christian view of hope as day-dreaming. The Old Testament associates hope with waiting on God's assured promises, and the New Testament usage is similar. It is not a vague longing but an assured dependence on the nature and integrity of God. It is an eschatological word because it rests on the assurance that God has a predestined plan that will come to pass. In terms of this, as Hoffman noted, "Hope is disciplined waiting," and a "fundamental renunciation of all calculations of the future" because we rest on God's promises, not our longings.¹ Hence, Paul says, "For we are saved by hope." No man can be saved by humanistic longings, and what Paul here speaks of is our trust in God's saving work and promises. We believe that the culmination of all things is the general resurrection of the totality of the new creation. We live in the expectancy of ever greater things from God. Abraham hoped against all humanistic hope (Rom. 4:18) and is therefore a type of faith. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul associates faith, hope, and love together as the virtues of grace. Bernard Clairvaux said, "The soul is more where it loves than where it lives," and the same can be said of our hope.

¹. E. Hoffman, "Hope," in Colin Brown, editor: *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. II, p. 244. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1976.

Hope is the trust that God has far more gifts in store for us than we can now see or comprehend. We live thus in terms of the unseen, but an unseen that has God's promise stamped upon it.

Because of this hope, we wait in patience for its fulfillment (v. 24). Our normal and eternally natural condition awaits us, and we gain in patience as we grow in hope. Our *patience* is the necessary virtue which must accompany hope. We gain endurance in the face of this world's evils because of our hope.

Moreover, we are never alone in our patient hope, because the Holy Spirit is the inseparable part of our lives (v. 26). In David's words, "When my father and mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Ps. 27:10). Again, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

Our inadequacies in prayer are remedied by the Spirit, who prays in us and guides our prayers and thoughts. Our prayers are ignorant: "we know not what we should pray for as we ought," but the Spirit makes intercessions for us. So fully does the Holy Spirit work with us that His intercession is "with groanings which cannot be uttered." We have Paul's amazing statement, "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30), which tells us how great is the redemptive love and association of the Holy Spirit with us and within us. This work of the Spirit is an aspect of our renovation and our resurrection life in Him.

What the Spirit knows, God the Father and God the Son know, for "he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (v. 27). We are told, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I try the reins" (Jer. 17:10). Paul tells us that the whole creation groans and travails, waiting for the great regeneration of all things; we too feel the same expectation and yearn to see it come to pass. The Spirit works so closely in the creation He helped make that He too expresses the same expectancy. In Genesis 1:2, we are told that, in the work of creation, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Now the Spirit moves in us to remake the whole creation.

This verse tells us that the Spirit as well as the Son is our intercessor. Moreover, there is a remarkable fact about this intercession. As E.H. Gifford noted:

- (1) His intercession is in accordance with God's own will and purpose, "for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, even the deep things of God" (I Cor. ii. 10), and (2) His intercession is "for saints," and saints, as such, are the special objects of the Divine purpose, in accordance with which the Spirit intercedes.²

² E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 158f. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

God, who searches all men's hearts, knows their unspoken desires, as does the Spirit; and God, knowing the mind of the Spirit, can thus with the Spirit govern the direction of our lives and make intercession a totally open and known reality. Thus, what we cannot express because it is moving towards formulation in our mind the Spirit knows already, and so too does the Father. It is a reality they are creating in us.

Because God's eternal and perfect purpose is at work in us, it is impossible for the results to be other than good (v. 28). Our present problems and sufferings are real enough, but they are turned into total and perfect good by God's providential government. It is neither men nor things which govern the universe but only God the Lord. Moreover, there is no possible triumph for evil; God uses all things to create His perfect good. Luther rightly saw Romans 8:28 as a magnificent statement of predestination; it is a sentence, he said, "to strangle 'the prudence of the flesh'."³ This means that our expectation and action must be premised on the Lord and His word, not on ourselves. Modern man sees himself as the best foundation. For example, money today is totally political: it is a creature of the state. The premise of modern economics is the antithesis of Romans 8:28; it in effect reads, the humanistic state makes all things work together for good to them that trust in it. The same is true of contemporary law systems; they are more or less arbitrary creations of man and have no roots in ultimate order. Again, the same is true also of other realms and disciplines; man is seen as the necessary lord of creation who must build upon himself as his own ultimate standard. The result is a belief in a man-made world, which quickly reveals itself as a world of chaos, confusion, inflation and trouble. The axiom of faith in a humanistic world is, "the government will do something." "I can do something," or, "Something will be done." Men prefer a faith in man to a faith in God, because our actions reveal our faith, and modern man is socialist man. This results, as Joseph Sobran, in *The Washington Times*, and Howard Phillips in the April, 1985, *Conservative Manifesto*, have noted, in a people who are increasingly the serfs of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. If we believe in man, we will be ruled by man. If we believe in God, we will be ruled by God. Men who profess to believe in God but who refuse to be ruled by His law are practical atheists.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is closely associated with true hope, waiting on the Lord and His assured promises. When we walk in the Spirit, we know that we and the world around us are governed by the triune God. The ground we walk on, the stars above us, the weather, and all things in creation are governed by God and His law. If we ourselves are under God and His law through Christ, then all goes well. We live, move, and have our

³ *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 372. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

being in God's perfect government. For us then man and the state playing god is a blasphemous presumption, not a need.

If, however, we live in a universe which is a product of chance, then the only tenable government is by man and by the state. Romans 8:28 gives the Christian an amazing security, because it declares that, in terms of God's perfect and total government, we can never lose. It also sets forth our security in Him.

In a world of chance, however, man has no security unless some man-made order provides it. The humanistic alternative to Romans 8:28 is statist security, and the humanistic state becomes a security state in its pretentious plans and efforts. Vast sums are expended in the effort to create a statist alternative to Romans 8:28. The results, however, are judgment.

Instead of godly hope, an assured dependence on God's promises and His nature and integrity, we are left with humanistic hope, an insistence that "it should be so," when it is not nor can be. The humanistic state offers the politics of hope. Campaigns by candidates offer a hope of change, but change without the critical factor, a change in man, regeneration. Just as pigs breed pigs, Adam's sons breed Adam's image (Gen. 5:3). Instead of a change in man, history sees instead the magnification of his possibilities to do evil. We are not saved by humanistic hope.

Humanistic eras thus see the rise of statism, and a great longing for security. Because of this lust for security, the humanistic cultures are readily led into slavery, whereas the sons of God create a culture of faith and freedom.

33. The Spirit and God's Order (Romans 8:28-30)

28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Those who complain about St. Paul's "difficult" literary style forget that it regularly culminates in the majestic style so well set forth in these verses which speak of the perfect and total government of God in and through all things. Romans 8:28 sums up the preceding verses and directs us to the meaning of all that follows.

In v. 29, Paul tells us that man, created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28), has his being redefined in Christ to replace Adam's false definition (Gen. 3:1-5). We are to be "conformed to the image of his Son." In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul says of the lost, that "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15f.), and by Him all things were made. Thus, to be conformed to Christ is to be conformed to the perfect image of God and therefore to God's original and final purpose for man. This means, Paul says,

8. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

9. Lie not to one another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

10. And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. (Col. 3:8-10)

The word "foreknow" requires us to recognize the Biblical usage of the word "know." In Psalm 1:6, we are told, "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," and, in Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Again, in Matthew 7:23, our Lord says, "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." The word means to fix one's regard upon for a special purpose, and *foreknow* "throws back this 'taking note' from the historic act in time to the eternal purpose which it expresses and executes."¹ Thus, we are predestined to be conformed to Christ, we know Him because He first loved us and chose us,

¹. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 217. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

but we are not chosen simply to be saved and to sit back and relax. Our Lord says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). We are not the end purpose of our salvation: it is the Kingdom of God. We are to bear fruit, be productive therein. The focus of our predestination is to be like Jesus Christ in our service to God and His Kingdom. In Godet's words, "What the decree of predestination embraces is the *realization of the image of the Son* in all foreknown believers." God exalts and glorifies our humanity in and through the Son who is the first object of predestination. "Thus what comes out as the end of the divine decree is the creation of a great family of men made partakers of the divine existence and action, in the midst of which the glorified Jesus shines as the prototype." Godet continued:

But how are we, we sinful men, to be brought to this sublime state? Such a work could not be accomplished as it were by the wave of a magician's wand. A complete moral transformation required to be wrought in us, paving the way for our glorification. And hence God, after fixing the end, and pronouncing the decree in eternity, set His hand to the work in time to realize it. He beheld them at their haven, all these foreknown ones, before launching them on the sea; and once launched, *He acted*; such is the meaning of v. 30.²

There is no escaping the Biblical foundation of predestination. We are not asked to understand the mystery of human responsibility and divine predestination, but we are required to believe in it. As Augustine said,

Moreover, that which I said, "That the salvation of this religion has never been lacking to him who was worthy of it, and that he to whom it was lacking was not worthy,"— if it be discussed and it be asked whence any man can be worthy, there are not wanting those who say— by human will. But we say, by divine grace or predestination. Further, between grace and predestination there is only this difference, that predestination is the preparation for grace, while grace is the donation itself. When, therefore, the apostle says, "Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus in good works," (Eph. ii. 9, 10) it is grace; but what follows —"which God hath prepared that we should walk in them"— is predestination, which cannot exist without foreknowledge, although foreknowledge may exist without predestination; because God foreknew by predestination those things which He was about to do, whence it was said, "He made those things which shall be" (Isa. xlv. 11).³

Thus, to weaken the doctrine of predestination is to weaken the doctrine of grace.

² Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 326. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications (1883) 1979.

³ St. Augustine, "On the Predestination of the Saints," in Philip Schaff, editor: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. V, p. 507. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956.

In v. 29, Paul speaks of the eternal counsel of God; in v. 30, the realization in time of God's plan is set forth. In our predestination, v. 30 tells us there are three divine acts; we are *called*, *justified*, and *glorified*. Paul here is not speaking of the predestination of the reprobate; that comes later.

The word *called*, is the Greek *kaleo*, in this verse, *ekalese*, meaning vocation or destination, or both. Since our destination is to be conformed to Christ and to serve Him, *called* here refers to both vocation and destination. Leenhardt thus is right in speaking of God's design as "vocation, justification, glorification."⁴ This verse brings us from eternity down to time, and hence vocation is the stress. We are called by God to serve Him, and His law-word is our plan of service. Sanctification is not mentioned in this verse because it is included in the word *called*: we are called in terms of serving God and finding our sanctification in that service.

We miss a key aspect of these verses if we forget the context. Paul has spoken of the work of the Spirit in us and in all creation in the remaking of all things. The triune God is the integrating force and purpose in all creation, making all things work together for good (Rom. 8:28). For us, this integrating, governing and over-ruling power is the immanence of the Holy Spirit. A weak doctrine of the Spirit means a weak power of purpose and integration in our lives, and a proneness to humanistic answers.

Every faith must have an integrating premise or presupposition. However, wherever it is humanistic or this-worldly, the consequences are both devastating and deadly for man and society as well as for social order.

To illustrate, the "peace-niks" of our time seek as their integrating premise for world order world peace. Their principle is peace, and for them it is the source of all virtues. Certainly the importance of peace is real. War in our time has become an instrument of revolution for both winners and losers. The prevailing nation, during the course of a war, uses the war to increase state powers and to further a social revolution. War is thus very much to be feared for what it does to the future of a country as well as to its combatants and its civilian victims.

At the same time, the "war-niks" see battle or war as the integrating principle for world order. They summon us to wage war on crime, poverty, conspiracies, and so on. To a degree, we must do so, just as, to a degree, we must seek peace. But a culture which breeds evil, personal, national, and international, will endlessly create more evils than can be killed off. At the same time, peace as the governing premise in such a social order becomes peace with evil.

⁴ Franz J. Leenhardt: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 235. London, England: Lutherworth Press, 1961.

A this-worldly integrating premise gives a warped view of reality, and it leads to exalting our particular virtue or plan of action into the status of a god or the ultimate virtue.

The Lord God is the Judge of all the world, and of war and peace. Our priorities cannot be of this world, but, if we lack a sound doctrine of the Holy Spirit, they will be. We therefore cannot fulfil our vocation without the Holy Spirit. Moreover, apart from Him, the doctrine of predestination becomes mechanical and is directed to eternity essentially rather than to all things in time and eternity.

34. The Rhythm of Life (Romans 8:31-39)

31. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?
32. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
33. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.
34. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.
35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
36. As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.
38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
39. Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 8:31-39)

To interpret and to preach the word of God is an awe-inspiring, frightening, and humbling task. There is nothing more important that a man can do. So much of Scripture always has more to it than we can fathom in our brief lives, and to misinterpret it is a dangerous offense. To give a false meaning is to use God's very words to create a new apocrypha. The word *apocrypha* comes from the Greek *apo*, away, and *krypto*, conceal; false interpretation conceals and hides or takes away God's meaning. Dibeluis notes that the attributes James 1:25 and 2:8 tell us belong to God's law are the royal law of liberty that 4 Maccabees 14:2 ascribes to Reason.¹ Whether done to create a substitute or additional Scripture by intent, or simply because we carry our presuppositions into our exegesis, the results are the same: the word of God is turned into another word with another meaning.

This is especially true where Paul's letters are concerned. So much of Scripture comes into focus here that any misreading is especially dangerous. Hence my long delay and fearfulness in interpreting Romans.

These verses are a magnificent organ crescendo in the symphony that is Romans. The glory of God's government, predestination, and grace resound here in awe-inspiring majesty. In v. 31, Paul sums up the previous discussion with unanswerable clarity: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us who can be against us?" This statement summarizes

¹ Martin Dibeluis: *James*, p. 143. Fortress Press, 1976.

all that precedes it in the letter. Paul tells us that neither we nor our enemies are stronger than God. Luther's comment here is especially good:

If God be for us, who is the Judge of all and whose omnipotence calls into being all things, no one can be against us, since everything that He has created must be subject to the Creator. So also the converse is true! If God be against us no one can be for us.²

According to Leenhardt, the words "for us" and "against us" imply a legal process. If God be for us, no man can be our accuser, because God is our Redeemer and Defender. Leenhardt said also:

The scope of God's plan which His faithfulness will accomplish justifies complete assurance; there is nothing more to be said after what has just been said. Yet the peace of God does not exclude the struggles of faith. The world is not yet transformed. If God makes all things concur to the good of those who love Him, it is by leading them to the victory of faith, not in sparing them trials (I Jn. 5:4).³

The doctrine of Christian assurance is basic to these words. We have an eternal security because our salvation and defense are God's work and cause, not our's. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit precedes this statement because, as Kasemann wrote, "The Spirit makes it clear that God's love is not just a general attribute but the ongoing action of the one who effects salvation on earth."⁴

Paul in these verses anticipates the objections of gainsayers. If they believe in God, how can they doubt His judgments and His providential government?

In v. 32, Paul tells us that God has already done the greatest thing of all for us: He gave His own Son to die for our redemption, to take upon Himself the death penalty. Having done this, to care for us is by comparison a little thing. This verse, like vv. 31, 33-35, is one of a series of unanswerable questions. If the Lord is God, how can we doubt His predestination, providential government, and grace?

Hendriksen was correct in saying that we cannot limit "all things" to "spiritual blessings, as some do." (To do so, is to limit God.) The term applies to all things "material as well as spiritual," as does v. 28.⁵ The fact that God saves us has implications for our lives daily. Hodge summed it up very ably:

² Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 117. J. Theodore Mueller translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

³ Franz J. Leenhardt: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 236. London, England: Lutterworth Press, 1961.

⁴ Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 246. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1980) 1982.

⁵ William Hendriksen: *New Testament Commentary, Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 288. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1980) 1981.

If God has done the greater, he will not leave the less undone. The gift of Christ includes all other gifts. If God so loved us as to give his Son for us, he will certainly give the Holy Spirit to render that gift effectual. This is presented as ground of confidence. The believer is assured of salvation, not because he is assured of his own constancy, but simply because he is assured of the immutability of the divine love, and he is assured of its immutability because he is assured of its greatness. Infinite love cannot change. A love which spared not the eternal Son of God, but freely gave him up, cannot fail of its object.⁶

In v. 33, Paul asks, who can question God? If God has justified us, how can anyone in heaven or hell, or on earth, question God's choice? Satan, the great accuser, is referred to here; he denies the fact of election and insists we are vulnerable to his power and charges. This, Paul says, is nonsense. God's chosen, God's elect, are secure because they are God's work and choice, not man's. Paul here echoes Isaiah 50:8-9:

8. He is near that justifieth me: who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near to me.
9. Behold, the Lord GOD will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.

We are commanded to walk in holy boldness, because God is our security. We must remember that, while this election includes our eternal security in heaven, it begins with our calling to serve and obey God here. The word *elect* is in Greek *eklektos*, *ek*, from, and *lego* to pick out. This word originated in military vocabulary, and it later was used in the political arena in our sense of elected men. The word means that one person or thing is chosen because the electing person chooses to do so; the chooser is not governed by anything save his will, and the chosen are then at the disposal of the chooser.⁷ The verb *charge* or accuse is *enkaleo*, to call to account, accuse, or file a charge; it refers to God's court of law. With God as our Defender and Redeemer, how can anyone bring an accusation to His court against us? The verb is in the future tense.

In v. 34, Paul tells us that no one has a right to condemn us except God Himself, and He is our Redeemer, having given His Son as our substitute, to die for us and to free us from the sentence of the law. In Mills' words,

The believer is so situated and protected in the plan and program of God that nothing can alter this position. God is the Planner, He is the Keeper, and He alone will consummate this plan and program for every believer. All this is unalterable because it is in the Sovereign Hands of God.⁸

⁶. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 453. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

⁷. L. Coenen, "Elect," in Colin Brown, editor: *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. I, p. 536. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1975.

⁸. Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian looks at Romans*, p. 280. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

With respect to this world and the next, in the magnificent words of Sanday and Headlam,

It is not a dead Christ on whom we depend, but a living. It is not only a living Christ, but a Christ enthroned, a Christ in power. It is not only a Christ in power, but a Christ of ever-active sympathy, constantly (if we may so speak) at the Father's ear, and constantly pouring in intercessions for His struggling people on earth.⁹

Christ is our Advocate and our Intercessor. Paul's words have inspired many commentators to ringing affirmations of the glory of God's salvation. E.H. Gifford wrote:

St. Paul accumulates the proofs of love and power: of love, for "*it is Christ that died*" for our sins; of power, for He not only died, but also *is risen* for our justification; of power again, for it is the same Christ "*who is also at the right hand of God*," and then, finally, of love still abiding, for it is He "*who also maketh intercession for us*."¹⁰

In John 11:42, the Son says to the Father, "Thou hearest me always," so that we know that Christ's intercessions for us are always heard at the throne of God. Not only is God for us, but Christ is for us.¹¹

Paul asks, "Who is he that condemneth?" Leenhardt commented:

Condemnation involves death. Who would condemn to death those for whom Christ has already died? If any accuser or tyrannical power like those of which v. 35 will speak should demand a victim, the victim has already been handed over and has undergone punishment. And not only has Christ undergone the condemnation and the penalty, but He afterwards displayed His innocence to His accusers by triumphing over death ... Christ the conqueror of death has returned to the tribunal and has sat down at the right hand of the Supreme Judge. Now He has become the advocate of those whom the same accusers would like to overwhelm too.¹²

Christ, "at the right hand of God," is, as Hodge noted, now "associated with God in his universal dominion" (Ps. 110:1; Eph. 1:20, Rev. 3:21; Heb. 1:3).¹³

In v. 35, Paul asks "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" meaning the love of Christ for us. Cranfield call this a "rhetorical question."¹⁴ This is the judgment of armchair scholarship. Paul was writing for and to Christians under attack, and, later on, under peril of their lives. Therefore the very real possibilities: "shall persecution, or famine, or

⁹ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 221. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

¹⁰ E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary: New Testament*, vol. III, p. 162. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

¹¹ Kasemann, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹² Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 237f.

¹³ Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

¹⁴ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, p. 439. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1975) 1977.

nakedness, or peril, or sword?" When we are under attack, "friends" often desert us, but never Christ, Paul makes clear. Calvin pointed out that *tribulation* "includes every kind of trouble or evil"; *distress* is an overwhelming inner feeling of horror at our troubles; and *persecution* refers to tyrannical violence against us.¹⁵ Leenhardt is right: "It is no rhetorical phrasing that we have here."¹⁶ The gift of the Spirit and His part in our lives is one clear assurance that we are inseparable from the love of the Father and the Son.

In v. 36, Paul quotes Psalm 44:22: "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." We have our sins and faults, clearly; but our offense in the eyes of the ungodly is not our sins but our Christ and our faith in Him. Kasemann calls attention to this verse as indicative of Paul's break with autarchy and the popular philosophy of his day. "The premise of his anthropology may be seen once more. A person is defined by his particular lord."¹⁷ The Christian is defined by Christ.

Then, in v. 37, Paul continues, "Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Paul has in mind the Roman conquerors and their triumphal entries; in Ephesians 4:8, and possibly elsewhere, this fact is in his mind. For him, the Christian is a greater conqueror than all these imperial hosts. He is therefore emphatic: "we are *more* than conquerors through Christ."

Then, in vv. 38-39, Paul declares that nothing, neither life, nor death, nor any possible thing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. There is nothing which can overcome God's perfect plan for us. Neither space, nor time, nor anything else can affect our relationship to the triune God: it is God established and unchangeable.

"Principalities" has reference to "angels of greater power and might (Eph. vi.12; 2 Pet. ii.11)."¹⁸

Paul celebrates, in these joyful and triumphant words, the total, providential, and gracious government of the triune God. We do not live in a mindless and unplanned universe but in a planned or predestined creation of the triune God. In such a world, we are "more than conquerors." The means to conquest are moral regeneration and growth.

Some writers make much of the fact that the words "determinate" and "predestinate" are not as prominently used in Scripture as in Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. The answer is that such a determination by God is presupposed, not argued, throughout the Bible. Philosophically, to deny

¹⁵. John Calvin: *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 328. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

¹⁶. Leenhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

¹⁷. Kasemann, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

¹⁸. E.H. Gifford, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

the determination of the first cause, God, is to undermine the reality of secondary or contingent causes such as man. The denial of God's predestination leads to the destruction of human responsibility, because man then is the creature of naturalistic determination by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms, by heredity, environment, and more. Predestination frees man from naturalistic determinism and establishes the reality of secondary causes.

In a world which denies predestination to God there follows a necessity to locate central planning and control elsewhere, and the result is the predestinating state, the planned society.

Those who believe in predestination by the triune God must oppose socialism or statist predestination. They must affirm that, under God, the prime secondary agencies of will are not institutions but persons created in God's image. The state is not created in God's image; man is. The state is not commanded to increase and multiply; man is (Gen. 1:26-28).

Augustine was right in declaring that to weaken the doctrine of predestination is to weaken the doctrine of grace; the two are essentially related. We can add that to weaken predestination is to weaken freedom, for the two go together. Without the doctrine of predestination affirmed and believed heartily, other forces enslave us, for we are then out of touch with God's plan and government.

In John 7:38, our Lord says, "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water," i.e., the Holy Spirit shall flow out of him and guide his steps. There is more, however: *flow* is in the Greek *reousousin*, a form of *rheo*, which in still another form is *rhythmos*, from which we get our word *rhythm*. When we believe on Christ, when we rest our whole life and confidence on His salvation and government, we then know His ruling and over-ruling power in and through all things. We know His predestination, and we know that the rhythm of life is the triune God; it is Christ our Lord, and it is the Holy Spirit in us, so that we live, and move, and have our being in the rhythm of life.

It is then our calling to allow God's rhythm to govern our lives, our families, schools, churches, politics, law, arts and sciences, and all things else. The new creation will be the perfect expression of that rhythm of life in the Spirit.

Predestination thus cannot be made mechanistic without denying it. To believe it is to hear the music of creation, and of God's plan for our lives.

It is for this reason that, as Paul prepares the Christians for the trials and tribulations of life, in the verses of Romans 8:1-39, he can both face up to the monstrous evils of tyranny and persecution and yet give expression to the glorious music of these words. Paul's is not an armchair faith. In II

Corinthians 11:23-33, he gives an account of his own sufferings for the faith:

23. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death oft.

24. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.

25. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and day I have been in the deep;

26. In journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

27. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

28. Besides these things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

29. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

30. If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

31. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

32. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of Damascus with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

33. And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

Paul, having suffered all these things, did not find the doctrine of predestination a problem; rather, it was for him a great joy. It spoke of God's rhythm of life.

35. Paul and Israel (Romans 9:1-5)

1. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
 2. That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
 3. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:
 4. Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;
 5. Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.
- (Romans 9:1-5)

It is common to speak of Romans 9 as the classic text on predestination. This is not altogether accurate; Romans 8 has as much to say on predestination, and much more than Romans 9, and many other texts in Paul rest on this fact. Romans 9 deals with one facet of the doctrine of predestination, and this is its offense. Its subject is reprobation, and men resent the fact that God the Creator can and does reprobate some men.

Moreover, in their concentration on reprobation, and how to explain it away, some commentators resort to tirades against Calvin, as though predestination was his invention rather than the doctrine of Scripture. Lenski wrote of “the Calvinizing exegesis that is so contrary to God’s righteousness by faith alone.”¹ One would think that faith is man’s work, rather than God’s grace.

Furthermore, we dare not forget that to Paul the matter is extremely personal, as Romans 9:1-5 indicates. In Philippians 3:5, Paul describes himself as “of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews.” The word translated as “stock” is in the Greek “genous,” meaning family or kind. We seriously misunderstand the text if we see it as evidence of Paul’s Jewish *nationalism*. What we call nationalism did not then exist. Today, nationalism and patriotism are associated with a political and geographical entity. This may be good or bad, but it is not what Paul refers to at all. Paul’s concern is *familistic and religious*. He refers to “Israelites” as “my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” This does not mean a racial allegiance. Israel owed its origins to Abraham; of Abraham’s sons, only Sarah’s son, Isaac, was of the chosen line. When Abraham went to Lot’s rescue with 318 fighting men from his own household (Gen. 14:14), this meant that probably twice that number were too old or too young for warfare. Add to this thousand another thousand females, old and young, and we have a household or family of some 2,000

¹ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 581. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1945.

persons, of whom only one, Isaac, was of Abrahamic blood. All these, however, were circumcised into the covenant (Gen. 17:10-14). Through the centuries, into medieval Europe, all converted slaves became Jews and covenant members. The family and the faith of the family was the governing fact, not blood.

Today, nationalism in the U.S. means the Fourth of July and a political allegiance; in France, it means Bastille Day, and so on, from country to country. In antiquity, peoples or nations usually came from families, and then tribes or clans, and their names often reflected this, i.e., Israel, Assur, Edom, Moab, Rome (Romulus), and so on. Now, we are the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Mexico, and so on.

Apart from this fact that for Paul *Israel* meant a family and a faith we cannot understand these verses and Paul's "great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (v. 2). His grief was like that of a parent whose child has gone astray, or a man whose family has wrongly broken with him. His grief is a religious fact; hence, in v. 1, he declares that "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not." The indwelling Spirit shares in his grief: "my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost."

Cranfield thought it possible that the Biblical law of evidence in Numbers 35:30, and Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:35 here influenced Paul.² This legal reference is confirmed by Paul's "triple oath" in v. 1: he summons his conscience, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to bear witness to what he is about to say.³ He calls upon these witnesses first of all to verify his "great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." The words used mean a consuming grief, and Robertson compared it to an attack of *angina pectoris*.⁴ Paul calls the witnesses to account to stress that his grief is both personal and religious.

In v. 3, Paul says that, like Moses, he is ready to take the guilt and expiation for Israel's sin upon himself, if that were possible. We are told, in Exodus 32:31-32,

31. And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.

32. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin —; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Moses refers to God's book of life, to life after death with the Lord. Paul echoes Moses' feelings. Like Moses, he sought to lead Israel into the fulness of the Promised Land, to Christ (Heb. 4), and they were rebelling against God. We are also reminded of David's grief over Absalom, "O my son

² C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 452. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

³ Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, *The Epistles of Paul*, p. 380. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1931), reprint.

⁴ *Idem*.

Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son" (2 Sam. 18:33).

The strong sense of family Paul and all Scripture manifests is basic to the survival of the Jews; the rapid decay of that same family strength became apparent in the events of the student revolt of the 1960s and the growing decline of Jewish familism in favor of political loyalties and creeds.

The word translated as "accursed" is literally "anathema." Paul finds himself on the point of wishing so extreme a thing. He tells us that his grief is such that he almost wishes the unwishable. Calvin's comment here is excellent: "the settled boundary of love is, that it proceeds as far as conscience permits; if then we love in God and not without God's authority, our love can never be too much."⁵

To make very clear to whom he refers, in v. 4 Paul specifies Israel, and he cites their heritage of grace. *First* of all, there is the *adoption* of grace. In Exodus 4:22 (cf. Jer. 31:9), God says, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn." *Second*, the *glory* rested with Israel, from Sinai, to the tabernacle, and then the Temple (Ex. 24:16f., etc.). *Third*, the *covenants* had been with Israel (i.e., the covenants after Adam and Noah), and God had bound Himself to Israel, and Israel to Himself. *Fourth*, as an aspect of the covenants made with Moses and Joshua, and basic to them, were the facts of the covenant *law*, the *service* of God required thereby, and the *promises* in the law and by the prophets. Psalm 147:20 calls attention to Israel's privileged status: "He hath not dealt so with any nation."

Paul's grief rests on faith and family, and the two are for him inseparable. Thus, after citing the fact that he is an Israelite, Paul tells us what this means to him. The term "Israelites" sums it up in one word: they were called to be the people of God. All that follows the name "Israelite," i.e., adoption, the glory, the covenants, law, service, and promises, is simply to illustrate what "Israelite" meant to Paul and in the Scriptures. Paul's family feelings are governed by a religious fact.

In v. 5, Paul adds to the list of privileges in the heritage of faith "the fathers." This refers to the Old Testament patriarchs. From them, as to his human nature, Christ came. Paul here affirms both the humanity and the deity of Christ. He came from the patriarchs in His humanity, but is also as God incarnate "over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Christ comes out of Israel, but He is more than an Israelite. "The fathers" belong to Israel; Israel belongs to God and to Christ the Son. In this statement, Paul prepares us for the separation for a time of physical Israel from God and the covenant. Because Jesus Christ as God over all is the maker and owner of

⁵. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 335f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

all things, He can, as the potter, like a potter (vv. 19-21), use and dispose of His creation at will. He is "lord over all," the Sovereign.

The greatest prerogative of Israel was to bring forth Christ. Having rejected the incarnate Glory, Israel was thus to be cut off for a time. The analogy to modern peoples is a clear one. If God cuts off Israel for rejecting the Son, will He not in due time cut off every modern state for rejecting Him? As Paul says, in Romans 11:19-21,

19. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

20. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

21. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

The nations of Europe and the Americans do not serve Christ. They can plead a higher culture and morality, even as Israel could in Christ's day, but this will no more spare them that it did Israel. To reject the Wisdom of God is to hate life and to love death (Prov. 8:36).

36. Natural Privilege versus Predestination (Romans 9:6-8)

6. Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

7. Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

8. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for seed.
(Romans 9:6-8)

At this point it is necessary to remind ourselves of what Paul has said previously. Certain texts are particularly relevant. In Romans 1:17, Paul tells us that the just shall *live* by faith. We cannot reduce this statement to cover only salvation. Our total life must be governed by our faith, by the triune God and His law word. Our justification is oriented to living. Then, in Romans 4:24, 25, Paul anchors our atonement and justification in Christ's resurrection. Jesus Christ, Paul says, was "raised again for our justification." Again, this is an emphasis too often lacking in the church. The death of Christ on the cross is basic to our atonement, but a permanently dead Christ can neither atone nor justify. Hence, Paul says, God raised Jesus from the dead for our justification. The justice of God triumphed in that event, and the power of sin and death were broken. Christ as the firstfruit of the dead was also the new Adam, the head of a new human race (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 45-49). This new human race is made up of those regenerated and justified by Christ's death and resurrection. The justified are also called "the just" (Rom. 1:17), because they are now God's instruments of justice or righteousness, the people of His law.

Then, as we have seen, Paul stresses God's sovereign grace in all this. It is not our human faith that saves us, for true faith is a supernatural grace and the gift of God. Our salvation is by God's grace, i.e., His predestination; faith is its consequence in our lives.

What all this does is to destroy *natural privilege*. It is not an accident of history that so much hostility has been manifested against Christianity by the human powers that be. Enlightenment rulers and monarchs at times suppressed the use of the Magnificat because of Mary's words,

51. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

52. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

53. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. (Luke 1:51-53)

Christopher Hill found that at least in Wrexham, if not more generally, the Church of England clergy administered the sacrament to the gentlemen on one Sunday, and to the poor the next.¹

Grace and predestination remove sovereignty and initiative for man. They nullify natural privilege. This is why sovereign grace and Biblical law go together. As Cornelius Van Til has noted, God's sovereignty requires theonomy. Thus, the just live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4) because their creation, the conditions and terms of their life, their atonement, regeneration, and justification all come from the hand of God, not from natural privilege.

The focus of modern revolution, more radically than the monarchs of Enlightenment Europe, insists on natural privilege. In the place of the divine right of kings, we have the demand for sovereignty and power to the people. J.J. Rousseau was the great philosopher of natural privilege and hence did much to undermine Christendom. The revolutionists insist on natural privilege, Christians on God's predestination. For the revolutionists, anything which limits man's natural privilege must be destroyed, and nothing limits it more than the doctrine of predestination.

From the perspective of the doctrine of man, a Catholic scholar, by no means pro-Calvinist, saw the future as a conflict between Rousseau and Calvin. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn wrote of Luther and Calvin, "The doctrines of both were strictly theocentric — more so, in a sense, than those of the Catholic Church." Calvin's monastic and medieval perspective he saw as best equipped to meet head-on the radical humanism of Rousseau.²

How far this negation of natural privilege goes we can see in many Christians, ancient, medieval, and modern. Thus, a missionary in China of a century ago, Mrs. Jonathan Goforth, whose husband's name belonged to the world of John Bunyan, wrote that she had planned her furlough in terms of her purposes, but then "I confessed the sin of planning my own life."³

Paul's thrust here is against natural privilege, i.e., the natural privilege of Israel. This is for him a painful fact: Paul loves his blood family, but he loves God more. God's word, he says in v. 6, has not been nullified by Israel's rejection of Christ, for God's Israel or chosen people are not necessarily members of the blood Israel. This position was not a novelty. It was basic to Old Testament faith. It still prevails in Orthodox Jewish circles. Thus, Mills, brought up in Orthodoxy in Poland and coming to the

¹ Christopher Hill: *The Experience of Defeat, Milton and Some Contemporaries*, p. 212. New York, New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books, Viking, 1984.

² Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, "The Western Dilemma: Calvin or Rousseau?" in *Modern Age*, vol. 15, no. 1, Winter, 1971, pp. 45-56.

³ Rosalind Goforth: *How I Know God Answers Prayer*, p. 89. New York, New York: Harper, 1921. (Mrs. Goforth went to China in 1888.)

United States in 1921, wrote that his family did not consider Reform Jews to be truly Jews.⁴

Paul tells us that the governing fact has always been “not mere natural succession but Divine election.”⁵ The promises of God are not dependent upon men.

In v. 7, Paul becomes specific. Besides Isaac, Abraham had Ishmael, born of Hagar (Gen. 16:15), and Zimran, Jokshaw, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah, born of Keturah (Gen. 25:1-2). These were all given some inheritance and sent off, while Isaac inherited the main estate (Gen. 25:5-6). Even more, God made clear to Abraham that “in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12; Heb. 11:18). The word “called” refers to vocation and destination.

This means that the line of promise is the line of Isaac. We can agree that v. 7 does not exclude from salvation Ishmael and the others. The point here is that Abraham had eight sons; natural privilege was set aside by God, who chose Isaac, although Abraham’s love of Ishmael was clearly great (Gen. 17:18). In God’s predestination, Isaac was the chosen line of promise. Step by step, however, Paul will soon make clear that predestination extends to our lives and also our eternal destination.

Even as among Abraham’s eight sons one was chosen, so God now passes over much of Israel to choose some from Israel and others from among the Gentiles. The line of Isaac was God’s chosen line, but God’s sovereign grace chose from Israel those whom He would choose. The choice of Isaac established no natural privilege for the line of Isaac, because we have repeated rejections and captivities for apostasy.

In v. 8, Paul stresses this fact. In Moffatt’s rendition of vv. 7b-8, “*No, it is through Isaac that your offspring shall be reckoned,*” meaning that, instead of God’s children being the children born to him by natural descent, it is the children of the Promise who are reckoned as his true offspring.” The true sons of Abraham are the chosen of God; hence, “we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise” (Gal. 4:28), whether we be Jews or Gentiles, for “if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The Jews had privileges in the Old Testament era, but these were privileges of sovereign grace, not blood. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:50, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.”

⁴ Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 297. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1971.

⁵ E.H. Gifford, in “Romans,” F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 169. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

One of the issues in the centuries long church-and-state struggle from the first century on, and bitterly fought at times in the medieval era, was the conflict between natural privilege and the aristocracy of grace. As the emphasis on civil power developed, lords and kings sought to control the appointments of abbots and bishops and to reserve them as a privilege of blood for their younger sons and relatives. There were various reasons for this. *First*, these offices carried power, and rulers wanted to govern and control all offices of power. *Second*, while natural privilege sometimes functioned in church offices, essentially the thrust of the vocations within the church was on an aristocracy of grace, and the church, when faithful, stressed the sovereignty of grace.

In the modern era, all the significant claims to power come from those stressing natural privilege. German National Socialism stressed the privilege of blood. Democracy, with its *vox populi vox Dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God, stresses the people. Marxism and the dictatorship of the proletariat limit natural privilege to one class. Hinduism, with its caste system, is totally wedded to natural privilege, and black, white, and yellow racisms have like views.

God must of necessity confound all such views. *First* of all, because God is the Lord, the Sovereign, no natural privilege can have any standing before Him. *Second*, because man is a fallen creature, all man's orders of natural privilege will be infected and poisoned by man's sin, his desire to be his own god and law (Gen. 3:5).

As a result, far-reaching implications are at stake in Paul's emphasis on predestination.

37. Natural Privilege and Cultural Death (Romans 9:9-13)

9. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.
10. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;
11. (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)
12. It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.
13. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.
(Romans 9:9-13)

As we have seen, God works against the presumptions of natural privilege. Although other factors were present in Hildebrand's insistence as pope on priestly celibacy, one was to undermine the prevailing emphasis on natural privilege. The feudal system sought to absorb the church's offices into its structure and to assign status within the church in terms of natural privilege. In the Eastern churches, the lower clergy were allowed to marry, but all higher offices were restricted to celibates, to men who were outside the family and feudal systems.

The rule of primogeniture was an aspect of this adherence to natural privilege, and one relevant to our text. In some cultures, the firstborn son takes the entire estate. In Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe, the firstborn has had a unique status by virtue of his birth. Thus, in England, many a firstborn son of the nobility and royalty has been a major problem precisely because his birth places him in a position of radical security, one which in effect gives him the privilege of influence and contempt for parental authority. The firstborn has often had a sacrosanct character.

In the Bible, primogeniture is limited. Beginning with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, each in turn set the firstborn aside in order to establish a more godly heir. The chosen firstborn or heir received a double portion in order to enable him to care for the parents. A godly firstborn son could not be set aside because his mother was hated by the father (Deut. 21:15-17). How extensively the firstborn were set aside by the Hebrews is apparent not only in the patriarchs but also in the kings, among whom especially in Judah, it was a minor consideration. Neither David nor Solomon were firstborn sons. The tribe of Levi had the functions of a firstborn, a fact of grace, not of birth. *The firstborn* in Scripture are often not the firstborn by blood but the firstborn by grace. In brief, natural privilege is negated as an unfailing rule. To deny that natural privilege is inescapably assured of rank and place but is subject to the priority of grace is a serious negation of the human order.

The examples Paul gives from the patriarchs of the subverting of natural privilege begin with the birth of Isaac (v. 9). Paul quotes Genesis 18:10 and 14 to show that the human condition does not govern God; He governs the human condition. Isaac, who is not the firstborn, is born miraculously. The conception and birth of Isaac are said by God to be His coming onto the scene in action: "At this time *will I come*." Ishmael was a product of the planning of Abraham and Sarah; Isaac represented God's plan; for Sarah at 90 years of age to conceive and bear a child was God's sovereign grace, not human privilege and choice. A mere physical connection with Israel is no assurance of a place in the promises of God.

It would have been possible, had Paul stopped here, for some to read natural privilege into the case of Sarah and Isaac. Sarah was, after all, the wife of Abraham, whereas Hagar and Keturah were concubines. In v. 10, Paul shuts the door on this escape route; he cites Rebecca and Isaac, and their two sons. Both Esau and Jacob were children of the same mother. The choice was sovereign grace.

The Greek word translated as "conceived" is *koiten*, bed; literally, Rebecca had bedded down with one, namely, Isaac. Man's place in God's plan is God's choice. From before the birth of the twins, God chose Jacob. Human circumstances and natural privilege are deliberately confounded by God.

This is stressed in v. 11. Before their birth, God had appointed the destinies of Esau and Jacob. To the last, the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, held to natural privilege. Although faithless, they believed in their "right." In fact, Herod saw himself as the promised messiah and so presented himself to the people (Acts 12:20-23).

Paul insists on the absolute freedom and predestination of God. The twins, before they were born, or had done either good or evil, were appointed by God to their places. This statement is not intended to please man but to set forth God's sovereignty; Paul leaves man no "share" in that sovereignty nor any reason to exalt himself.

In v. 12, Paul cites God's statement to Rebecca: "And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). The word "manner" is in Hebrew "derek," mode, course, or journey. Two peoples with differing roads or directions are to come forth from Rebecca: their destinations are different. The word "separated" is in the Hebrew "parad," to divide, spread, sever, and sunder. Until now, Paul's reference to Isaac and Abraham's other sons has been with respect to God's choice of the Messianic line. Now it includes more: faith, life, and destiny. No other

meaning makes sense. "The source of the selection is God himself."¹ Predestination to both salvation and reprobation is clearly taught and stressed here. Both Esau and Jacob as individuals, and as peoples, Edom and Israel, are meant. The rejection of Esau was a denial of natural privilege. Israel had come to believe in its own natural privilege by virtue of God's covenant, and Paul is declaring this belief to be wrong.

In v. 13, Paul cites Malachi 1:2,3, wherein God declares His love of Jacob, and His hatred of Esau. "Hatred" here means rejection and reprobation, even as love connotes salvation. Paul drives home God's rejection of natural privilege without compromise. He leaves it no standing before God.

The fallen world, however, is emphatic on the validity of natural privilege, both before God and before men. To the extent that we allow natural privilege any ground except under God and His grace, to that extent we undermine God's sovereignty and law.

To illustrate, in Dr. Howard Halperin's (Ph.D.) column, "On Your Own," a letter from a young woman, a Christian and a virgin, is cited. The woman makes clear her refusal to assent to fornication, and her dismay at the young men and women who engage in it. Halperin disapproves of such a moral and religious attitude. He favors the acceptance of the other person's value system and a respect for it. There should be no confrontation. The girl, on refusing fornication, should say, "This is not a personal rejection and I hope it doesn't go so counter to your feelings and values that you will want to stop seeing me. But it's important to me to be true to what I believe." Halperin concludes, "This is a much more acceptable, receptive and likable message than communicating, 'I'm good and pure and you are bad and indecent'."² Halperin denies implicitly any governing moral law from God, and he affirms man's natural privilege to order his life according to his tastes.

Whether in the sphere of personal conduct, state law, or man's relationship to God, natural privilege asserts the autonomy of man from God. Man is seen as free to assert his own standards, and God must accept man on his own self-evaluation.

Natural privilege means, however, cultural death. The more deeply entrenched it becomes, the more deadly its consequences. Old China, with its rigid family system, and India with its castes, both represent the development of natural privilege into stagnation and decay. In the world outside of Christ, natural privilege prevails, and with it death. Natural

¹ Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, *The Epistles of Paul*, p. 382. Grand Rapids, Michigan (1931) reprint.

² Howard Halperin, "Conveying Feelings About Premarital Sex Takes Tact," in *The Stockton (California) Record*, Monday, May 13, 1985, p. 31.

privilege rivets chains upon man and forestalls substantive change and progress.

Man's original sin is to be his own god and lawmaker, his own source of good and evil (Gen. 3:5). The tempter's insistence was that, instead of a law and requirement coming from and imposed by God, it was man's natural privilege to be his own god and determiner. As Dahlberg noted, "man is always seeking Eden," and his own counsel was, "Be primordial or decay."³ For Dahlberg, "All the errors concerning the human race come from not realizing that man is merely another animal."⁴ If man is "merely another animal," then his only valid standard is the biological demands of his being, some form of natural privilege. If, however, man is God's creation, man and every aspect of his life must be under God's law word. The totality of man's being, relationships, and world must be God-governed.

The fall is man's rejection of God's government and man's assertion of a natural privilege. But natural privilege is a myth, although sometimes a well-established one. The medieval insistence that grace must govern nature was a radical attack on the world of natural man. Rousseau established the priority of Adam over Jesus, and for him Adam, the natural man, was to replace Jesus, because nature must replace and abolish grace. With the French Revolution, Jacobinism in 1789 made Adam the symbol of the unity of man as against Jesus Christ, the divider of men. "Adam became a great messianic figure standing for the end of time when all men shall meet again."⁵ *Creation* became man's power and prerogative, and Goethe set forth the new premise: "Allah need create no longer. We instead create his world."⁶

The world of Adam is the world of natural man and natural privilege. Previously, the world of grace commanded the minds of men, and the liturgy of society which held men's being in its music and rhythm was from the church, whether Catholic or Protestant. Now it was centered on the life of man, elite man, the man most naturally privileged. In England, for example, dinner among the elite became a liturgy and a ritual, and, whether at home or in hot and humid Africa, gentlemen and ladies dressed for dinner. The American painter, Whistler, once described the English ritual on shipboard during bad weather; he was the lone non-Englishman. All were dressed for dinner, although many were somewhat green, and sometimes made their way to the rail to vomit. The women were properly gowned, the men in dinner jackets, and the stewards were behind their

³ Edward Dahlberg: *The Sorrows of Priapus*, pp. 63, 126. New York, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest Book (1957) 1972.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁵ Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy: *Out of Revolution*, pp. 180, 217. New York, New York: William Morrow, 1938.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

chairs in their dinner jackets. The prerogatives and forms of natural privilege were rigorously maintained.

In culture after culture, variations of such emphases are commonplace. Because the governing world is for humanistic man this fallen world, the forms of this world's activities take on great importance. Natural privilege is the ruling premise in one form or another. In Marxist countries we find the greatest exaltation of the ruling class because there is no countervailing doctrine of grace to limit their power. The same is true of pagan societies of the past.

Paul grounds the rejection of natural privilege in the fact of salvation by sovereign grace and predestination. The great festivals of the Old Testament likewise rejected natural privilege. The Day of Atonement and the Sabbath Year wiped out past sins, cancelled debts, and a man was stripped of all plans and obligations that might interfere with God's will. Natural privilege was blocked thereby.

The world of nature is fallen; the world of revelation is the redemptive order which must work to undermine all the pretensions of the natural world and all its claimed privileges.

Christopher Hill cites an example of what the English "Restoration" of Charles II did to the Church of England. In Wrexham, for example, gentlemen received the sacrament on one Sunday, as we have seen, and the poor on the next.⁷ Such a step established natural privilege in the very realm of grace and indicated the extent of the revolution wrought by the Restoration.

The world of natural privilege fails to see that this realm of man is God's creation and, historically, *a religious product*. Gasset described in 1932 the new barbarism arising in the scientific and academic communities, the belief "that civilisation is *there* in just the same way as the earth's crust and the forest primeval."⁸ This failure to recognize the supernatural force in history leads to barbarism, because it treats as a continuing natural fact, like the air we breathe, the centuries-old advances of Christian faith. To a degree, this is what Rosenstock-Huussy also reacted against when he wrote:

Illiteracy and literacy are not opposites. We shall perish if this is not heeded. In the Christmas message of Queen Elizabeth, on December 25, 1958, I had to listen to the horrid sentence: "... let us enjoy our accumulated civilization." That is the end of the living word, indeed. For, what I resented all my life, even for our memory that it be treated as a sum and a mere rubbish heap, this now is proclaimed from on

⁷. Christopher Hill: *The Experience of Defeat*, p. 212. New York, New York: Viking, 1984.

⁸. Jose Ortega y Gasset: *The Revolt of the Masses*, p. 126. New York, New York: W.W. Norton, 1932.

high as constituting the universe of the word. Let us defend the Harmony of the Spheres against any accumulation of civilizations.⁹

Christianity is a rejection of the world of Adam and an affirmation of the world of Christ. As such, it is a denial of natural privilege in favor of sovereign grace. The world of Adam is the world of death.

⁹ Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, "Biblionomics," in *Bibliography, Biography*, p. 25. New York, New York: Four Wells, 1959.

38. Natural Privilege and Causality (Romans 9:14-18)

14. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

(Romans 9:14-18)

Paul has been reviewing Israel's history and origin with predestination in mind. No man and no people have any claim on God. If God can set aside Israel, He can set aside anyone.

Men, however, have a fixation on predestination; it is an offense to them, because it says that God, not man, is the Lord. Man wants to be in some degree his own god (Gen. 3:5), and hence his rebellion against this doctrine. I recall, in the late 1930s, a professor, in a graduate course, refer in passing to Calvinism as "the triumph of logic over life;" he conceded freely that, if the God of the Bible is the actual God, Paul, Augustine, and Calvin are right, but logic for him was limited to the constructs of the human mind, and life had not evolved in compliance with a higher logic. At one point this professor was right: one must deny the God of Scripture to escape the necessity of predestination.

But Paul in these verses *assumes* predestination. His concern is to demonstrate the righteousness or justice of God. He relates to God's justice His mercy and compassion. There can be no abstract definition of any of these things. Justice is not a platonic idea existing aloft to judge both God and man, but justice is what God does and is. The world of abstract universals is anti-Christian. This means that we must follow Calvin closely when he writes:

The predestination of God is indeed in reality a labyrinth, from which the mind of man can by no means extricate itself: but so unreasonable is the curiosity of man, that the more perilous the examination of a subject is, the more boldly he proceeds; so that when predestination is discussed, as he cannot restrain himself within due limits, he immediately, through his rashness, plunges himself, as it were, into the depth of the sea. What remedy then is there for the godly? Must they avoid every thought of predestination? By no means: for as the Holy Spirit has taught us nothing but what it behoves us to know, the knowledge of this would no doubt be useful, provided it be confined

to the word of God. Let this then be our sacred rule, to seek to know nothing concerning it, except what Scripture teaches us: when the Lord closes his holy mouth, let us also stop the way, that we may not go farther.¹

In the plain words of Scripture, we are *required* to believe both in human responsibility and God's predestination. We are not asked to understand it but believe it. None of us wait on understanding the process of digestion before we eat, for then we would all be dead, nor do we wait on using electricity until we understand it.

Paul's point in v. 14 is thus blunt: it is blasphemy to question God's justice.

In v. 15, Paul quotes from Exodus 33:19 and 34:7 concerning the mercy and compassion of God. If God so spoke to Moses, will He not assert His same sovereign power to grant or withhold mercy to Israel and to the church? God declares that the determination of those who shall receive His mercy is His sovereign act and choice. We must remember that the two verses in Exodus which Paul cites are God's statements when Israel gave itself over to the worship of the golden bull calf, a fertility cult. There was then judgment on God's part, but also mercy, without reference to any merit in those who received it. Like it or not, God and Paul slam shut every crevice against human merit. God's mercy is as free as His grace: both are sovereign.

In v. 16, Paul concludes, to cite Lilly's words, "Faith is God's gift and not the product of man's will or effort."² Ultimate causality is reserved entirely to God. Neither man's willing nor running, i.e., effort, can affect God's determination. This, however, does not permit quietism; man's secondary causality is basic to his life and his responsibility.

In v. 17, Paul again quotes from Exodus, this time 9:16. God spared Pharaoh's life during the plague of boils in order to use Pharaoh to manifest God's judgment. He predestined Pharaoh to live and to view his ruination as well as his reprobation.

Then, in v. 18, Paul concludes, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." God is sovereign; He alone is the ultimate and determining cause of all things, and whatsoever God does is just, because He is justice. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter III, section I, declares:

God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence

¹ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 353f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

² Rev. Joseph L. Lilly, "Romans," in *The Catholic Biblical Association: A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 432. Kansas City, Missouri: Sadler, 1942.

offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Thus, we must conclude, *first*, there is no injustice with God, because He is justice. Abstract universals about justice are merely constructs of the human mind, having no relationship to reality. On all sides, however, men dream up their own ideas of justice and insist that God and man must conform to them.

Second, God's determination of all things means that predestination has to do with more than heaven and hell: its scope is all things. At the same time, we must affirm human responsibility, because God says so. He does not give us a choice of doctrines.

Third, God is declared by Paul to be the full and final cause of all things: there is no ultimate determination apart from Him. There can be no diminution of this doctrine without a fatality of faith.

To illustrate, in the late medieval era, and again in the late Reformation and Counter-Reformation eras, there was a rise of two movements, witchcraft and alchemy, plus the strengthening of a third, astrology. What these movements represented was a belief in naturalistic determination. If man could only gain the key to nature, he could then predestine certain things for himself. There were a number of other manifestations of this search, the quest for the philosopher's stone being one. All rested on a common faith that man could gain the primary determination of himself and nature. This belief was a major stand in the formation of modern science. Gale E. Christianson in his study, *In the Presence of the Creator, Isaac Newton and his Times* (1984), concludes that Newton was anything but a rationalist because of his belief in alchemy. Newton, an Arian by faith, was in fact a naturalist. He was ready to concede to God the status of a first cause in creation, but physics and the laws of motion now determined causality for him.

The quest for ultimate and essential causality apart from God lead to a variety of disastrous by-ways, including scientism and occultism. All represent attempts to assert the primacy of natural privilege. Paul makes clear that natural privilege has no validity in any sphere. Man is a creature, and nothing can change that fact. Of our triune God it is said, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). How can the creature imagine that he can play the creator?

The Lord makes very clear in all of Scripture His proprietary and creating right. A proprietary right is the exclusive right to anything. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, our Lord sets forth this power on the part of God. The householder who hired men to work in his vineyard at the morning added to their number at the third, sixth, ninth, and

eleventh hour. When pay-time came, glad to see the work done, he paid all the laborers a full-day's wages. When some complained about this, the householder's response was, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt. 20:15). If we as men are given this freedom by God, i.e., to do good and to reward others without respect to the fact that some are "less deserving," then how clear and unimpeachable is God's freedom. His causality is exclusive and total, and His proprietary right, as man's can never be, is absolute. Man cannot play the creator and cause. In Paul's words, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

39. Natural Privilege and Creation (Romans 9:19-23)

19. Thou wilt say then unto me, Who doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20. Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21. Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22. What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23. And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.

(Romans 9:19-23)

Paul says nothing new here that Scripture has not repeatedly said, as witness Deuteronomy 29:4, Psalm 69:23, Isaiah 6:10, 29:10, etc. The objection of people to these verses is that Paul shuts the door totally against reducing predestination to foreknowledge. In Hodge's words:

If the fact that one believes and is saved, and another remains impenitent and is lost, depends on God, how can we be blamed? Can we resist his will? It will at once be perceived that this plausible and formidable objection to the apostle's doctrine is precisely the one which is commonly and confidently urged against the doctrine of election. There would be no room either for this objection, or for that contained in the 14th verse, if Paul had merely said that God chooses those whom he foresees would repent and believe; or that the ground of distinction was in the different conduct of men. It is very evident, therefore, that he taught no such doctrine.¹

Earlier, Paul raises the question of God's justice and answers it. Now he pushes all questioners to raise the question of coercion. How can God find fault, "for who hath resisted His will?" Paul takes predestination very seriously; he sees objections to it as evidence of man's desire in some underground manner, to be his own god and determiner (Gen. 3:5). He resolutely exposes every objection in order to confound it. Paul has already made it clear that justice is not a neutral nor an independent norm but is God and His nature. God cannot be judged by Himself: He is the Lord.

The word for God's "will" in v. 19 is *foulema*, which means a deliberate, decreed purpose. The eternal and decreed will of God cannot be resisted by man's will or whim. No creature has ever resisted God's eternal decree and will, nor can they. There is no cause nor justice higher than God, nor is there any determination apart from Him.

¹. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 499. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong, (1882) 1893.

The coincidence of divine predestination and human responsibility is difficult for the mind to grasp because God is involved. We recognize in the natural world that every physical event has behind it a multiplicity of causes. Nothing exists with only a single cause behind it. This multiplicity of causes, each totally co-extensive over each result, poses no problems for us. It is only when we must see behind, in, and over this multiplicity of causes the determining cause, God's decree, that men have problems, because their autonomy is now denied.

In v. 20, Paul uses the familiar Old Testament image of a potter (Job 10:9, Ps. 2:9, Isa. 29:16, 41:25; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:1-12). It means that the basic relationship of man to God is of creature to Creator. "As the moulder produces the quality of the vessel formed by him according to his own free will, so God constitutes the moral quality (fitted for blessedness or not so) of men as He will."² When man asks God, "Why hast thou made me thus?", he is in effect saying, why am I a creature? Why am I not autonomous? Man, aware of the image of God in himself, is not content unless he can be his own god. The fact that the Old Testament uses the imagery of the pottery does not make it any the more acceptable to men in any age. Men resent being placed on the level of a pot; although God makes clear that there is a hierarchy of being, and man has been placed only below God (Ps. 8:5-8), the fact remains that, in the sphere of autonomy, man and the pot are alike God's creations and cannot indict God or alter His will.

Since God is the potter and we are the clay, to know what we are we must understand God's word, and God's purpose in our creation. We have no independent meaning or purpose.

In v. 21, Paul presses further; this image means that God can create one vessel unto honor and another to dishonor. The word "honor" is the Greek "time," or value or price, and "dishonor" is "atimia," the negative of "honor." In normal Greek usage, the reference is to the marketplace and its pricing, but here the sole source of valuation is emphatically set forth as the will of God. God has the sovereign right to use men for His own purpose. How Paul intends for us to read this was made clear by Godet:

The lump therefore represents the whole of *humanity*, not humanity as God creates it, but in the state in which He finds it every moment when He puts it to the service of His kingdom. This state includes for each individual the whole series of free determinations which have gone to make him what he is. Let not Israel therefore say to God: Thou hast no right to make of me anything else than a vessel of honor; and Thou has no right to make of that other body, the Gentiles, anything else than a base vessel. It belongs to God Himself to decide, according to His wisdom, the part which He will assign to every

² Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 379. Peabody, Massachusetts: (1884) 1983.

human being. Comp. 2 Tim. ii. 20, 21, where the words "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor," shows clearly the truth of the standpoint which we have just expounded.³

God's predestination is from all eternity, but God is not the God of Deism but the living, ever-active God who is at every moment at work in us in coincidence with our work. "What God is governs what God does,"⁴ and God is all-righteous.

Man objects to God's sovereignty because he wants his autonomy and sovereignty. At the same time, man insists that he should have free claim on God's mercy and grace whensoever man wills!

Paul strikes hard against this equivocal position in vv. 22-23. He introduces the "longsuffering" or patience of God with His creatures. Men imagine a vain thing; they demand the benefits of God's lordship while claiming autonomy from Him. Paul stresses the patient restraint of God in dealing with men. Moreover, in all this God has a glorious purpose for most men, to share in His glory, and for most of a potter's vessels are to honor, and they are "afore prepared" for this goal.

The goal of natural privilege is to convert God into a natural resource; only on this ground is God then tolerable. God as the Lord or Sovereign is anathema, because as such He undercuts totally any possible valid ground for natural privilege. The only real world, however, is God's world, a realm in which all things, including life itself, are acts of grace on God's part. If life itself is a grace, as Peter tells us (1 Peter 3:7), then we are indeed pushed back and stripped of all possible natural privilege before God.

If God is the potter and we the clay, we cannot insist on a meaning for our lives apart from Him, nor can we choose its nature and terms. Psalm 47:4 declares, "He shall choose our inheritance for us." We are made to His specifications for His purpose.

Man insists, Paul says, on finding fault with God's predestinating purpose. God's goal is glory for most of mankind in due time. Moreover, man cannot create or re-create himself; he cannot step outside God's universe, nor establish an independent life. We are told, "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death" (Prov. 8:36). If "The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul" (Prov. 20:2), then how much more deadly it is to provoke God the Lord?

Natural privilege, however, is that state of mind which makes claims against God and then justifies itself. God said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to

³ Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 357. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1979 reprint.

⁴ C. Norman Bartlett: *Right in Romans*, p. 96. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1953.

be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death” (Jonah 4:9). For less than Jonah’s gourd, natural privilege is ready to be angry with God.

The issue, says Paul, raised by natural privilege claimants, is *coercion*. God’s order leads to man’s coercion. Modern man in particular is supposedly hostile to coercion: his world view permits any activity between consenting adults, and he boasts of his non-coercive morality. The fact of statism belies this claim; the libertarian believes in freedom for all activities but not for Christian order. Never has civilization been more coercive, and all in the name of non-coercion. Since in the world of Rousseau, reason is identical with the state, and the state is the ordained realm of natural privilege, coercion becomes resistance to the voice of reason, the state. In Marxist states, resistance to statist coercion is counter-revolution, and the democracies have their own terms of abuse for dissidents. The god-like realm of natural privilege is now the modern state, the new god walking on earth.

Paul works patiently in Romans to expose every argument against the triune God, “that every mouth, may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19) of trying to play god (Gen. 3:5). “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

God creates us; He does not coerce us. Because the humanistic state is not our creator, it can only remake us into its appointed image by coercion. Thus, education in the hands of the state is coercive, compulsory, and a form of humanistic predestination. In every sphere, the state is coercive because it is anti-God, anti-Christ. It insists on playing the potter with the lives of the people. But nothing is more evil or more deadly than a non-god playing god. We then have the triumph of the demonic.

40. Predestination versus Human Rights (Romans 9:24-29)

24. Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

25. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

26. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

27. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

28. For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

29. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah.

(Romans 9:24-29)

Paul's passionate concern is to shut the door on any and every attempt by man to assert his imagined privileges and rights against God. Man can make no claims on God nor appeal to any independent realm of truth and justice against God. Man cannot manufacture his philosophical myths such as free will and assert them against God. The idea of free will rests on Genesis 3:5, man's claim to be his own god and determiner. Men do not create themselves, their context, race, aptitudes, nor heritage; they are products of a human history. Faced with God, however, men insist on a mythical freedom which rests on their will to be gods.

In v. 24, Paul tells us that God has predestined and chosen, *called*, His vessels of mercy from among both Jews and Gentiles. Both are in the church; they are evidences of God's grace to all peoples.

Salvation is not a natural privilege or right of any people. "Sinners, then, have no rights before God, no claims of their own."¹ We must add that no man, sinner or saint, covenant-breaker or covenant-keeper, has any rights or privileges before God.

But what of Israel? Paul sees Israel as the chosen covenant people of God, not as a blood line. Hence, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom. 9:6), and "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:29). Thus, Paul's point that *some* of the *called* are Jews is very important to his thesis. As John Murray noted, "That there should be the called from Jewry belongs to the argument of the passage as a whole.

¹. C. Norman Bartlett: *Right in Romans*, p. 97. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1953.

The covenant promise has not failed but comes to effect in the *true* Israel, the *true* children, the *true* seed (cf. vss. 6-9, 27, 29; 11:5,7).²

God's calling is both a discipline and a grace. We are prepared for our calling by those things God has us experience beforehand, and His prevenient grace schools us for His service.

In v. 25, Paul quotes Hosea 2:23, wherein God declares that the apostles of Israel shall be again made God's people. Paul cites a verse dealing with Israel's restoration to show the grace of God means also the ingathering of all peoples. Whether it be Israel or the Gentiles, it is all of grace. Membership in the covenant is by God's grace and calling, not by birthright or natural privileges.

In v. 26, this same fact is developed further. This time he quotes Hosea 1:10. Wherever there are Gentiles in any part of the world, there in time these will be God's covenant people by God's electing grace. The use of Hosea is telling. All covenant-breakers are compared to an adulterous woman who has turned prostitute. The sin of the unregenerate is as repulsive in God's sight, and His grace totally unmerited. A whoring wife can make no claims on her husband; she has no natural privilege or right. In fact, Leviticus 20:10 makes clear the death penalty applies to both the adulterer and adulteress: "And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death." Man's only merited status is death.

In v. 27, Paul goes from the calling of the Gentiles to the exclusion of physical Israel. He does *not* say that Jews are excluded, but rather that Israel and Judea as covenant peoples are excluded. Great numbers of Jews and Galileans (Israelites) were saved as individuals, but not the nation as such. However numerous Israel might be, only a remnant was saved. The church supplants Israel as the covenant people, and the nation as such no longer has any standing. Paul now cites Isaiah 10:22, 23, which refers to the reduction of the nation by the Assyrian invasion. Israel is to be reduced to a remnant but must not fear, for God's purposes for the remnant shall triumph. The return is a covenantal return: "The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God" (Isa. 10:21). Paul writes with the apostasy of Judea and the forthcoming fall of Jerusalem in mind. Hendriksen noted:

At this point we should guard ourselves against committing an error in our interpretation. It is a rather common practice to say that Paul now begins to spiritualize, by stating that only the remnant *will be saved*. However, a close look at Isaiah's own prophecy shows that he by no means restricts his prophecy to a prediction of a physical *return*

² John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 37. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1965.

from captivity, but states that the remnant will return "to the mighty God" (Isa. 10:21). They will *lean on Jehovah*, will rely on the Lord (verse 20). Paul is therefore exactly reproducing Isaiah's thought when he says that of the total number of Israelites only the remnant *will be saved*.³

Paul makes clear that both the calling of the Gentiles and the rejection of Israel are predicted in the Old Testament. It is clearly implied that the Gentiles will be rejected if they assume that their status is a natural privilege (Rom. 11:19-21).

Isaiah (1:9) is again cited by Paul in v. 29. Isaiah is emphatic that only God's grace separates Israel from Sodom and Gomorrah, and the same is implied with respect to the Gentiles. Personal merit as a natural privilege and power has no standing before God. In v. 28, the efficiency of God is stressed. God's purpose with respect to history is effectively carried through by Him. This development is contrary to our will but in terms of God's will.

By citing Isaiah, Paul calls attention to Old Testament history as verification of his statement. God used judgment to separate the apostates from Israel and to salvage and bless in time His remnant. The same process is again at work. Sanday and Headlam rendered v. 28 in these words: "For a work, accomplishing and abridging it, that is, a sentence conclusive and concise, will the Lord do upon the earth."⁴ They cite these verses as a further development by Paul of the power and rights of God as Creator as against man.⁵ Having said this, Sanday and Headlam, like so many others, then proceed to undercut Paul's meaning by insisting that Paul was somehow substantiating man's independent will. Their conclusion, therefore, is designed to restore to man some degree of power in their determination. They recognize that Paul declares God's sovereignty and His freedom from man's being and actions, i.e., the totally sovereign power of God in determining all things without reference to the creature's will as in any sense determinative. The freedom of the Divine election and its gratuitous nature are then undercut. Paul, who has so insistently stressed God's sovereignty, begins to sound, for Sanday and Headlam, and others as well, like a 19th century English liberal. Somehow, no matter what Paul says, he is made to sound like a reasonable man with a full appreciation of the moral values of man's independent will.

This misinterprets Paul. Paul, as an intensely loyal Jew, was clearly aware of Israel's moral superiority among the nations. Given the Sadduceeism, the Phariseeism, and the judicial murder of Jesus Christ.

³. William Hendriksen: *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 332. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1982) 1984.

⁴. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 265. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

⁵. *Ibid.*, p. 266f.

Israel was still far ahead of all other nations. In morality, education, and discipline, no other nation of antiquity could compare with Israel, and Israel knew it. As a consequence, Israel saw itself as superior and as naturally privileged among the nations. The Jews were everywhere a proud and a successful people, and our Lord indicts this pride which is carried into the very presence of God in prayer (Luke 18:10-14). This attitude clashed with the pride, arrogance, and assured sense of superiority which marked Greeks and Romans. Paul indicted this in Jews and Gentiles with unsparing words:

For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (1 Cor. 4:7)

It is a human failing which we are all prone to manifest, i.e., to compare various nationalities favorably or unfavorably, and to stress their differences. Paul has no use for this, declaring, "for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22-23).

Paul *hates* natural privilege and natural rights, because he sees it as the deadly moral ailment of his own people, whom he loves intensely. He sees it as a threat to the future of the church (Rom. 11:19-21). For the Gentile believers to view Israel's pride and its sense of natural privilege with smug disdain is for Paul to manifest the same deadly evil.

Our standing before God and in history is a matter of sovereign grace, mercy, and predestinating purpose. We *may* have virtues and abilities by the grace and providence of God, but God also raises up His Assyrias, Babylons, Romes, and Soviet Unions to do His work and to shake the nations. To rest on natural privileges, powers, and rights is to rest on death, for all such are sure to perish.

Where men insist on their natural privileges, powers, and rights before God, they will soon feel free to go their own way without God: they are confident in their own power and ability. The language of law will then shift from God's law to human rights, and justice begins to fade. The term human rights has no definition: it means what the speaker chooses to make it mean. It means in our time a variety of things, i.e., Marxism declares itself to be the gospel of human rights; homosexuality, abortion, child molestation, the sexual revolution, drugs, and more are all defended in terms of *human rights*. Men and the state define human rights, and it can mean anything. In First Amendment cases, it often means the suppression of Christianity.

The premises of all such thinking are destroyed by Paul. God is the Lord. Man has no claims against Him. Isaiah, faced with the vision of the glory of God, saw that, instead of any privilege, he merited only judgment:

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (Isa. 6:5)

A note about the reference to “the Lord of Sabaoth” in v. 29. It is translated in the Old Testament from *Yahweh sebaot* as the “LORD of hosts” or armies. He is the God who controls all armies, so that nothing moves apart from Him. By using this term, Paul stresses further the fact of predestination.

41. Security (Romans 9:30-33)

30. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

31. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

32. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone;

33. As it is written, Behold I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
(Romans 9:30-33)

Paul has been much abused by scholars, who have seen him as the perverter of an ostensibly simple gospel, or as a man who broke with Old Testament faith, or as one who introduced Greco-Romans mystery religions into the life of the church, and many more like myths. This misrepresentation of Paul is common to non-Christian, Christian, and Jewish scholarship. Thus, Rabbi Samuel Sandmel tells us that Paul repudiated the laws of the Pentateuch as obsolete and annulled. Sandmel, however, misreads both the Old and the New Testaments, and his standard is not the law but contemporary liberal Judaism. He sees the contrast between Judaism and Paul thus: "The Jewish view: man sins, man can atone, God can forgive. The view of Paul: man is under bondage to sin, the divine Christ atones for man, and then man is 'forgiven.'"¹ It should be noted that Sandmel does not give us the Old Testament view, but "the Jewish view"; there is a difference.

In v. 30, Paul begins with the words, "What shall we say then?" If God has not annulled His word, and if the force of His covenant still stands and the law thereof, what has happened? Paul has called attention to the fact that the covenant, i.e., God's election, is all of grace, not of natural privilege, right, or birth. "The Gentiles, sunk in carelessness and sin, have attained the favour of God, while the Jews, to whom religion was a business, have utterly failed."² The condition of Israel in Egypt was comparable to that of the Gentiles in Paul's day. God's election in both cases was an act of sovereign grace. The Jews now had come to see their covenant status as a mark of their obvious superiority, not a fact of sovereign grace. The Gentiles were not interested in justice, but, by God's grace through Christ, they have been justified because of Christ's righteousness. The Gentiles were not interested in God's justice because

¹ Samuel Sandmel: *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?*, pp. 8, 10. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1978.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 517. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

they preferred their will and idea concerning right and wrong to God's truth; by God's grace, they have been made just before God and a people of righteousness in spite of themselves. Grace is sovereign, not earned.

Some have objected strongly to Paul's statement that the Gentiles did not seek justice; they call attention to Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and others. These all, however, espoused a humanistic and abstract "justice" which in God's sight is no justice at all. The same is true of contemporary doctrines of justice. All are man-centered abstractions. Publishing house catalogs, listing a great number of scholarly studies of the family, justice, social problems, and more are a good example of this. Every brief review gives us an emphasis on abstractions, on man-made categories which become Procrustean beds on which to press and pull mankind. For such men, it is the heart of scholarship to create an abstraction and then compel life to conform to it. There are, however, no abstract universals in God's creation, and all such scholarship is an exercise in futility at the least. Meyer's comment was to the point:

In opposition to the Jewish conceit of descent and of works, he desired to establish the free and absolute sovereign power of the divine will and action, and that the more decisively and exclusively, the less he would leave any ground for the arrogant illusion of the Jews, that God *must* be gracious to them.³

This "conceit of descent and of works" now marks the church.

In v. 31, Paul says that Israel, while professing and following after the law of righteousness, did not attain righteousness. Israel was zealous with respect to the law, but not in God's way. Contrary to Israel's view, and that of much pietism, it is not the zeal that satisfies God. Paul in Philippians 3:4-6 speaks of his zeal as a Pharisee and sees it as worthless and wrong.

In v. 32, Paul says that Israel, while following the law of righteousness did not attain unto a law of righteousness. They sought salvation by law, when salvation is by grace. They failed to pay attention to the meaning of sacrifice and the fact that atonement requires a sinless and unblemished substitute to effect atonement. The sacrificial system had become a meaningless ritual, not the means of atonement. After the fall of Jerusalem, Judaism dropped sacrifice and more and more openly made man's moral works the means of self-salvation. All who seek to save themselves by their morality believe that they can place God under obligation to themselves. With the right works, God will be obligated to save them. Our Lord condemns this attitude, saying, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

³ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 395. Peabody Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers (1884) 1983.

Christ, our atonement, is the stumbling-block over which Israel fell. "Their misunderstandings consisted in thinking the *works* of the Law could merit this justice, whereas it is a gift of God independent of works and conditioned on faith."⁴ God salvaged His covenant by separating it from the Old Israel and giving it to the New Israel, made up of Jews and Gentiles alike and called into being by God's sovereign grace. Christ was the destiny of Israel, but Israel turned its back on its life and future.

In v. 33, Paul cites Isaiah again, this time Isaiah 27:16 and 8:14. The foundation of the Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ, but to those who reject Him, He is "a stumbling stone and rock of offense." The term "rock" is used in Scripture as a symbol for God (Deut. 32:18, 39; etc.) Jesus Christ as very God of very God, and very man of very man, is an offense to the ungodly, in particular, He is an offense as the atoning God and Redeemer. Paul wrote with the old Hebrew interpretation of Isaiah in mind. The Targum for Isaiah made clear that the reference was to the Messianic King.⁵ The reference is plainly personal and to Christ: "whosoever believeth on *him* shall not be ashamed." Christ is a Rock of strength and salvation to some, and an offense and a stumbling block to others.

Paul quotes an Old Testament statement about salvation in the Messiah. The key is "whosoever believeth on Him." There are no changing dispensations in God's plan. In every age, salvation is the same. The just then, now, and always can only live by faith.

Paul is echoing old rabbinic statements about Isaiah's words. He is citing what our Lord says about Himself (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), and also what Peter says (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7).

The Hebrew reads "whosoever believeth on him shall not make haste;" Paul says the believer shall not be ashamed, meaning that he will not be confounded. The Hebrew meaning, Murray tells us, is apparently "that he will not flee in disappointment."⁶

As we have seen, Paul eliminates from consideration the humanistic reasonings of his day. For example, the term "free will" is alien to Scripture. It is an absolute concept and alien to Biblical faith. Karl Barth insisted on the absolute freedom of God; for him, God could be tomorrow what He is not today, the devil, for example. For him, the orthodox theologians "limited" God by binding Him to their views of Biblical doctrine. For Barth, God's absolute freedom was necessary to establish man's like freedom. Barth separated God from "power in itself," but he insisted on

⁴ Rev. Joseph L. Lilly, "Romans," in The Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 433. 1942.

⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 511. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

⁶ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p.45. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, (1968) 1971.

God's power to save one and all; his universalism was implicit but clear. God for Barth was omnipotent only as "saving and righteous power. In that way God is the content, the determination, the limit of all that is possible."⁷ This, however, gives us not the sovereign predestinating God but universal potentiality. "The limit of all that is possible" has reference to man and the universe, and it does not include the limitation of God's law. God is reduced to a limiting concept, and man is free to develop into all possibility, because power in itself is not ascribed to God but to our universal potentiality.

All who insist on free will must limit God in order to free themselves. In so doing, they must insist that, whatever part the triune God plays in their lives and their salvation, it is a part made possible only because man gives God permission. Sovereignty is transferred from God to man.

This position is basic to modern man. God and Christ are options, not foundations. The good life and the good society are possible without God. This being the case, of what value is God, and of what value is salvation? Their role is reduced to that of fire and life insurance, or to icing on the cake.

Salvation then is turned into something other than what Scripture declares it to be. It becomes security about heaven. People whose concern is security are not motivated to dominion and conquest in Christ's name. Security is retreatist in emphasis. The retreat of the church has been a result of its emphasis on salvation as security, not as a calling to exercise dominion as God's covenant man.

Salvation as security is not to be confused with the doctrine of eternal security, which rests on predestination and on the covenant life. "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not make haste," says Isaiah 28:16. This sentence is rendered by Moffatt as, "he who has faith in Me will never flinch"; others have suggested "hasten away," or "hasten about." John Gill noted:

The Targum is, "shall not be moved when trouble comes;" being founded upon this Rock of ages, which is proof against all storms and tempests: see Matt. vii. 24, 25. The apostles Paul and Peter, agreeably to the Septuagint version, render it, *shall not be ashamed, or confounded*.⁸

Paul cites this sentence because it is linked to predestination and our security in God's government and calling. We are to *live* by faith. Those who reduce Paul's text to *saved* by faith falsify also the meaning of security in Christ.

⁷ Karl Barth: *Dogmatics in Outline*, p. 49. New York, New York: Philosophical Library, 1949.

⁸ John Gill: *Gill's Commentary*, vol. III, p. 856. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980 reprint.

42. Christ as the Perfect Expression of the Law (Romans 10:1-4)

1. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.
2. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.
3. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.
4. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:1-4)

At this point, one interesting fact needs to be noted. Paul does not speak of his concern for the Jews but for Israel. *First* of all, Paul was not, strictly speaking, a Jew or of the tribe of Judah, but of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). This is in some respects a minor point to us, but an important one to Paul. *Second*, Paul is not writing politically but religiously, in terms of God's covenant. The covenant had not been with Judah and Benjamin as such but with Israel. Now Israel had broken the covenant, and Paul is intensely concerned because this means judgment. This judgment was soon to come with the fall of Jerusalem. The key point for Paul is this religious fact. It is a matter of desire and prayer with him that Israel be saved.

Paul is thus intensely moved by a very human loyalty, a love of his own people. At the same time, he is radically religious and theological in his concern. It is not the *survival* of his people Paul desires, but their *salvation*. It is this that separates Paul from modern man's loyalties: his loyalty is to the Kingdom of God, not to any human realm, however much cherished.

Paul acknowledges the zeal for God shown by Israel. "I bear them record," he says, i.e., I am ready to be a witness and to testify to this fact. This zeal, however, is "not according to knowledge." The word translated as *knowledge* is in the Greek *epignosin*. *Gnosis* means mainly a seeking to know; it can also mean knowledge. *Epignosis* means a correct, exact, or full knowledge. The religious leaders of Israel knew a great many things about God, but they did not know Him. Paul is fully aware of the religious superiority of Israel as against the Gentiles, but it is the Lord, not the Gentiles, who is the test (Rom. 2:9-11). Interpretations had replaced the Scripture and God as the guidelines of faith in Israel. Calvin commented, "it is better, as Augustine says, even to go limping in the right way than to run with all our might out of the way. If we would be really religious, let us remember that what Lactantius teaches is true, that true religion is alone that which is connected with the word of God."¹

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on Romans*, p. 382. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

In v. 3, we see something about Paul in his statement. Paul, however great his love of his people, is always rigorously honest and blunt. He begins by declaring that Israel is "ignorant of God's righteousness" (*dikaïosunen*), His justice, His quality of being right or just. God is righteousness or justice in Himself; there is no possible justice or truth outside of God. The Greeks had set up an independent realm of universals apart from and over both God and man. Both God and man were to be judged by these abstract universals or ideas, and the key to all understanding was the knowledge, not of God, but of ideas or universals.

Paul is accusing Israel of also having a false doctrine of righteousness. Israel's view of righteousness was *not* an abstraction as with the Greeks. It was, in fact, very concrete. According to Lewis Jacobs, in the Jewish faith, "Righteousness (is) the fulfillment of all legal and moral obligations. Righteousness is not an abstract notion but rather consists in doing what is just and right in all relationship." As Jacobs correctly points out, the Biblical doctrine of righteousness "bears a distinctly legal character." Later, in Maimonides, righteousness came to "embrace the Greek ideal of harmony and balance in choosing the middle way."² In all of this, the Torah remained as the governing law. There was, however, a subtle shift from righteousness as the revelation of God's nature and His requirement for all creation to a stress on human relationships. God's law was a resource for man's community life, which was true enough, but the focus was now on man's life and man's choice of good and evil. According to the rabbinic commentary, *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, it is not God's providence and predestination which sustain the world but rather man's law-keeping. We are told

By ten Sayings was the world created. And what does the Scripture teach thereby? Could it not have been created by one Saying? But this was to requite the ungodly which destroy the world that was created by ten Sayings, and to give a goodly reward to the righteous which sustain the world that was created by ten Sayings.³

We begin to understand the nature of this changed emphasis in the work of Saadia Ben Joseph (A.D. 882-942), the greatest scholar of this era, who said, in answer to a question about the resurrection of the righteous of Israel, that "they have the power of choosing between obedience and disobedience." Paul stresses man's responsibility but also the divine decree and ultimacy. Saadia Gaon, however, limited God to foreknowledge: "He knew that they would choose to obey and not to disobey Him."⁴ This

² Lewis Jacobs, "Righteousness," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 14, pp. 180-184. Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Publishing House, 1971.

³ Judah Goldin, translator: *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan*, p. 243. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1955.

⁴ Samuel Rosenblatt, translator: *Saadia Gaon: The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, p. 433. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press (1948) 1955.

means that ultimate decision-making is in man's hands. Hence, Sandmel was correct when he stated, "The Jewish view: man sins, man can atone, God can forgive. The view of Paul: man is under bondage to sin, the divine Christ atones for man, and then man is 'forgiven.'"⁵ Sandmel's view is an accurate summary.

Whereas the Greek view of righteousness or justice was an abstraction or an abstract universal, the Jewish view was and is, while abstracted from God, made a concrete universal only in man. Judaism thus has had a remarkable affinity to humanism from the days of the Pharisees and Sadducees to the present. God's law becomes a resource for man, and the essence of justice is social; in Jacob's words, it "consists in doing what is just and right in all relationship." In the definition of what is just and right, the needs of the human relationship is a large part.

There is much to commend in George Horowitz' the *Spirit of Jewish Law* (1953), a book often quoted in U.S. courts. However, Horowitz cites with approval Maimonides and others who have said that God's law can be disregarded as a temporary measure when the life of the body politic or persons requires it. Instead of the plain meaning of the sentence of Psalm 119:126, "It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void the law," these men interpreted it thus: "It is time to do something for the LORD, so make void thy Torah."⁶

Paul thus was on sure ground when he said that Israel was "ignorant of God's righteousness." They had created another doctrine of justice. Today, of course, the churches, by relying on and being content with state law in the place of God's law, are also "ignorant of God's righteousness."

Israel was, Paul continued, "going about to establish their own righteousness, (and) have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." Israel failed to recognize that there is no justice apart from God. The common rabbinic view held that the law was like water, and the interpretation like wine. Just as modern courts take a law and re-interpret it radically, to gain ends sometimes quite alien to the intent of the law, so the rabbinic interpretations, and those of too many churchmen, use Scripture to buttress non-Scriptural meanings. The righteousness of God is not accepted, and a humanistic view of law and justice is established in God's name.

In v. 4, Paul concludes, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." By this Paul means that the atonement is the great and consummate expression of God's righteousness, law, or justice. Jesus Christ, in His purpose, person, life, work, and death is the "end of the

⁵ Samuel Sandmel: *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament?*, p. 10. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1978.

⁶ George Horowitz: *The Spirit of Jewish Law*, pp. 93-95. New York, New York: Central Book Company (1953) 1973.

law.” The word translated *end* is *telos*, which means much more than our English word, although “end” as “purpose” gives us a clue to its meaning. *Telos* means accomplishment, perfection, or success, not destruction. The word *telos* is the root of our English word *teleology*, i.e., the shaping of things to a purpose, a word suggestive of providence. Thus, Christ is not the destruction of the law of God but the perfect expression thereof. He is righteousness incarnate. Paul then goes on to speak of the necessity of faith, of a total expression of Christ in our lives. Being now members of Christ, we must set forth His righteousness or justice. All too many commentaries manufacture a false antithesis between grace and law. While Paul denies law as the way of salvation, he affirms it as the way of sanctification.

Thus, Paul says that Israel did not submit to the righteousness, law, or justice of God when it refused to submit to Jesus Christ, because in Christ the righteousness of God was made manifest. Man, unable to make atonement for sin, finds atonement through Jesus Christ. Christ as the new Adam recreates us to become members of a new humanity of righteous or just peoples. Everyone that believes is now dedicated, *not* to establishing their own righteousness, but to manifesting the righteousness of God their Savior.

The insistent misinterpretation of this text rests on the prior misinterpretation of Matthew 5:17-20. By insisting that Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill,” meaning He had come to end or destroy the law, all the rest of the New Testament had to be interpreted the same way. Our Lord’s strong insistence on the validity of the law has been turned into its denial. Paul is brought into line with this by the same perverse misinterpretation.

As against the Greek abstract universalism and the Jews concrete immanentism in man’s will, Paul sets forth God’s predestinating power, man’s responsibility, and the fact of God’s law or righteousness as the responsible way of life. Fallen man, however, cannot do more than reproduce his sin. As Moses tells us, Adam begat “after his likeness” (Gen. 5:3), i.e., reproducing in his seed the same will to be one’s own god and law (Gen. 3:5). The great Adam, Jesus Christ, is the true covenant man, and, born again or begotten by His supernatural regenerating power (John 3:1-13), man is now made just by Christ’s atonement and thus capable of being a covenant-keeper, i.e., a man whose sanctification by means of the law is possible.

43. Faith and Law (Romans 10:5-13)

5. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7. Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.

9. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shall be saved.

10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

(Romans 10:5-13)

These verses are a joy to the antinomians who set them as a contrast between Moses and Christ, and as a contrast between faith-righteousness and law-righteousness. There is a serious problem with this interpretation. *First*, in v. 5, Moses is quoted, but Moses is simply citing God's express words in Leviticus 18:5 (cf. Neh. 9:29; Ezek. 11, 13, 21; Gal. 3:12). Can we quote God against God? God thus is the source directly of the declaration with respect to "the righteousness which is of the law." *Second*, in v. 6, in speaking of "the righteousness which is of faith," Paul is again citing Moses in Deuteronomy 30:12-13. In v. 8, Paul uses Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:14. In v. 11, "For the Scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed," it is the prophets who are cited (Isaiah 28:16; 49:23; Jer. 17:7; cf. Rom. 9:33). If there is a break between the Old and New Testaments on salvation, why is Paul using the Old Testament, and the law in particular to substantiate faith righteousness? Most of his readers would recognize that his citations were from the law. Did Moses himself have two plans of salvation in mind?

The law was never given in separation from or in opposition to grace. The law is *covenant* law, and God's covenant and its law are acts of grace to enable man to live. Whatever Phariseeism did with the law, the Bible makes clear that the law was a privilege and grace to Israel. In Ezekiel 20:11 God stresses the law as a gift and a grace.

Again, in vv. 6 and 7, we have a strange reference to Christ and faith righteousness. Faith righteousness will not lack faith in Christ's ascension

nor his resurrection. If Paul is contrasting law-righteousness and faith-righteousness in any antinomian sense, why this reference?

It may help us to understand these verses if we render faith-righteousness and law-righteousness as faith-justice and law-justice. Christ in His atonement effects the remission of our sins; we are made a new creation. As a result, Paul is not opposing one kind of righteousness to another, because the same God, and the same prophet, Moses, is his source for both. As far as salvation is concerned, and as far as righteousness is concerned, "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (vv. 12-13).

Let us look again at Leviticus 18:5, which is God's statement through Moses and which Paul cites as law-justice in Romans 10:5: "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD." *First*, this is covenant law to covenant people who are reminded (Lev. 18: 1-4) that they have been *saved* by God's grace from Egypt. This law-justice or righteousness is not separated from grace but follows God's saving grace and must follow then in the lives of the people of grace. It is not a *saving* word but a *word to the saved* about life and sanctification in their covenant faith and Lord. Any other interpretation is nonsense. Moses is not giving us a plan of salvation by works.

Second, Leviticus 18 gives us a catalogue of sexual sins. Is Moses saying that men are saved by avoiding incest, or avoiding women during menstruation, or by avoiding adultery, Molech worship and sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality? If we say that Paul cites Leviticus 18:5 as salvation by law, he thereby declared that the Jewish plan of salvation was by avoiding these specific sexual sins. Neither the rabbis nor Paul ever said so. The idea is nonsense.

Verse 6 in the English begins "But," as though contrasting law-righteousness and faith-righteousness. This is a possible translation, as is "and." Robert Young, the compiler of the concordance, in his *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*, renders it as "and," which gives a very different meaning. It then becomes, not a contrast, but a unity. This is not all. It can mean, truly, in truth, verily, i.e., to strengthen or confirm something said. In Romans 3:31, Paul says that he does not make "void the law through faith" but, rather, "we establish the law." In this present context, he is linking law and faith, and using Moses to verify law-righteousness (or sanctifying works) and faith-righteousness or God's grace unto salvation.

Some serious consequences follow the interpretation which has Moses teaching salvation by works, and the New Testament salvation by faith. I encounter its consequences all over the church, among "Bible-believing

Christians.” There are all too many who believe that God saves all “good people” in non-Christian cultures, whatever their religion. This is a flagrant denial of the Biblical doctrine of sin, and Paul’s plain statement, “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10; cf. vv. 11-23). Many are insistent that a “good God” must send all such to heaven. All those people worship the god of their imagination, not the living God. Such people are not interested in the very words of Scripture: they affirm the Bible generally, and they deny it specifically. But others are knowledgeable “fundamentalists” of this newer breed, not the older variety. Their position is this: salvation is possible for all non-Christians in terms of law-righteousness, and for Christians only by faith-righteousness. Pagans thus who avoid the specific offenses of Leviticus 18 can be saved by law-righteousness. This is a radical perversion of Scripture.

Paul continues, in vv. 7-10, to deal with true faith-righteousness. It cannot be limited to belief in our hearts, although it must begin there. Then Paul requires of the believer that he “confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,” and declares, “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” The word *confess* is the Greek *hommologeō*, here *homologeseis* (*homos*, the same; *legō*, to speak), meaning to assent to, declare, or admit. We can only appreciate the force of this requirement if we think of confessing Christ in the Soviet Union. It is a confession of dissent from the existing order and a dedication to the creation of another under the headship of Jesus Christ. To confess Christ was to risk persecution and even death, but faith must have works.

In vv. 11-12, Paul makes clear that all men are saved by faith-righteousness. It is “whosoever believeth on him,” and this applies to all peoples, “for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek.” All men are sinners before God, and all men are saved only by Christ’s atonement. The Lord is equally “rich unto all that call upon him.”

In v. 13, Paul cites Joel 2:32, part of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) concerning the Gospel era, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the judgment of God upon the nations, and still another fact. *First*, according to Joel 2:32, “whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered.” Salvation is in terms of the Lord, not in terms of our relationship to Israel. *Second*, it is still a redemption which comes from Israel, “for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance.” Israel is the community through whom the faith, from Moses until the apostles, was made known to the nations. Among other texts, Jonah and Psalm 87 witness to this fact. *Third*, as Israel falls by the wayside, “the remnant whom the LORD shall call” shall make the Lord’s work known to all.

In all of this, there is no hint of two plans of salvation. We are saved by grace; it is faith-righteousness which marks the redeemed. The saved people of God will manifest a law-righteousness in all their ways, because

sanctifying grace governs their lives. Law and faith are not opposed but united.

44. Faith and Truth (Romans 10:14-21)

14. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15. And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17. So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

18. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

19. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation will I anger you.

20. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.

21. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people. (Romans 10:14-21)

In vv. 12-13, Paul states that God hears all who call upon Him without distinction. In v. 17, the qualification of God's word is made, but all men can pray in terms of God's truth, without any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Thus, in v. 14, Paul's statement is this: Israel has had full opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord; they are therefore without excuse. By analogy, the fulness of opportunity to call upon the Lord and to live in terms of His law-word, His truth, has not been lacking in the church and in the so-called Christian West. Like Israel, the church and the nations are without excuse.

However, neither Israel nor the church and the nations can call efficaciously on the Lord if they have not believed in Him nor been willing to hear Him. There are many preachers now as in Israel in Paul's day, but only those have a valid message if God has commissioned them to proclaim it. They cannot hear without a true preacher. God through Jeremiah condemns all false preachers or prophets:

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. (Jer. 14:14)

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. (Jer. 23:21)

For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. (Jer. 27:15)

Cranfield notes that all along the law pointed to Christ, and now the fulness of that message was present in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.¹

All that God requires of us is that we call upon Him with faith, and that we "hear" (believe and obey) His word. Knowledge of the word is necessary, and faithful preaching is essential for such knowledge. Faith and unbelief have reference to God; they are acts of obedience or disobedience. Because they are our response to God, their primary reference is to God, not to our personal feelings.

In v. 15 Paul continues, quoting Isaiah 52:7 and Nahum 1:15, "How beautiful are the feet," or, how marvelous and welcome, is the coming of all "that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things." This was a Messianic prophecy and has reference to Christ. It had reference to the release from captivity and exile as a type of the release inaugurated by Christ in His coming. The welcome ones are those who proclaim Christ, because, whatever their sufferings, they set forth the cosmic victory.

It should be noted at this point that Luther went wildly astray in dividing the law and the gospel. He declared, in his comments on this verse, "For the Law shows nothing but our sin, makes us guilty, and thus produces an anguished conscience; but the Gospel supplies a longed for remedy to people in anguish of this kind. Therefore the Law is evil, and the Gospel good; the Law announces wrath, but the Gospel peace."² It is worth noting that Roman Catholic scholars today are in agreement with Luther and the antinomians. Father Joseph L. Lilly commented, "The function of the Law was to guide its followers to Christ. When it reached that end, when Christ came, the Law ceased."³ Late medieval pietism was antinomian, and this influenced Luther more than many realize.

The message of the preacher is the end of the captivity of sin; the message is salvation, and freedom to live and serve the Lord in the promised land.

In v. 16, Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?" Isaiah speaks of God's atonement for sin as His suffering Servant becomes our substitute. This is Paul's point also. Isaiah tells us of unbelief, and of disobedience. It is a willful rejection. The words "have not obeyed" are to be linked to v. 3, "have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God."

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 533f. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

² *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 416. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

³ Joseph L. Lilly, "Romans," in The Catholic Biblical Association, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 434. Kansas City, Missouri: 1942.

In v. 17, Paul says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Calvin's note on this sentence is excellent: "faith is grounded on nothing else but the truth of God."⁴ Since faith comes from hearing, receiving and obeying, the word of God, Paul here stresses the centrality of the Bible to faith.

In v. 18, Paul now turns to the first of two objections. Some will say, but not all men have heard! This Paul denies. He earlier spoke of the inescapable knowledge of God, which men hold back and suppress in their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-20). He now cites Psalm 19:4 concerning the universal knowledge of God; that psalm begins with the words, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Since the Old Testament was Israel's Bible, and the church's Bible as well, Paul demonstrates the unity of the law and the prophets with the gospel. Men are without excuse if they reject the gospel, or if they divide the one revelation of God in the Old and New Testaments. Since the psalmist speaks of God's universal revelation, Paul, in using this text, says that Jews and Gentiles are alike without excuse. Had he limited the sentence from the psalms to Israel, as some hold, he would have perverted its meaning. His point is that, since God's truth has been revealed to all creation, how can anyone, least of all Israel, claim not to have heard it.

In v. 19, Paul answers a second objection which his first answer had in part covered, namely, "Did not Israel know?", the implication being that Israel was ignorant. Paul now cites Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21. Moses here cites God, and a very important definition is made. He refers to "a foolish nation" whose people are "not a people." God defines a people as those who are in covenant with Him. All others are lawless and in defiance of God's covenant and law. They are thus before Him as outlaws, as criminals, not as a people with standing. Israel, by rejecting Christ, ceased to be a people in the covenant sense and became outlaws before God; this is true also of the nations of our time. Before God they are "not a people" until they are in the covenant and under its law. We have a vestige of this usage in the withdrawal of citizenship from convicted criminals. The word "foolish" means unintelligent, lacking in sense.

Then, in v. 20-21, Paul again quotes Isaiah, this time, 65:1-2. Israel was responsible for God's judgment on it. Our Lord speaks of this fact with grief in Matthew 23:37-38. Israel is described as a "gainsaying people," i.e., a people determined to contradict God. The Gentiles, on the other hand, were responding with faith to the gospel.

If we read these verses only as Paul's indictment of Israel, we miss their point. Paul is stressing the nature of apostasy as exemplified in Israel. In

⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 401. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

Romans 11:13-24, Paul strongly stresses the fact that, if Israel was not spared, why should He spare the Gentiles? In Israel, Phariseeism stresses the natural privileges of God's chosen people, and the results were disastrous. Today the same Phariseeism is to be found also in the church and in the Western nations. They identify civilization, culture, and the future of mankind with themselves, not with faithfulness to the triune God. In all this, they invite judgment.

A return to faith is thus a necessity, but faith is not faith unless it is grounded on God's truth. The faith of pietism and antinomianism uses materials from Scripture to create a system of doctrine alien to Scripture. God is "reformed" to meet the beliefs of the church today. Such faith is no faith, and such people are "not a people."

45. The Faith Foundation of Morality (Romans 11:1-6)

1. I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.
2. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,
3. Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.
4. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.
5. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.
6. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. (Romans 11:1-6)

We must remember that Paul was writing to Christians who were still predominantly of Jewish origin, although increasing numbers came from Gentile families. There was no conflict between these two groups, and the hostilities of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles no doubt brought them closer together.

On the other hand, we must also remember that Jews were both respected and disliked in the Roman Empire. Their education and abilities gave them clear advantages over other peoples. Their privileged status under Roman law was, however, an irritation to many. The Jews everywhere separated themselves from other peoples. In their observance of Kosher laws, dress code, and other forms of separation, they impressed others as a proud and arrogant people, sometimes rightly so, no doubt, as well as wrongly so.

Thus, Paul knows full well that, if he were to say, God is finished with the Jews, there would be many who would rejoice. Non-Christians would soon be aware of the Christian position. Paul, as an Israelite, has no desire to feed any false report. Moreover, as a passionate man who loved his heritage, he wanted the truth to be known. Thus, in v. 1, he faces the question, "Has God cast away his people?" As a man who knew the Old Testament fully, Paul could answer from knowledge and inspiration. Sentences like Psalm 94:14 (cf. 1 Sam. 12:22) are plain-spoken: "For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance." The Hebrew word for *cast* means to pulverize and reject; the Greek word in Romans 11:1 means to put away.

Paul adds, "For I myself also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin." The new Israel of God, the church, begins with twelve apostles, all men of Israel. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is also of

Israel. This Jewish character of the church did not end with the apostolic era. Well into the medieval era, some of the popes were from Jewish families.¹ Moreover, the music and liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Orthodox Churches borrows heavily from the old Jewish music and liturgy. In the Church of Armenia, the influence is strong both in music and in the borrowings of Hebrew words.² Protestant hymnals often carry ancient Jewish hymns. Also, over the centuries, the conversions of Jews to Christ has been steady, and is now higher than ever. Everything in the New Testament stresses both a break with what Israel had made of the faith together with an insistence on a continuity of the church with the Old Testament faith and saints.

Thus, Paul says, in v. 2, "God hath not cast away his people whom he foreknew." This is a very important key to Paul's discussion, together with v. 5, "there is a remnant according to the election of grace." *First*, Paul says that those of Israel whom God elected or predestined to grace are not cast away. He himself, in his own person, is evidence of that fact. *Second*, as our Lord predicted in Matthew 24, Israel as a nation is cast away for a long season, but to say that the nation is rejected as God's covenant witness is not to say that all its peoples are also cut off. *Third*, "there is a remnant according to the election of grace"; the New Israel of God has a continuity with the old because its constituting element, humanly speaking, is Israelite, the remnant. God "foreknew" what Israel would do; history has no surprises for God, whose eternal decree determines all things. As a result, He prepared a remnant to establish the continuity of His covenant.

Israel had been called to be a missionary people, Solomon was mindful of this in the prayer of dedication of the Temple (2 Chron. 6:32-33). They had, however, identified the covenant people with their race rather than God's grace.

Paul continues, in v. 2b and 3, "Wot yet not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." This quotation is from 1 Kings 19:10 by Elijah. In due time, after Elijah and Elisha, Israel was cast away; the Assyrian captivity destroyed the nation, and, later, Judah was destroyed by Babylon, but a remnant was saved, and Paul is a descendant of that remnant. The disappearance of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was not the disappearance of the covenant nor or a remnant faithful to that covenant. Elijah could feel so lonely that he concluded that none but himself still remained faithful to

¹. Joachim Prinz: *Popes from the Ghetto*. Dorset Press, 1966. The term "from the ghetto" conveys a false image; these men came often from prominent and powerful families.

². Eric Werner: *The Sacred Bridge*. New York, New York: Columbia University Press (1959) 1963.

God. The situation then was worse than now, with Paul. Now God was about to destroy Judea (Matt. 24), but not His covenant nor His remnant.

There is an interesting parallel here. Elijah spoke of the hostility to God's altars being so great that they were not only destroyed but their foundation rocks dug up to be scattered (1 Kings 19:10). Our Lord, in predicting the fall of Jerusalem, says that not one stone of the Temple will be left standing upon another; every stone shall be "thrown down" (Matt. 24:2).

The comparison between Elijah's day and Paul's stresses at the same time the difference. The remnant now is Christ's remnant, working in the power of the resurrection and with a mandate to disciple all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). Israel as a nation is missing out in this new glory, but the Israelite remnant is not.

God's answer to Elijah is cited by Paul in v. 4, quoting 1 Kings 19:18. "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." The number 7,000 is not literal: seven is a sign of fulness. God is saying to Elijah that His elect remnant exists, however much unknown to Elijah, and it has not surrendered. This remnant stands, not because of Elijah, but because of God. God always has more troops than men can ever imagine. He says, "I have reserved (or, kept to Myself) seven thousand men." These are a reserve force; God maintains in every step of history His reserve forces, natural and supernatural, and His power dominates the situation, things both known and hidden. God makes this reservation of 7,000 men in faithfulness to His covenant promise.

Thus, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (v. 5). God's plan is thus in operation with continuity. The old salvation people, Israel, still has a remnant. A remnant from Elijah's day became the nucleus of a renewed covenant-faith, and this prepared the way for Christ, Paul, and the church. Now again a remnant is at work, with a world-wide commission. The remnant is no longer a nation but a covenant people, and their work is to create a world of covenant peoples.

In v. 6, Paul makes clear that the remnant is not faithful because of itself or its character but because of God's grace. If God's grace did not govern and remake them, these people would be unregenerate, and "grace would be no more grace."

Then, Paul adds, if the remnant exists because of its works, "if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." *Otherwise* is *epei*, thereupon. Hodge commented, "If founded on any thing in us, it is not founded on the mere good pleasure of God."³ True, but there is more here. Paul has made clear that faith and works are inseparable in

³. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 561. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

life, not in our redemption. Works manifest our faith. Paul does not make void the law; rather, he establishes it (Rom. 3:31). Paul is now saying that, where there is no grace there are no works. The idea that men can be virtuous, moral, and capable of doing good in their personal and social lives is alien to Paul. Not only is faith without works dead, but works, i.e., good works without faith are not-existent. Where faith wanes, works wane. Where faith disappears, good works disappear. The divorce of works from faith has created the illusion that ungodly men can create a just social order. Since the Enlightenment, and especially since the French and Russian Revolutions, this has been the premise of Western man. It is also the source of our social decay.

With the Enlightenment, men began to assume that there were two sources for morality. The *first* was Christianity, a necessity for the common man. John Locke said, "The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all." Locke saw Christianity as a system of morality essentially rather than a faith which governed all things, including morality. Voltaire agreed with this, and he was emphatic that the doubts of philosophers and the intellectuals be kept from the masses. Without their religious superstitions, the masses could be dangerous. For the elite, *second*, Voltaire and others saw a second source of morality and a greater one, Reason. Only the elite are capable of this, and hence they must rule.

In due time, however, revolutionary thinkers challenged the first source as invalid. True morality could be taught the masses, and here Rousseau was the prophet of this new faith, by means of a rational and naturalistic education, the *third* way. This faith swept Europe and America and was the rationale of statist education, from its inception an anti-Christian force. With the elite, who now added science to reason, governing education, a new man fit for a new society could be created.

These ideas were revivals of Greco-Roman beliefs and were pagan to the core. Paul, in declaring simply and bluntly, that, where there is no faith, there will be no works or morality, was denying the foundations of classical culture.

Commentators by and large pass over this sentence, "But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work," or else they drop it as not belonging to the text. Hodge was almost alone in his dissent with this practice.

It is, however, fundamental to Paul's doctrine of God and his exposition of our salvation. When James says that faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26), he is summarizing the Law and the Gospels (cf. Matt. 7:26; James 1:23; John 31:19-22; Prov. 21:11; 1 John 3:18; James 3:13; Rom. 2:20-21; John 15:14; Heb. 11:31; Matt. 21:31; etc.). Morality without faith is like a tree without roots; it soon wilts and perishes.

46. Israel's Future and Ours (Romans 11:7-12)

7. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

8. (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.

9. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:

10. Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.

11. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

12. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness? (Romans 11:7-12)

Because Paul is speaking of the *future* of Israel, he is touching on raw nerves and intense feelings. The history of man from the creation of Christ saw one line of hope appear on the human scene, the rise of Israel. Granted that Israel had been often faithless; granted it had slain the prophets and often denied the Lord and His covenant. What else was there in history of *equal_merit*? Who else had served God at all?

Granted that the apostasies of Israel were very great, could not God again purge Israel as of old and continue to use the nation? Could not the remnant as Israel serve God as before, and even more?

Not so, says Paul. The elect in Israel have been blessed and know the Messiah, but the rest were "blinded." The word translated as "blinded" is a form of the Greek *porroo*, meaning hardened, calloused, or thick-skinned. They did not harden themselves; they "were hardened" by God. They failed, where the elect succeeded. However, as Sanday and Headlam commented, "They have not failed because they have been hardened, but they have been hardened because they have failed; cf. 1:24ff., where sin is represented as God's punishment inflicted on man for their rebellion." The condition of Israel is a result of God's action (ch. 9) as also their own (ch. 10).¹

Israel had become *hardened* or petrified. As such, it belonged to the past, not to the future, and God was now using an unpetrified elect as the pioneers of the future. We see something of God's work in history: those people whom He by-passes, He hardens or petrifies. The Greek word for "harden" was also used at times for stones in a man's bladder; such things

¹. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 313. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

are an impediment to healthy functioning. Similarly, nations which become petrified in their ways, however good those ways once were, become soon a part of history's past, not its future.

In v. 8, Paul refers to Isaiah 6:9, Jeremiah 5:21, Ezekiel 12:2, and Deuteronomy 29:4. In Deuteronomy 29:4, Moses speaks of the hardening in his day: "Yet the LORD hath not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." Isaiah 29:9,10 also speak to this same blinding and hardening. Israel has "a spirit of slumber." The reference is to a deep sleep. Israel is asleep to God's reality and cannot know the truth.

What Paul has in mind by this phrase, "the spirit of slumber," was described by Herman Broch, in his novel, *The Sleepwalkers*, an account of the blindness of peoples between the two World Wars. First published in German in 1931, and in English in 1932, the author both depicted and shared in the sleepwalking blindness of the times. He asked, "Can this age be said still to have reality?" He saw that history is composed of values, since life can be comprehended only in the category of value, "but where were the values?" His answers were existentialist. Since the Renaissance, the world had disintegrated into many separate and purely local value systems. "Our age is crumbling away," he felt, but his answer was Kantian; his hope was in "the rule that all consequences must be drawn from the autonomous code of the Self, so that the work, uninfluenced by any dogma, shall spring from the pure originality of the Self and of its law."² He described the hunger for a political messiah:

We know too well that we are ourselves split and riven, and yet we cannot account for it; if we try to cast the responsibility for it on the age in which we live, the age is too much for our comprehension, and so we fall back on calling it insane or great. We ourselves think that we are normal, because, in spite of the split in our souls, our inner machinery seems to run on logical principles. But if there were a man in whom all the events of our time took significant shape, then and then only would this age cease to be insane. Presumably that is why we long for a "leader," so that he may provide us with the motivation for events that in his absence we can characterize only as insane.³

Broch illustrated what Paul writes about, the dereliction of peoples in history. Because Paul has his eyes on the future, i.e., on the setting aside of Israel and the possible setting aside of the Gentiles later on in history, it is very necessary to see the continuing relevance of his words.

In vv. 9 and 10, Paul cites David, Psalm 69:22,23. The image is of men banqueting with a strong sense of security; in the midst of their feasting, they are attacked, and their secure postures and place become their

² Herman Broch: *The Sleepwalkers, A Trilogy*, pp. 562f, 480ff, 373ff, etc. London, England: Martin Secker (1931) 1932.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

downfall. More than a few commentators have fancifully declared that the table is the Law, and the Law becomes poison and death to Israel! Such comments are eisegesis, not exegesis. Paul's point is that God's retribution overwhelms all who reject the Messiah. The word "recompense" can be translated as "retribution."

In v. 11, Paul asks, has Israel stumbled because it is to fall permanently? No, Paul tells us, Israel has been set aside to open the door to the Gentiles, and to provoke Israel to jealousy *or* to admiration for peoples whom they once despised. The words "provoke to jealousy" translate the verb *parazēlosai*, and it can also be translated as "emulation." Perhaps Paul here means both jealousy *and* emulation, i.e., the triumph of the Gentiles through the Gospel may produce jealousy in some Jews and emulation in others.

But why should through their fall salvation come to the Gentiles? To answer this question, we must recognize the long-standing identification in history of a religion with a people. Ruth expressed this ancient opinion when she said to Naomi, "whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). About twenty years ago, I upset an American businessman greatly when I made clear to him that he could not be a Christian, given his unbelief. Very much offended, he responded, "What do you take me for? A Jew?" Similarly, I have known Jews who ridiculed the synagogue and Jewish faith who attended faithfully every Yom Kippur because, whether they believed in Judaism or not, it was their "religion." When I was a missionary to the Pauite and Shoshone Indians, I found that the godless Indian Service personnel were a major roadblock to interest in Christianity by many Indians. They assumed Christianity to be the white man's religion; disliking the federal agents, and being Indians, they felt that Christianity was not for Indians. Certainly Christianity has grown rapidly since the end of colonialism.

With so prevalent an identification today of race or nationality on the one hand, and religion on the other, we must remember it was perhaps greater in Paul's day by far. Thus, the rejection of Israel as the covenant people opened the door for Christianity to be the world religion. "Full salvation" came to the Gentiles because Israel as a nation was set aside for a time.

The subsequent problem was the attempt of European rulers to control the church and nationalize Christianity, reproducing thereby the sin of Israel. Much of the church and state struggle has had this element in it.

In v. 12, Paul looks ahead to the restoration of the Jews. Their fall enriched the world; their restoration will enrich the world even more.

“Their fulness” means all the remnant of Israel, not Israel as a nation being again the exclusive church, as it were.

Paul thus tells us that God in history will break down the old barriers. This does not mean the obligation of national or racial differences, but their irrelevance before the governing fact of Christ’s Kingdom and church. The kingship of Christ and His dominion shall triumph over all things. Israel’s apostasy serves God’s purposes, because He ordains that all things shall work together for good in His Kingdom.

In Paul’s plain statements, the issue is this: man is responsible to God, who created him and predestines all things. But man tries to *use* God and to make God responsible to him. For man to see himself and his institutions as *the end and purpose* of God’s activity is to ensure rejection. For this reason, Israel as a nation was rejected. The center of the early church was the Near East and North Africa, and God by-passed both in due time, as those areas became proud and arrogant in the conviction that God’s purpose in history was centered on them. In turn, the Christian centers have been Rome, France, Spain, Germany, Britain, and the United States; they have been Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant churches, and all have each in their way seen themselves as the center of God’s purpose in history. All have been or are being by-passed, and their restoration requires faith and humility, and living by faith and by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). There is no future for the United States unless it recognizes itself as an unbelieving, apostate, and Christ-hating nation. As Paul makes clear in Romans 1:18-32, unbelief or disbelief is not a mere lack; it is not the mere absence of faith. It is a belief that man is his own god (Gen. 3:5), coupled with a hatred of the living God. We cannot deal with unbelief unless we recognize it for what it is, something Arminianism refuses to do.

Man’s original sin is his desire to be his own god and his own source of morality and law (Gen. 3:5). All around us, men in Christ’s name too often make their own laws and think they are blessed by God for rebelling against Him. The law is God’s grace and goodness to us, His covenant provision. To despise God’s law is to despise God. The horrifying fact is that men despise God’s work and expect to be blessed.

The fanciful interpretation of v. 9, whereby the Law is said to be the table, and death to all who heed it, has been restated for centuries. Such comments destroy the meaning of the text instead of setting it forth. They represent “Christian” Phariseism. Knowing what God thinks of Pharisees, these churchmen have still worked zealously to become Pharisees. Paul has given us the capstone of Scripture, but too often the church has not wanted to understand Paul. These churchmen have set aside God’s law-word for a do-it-yourself religion. They are inviting death, and they call it life.

Moreover, they casually assume that Paul had as little respect for Scripture as themselves, and that he twisted it to mean what suited him. Had Paul misinterpreted the Old Testament at any point, the rabbis would have nailed him for it. The assumption that Paul used or misused David's words to serve an alien end tells us more about the scholars than about the mind of Paul.

47. The Only Root (Romans 11:13-24)

13. For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

14. If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

15. For if the casting away of them be reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

16. For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

17. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;

18. Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

19. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

20. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:

21. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

22. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

23. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.

24. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (Romans 11:13-24)

A very bad habit of the church concerns absentees. Pastors preach at or against people who are not present, and listeners feel that the sermon is exactly what their absent spouse or friend needs. The purpose of preaching should be to strengthen those who are present by the word of God. Paul in Romans speaks to the church; he is concerned most about the sins of Christians, and their errors. He makes this clear, having dealt with Israel, that he is really talking about the future of the church in the course of discussing Israel. He tells the church plainly, in Calvin's words, "the vengeance which God had executed on the Jews, is pronounced on the Gentiles, in case they become like them."¹

In v. 13, Paul says that he glorifies his ministry to the Gentiles by success, because that success will speed the salvation also of Israel. For Paul, the conversion of all the Gentiles and the Jews as well is basic to history, and Paul sees himself as instrumental to that purpose and goal. Some have

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles to the Romans*, p. 434. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans, 1948.

inferred from this verse that most Christians in the Roman Church were Gentiles; the verse is insufficient evidence for this conclusion. They were both Jews and Gentiles, and were now Christians all.

In v. 14, Paul makes clear that he expects no great turning of Israel to Christ in his own day; his hope is that he “might save some of them.” The fact that his hope is far from realization in his lifetime neither deters his hope nor his effort. He wants to provoke to emulation some of the people of Israel.

Then, in v. 15, he compares the future restoration of Israel to faith in Christ as comparable to a resurrection from the dead. Paul here has Ezekiel 37:1-14 in mind, the vision of the valley of dry bones which are resurrected by God. The resurrection of Israel is in Ezekiel’s mind, a resurrection into faith. This too is why Paul used this same image. Some commentators see this reference to resurrection as somehow tied to the general resurrection at the end of the world. They seem to believe that the redemption of Israel is something which will require the miraculous end of history to effect.

What Paul says is that the conversion of Israel will be “life from the dead.” It will be this in a double sense. *First*, it will mean that Israel is alive in Christ and again in the covenant, not as the exclusive covenant people but as one among many. *Second*, it will be “life from the dead” for the Gentiles also, because it will add to their ranks a strong body of covenant men. If when cursed, Israel contributes to the world-wide spread of faith, how much more so with its restoration.

In v. 16, Paul cites or refers to the law of the firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-11, 15-16; Num. 15:18-21), the required offering of the firstfruits as holy to the Lord. The firstfruits represented the entire harvest. All was dedicated to the Lord in the firstfruits. By giving the firstfruits to the Lord, all the rest was thereby made holy also. Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Exodus 23:16; 34:26; and Numbers 18:12-13 also deal with the law of the firstfruits. These offerings were both individual and public in character, a part of the firstfruits festival. In every case, the whole is represented by the part, i.e., the firstfruits, and if the firstfruits are holy, then all the rest are holy and free. The firstfruits are closely related to the tithe. In giving a tithe to the Lord, the tenth and the firstfruits of our increase, we thereby declare our purpose to use the rest in His service, in our family’s life. The offertory hymn sets this forth plainly:

We give Thee but thine own,
Whate’er the gift may be:
All that we have is thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.
(*William Walsbam How, 1864*)

The offering, when “waved” before the Lord, signified that all our lives must go before the altar for dedication and the affirmation that *we are not our own*; having been bought with a price, we belong totally to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This is not all. The firstfruit represents the whole, and, therefore, the *firstborn* represents the whole. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is both “the image of the invisible God” and “the firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1:15). When we are members of Christ’s new humanity, we are holy before God because Jesus Christ is holy, “for if the firstfruit be holy, the lump also is holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.”

Commentators disagree as to who is the firstfruit, the dough, and the root. Some and most have insisted it is Abraham. Origen insisted that it is Christ. Certainly, Abraham was the *natural* root, but Paul speaks of the cutting off of the *natural* branches, so it can be questioned that he here stresses the *natural* origin. Abraham gave birth to many non-covenant peoples. Is he in himself the holy root or firstfruit? It is true that in v. 28 Paul says of Israel, “they are beloved for the fathers’ sake,” i.e., the three patriarchs and other fathers in the faith. However, our Lord speaks of Himself as the true vine, and all non-fruit-bearing branches as purged (John 15:1-6), and this usage would be most fresh in Paul’s mind. Moreover, John the Baptist had said of Israel that God was laying an axe to the root of the trees (Luke 3:9). Isaiah 11:10 speaks of the coming Messiah as the root of Jesse; this verse is clearly in Paul’s mind and is cited in Romans 15:12. Revelation 5:5 speaks of Christ as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,” and in Revelation 22:16 we read, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” Furthermore, in v. 18, we are told that we, the branches, are borne by the root; the word for “bearest” is in the Greek “*bastazeis*,” meaning supported or carried. We are indeed sons of Abraham by faith, but it is Christ who supports and carries us. Moreover, since vv. 17-24 speak of our engrafting into Christ, after John 15:1-6, it would be strange to turn v. 16 into a reference to Abraham. We are transferred from the wild root, the first Adam, to the true root, Jesus Christ. To call the patriarchs “the holy root,” as most commentators do, is to create a very different perspective on the church and the future. It would certainly favor the Scofieldian view of Israel’s future! Even men like Sanday and Headlam made surprising statements here:

St. Paul gives in this verse the grounds of his confidence in the future of Israel. This is based upon the holiness of the Patriarchs from whom they are descended and the consecration to God which has been the result of this holiness....

... Israel the Divine nation is looked upon as a tree; its roots are the Patriarchs; individual Israelites are the branches. As then the Patriarchs are holy, so are the Israelites who belong to the stock of the

tree, and are nourished by the sap which flows up to them from those roots.²

To believe this is to believe, as some Pharisees did, in works of supererogation by the patriarchs, i.e., that the works of the patriarchs were so excessive in merit that their merit makes their heirs meritorious. The Protestant scholars who criticize this view in Roman Catholic theology blithely adopt it in their interpretation of Paul! What Paul means is that we are holy before God because we are members of Jesus Christ, who is holy.

In vv. 17-21, Paul speaks of our engrafting into Christ. We are the aliens and strangers who were afar off and are now "made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:12). The whole of this passage, vv. 13-21, has a supernatural reference. Abraham is a natural root, Christ a supernatural one. Israel is the broken branch or branches; long after these pruned branches have been pruned, they are grafted into the olive tree. This is not a natural fact. Dead, pruned branches cannot be grafted back into a tree in nature. Paul speaks of a miraculous "tree," Christ, and a miraculous engrafting and new life. However, Sanday and Headlam (of the Church of England) saw the root of the olive tree as the patriarchs, and the tree as the church.³ This was the view also of John Murray, an orthodox Presbyterian: "Israel with its rootage in the patriarchs is viewed as the cultivated olive tree (cf. v. 24) and the Gentiles as the wild olive. The latter is grafted into the former."⁴ It is the *branches*, however, which we must see as Israel and the Gentiles. "The natural branches" make up the tribes and peoples of Israel with whom the covenant was made, first with the patriarchs and then with Israel as a nation. The grafted branches are the Gentiles. We are not to boast or be proud towards the cut-off branches, Israel; then we become Pharisees also, as we forget that our engrafting into Christ is by His grace, not our merit. To partake of the life-giving nourishment of the olive tree does not mean that the patriarchs are our source of life but that Jesus Christ is. The pruned branches were cut off "because of unbelief." This was not unbelief in the patriarchs but in the true Messiah. We stand only by His grace and faith. Therefore, "Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee" (vv. 20-21).

In vv. 22-24, Paul comes to his conclusion: we stand only by grace. God is able to graft the dead branches of Israel back into the tree of life (Rev. 22:2) to make them alive again. Since they were the original branches in God's covenant tree (the Man, Jesus Christ, God the Son), it will be the

² William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 326. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁴ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 85. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1965) 1971.

return of Israel to its original place. The way to continue in the goodness and grace of God is to continue in the faith.

Some commentators tell us that this good tree that gives life is “spiritual Israel,” i.e., the Old Testament church invisible. Since the church has always been Jesus Christ, then that “spiritual Israel” was also always Jesus Christ, in that the sacrificial system, among other things, set forth Christ and His redemptive work.

The pruning and the engrafting have to do with one tree alone, and that tree is Christ. The church is the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) it is the covenant people in Christ, the covenant head. He is the promised one who crushes the serpent’s head and gives life (Gen. 3:15).

Furthermore, in Romans 12:1-8, Paul speaks of the believers as many members but one body, a further development of the tree and its branches image. We are one body *in Christ*, not in Abraham. Abraham is our father in the faith, and the “Jerusalem which is above ... is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26), but it is Christ who is our Savior, and the way, the truth, and *the life* (John 14:6). Abraham can neither save us, nor give us life by engrafting into him.

Both for Jews and Gentiles, the meaning of Paul’s words should be clear. Our particular heritage is God-ordained and not to be despised, beginning with the honoring of our parents (Ex. 20:12). The Bible gives us many genealogies, and not always of the Messianic line (cf. Gen. 36:9-43). There is no warrant in Scripture for a disregard of or a contempt for our past, but neither are there any grounds for idolizing it. There is nothing redemptive about being a Jew or a Gentile: neither heritage can save us or give us life in any redemptive sense.

Both nations and churches have been prone to identify themselves with life, however. It is grimly ironic that, with the world-wide practice of abortion, they are now identified with death. Jesus Christ is alone the tree of life; we cannot look to our heritage nor to our church as the savior. God gives us life through one tree, Jesus Christ. Israel saw itself as that one source; churches have seen themselves as the source, when it is rather their duty to be a witness to the source. There is no salvation outside of Christ, and no church now dares openly claim that salvation is exclusively through its channel, although some tacitly hold to such a position. Similarly, God is not limited to using our nation or any other nation as His instrument. God makes clear, in Amos 9:17, that in His sight Israel is no better than Ethiopia: whatever advantage they have is of grace. He is the One who “brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Capthor, and the Syrians from Kir.” All serve His purpose.

God thus declares Himself to be the exclusive source of salvation and life. The image of the life-giving tree is an important one. The modern idea of

salvation means a “decision for Christ” and then a minimal moral obligation thereafter. As against this, our Lord says

4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

Catholics and Protestants alike seem to believe that abiding in the church is everything, or almost everything. Their attendance at church is good, but their knowledge of Christ’s teachings, of the Bible, of the requirements of the dominion mandate and more, is minimal. Concomitant to this has been a weak doctrine and knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

To see Christ as the tree of life means an exclusive devotion and service. It means that every area of life and thought is then for us governed by God’s law-word. It means further that neither we as persons, as churches, nor as nations are the goal or center of history, nor God’s exclusive instrument. God uses men, churches, and nations, but He cannot be used by them. Israel was cut off because of false beliefs, and so too will be all churches and nations because of unbelief. There is only one tree or root for man, and none other, Jesus Christ.

48. The Elite and the Elect (Romans 11:25-36)

25. For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.
26. And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:
27. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.
28. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.
29. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.
30. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:
31. Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.
32. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.
33. O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
34. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?
35. Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?
36. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:25-36)

As we have seen, the doctrine of the merits of the fathers was a doctrine of the rabbis. Sanday and Headlam, in an excursus, give examples of this belief. Thus, a comment on the Song of Solomon 1:5, "I am black, but comely," held: "The congregation of Israel speaks, I am black through mine own works, but lovely through the works of my fathers." Another comment held, "As this vine supports itself on a trunk which is dry, while it is itself fresh and green, so Israel supports itself on the merits of the fathers, although they already sleep." Again, we read, "The Holy One spake to Israel, My sons, if ye will be justified by me in the judgment, make mention to Me of the merits of your fathers, so shall ye be justified before Me in the judgment."¹

Paul has this doctrine in mind as he writes. The Romans were no less sure that they were the chosen people of history. Rome was eternal Rome, divine Rome, the world's center. Israel's belief in its inherent merit was linked to the living God, making it far worse, but Romans also saw

¹. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 331. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

themselves as this world's elite people. Here we come to a fundamental difference. The Jews, Greeks, Romans, and others to the present, including Chinese, Japanese, French, Spanish, Germans, English, and Americans, have all seen themselves as history's elite people. As against the elite, Paul sets forth the elect. The elite are self-chosen; the elect are God-chosen. The elite assert a natural privilege and an inherent merit. The doctrine of the works of supererogation, or the inheritance of the surplus merits of the fathers, has many forms. Being born in a country with a great past of many great men gives us no claim on God.

This rabbinic doctrine of works of supererogation passed into the church and was developed by the medieval schoolmen. In this century, Catholic scholars have normally dropped the concept, although in the last century Pelliccia set it forth plainly:

... a theologian of recent times, Alexander de Hales, proposes... "When the penalty of a due and sufficient contrition has already been suffered, may the supreme Pontiff remit to a penitent the whole of the penance which his sin properly deserves?" Answer: "He may;" and he brings forward the following arguments in support of his opinion: "It may be said that when our Lord the Pope grants a plenary indulgence, he himself inflicts punishment, by obliging the Church, or some member of it, to make amends for the sin". This is the first reason. The second is: "Because the treasury of the Church, which is set forth for the satisfaction of the Church, consists principally of the merits of CHRIST." What he means by the treasury of the Church, he briefly explains in these words: "It consists of the merits of the supererogation (a sum paid over and above what is due) of the members of CHRIST, and is chiefly made up of the supererogation of the merits of CHRIST." The Roman Pontiff, therefore, according to the opinion of the Schoolmen, did possess the power referred to, for it was allowable for him to apply the merits of CHRIST or of the faithful as compensation for the penance of another, though as the same writer says, the Pope ought not to do this except in cases of urgent necessity.²

This doctrine was set forth in *Unigenitus Dei filius* (1343) by Clement VI. It was implicitly sanctioned by the Council of Trent in its affirmation of indulgences. The concept of the superfluous and super-abundant merits of the saints providing a spiritual treasury upon which sinners could draw became very popular. It is now quietly by-passed on the whole.

Protestants were vocal in denouncing the Catholics for this doctrine, but, in their own way, developed a weak counterpart to this doctrine. At its heart, the doctrine of works of supererogation assumes a merit gained by natural privilege and inheritance. The common assumption that being Protestant is meritorious and established a rank, or that membership in a strongly confessional church, or one that professes to be "very

² Alexis Aurelius Pelliccia: *The Polity of the Christian Church*, p. 480f. London, England: Masters, 1883.

Bible-believing,” gives a status to a person. The same applies to national inheritances.

Paul is determined to undercut any trust in such a status by Jew or Gentile. As against an elitism, he insists on predestination, for the doctrine of predestination is the death-knell of elitism. As Paul says in I Corinthians 4:7, a statement basic to grace and predestination: “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”

All this is closely related to a word Paul uses in v. 25, *mystery*, the Greek *musterion*. This Greek word had a very specific religious meaning; the mystery religions or cults were secret societies with a secret faith and a secret agenda. Rome was with reason fearful of these groups; on one occasion, a revolutionary plot was well under way in their secret counsels. These cults were, whatever their membership, elitist in their intentions, as all secret societies are. For Paul to use a word common to these secret societies was startling, and it called particular attention to what he was saying. The mysteries *concealed* their faith and goals; Paul says that God in Christ *reveals* His purpose. Paul was thereby undercutting the elitism of the mystery religions. God’s revelation does not come to an elite secret society but is proclaimed before all the world and creates its own elect people. This mystery is opened to all mankind (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:3-4; Rom. 16:25), although it had been a secret since the world began. This mystery is the incarnation (1 Tim. 3:16); it is the crucifixion (1 Cor. 2:7-8); it is the unfolding of the meaning of all history in Christ (Eph. 1:9-11); it is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the Kingdom (Eph. 3:3-6; Col. 1:26-27; Rom. 16:5). The mystery religions had no such gospel. Paul, without directly referring to the mystery cults, thus makes their elitism ridiculous.

Vincent gave an interesting sidelight on the meaning of mystery:

In early ecclesiastical Latin *musterion* was rendered by *sacramentum*, which in classical Latin means the military oath. The explanation of the word *sacrament*, which is so often found on this etymology, is therefore mistaken, since the meaning of the sacrament belongs to *musterion* and not to *sacramentum* in the classical sense.³

Clearly, the basic meaning of *mystery* must determine the use of the word *sacrament*. This means that the sacrament celebrates the revelation of God made to the elect and set forth before all the world. On the other hand, the choice of the word *sacramentum* was not accidental. Those receiving the revelation and the new life and fellowship therein take a military oath of allegiance to Christ the Savior and King.

³. M.R. Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. II, p. 727. MacDill AFB, Florida: MacDonald Publishing company, n.d.

Paul is speaking of the extent of this revelation. "The fulness of the Gentiles," i.e., their world-wide conversion, will be marked by the end of Israel's hardness and the fulness of its conversion. All too many commentators assume that all this occurs just before the end of the world. Such an attitude presupposes a belief that God has no purpose in history except the conversion of all peoples. This view denies that dominion and Kingdom mandate which is so basic to Scripture. Man's duties to God begin with man's restoration; they are not concluded when he says "yes" to Jesus and ostensibly gains a fire and life insurance policy from Him.

We should remember too that Paul says that blindness or hardness "in part is happened to Israel." In other words, in his day and since, there has been an influx of Jews into the church, so that "the fulness" is not the only point of conversion. "The fulness" of America's conversion will not mean 70% but the conversion of the people *and* their national, educational, and societal life in its every aspect to Christ as King.

In v. 26, Paul concludes, "And so all Israel shall be saved." Since the church is "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), "all Israel" refers to "the fulness of the Gentiles" and of the Jews. Paul cites then Isaiah 59:20, "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD." The Redeemer is He who pays the price to set His people free. Isaiah's reference, Young noted, was "not to the nation as a whole, but to the seed according to election, the true Israel."⁴ While Paul's concern here is the salvation of Israel, it is *the fulness* of God's Kingdom which is uppermost in his mind. In v. 27, Paul adds, "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." This has reference to Jeremiah 31:31, cited also in Hebrews 8:8 and 10:16. It has reference to the world-wide mission of Israel to all peoples, and the place of all peoples in God's covenant. It is this fulfillment of which Paul speaks. When God takes away our sins, then our response must be faithfulness and obedience. This means that "all Israel," Jew and Gentile, have now the duty of dominion under God and service to His Kingdom.

Nothing that Paul says has any reference whatsoever to the restoration of Israel as a political state, especially since Paul's concern is with Christ and His Kingdom. Calvin said, "I extend the word *Israel* to all the people of God."⁵ God is not expressing concern for reprobate nations, whether Jew or Gentile; they are all under His judgment.

This is stressed by Paul in vv. 28-32. At the heart of these verses is the statement, "God hath concluded (or, consigned) them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." In His infinite wisdom, God ordained the

⁴ Edward J. Young: *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. III, p. 441. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972.

⁵ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p.437. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

fall of mankind, and the sin and depravity of all peoples and nations. He renders them all unfit to commend themselves to God for their works, or to be other than fools as they pretend to be an elite people. He brings disaster and death to the pride of man, so that they can then be objects of grace and mercy, knowing they stand only in the power of God, not in and of themselves. Antinomianism leads to elitism, because it tells man that his own law, formed in terms of his original sin (Gen. 3:5), can provide him with justice and order rather than God's law.

This means that Israel has a double status: "enemies for your sakes," but, in terms of God's predestination and covenant, "beloved for the fathers' sakes." However reprobate in a particular case, in terms of God's promise, their seed will be blessed in God's time because of His covenant. The reason is clear, "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." God keeps His covenant promises in His own time, for "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

Three times in these verses Paul contrasts *disobedience* and *mercy*. He thereby emphasizes the grace of God, undercuts elitism, and stresses the election or predestination of God as our only ground.

In vv. 33-36, usually called the Doxology, Paul makes clear that his focus in all this has not been Israel nor the church, but the wisdom, grace, and majesty of God. Any emphasis on either Israel or the church warps his meaning, which is emphatically God-centered. Hence the antithesis between an elite and the elect. God smashes elitism in Jews and Gentiles alike. Hodge rightly summed up Paul's stress in these verses:

The principal ideas presented in this passage are, 1. The incomprehensible character and infinite excellence of the divine nature and dispensations, ver. 33. 2. God's entire independence of man, vs. 34, 35. 3. His comprehending all things within himself; being the source, the means, and the end of all, ver. 35.⁶

God's ways are "past finding out." No man can know the mind of the Lord except by revelation. Thus, while we can know God truly by His grace, we can never know Him exhaustively. All this has been made powerfully clear by Cornelius Van Til. Those who insist on a God who operates in terms of Aristotle's logic and theirs, are guilty of blasphemy. To understand and comprehend the mind of God would require of us minds equal to or greater than God. Man is created in God's image, in terms of God's communicable attributes, *not* His incommunicable attributes. Man is not a clone of God, but His creation.

⁶ Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 595. New York, New York: Armstrong (1882) 1893.

Commenting on these verses, Cranfield beautifully wrote of Paul's general argument,

If we have followed him through these chapters with serious and open-minded attentiveness, we may well feel that he has given us enough to enable us to repeat the 'Amen' of his doxology in joyful confidence that the deep mystery which surrounds us is neither a nightmare mystery of meaningless nor a dark mystery of arbitrary omnipotence but the mystery which will never turn out to be anything other than the mystery of the altogether good and merciful and faithful God.⁷

In this Doxology, Paul states the presuppositions of all that he has said. The justice and mercy of God are Paul's starting point because this is how God reveals Himself. God is what He says He is, not what man thinks.

Calvin, in commenting on v. 34, said in part:

He begins here to extend as it were his hand to restrain the audacity of men, lest they should clamour against God's judgments, and this he does by stating two reasons: the first is, that all mortals are too blind to take a view of God's predestination by their own understanding, and to reason on a thing unknown is presumptuous and absurd; the other is, that we can have no cause of complaint against God, since no mortal can boast that God is a debtor to him; but that, on the contrary, all are under obligations to him for his bounty.

Within this limit then let every one remember to keep his own mind, lest he be carried beyond God's oracles in investigating predestination, since we hear that man can distinguish nothing in this case, any more than a blind man in darkness.⁸

In elitism, man plays at being god. Whether he call himself a philosopher-king, a scientific planner, or a bureaucrat, he assumes that his wisdom can best govern men and the world. The myths of evolution have greatly furthered modern elitism, since man is now seen as the highest form of evolutionary development, and the scientific as the highest point of man. Most contemporary concepts of political order presuppose elitism, usually disguised in the names of republics or democracies. All such thinking is a clear invitation to God's judgment.

Paul stresses predestination. By means of predestination, His covenant and the covenant law, God makes plain that justice and mercy can only exist in His Kingdom because "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen."

⁷ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 592. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

⁸ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

49. "One Body in Christ" (Romans 12:1-5)

1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
2. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.
3. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.
4. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:
5. So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:1-5)

According to some commentators, at this point Paul leaves theology proper for "application," or for practical theology. In a very limited sense, there is a superficial element of truth to this, but even more nonsense. Paul does not shift from being a theologian to being a pastor; no such division exists for him. We cannot impose academic distinctions on Paul; neither can we call some of it "devotional" matter, as though it were not also revelational and theological. Our modern distinctions are man-made and super-imposed on Scripture.

Paul is as theological here, and as personal, and as practical, as in the preceding chapters. He has given to the word "mystery" a new meaning. At one time, some scholars saw Paul as influenced by mystery religions, a scholarly perspective which well illustrates one form of occupational moral idiocy. Paul says that God in Christ reveals things previously unknown to man. He creates an elect, not an elite. Now, Paul continues by declaring, *first*, "the reasonable service" of the elect, and, *second*, they are not to divide themselves into an elite leadership versus a vulgar mob, but that they are "one body in Christ."

We are to present our "bodies (as) a living sacrifice" to God. The word *present*, *parastesai* in the Greek, was a word used in that era for presenting a sacrifice or an offering. It is so used of the presentation of Christ in the Temple (Luke 2:22), of Paul presenting his converts (Col. 1:28), and of Christ presenting His church (Eph. 5:27).¹ We are not sacrifices of atonement, for Christ has finished all our need there, nor can we ourselves make atonement. We are sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. We are not comparable to the unblemished lamb, but to the sacrifice of leaven. This

¹. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 352. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

has reference to Leviticus 7:13: the sacrifice of thanksgiving to God and of peace with God was leavened bread. Leaven, indicating corruptibility, represents our gifts and service to God; what we do is never sinless and it passes away, but it's required by God as our "reasonable service." Psalm 50:14 declares, "offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High." This is what Paul requires of all. Elsewhere he says also:

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Rom. 6:13)

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience to righteousness? (Rom. 6:16)

Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. (1 Cor. 6:13)

For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor. 6:20)

The fact that it is our *bodies* (*somata*) that we are to present as a living sacrifice is very important. The reference is to the body as a whole, the living, functioning beings we are. We are not summoned to spiritual exercises but to the offering of our total life to God's service wherever we are, and in our respective callings. Paul speaks of our *bodies* here, each in our lives and places; later, he speaks of the *body* of Christ of which we are members. We are one *soma*, body, in Christ. So much has been said of the mystical body of Christ that we tend to forget that it is spoken of with respect to the life of Christ's living body here. Paul is still telling us how to *live by faith*; he tells us what is our reasonable or *logical* service in the church, in the state, and in every other area of life. "The mercies of God" should prompt this response in us.

Attempts to down-grade the Old Testament by contrasting "the living sacrifice" of Paul with the dead sacrifices of the Old Testament are badly in error. Man can never be an acceptable sacrifice of atonement but only a living and leavened offering.

In v. 2, Paul says that we are not to be conformed or fashioned by our times but by the revealed will of God in His world. The word *conformed* has reference to our response to the currents of thought in our time. It refers to assimilation and accommodation to the temper of the world around us. Instead, we are to be *transformed* or *transfigured* (and the word is used of Christ's transfiguration in Matthew 17:2, and Mark 9:2). We live now a changed life; we are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are to be transformed so that we may understand and know what the will of God is and then conform ourselves to it. James Moffatt's version brought this out clearly: "Instead of being moulded to this world, have your mind renewed, and so be transformed in nature, able to make out what the will of God is, namely, what is good and acceptable to him and perfect." Murray tells us what the will of God is very plainly:

The will of God is the law of God and the law is holy and just and good (cf. 7:12). We may never fear that the standard God has prescribed for us is only relatively good or acceptable or perfect, that it is an accommodated norm adapted to our present condition and not measuring up to the standard of God's perfection. The will of God is the transcript of God's perfection and is the perfect reflection of his holiness, justice, and goodness.²

The law of God is thus the will of God; we do not find God's will by introspection, or meditation, but by reading His word. The faith is thus not merely a private and spiritual concern but a public and private expression of God's life and law through us. Kasemann's comment here is superb:

Since he (Paul) is concerned with service in daily life and the secular world, he is unable to see in Christian existence a private matter. It has a public or eschatological character which is important for the world. When God claims our bodies, in and with them he reaches after his creation. Only an existence oriented to the world does justice to his will to rule. If this will is denied, of course, this life is one of conformity to the cosmos which according to 1 Cor. 7:31 is destined to perish. Christian existence, publicly offered to God corporeally as a sacrifice, is in all circumstances a pointer to the new world which has come in Christ, to the kingdom of God. It will be, in fact, taking form according to the particular situation, a demonstration against the present world.³

Paul's words in v. 2 are in the present passive imperative and are a command: "Stop being fashioned" by the world.⁴ Paul requires of all converts a radical reversal of values.

In v. 3, he says more of this reversal. We are not to be governed by our self-evaluation nor by our opinions but in terms of faith and God's standards. This means that we do not judge ourselves in terms of our gifts and abilities as against those who appear to be inferior, but in terms of grace. We are what we are by God's grace, not because we made ourselves so. Paul again strikes at elitism. Our talents are a gift from God, and we must see ourselves in terms of those who have received something which

² John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 115f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1968) 1971.

³ Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 329f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1980) 1982.

⁴ Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 402. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1931, reprint.

perhaps should make us more grateful, if our gifts have been great. The greater the measure of our faith, the saner and more grateful is our opinion of ourselves. Not pride but grace is required of the gifted. We are all priests unto God, each in our appointed way. Paul makes this statement "through the grace given unto me," and we are to think and act under grace. The purpose of the gifts is not our self-glorification but the Kingdom and glory of God.

Commenting on this verse, Luther said, "faith is nothing else than obedience to the Spirit." There are, however, different degrees of obedience to the Spirit, Luther added.⁵

In vv. 4-5, Paul gives us God's picture of the new humanity in Christ, not a division between the elite and the masses, but many diverse and complementary gifts in one body. Commentators often remark that the image of the social order as a body was common in Roman thinking; Paul, we are told, was thusly using a familiar concept. The important point, however, is how Paul uses it. Because man is family born, it is easy enough for him, in one society after another, to use the image of the family as well as of the body to describe a community or a social order. The fact, however, is clear that all such non-Biblical usage was elitist. It was used to justify slavery on the one hand and an elitist ruling group on the other.

Paul's usage militates against elitism. The *head* of the body is Christ, not an elite group of rulers (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:15; 5:23). The church is Christ's body, and the body is ruled by the head (Col. 1:18); Christ the Head is also "the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2:10). On the human level, all of us are *members* of the one body. We may have differing offices and functions, but we are "every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:5; cf. 1 Cor. 12:4,12,20,27; 10:17,27; Eph. 1:23; 4:25; 1 Peter 4:10f). The Head uses the body; although certain members of the body may be more prominent than others, all members are used by Christ and are His instruments. Elitists *use* people to accomplish their fallible and evil goals; the Lord uses us to accomplish His infallible purpose. All the members have a mutual dependence on one another. They are thus not only members of the one body, but members one of another.

In brief, in Paul's perspective, the Head and Messiah of the body is Jesus Christ. In the elitist faith, the philosopher-kings, the scientific planners, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and other like groups are the body's head and messiah.

We can only be members one of another if we are first of all members of Christ. There is no life in the body apart from Him.

⁵ Hilton Oswald, editor: *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures in Romans*, p. 444. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

Elitism seeks to conform us to the state and its rulers. Paul tells us that we must be conformed to Christ. Again, Paul is undercutting the premises of this world and its doctrines. We are either one body in Christ, or else one body in some Caesar, philosopher-king, or some other elitist. Paul uses the concept of the body to establish the necessity of unity in Christ. This is more than a unity in a church, and it is the antithesis as well as death of the pagan concepts of organic society.

50. The Community of the King (Romans 12:6-13)

6. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;
 7. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;
 8. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.
 9. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.
 10. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;
 11. Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;
 12. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;
 13. Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.
- (Romans 12:6-13)

As we have seen, Paul undercuts elitism. This, however, is not all, he also undercuts equalitarianism. We too often assume that equalitarianism is a modern idea, a product of the age of revolution. In Paul's day, *in varying forms*, it was common to Greco-Roman thought.

Aristotle wrote of the matter in his *Politics*, stating, "Everywhere inequality is a cause of revolution, but an inequality in which there is no proportion — for instance, a perpetual monarchy among equals; and always it is the desire of equality which rises in rebellion."¹ Note Aristotle's stress on, *first*, inequality as the cause of revolution; *second*, he implies that an inequality with proportion is valid and necessary for society. Aristotle has in mind the proportion which marks the human body, and he had earlier compared the state, "composed of unlikes," to a body, which has all kinds of functions in it, including master and slave.² In democracies, a false notion of equality prevails:

For two principles are characteristic of democracy, the government of the majority and freedom. Men think that what is just is equal; and that equality is the supremacy of the popular will; and that freedom means the doing of what a man likes. In such democracies everyone lives as he pleases, or in the words of Euripides, 'according to his fancy'. But this is all wrong; men should not think it slavery to live according to the rule of the constitution; for it is their salvation.³

¹ Aristotle: *Politics*, Bk. V, ch. 1; p. 211. New York, New York: Modern Library, 1943.

² *Ibid.*, Bk. III, ch. 4; p. 131.

³ *Ibid.*, Bk. V, ch. 9; p. 237.

Aristotle gave attention to equalitarianism because it was a major undercurrent of thought in antiquity. Euripides, in the *Phoenician Maidens*, had Jocasta say, "nature gives men the law of equal rights." In the second century A.D., Roman lawyers were often in agreement that this was true. Paul thus had two pagan doctrines to contend with concerning the nature of society, elitism and equalitarianism, both humanistic concepts. In both the focus is on man and his rights, not on God's order.

Because Paul's emphasis is on predestination, on God's sovereign and electing grace, he speaks, not of our *abilities* but our *gifts*. We have, he says in v. 6, "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us." Paul, said Calvin, intended to "beat down the pride which he knew to be innate in men." Moreover, "the society of the godly cannot exist, except when each one is content with his own measure, and imparts to others the gifts which he has received, and allows himself by turns to be assisted by the gifts of others."⁴

The word *gifts* is in the Greek *charismata*. The word *grace* is *charis*, and this meaning is basic to *gifts*. Our usual approach to the meaning of *gifts* emphasizes what is received; Paul's emphasis is on the Giver, i.e., on the fact that the gift is an act of grace to enrich the Lord's Kingdom. Hans-Helmut Esser has called attention to the fact that the doctrine arises out of the pardon and legal acquittal which is ours in Christ (Rom. 8:31ff); from beginning to end, our life is anchored in grace (2 Cor. 6:1-9; Rom. 5:2; cf. John 1:16), which uses man's weakness to accomplish God's purpose (2 Cor. 12:9). This grace, as it works in the Christian's life through the Spirit leads to "a personal endowment with grace."⁵ Since these *gifts* include such things as *giving* and *mercy*, we must understand these spiritual gifts in a wide sense as covering the whole Christian life.

At this point, let us look back at a word in v. 4, *office*, the Greek *praxis*, a doing or a deed. Luther and the King James translate it as *office*, giving it an ecclesiastical or institutional reference. The Catholic Confraternity version is more "Protestant," translating it as *function*! Paul is not discussing the *organization* of the church but its *life*, a very different thing. The heavy focus on office has warped many churches.

These gifts are to be exercised "according to the proportion of the faith." The word *proportion* is the Greek *analogian*, the right relationship. The gift is to be exercised in faithfulness to the Lord and not as a means of self-exaltation.

⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 459. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

⁵ Hans-Helmut Esser, "Grace, Spiritual Gifts," in Colin Brown, general editor: *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. II, p. 121. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1967) 1976.

Hendricksen has called attention to the seven varieties of gifts: prophesying, rendering practical service, teaching, exhorting, contributing to the needs of the people, exercising leadership, and shewing mercy.⁶ This list makes clear that these are not offices but functions. Indeed, the Biblical view of what *we* call offices is a functional one: they are defined in terms of service to the Lord and His Kingdom.

Prophesying is used in the Old Testament sense as speaking for God, setting forth His law word. Prediction can mark that word but is not essential to prophesying. The word is *propheteia*, a Greek word often referring to an interpreter of an oracle, whereas in Scripture it refers to one who speaks for God. In its Biblical use, it does not require revelation nor does it exclude it.

In v. 7, *ministering* and *teaching* are listed among the gifts. The word translated as *ministry* is *diakonian*, and *teacheth* is *didaskon*. *Ministry* has reference to *service* to the Christian community, and to *teach* means to give *instruction*. Neither word requires us to limit their meaning to the church.

In v. 8, we are told of the gifts of exhorting, giving, ruling, and shewing mercy. *Exhorts* is *parakalon*; it means calling a person to one's side, and it thus has the meaning of aligning ourselves with such a person for the Lord, to help them, to encourage and to admonish them. It is an act of grace and a gift or function of grace. Giving is *meta didous*, which means sharing more than giving; the stress is on community; it is also rendered *impart*; it is to be done with simplicity or liberality. This can refer to both imparting teaching or help with simplicity, or sharing our means in the same way. *Ruleth* is *proistamenos*, to take the lead; *diligence* (*spoude*) is required, i.e., an earnestness with a business-like dispatch. *Mercy* (*eleos*), is to recognize need and to meet it; *cheerfulness* is *hilaroteti*, our word *hilarity*. When we recognize need, we rejoice at the ability to help.

In v. 9, *love, agape*, God's loving and unmerited grace, is to be manifested through us without *dissimulation*, *anupokeritos*; it is to be unfeigned. We must *abhor* evil, i.e., it must be repulsive to us, and we must *cleave* or join ourselves solidly to that which is good.

Verse 10 calls for *philadelphia*, brotherly love, and, in giving honor (*time*), to be ready to give precedence to others rather than seeking self-honor.

In v. 11, we have a contrast to giving honor to others. Some people shrink back, not from honor, but from work and duty; *slothful* is *okneroi*, shrinking from doing our work. Rather, we are to be "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord." The reference is clearly to more than church work.

⁶ William Hendricksen: *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 409-413. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1980) 1981.

Then in vv. 12-13, we are told that the gifts or functions of grace in us mean also “rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.” Obviously, more than church offices are meant. Equally clear is the fact that, in some degree, these are functions of all believers. Some of us may be more gifted in one sphere than another, but, as members of the same body, we are all involved in these deeds or functions. For some, the functions of teaching and prophesying may be exercised in their home, with their children, with others, in the church and outside the church. Because the church is a body, if we speak of the necessity of exercising these gifts in the church, we *can* say that some are organized for diaconal works of mercy, but we cannot limit mercy to them.

Instead of an institutional orientation, we have rather one to the Holy Spirit. In their true expression, these deeds or functions are the fruits of the Spirit. These gifts are exercised according to “the measure of faith,” in a right relationship to the Lord, not for self-exaltation. They are exercised with simplicity or liberality, and with cheerfulness or exhilaration, i.e., stimulating and exciting us because it is Kingdom work. Our gifts when of the Spirit are an unfeigned expression of our happy cleaving to the Lord’s way and Spirit.

“The necessity of the saints” means the needs of widows, orphans, the persecuted, and the needy. It is a summation of the Old Testament requirements of charity towards the covenant brethren. Because the Spirit makes us always mindful that we can do little or nothing apart from God’s gifts, we are continually “instant in prayer.” In v. 13, we are told that these gifts lead to “*communicating* to the necessity of the saints.” *Communicating* is *koinonountes*, sharing or distributing, and the word implies both giving and sharing because of a relationship, or as an act thereof.

In our time, too little is said of *hospitality* either as a gift of the Spirit or as a required act or duty. The literal reading of Paul’s words, *ten philoxenian diokontes*, is pursuing (hunting, or chasing) hospitality. In Robertson’s words, “They were to pursue (*dioko*) hospitality as their enemies pursued (*diokontas*) them.”⁷ In Hebrews 13:2, we are told, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The reference is clearly to Abraham and to Genesis 18 and 19. In referring to the Old Testament account, however, the focus is on the present and *our* attitude towards hospitality. We are to see each occasion as a God-sent opportunity for us to exercise our gift of grace. Neither we nor Abraham and Lot can know the results: they are in the hands of God, but the duty of

⁷ Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 405. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1931, reprint.

hospitality is ours. When God gives us a duty, He also gives us a gift, and we dare not despise it.

There is another important aspect to this. The *hospitality* required is of the kind where *no return favor* is likely. At the home of a chief Pharisee, our Lord told him and us what this means:

12. Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee.

13. But when thou makes a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:

14. And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

(Luke 14:12-14)

This is surely a very neglected saying of our Lord. It is, however, very much in the mainstream of the law, the prophets, and the apostolic teaching. Proverbs 19:17 summed up the Old Testament teaching: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." Our Lord speaks of it also in Matthew 6:4, and Paul's words in Philippians 4:18-19 refer to help he received from others.

Paul's meaning is clear. Neither elitism nor equalitarianism do anything other than warp and destroy society. Elitism means self-exaltation; autonomous man denies that he is a creature, or that his talents are a *given* in his being, not a self-creation. As a result, he seeks to use other people to further his efforts to play god. Equalitarianism is an envious levelling of all men, to the lowest common denominator; it denies the validity of unique gifts and insists on an equal misery for all and an equal hatred for all.

Paul tells us that we all have our gifts and functions, and they are from the Lord and for His purposes. We are to respect our talents as God-given gifts, and we are to respect the gifts of others. We each have our particular function. Our common ground with others is not in terms of an elitist-mob or masses relationship, nor in terms of a levelling or equalitarianism. Our common ground is community in Christ. From our community of the King, we are able to communicate the gifts of grace one to another as well as to those outside the community.

In our lives, exhilaration or cheerfulness comes not from "envying, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19, 21), but from exercising the gifts of the Spirit with grace. To separate ourselves from "the works of the flesh" without giving ourselves to the gifts and deeds of the Spirit is to live a barren life, in a house cleaned but not occupied (Luke 11:24-26).

51. Christian versus Totalitarian Morality (Romans 12:14-21)

14. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.
 15. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.
 16. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.
 17. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.
 18. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.
 19. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.
 20. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.
 21. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.
- (Romans 12:14-21)

Paul began Romans by telling us that the just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17). This means believing in the sovereignty and predestination of the triune God. Because God governs all things, and because the government is on Christ's shoulders and not our own, we can live in the confidence that all things work together for good for us in Christ (Rom. 8:28).

The results for ethics are far-reaching. Everything does not depend upon us nor on man. We do what God requires of us and leave the outcome to Him. We *live* by this faith. The more faithfully we live by this faith, the less our anxiety (Matt. 6:25-34).

We can contrast the ethics of anxiety with the ethics of faith. Anxiety leads to sleeplessness, because anxiety is concerned with all the possibilities as though all the possibilities are human options. Because of the Fall, all of us are prone to anxiety, which is the attempt to play god in our lives (Gen. 3:5), to plan our tomorrows as though everything depends on us. Quite aptly, this century of existentialist living has been called the age of dread, and the age of anxiety. If everything depends upon us, then indeed we have reason to be both sleepless and anxious. If everything depends upon the triune God, then, having done our duty to Him, or having humbled ourselves in contrite prayer to Him, we can say with David, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8).

The ethics of anxiety is a totalitarian ethics, because it must control all things in order to ensure success. For this reason, non-Christian ethics is totalitarian: good results require total control and government by man. Humanistic ethics sees only one source for the good: human action. For this human action to produce good requires the total control and government of all factors, hence the totalitarian order. (Libertarian

humanism enthrones not the state but the free market, so that again we have a form of totalitarianism, in that the totally free market is the sole criterion of value.)

Christian ethics begins and ends with the sovereign predestinating power of the triune God. Our ethics then are not the ultimate source of good but simply our obedient response to the ultimate righteousness, the triune God. He is the determiner of all things, including our salvation. Our ethics then are not the ultimate government but our response to His grace and government, our thank offering for His providential salvation and rule.

This is the context of Paul's comment in these verses. In v. 14, he echoes our Lord's words in Matthew 5:44, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you" (see also 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Peter 2:23; 3:9). *To do good* is legitimately in our power; to execute vengeance is not a personal option but a right reserved to God (v. 19), or to God-ordained agencies like the state. Calvin's comment here was very telling:

Arduous is this, I admit, and wholly opposed to the nature of man; but there is nothing too arduous to be overcome by the power of God, which shall never be wanting to us, provided we neglect not to seek for it. And though you can hardly find one who has made such advances in the law of the Lord that he fulfils this precept, yet no one can claim to be the child of God or glory in the name of Christian, who has not in part attained this mind, and who does not daily resist the opposite disposition.

I have said that this is more difficult than to let go revenge when any one is injured: for though some restrain their hands and are not led away by the passion of doing harm, they yet wish that some calamity or loss would in some way happen to their enemies; and even when they are so pacified that they wish no evil, there is yet hardly one in a hundred who wishes well to him from whom he has received an injury; nay, most men daringly burst forth into imprecations. But God by his word not only restrains our hands from doing evil, but also subdues the bitter feelings within; and not only so, but he would have us to be solicitous for the wellbeing of those who unjustly trouble us and seek our destruction.¹

In obeying these commandments, we do *not* give evil free sway, but, rather, we recognize that God's free sway brings justice and grace alike, and we leave this to Him. The Sabbath rest is required of us, and it means taking hands off our lives, our affairs, and the world around us in the faith and confidence that God's government prevails. These commandments require a practical Sabbath of us all the days of our lives. Beyond a limited degree, we cannot govern affairs, and so we live by the faith that the Lord God

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, p. 468f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

governs all things. Hence, we bless, not curse, because God is the source of vengeance. This is not a pacifistic and pietistic response but one born out of confidence in God's absolute and perfect government.

The word *persecute* is *diokontas*, to pursue, to hunt after, and it is the same word used in v. 13, "pursuing (*diokontes*) hospitality." Our pursuing zeal is to be manifested in Christian action, not in vengeance. To *bless* means to return good for evil. Paul is here echoing our Lord's words:

43. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.

44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust. (Matt. 5:43-45)

In v. 15, we are commanded to "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." This requires love and community. We are to be happy when others are blessed, and to feel grief over their griefs. We cannot be unconcerned about others. The totalitarian ethics sees people as building blocks or manure for a future society and is commonly unconcerned about the present distress created by its policies. Such an unconcern is evil and is a mark of elitism. What Paul says here is basic to Old Testament covenantalism. The Talmud summed it up in similar words: "Let not any rejoice among them that weep, nor weep among them that rejoice."² In Proverbs 17:5, we are told, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished." The parallelism here is most telling: to rejoice at evil overtaking anyone, however merited, is like mocking the poor. We can thank God for His justice only if we at the same time remember His grace to us.

In v. 16, Paul says, "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." To be "of the same mind" means to have the common concern for one another, i.e., to have the same goal for Christ's community. Luther said, of "Mind not high things,"

The Apostle means to say: Do not regard those who rank highly in the world, and do not be displeased with such as are despised. Take a cordial interest in those that are lowly and have pleasure in them. So St. Augustine says in his "rule"; "Do not boast of the high rank of wealthy parents, but of the brotherhood of poor brethren."³

² E.H. Gifford, "Romans," in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, with Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 209. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

³ Martin Luther: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, J. Theodore Mueller translation, p. 161. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1954.

A common slander over the centuries has it that Christianity began as a slave religion, appealing only to the lowest in society. Both the New Testament and the writings of the early church make clear how false this is. The church from the beginning included men of all estates, and many were important persons, from Paul on. Hence, it was very necessary to stress this requirement of community. We have an echo here of Proverbs 3:7, "Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the LORD, and depart from evil."

We are not to be "wise" in our own "conceits" or self-importance. *Condescend* is a translation of *sunapagomenoi*, going along. We are to be ready to carry or go along with men of lower estates as brethren in Christ.

In vv. 17-18, Paul gives a general summary of all this: "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Our conduct and our mind towards all men must be godly, and we are only capable of this if we recognize that the duties are ours, and the results are in the hands of God. This is not the perspective of a pietistic retreat but of confidence in God's government and victory. According to Proverbs 20:22, "Say not thou, I will recompense evil, but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee." Paul is steeped in the Old Testament and constantly echoes it, as for example Proverbs 3:3-4:

3. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:
4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

"As much as in you lieth" means that we are to observe God's requirement with all our being. We are emphatically not told to be passive towards sin but that, faced with evil, we are not to give back evil but rather God's grace and justice. Civil government exists to give back that justice for evil.

In vv. 19-21, Paul tells us that vengeance belongs to God, and to God's appointed agencies, a fact developed in Romans 13:1-4. Our personal duty is to return good for evil. Paul is again citing or echoing the Old Testament, e.g.:

Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD. (Lev. 19:18)

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work. (Prov. 24:29)

To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. (Deut. 32:35). [See Heb. 10:30, For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.]

If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. (Ex. 23:4)

21. If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:

22. For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee. (Prov. 25:21-22)

To leave vengeance to God means to "give place unto wrath," i.e., the wrath of God. In Murray's words, "The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands." With respect to *wrath*, Murray said:

In Paul's usage "the wrath" and also "wrath" without the article is pervasively the wrath of God (*cf.* 2:5,8; 3:5; 5:9; 9:22; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9). In every instance, with the possible exception of 13:5, where "the wrath" is spoken of without any further specification (3:5; 5:9; 9:22; 1 Thess. 2:16) it is the wrath of God.⁴

Heaping coals of fire on an enemy's head is to make him ashamed of his evil and to overcome evil with good by refusing to allow evil to degrade us to its level. To render evil for evil is to make evil triumphant.

It is a serious error at this point, however, to assume as some do that love will conquer our enemies. Paul does refer to a moral victory, in that we overcome evil by preventing evil from leading us to a like response. It is not our love that conquers but God; hence we give place to His wrath or grace, as the case may be. We give place to wrath, Calvin said, "when with quiet minds we wait for the seasonable time of deliverance, praying at the same time, that they who are now our adversaries, may by repentance become our friends."⁵ Our personal victory over evil comes in preventing it from warping us into a mind governed by a reaction to evil, i.e., dominated by what has been done to us rather than by what the Lord requires of us.

As we have seen, totalitarian ethics insists on man's government over all things; man himself must right every wrong. This assumes that man's moral judgments are capable of such a task; it requires that man play god.

Men have been unwilling to leave ultimate judgment in God's hands. Enlightenment thinking insisted on transferring it to "Nature." The result was the doctrine of poetic justice. Nature infallibly righted all wrongs and settled all scores. Shakespeare's plays were re-written in some cases, as witness *King Lear*, to provide poetic justice in time. Men found it intolerable that justice should govern from beyond time and history and irregardless of man's calendar and expectations.

⁴ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 141. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1968) 1971.

⁵ Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 474.

Later, with Darwinism, "Nature" as the source of ultimate justice was dropped, since "Nature" was now no more than a blind and mindless product of chance. To retain an ultimate justice, man and the state now took the place of God and of "Nature." The result has been the totalitarian state and theories of law which reserve all judgments with respect to good and evil to the state. Right and wrong are now what the state says they are, and morality now has, not a God-centered meaning, but a state-centered one.

Paul tells us that morality is what God says it is. He tells us that there are strict limits on the power of moral action as well as our exercise of moral judgment. The government of all things is in the hands of the triune God, not mine. Because morality is a subordinate branch of theology, and moral law an expression of God's righteousness or justice, we cannot give to morality a totalitarian power. Christian morality is the expression of our life in Christ, not our attempt to play god (Gen. 3:5).

52. The State and God (Romans 13:1-5)

1. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:
4. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.
5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. (Romans 13:1-5)

We come now to one of the more controversial portions of Paul's letter, verses that have often been used to require an abject subservience to the state. This should not surprise us. People have used the Bible to vindicate homosexuality despite its plain statements. Why not statism as well?

Two general comments are in order. *First*, spies were commonplace then as now. The national leaders used spies to build a case against Jesus (Luke 20:25), and they were no less hostile to Paul. Thus, both Roman and Judean spies and informers would be ready to use any material possible against Paul and to denounce him to the authorities. *Second*, despite this fact, Paul speaks out plainly and bluntly, and, by placing *every* civil government *under* the triune God, he radically altered the nature of politics.

In v. 19, Paul says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord." As we have seen, to "give place unto wrath" means to allow the wrath and vengeance of God to operate rather than to play god ourselves. We are now told to be subject, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (v. 5). The Greek word translated as *wrath* is *orge*, a form of *orge*. It has reference, not merely to a feeling of anger, but to anger in action to bring about retribution. The use of this word thus requires us to believe in God's justice and to expect it and work for it. It refers to God's justice at work in history.

Terror is *phobos*, or fear. The required fear is a religious one, God-centered, because it is God's order and God's restraint on sin that is at stake. This terror is thus with respect to God and His law order, not man's. Hence, this terror must be aroused in evil-doers, not the godly.

The word *sword*, *machairan*, is a short sword or dagger. Of this weapon, Vincent tells us, that it was

Borne as the symbol of the magistrate's right to inflict capital punishment. Thus Ulpian: "They who rule whole provinces have the right of the sword (*jus gladii*).¹" The Emperor Trajan presented to a provincial governor, on starting for his province, a dagger, with the words, "*For me. If I deserve it, in me.*"¹

Trajan (c. A.D. 53-117), of course, comes after Paul, but his words represent the best in the Roman legal tradition. The symbol of the sword thus represents both capital punishment and justice.

Conscience is *suneidesin*, knowing oneself (before God). Paul says "ye must needs (or, there is a necessity to) be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." The necessity is thus twofold: *first*, we are required to be confident in God's vengeance, not our own. *Second*, our conscience before God tells us that God's judgment produces sure justice, and ours injustice when we act in independence from God.

It should be apparent by now that Paul not only places civil government under God, but he implicitly and surely requires that civil government comply with God's law. This is clear from Paul's references to civil government: it is "ordained of God," as are all things, and, like everything else in the universe, must serve God. This same verse 1 also requires everyone to be "subject unto the higher powers." Both words, *ordained* and *subject*, have reference to a God-established order, and both every man and every ruler are placed under that order with a duty to comply to it. The declaration by "Peter and the other apostles" that "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) applies equally to the subject and the ruler, to the state and to the citizen. There are no exemptions from God's law.

Moreover, Paul, as we have seen, is intensely faithful to the Old Testament: The sacrificial system made clear that the greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability, so that the sin of the priest, for example, was the most grievous (Lev. 4, etc.). Our Lord sums up the matter thus: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:48). The duty of obedience to God and His law is equally mandatory for both a civil government and the peoples thereof, but the penalty for disobedience is greater for the rulers.

"There is no power but of God." Since He made all things, all things and the conditions of their lives are God-imposed and inescapable. According to Robertson, Paul tells us, "God is the author of order, not anarchy....Paul is not arguing for the divine right of kings or for any special form of government, but for government and order. Nor does he oppose here revolution for a change of government, but he does oppose all lawlessness

¹. M.R. Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. II, p. 746. MacDonald Publishing Co., MacDill AFB, Florida, reprint.

and disorder.”² Robertson to the contrary, when Paul tells us twice in this verse that God has ordained all governments in every sphere, he does not mean thereby that every sphere can be a law unto itself. Clearly, the implication is that every sphere of life and authority is under God and His law.

In v. 2, Paul deals with resistance to authority. If we set ourselves in array against authority, we incur *judgment*, given in English as *damnation*. The word “resisteth” implies an across-the-boards radical defiance of authority, not a moral stand on a particular point. Bartlett said, “But man’s law must be rooted in God’s laws. A government that defies the laws of God is heading for disaster.”³ Paul is not requiring an unquestioning submission to all authority. Rather, he is saying that we cannot without sin challenge the fact of authority in any sphere, family, church, state, or elsewhere. He is generalizing, although civil government is clearly in mind.

The Christian’s relationship to civil government was a problem for the early church, as it should be today also. The fundamental confession of the early church was “Jesus Christ is Lord” or Sovereign (Phil. 2:9-11). This, however, ran counter to the claim of Rome that Caesar was lord or sovereign. Paul answers the question, can we obey Caesar, who claims to be our lord? Paul’s answer is that Caesar is “the minister of God,” i.e., *diakonos*, servant. We obey Caesar as God’s servant, not as a sovereign.

What Paul says here is in line with Old Testament prophetic teaching. It was echoed in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, an apocryphal work c. 50 B.C. and A.D. 40, which admonished all the rulers of the earth to remember that their dominion came from God; they were obligated to keep His law or be judged. Gerald R. Cragg saw clearly the agreement of Paul with this.⁴

Lenski saw this section as dealing with “The Christian in the Secular World.”⁵ There is a degree of truth to this, but, more important, Paul tells us that every kind of authority and every civil government lives in God’s world under God’s government. Our perspective is badly warped if we forget this. This universe will cast into outer darkness, into hell, all who by-pass God’s law for their own. In Revelation 13:9-10, we are told

9. If any man have an ear, let him hear.

10. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

² Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 407. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1931) reprint.

³ C. Norman Bartlett: *Right in Romans*, p. 115. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1953.

⁴ Gerald R. Cragg, “Romans,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. IX, p. 602. New York, New York: Abingdon Press, 1954.

⁵ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, p. 783ff. Columbus, Ohio, 1945.

The word “sword” is again “machaira,” the Roman symbol of state power. We are thus told that when the state abuses God’s law and enslaves people unjustly, or kills them without cause, God will enslave and kill that state. This confidence in the wrath of God “is the patience and the faith of the saints.”

Paul thus gives us no doctrine of passive obedience. The comments of Hodge are very telling here:

All authority is of God. No man has any rightful power over other men, which is not derived from God. All human power is delegated and ministerial. This is true of parents, of magistrates, and of church officers....

It was his (Paul’s) object to lay down the simple principle, that magistrates are to be obeyed. The extent of this obedience is to be determined from the nature of the case. They are to be obeyed as magistrates, in the exercise of their lawful authority. When Paul commands wives to obey their husbands, they are required to obey them as husbands, not as masters, nor as kings; children are to obey their parents as parents, not as sovereigns; and so in every other case. This passage, therefore, affords a very slight foundation for the doctrine of passive obedience.⁶

Luthi saw “three principles” in these verses. *First*, all authority comes from God. *Second*, authority is God’s servant to promote good and suppress evil. *Third*, every person must be subject to the governing authority. Luthi held that we must be in subjection even when we cannot be in submission, and we go to prison for it.⁷ Such a perspective sees nothing of Paul’s view of the state under God. It is not merely persons who under God are under the state’s authority but also the state and every other agency. The doctrine of the divine right of kings has its echo in too many commentaries which call for passive obedience.

Luther held to a monastic view: “the world is conquered and subjected in no other way than through contempt.”⁸

In vv. 3-4, Paul defines the state. *First*, the state is not a god but God’s servant. *Second*, as God’s servant, it must be a terror to evil, “a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” Since in v. 19 Paul tells us that vengeance belongs to god, it can only be exercised by the state under God, by delegation, according to God’s law. Since God’s vengeance has reference to God’s law, no state has the freedom to create its own law and use coercion to enforce it. *Third*, if we do good, we should have “praise” from

⁶. Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 639, 641. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong (1882), 1893.

⁷. Walter Luthi: *The Letter to the Romans*, pp. 187, 192f. Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1961.

⁸. Martin Luther: *Lectures on Romans*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 25, p. 468. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

the civil government, and “good” in the form of godly order. Lange said, “Commendations by the magistrates, in opposition to punishments, were common even in ancient times.”⁹

Let us remind ourselves that Paul was a very learned and faithful Israelite. Basic to the historic and Biblical political faith of Israel was the sentence in the law, “thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother” (Deut. 17:15). A non-covenant man cannot be made a ruler. The penalty for breaking the covenant is to be ruled by evil men (Deut. 28:14-68). Isaiah tells us that the prelude to outside oppression and rule is being ruled by children and women, i.e., an abdication of godly authority by men.

When this happens, civil government ceases to be God’s minister and becomes God’s wrath to others and to itself. It becomes a terror to the godly, and the protection of evil men, as our courts are becoming now.

Because obedience is grounded (v. 5) in conscience and in the confidence in God’s wrath of which Paul speaks, it is not servile obedience but a regenerative obedience. It obeys within the limits of God’s law and it works to reconstruct the entire social order by obedience to God. Necessity is attached to this, because society cannot be made good by negation. Peter tells us, “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man *for the Lord’s sake*” (1 Peter 2:13).

A society and its various areas of government reflect the nature and character of men. A society made up of evil and reprobate men will reflect their character. The homosexual and degenerate nature of Roman leadership and authorities began to appear even in Paul’s day. The old proverb says simply, “You can’t make a good omelette with bad eggs.” The essence of non-Biblical politics is to try to do precisely that, to so arrange the bad eggs to produce a gourmet dish, i.e., to take sinful, fallen men and to create a just social order. This is the purpose of revolutions in the modern era. We can, in more than a few cases, say that the old regimes overthrown by revolutions were bad, but we must add that the new ones have been far, far worse. If we apply systematically the premise that man without Christ can create a just social order we thereby enthrone evil as the means to good.

Revolutions assume evil to be a class trait rather than a human trait, and they are therefore unable to cope with it. Instead, they become incarnations of evil.

Paul places all men and institutions under God, including the state. St. Augustine understood this well. He declared that all states without justice, i.e., not under God, are like bands of robbers, like a Mafia:

⁹ John Peter Lange: *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Romans*, p. 399. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint.

Justice being taken away, then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves, but little kingdoms? The band itself is made up of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of the confederacy; the booty is divided by the law agreed on. If, by the admittance of abandoned men, this evil increases to such a degree that it holds places, fixes abodes, takes possession of cities, and subdues peoples, it assumes the more plainly the name of a kingdom, because the reality is now manifestly conferred on it, not by the removal of covetousness, but by the addition of impunity. Indeed, that was an apt and true reply which was given to Alexander the Great by a pirate who had been seized. For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, "What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet are styled emperor."¹⁰

We do not eliminate criminals by becoming criminals. The problem is in the fallen nature of man, and the remedy must begin there. This means that the just must *live* by faith.

¹⁰. St. Augustine: *The City of God*, Bk IV, ch. 4; p. 112f. Marcus Dods translation. New York, New York, The Modern Library, 1950 reprint.

53. The Fullness of Law (Romans 13:6-10)

6. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

8. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:6-10)

Paul, as always, gives us a carefully developed statement, and the words he uses are very important. In v. 6, the word *pay* is *teleite*, a form of *teleo*, as in our English word *teleology*. It means to accomplish or finish, to bring to an end, to pay. *Tribute* is *phorous* (*phoros*), and it refers to that which is due by a subject to his overlord. However, *custom* is also a translation of *telos* in v. 7, and it can mean a toll, tax, or an end, a termination. Thus, the word *teleo* sets the meaning of this text: it refers to a God-ordained order of support for God's realm on earth. It is to be paid to God's ministers, *leitourgos*; in Romans 15:16, Paul says that he is such a minister (*leitourgon*), and in Philippians 2:25, Epaphroditus is called by Paul the Philippians' minister (*leitourgon*) to himself. In Hebrews 8:2, Jesus Christ is called our minister (*leitourgos*) in the heavenly sanctuary. The word thus is inclusive of but not limited to civil authorities; it refers to God's servants or ministers in any and every realm. It is an error thus to limit the application of Romans 13:1-10 to civil authorities. God has an order in every sphere of life, and we are to respect that order and give to it that which is due and godly. Wherever there is legitimate authority, there is a legitimate duty on our part. Earlier, where the reference is more or less centered on civil rulers, the word describing them is *diakonos*, servants. Here it is *leitourgos*, and it refers to one who has a public office; in its earlier meaning, *public* had as much reference to God's service as to anything else, if not more so. In rendering tribute and custom to all authorities under God, we accomplish or "pay" a public function in so doing, because the "minister" has a public function for the Lord.

The word *fear* in v. 7 is *phobon*, and *honor* is *timen*, a price; in 1 Timothy 5:17, we are commanded to give double *honor* (*times*) to those who labor worthily in teaching and in the ministry of the Word. Paul is thus stressing the fact that God's *tax* extends beyond the boundaries of civil government.

The context clearly points far beyond the state or civil government. The tithe is God's tax. The common limitation of Paul's words here to civil government misrepresents the text.

How the early church viewed the state is important. They saw it as an enemy, to be coupled with "the enemies of the cross" as a subject of prayer. Polycarp's "Letter to the Philippians" is representative:

Pray also for kings, and potentates, and princes, and for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross, that your fruit may be manifest to all, and that ye may be perfect in Him.¹

Contemporary prayers for the president, Congress, governors, and others, which ask God to bless ungodly and evil men are perversions of Paul's meaning; we are to pray that God give them wisdom, bring them to repentance and a saving knowledge of Him, but certainly not to bless them in their evil ways.

In vv. 8-9, Paul declares, *first*, that we are to live in terms of the Biblical faith concerning debt. The law forbids long term debt, limiting us to six year loans. The general premise behind the law, and the goal of godly living, is to live debt free: "Owe no man anything." *Second*, we do have a "debt" or obligation to all men, "to love one another." The word "owe" can be render "*be a debtor* to no man" except to love one another.

This requirement of "no debt" means not only to be debt free but to give men what is due them for their work, their goods, or their loans. The law declares:

14. Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:

15. At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it: for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee. (Deut. 24:14-15)

27. Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

28. Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and to morrow I will give; when thou hast it by thee. (Prov. 3:27-28)

The word for *love* is *agapan*, a word which means love filled with grace, a love which manifests God's mercy, grace and law. Our debt of love to all men is then defined by Paul as fulfilling the law. The word "fulfilled" is *pepleroken*, filled up or put into force. To love in God's eyes is to keep His law in relation to Him, and in relation to men. Paul tells us what this means. If we do not commit adultery, we respect the sanctity of our neighbor's marriage; if we do not kill, we respect his life; if we do not steal, we respect

¹. Polycarp, "Letter to the Philippians," xii, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, p. 36. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981 reprint.

his property; if we do not bear false witness, we do not dishonor his name; if we do not covet, we do not by word, thought, or deed seek to use lawless or 'lawful' means to wrong him unjustly. The laws of God tell us how to love God with all our heart, mind, and being, and also how to love our neighbor as ourselves. Older commentators sometimes spoke of the law as "a rule of gratitude," i.e., towards God, and it is a rule of love and society towards other men.

It should be noted that "owe no man anything" is *not* a prohibition on short term debt; in fact, our Lord in Matthew 5:42 requires us to be generous in loans, which means borrowing *within the law* was not forbidden.

The *love* required of us is not a personal affection but a manifestation of God's law and grace. *How we feel is irrelevant*; we are required to manifest the life God requires of us, the life of the covenant faith and law. As Mills observed, "As a Christian you have no rights, only duties."² Paul began by declaring that the just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17); now he is developing *the duties of justice, the life of the just*.

In v. 10, Paul concludes, because "love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" or, the fulness of law. There is thus no separation between love and law; this means that sin, evil and hate go together. One who commits adultery neither loves God's law nor his wife; he hates both, or, at the least, shows contempt towards them. The *love* which works no ill to others is God's love and law at work in us. The life of the justified is a life of love and justice, the love and justice of God at work in and through us constantly. As Mills noted, "The mood and tense of the word 'worketh' expresses a continuous action."³

It is very wrong to take a humanistic view of love and law. For the justified, both God's law and His grace and love at work in us are supernatural facts. They manifest God's power and life in us and for us. To view God's law as a past fact and a dead thing is to deny the covenant as God's purpose for men. The covenant is God's grace, love, and law for men. In covenant man, the expression of the life of law and love is the release of God's power on earth, the manifestation of a charismatic energy whereby men and society witness the power of God in action.

The Bible speaks of *the Law* as one, as a unity. It is wrong thus to approach it as a series of options to be rated and judged by their applicability to our culture. This Law expresses the righteousness or justice of God. In God, all His attributes are in harmony, so that no conflict exists between law and love, justice and mercy, wrath and pity, nor between any

² Sanford C. Mills: *A Hebrew Christian Looks at Romans*, p. 437. New York, New York: American Board of Missions to the Jews, 1977.

³ *Idem*.

other of God's attributes. All are in unity and share in the perfect simplicity of His being. Law and love are thus inseparable in God and therefore, when faithfully manifested in us, again inseparable.

The life of the justified is thus the covenant life, and it is inseparable from God's Kingdom work.

54. The Day of Battle (Romans 13:11-14)

11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. (Romans 13:11-14)

These verses have an important place in church history because of St. Augustine. In his *Confessions* (Book VIII, chap. XII, no. 29), he tells us of his crisis. He heard the voice of a boy or girl from a neighboring house chanting, "Take up and read; take up and read." He then returned to the reading of the apostles, and the volume opened to Romans, and his eyes fell first on Romans 13:13-14. Augustine said, "No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, — by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, — all the gloom of doubt vanished away."

Paul's imagery here is one common to Biblical thought and to church history. The darkness of sin, and the refusal to believe, is contrasted to the light of the Gospel. The world outside of Christ is a dark age, but His coming brings light and wisdom.

Non-Biblical Hebraic writings also stressed this. The so-called *Wisdom of Solomon* (first century B.C.) tells the rulers of the world, "your dominion was given you from the Lord," who "will examine your works and inquire into your plans to see if the nations have kept God's law."¹ Again and again, the summons in Old Testament and New Testament faith is to awaken to the ultimate and basic issues. Men are absorbed with the moment and neglect the responsibilities of life in their concentration on the minutia of things. Paul stresses this note repeatedly:

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. (1 Cor. 15:34)

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. (Eph. 5:14)

Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. (1 Thess. 5:5-6)

Paul does not summon us to pietism but to Christian living and responsibility. Paul is not saying, the end of the world is near, but, rather,

¹. Edgar J. Goodspeed, translator: *The Apocrypha*, p. 187f. New York, New York: Vintage Books, Random House (1938) 1959.

it is time to work. We live our lives in a short span, and we cannot pass our responsibilities on to the future. The urgency is not in God's time but in ours.

Paul says, v. 11, "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." Obviously, this does not refer to their personal salvation; as the ones who believed, they were saved. If it refers to heaven, putting on armor and going into battle is irrelevant; it is then a question of waiting for death. If it refers to the second coming, then it is surprising that we are only told to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and not also to expect His return. In v. 12, Paul refers to the fact that "the day is at hand." Such references are commonly eschatological in the Bible, but not exclusively so. Moreover, when they are, they do not usually refer to the second coming or last judgment but to a near crisis in time and history, a judgment on men and nations rather than the Last or final Judgment. To see judgment only in terms of the final one is to paralyze Christian action in time, and Paul has no such intention. Godet saw vv. 11-14 as declaring that "the expectation of Christ's coming again (is) a motive to Christian sanctification."² Paul's stress, however, lies elsewhere. He summons believers into the light of Christ, to don their armor and move forward in terms of the lordship of Christ against the powers that rule this world. "The day" is not merely a symbol of judgment; it is also the time for work and battle. In v. 13, Paul says, "Let us walk honestly." The word *walk* is *peripatesomen*, we should walk, from *peripateo*, and it means figuratively the whole round of activities in an individual's life. The word has the implication of power and dominion, of trampling something underfoot, completely crushing it.³ Our walk is to be honest or honorable. We are in the day, the time of work, dominion, and conquest.

In v. 12, the battle imagery is very obvious. We are called to exercise dominion to victory and hence must cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. The old order of the world is described as the night. With Christ's coming, a new order is dawning, the day, a time for His people to work and to exercise dominion. "The night is far spent" (*prokopten*) or advanced; the dark night of man's fall is going to disappear before the light of the Gospel, because "the day is at hand." Paul tells us that with Christ's coming the final age of history has been ushered in, *not* the end of the world but the end-time. Now what remains is the development of the meaning of His coming and reign, His new humanity redeemed and made new by His atonement, and the world remade in terms of His dominion law.

² Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 448-452. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, (1883) 1977.

³ G. Ebel, "Peripateo," in Colin Brown, editor: *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. III, p. 943. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1971) 1978.

For this reason, v. 13 tells us, we must abandon living for ourselves. This is typified in “rioting” or revellings; in “drunkenness” or in strong drink; in “chambering” or bedding ourselves; in “wantonness” or excess; in “strife,” because no man is blessed, converted, or changed by quarreling with him; in “envying” or jealousy, again a mark of the old order, not the new.

Instead (v. 14), we are to put on the new man, Jesus Christ. We are new creations and members of a new humanity in Him. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Christ is for us “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

Putting on Christ means we do not make provision or take thought for the flesh, our fallen human nature, to make any concessions to its desires. Our new nature means a new life, and the old must give way to it. Calvin made clear that this counsel or command was not an ascetic requirement: “we are to provide for the wants of our flesh, but not to indulge its lusts.”⁴

All too many commentators, both orthodox and modernist, insist on reading these verses in terms of the second coming, in terms of Christ’s imminent return. If this is correct, then Paul was very wrong; after more than 1900 years, Christ has not yet returned. Such a reading has crippled Christian action also, because it has led to an indifference to the world around the church. We are told that the works of darkness are to be cast off and replaced by the works of light. Men who are always expecting to leave time and history will thereby minimize their work and dominion therein, and this is hardly putting on “the armour of light.” Paul summons us to the day of battle unto victory, not the day of departure.

⁴. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 491. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

55. Jots and Tittles (Romans 14:1-5)

1. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.
2. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.
3. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.
4. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.
5. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.
(Romans 14:1-5)

After affirming God's sovereignty and predestination, Paul begins in Romans 12:1 by summoning us therefore to present ourselves as living sacrifices unto God. There is no approach unto God without sacrifice, the sacrifice of atonement by Christ, and then of thanksgiving by us. But life in Christ means submission, subjection, and obedience to God, and, in Romans 13:1 we are told, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers." God's order begins with our submission to Him and His law-word, and, under Him, to all due authorities.

Our problem since Adam is that, because of our fall in Adam, we all seek to be our own god and law (Gen. 3:1-5). As a result, we want everyone, including God, to hear and obey our word, and we tend to feel that the world will decay if we withhold our comments and judgments.

It is this that now concerns Paul. He requires theology in our actions. The faith is not merely a series of articles to profess but also the way of life required by that profession. We are certainly not called to sit in judgment on the world. It is not we who shall sit on the throne of judgment on the day of the Last Assize but Jesus Christ: it is we who shall be judged, both now and then.

In v. 1, Paul speaks of a "weak" brother in the faith, *not* a sinful one. The word for "weak" is *asthenounta*, being weak. It means strengthless and sometimes impotent. There have been excellent suggestions as to what groups are described by this term, and they are frequently very good ones. Paul cites two central areas of conflict between the "weak" and the "strong." These are, *first*, diet. Because in non-Judean cities meat was commonly sacrificed to idols before eating, some were deeply troubled. All such meat was eaten by pagans as an act of communion with their gods. Some Christians thus turned vegetarian rather than eating meat. Then too some converts may have been members previously of the Essenes and were thus vegetarians to begin with. It is likely too that fasting was involved. The

second area of conflict was the observance of days. This can mean a great many things, not necessarily the observance of the Biblical festivals. In fact, had the Biblical festivals been the issue, Paul would not have missed the opportunity to use their typology for his purposes. The observance of days had a "non-Biblical" meaning. To illustrate, some years ago, local customs had a powerful force. I can recall how a bereaved family, or a widow, was expected to dress and behave, and departures therefrom were viewed as shocking. One major urban church had an ugly controversy over the matter. The pastor's wife died, after a long illness, leaving him with three small girls. Some time earlier, his sister-in-law, still single had resigned from a good position to come and care for her sister and her nieces. She maintained a separate apartment nearby. After the woman's death, the pastor, having had heavy medical expenses, plus paying for his sister-in-law's apartment, decided, six months later, to marry his sister-in-law. He was grateful to her and had come to love her. The church's anger was over the timing; all agreed that she was the logical choice. But most felt that a man should *not* marry until at least a year after his wife's death. This is observing or regarding the day. It has reference to a "non-Biblical," "non-moral" fact, but it is not unrelated to God and His law.

Another fact: there is no *necessary* correlation between these two areas of conflict, but they are related. Some might be troubled about meats offered to idols who were not concerned about days, and vice versa. Paul is not dealing with two parties in the church but with an attitude. If the issue had been the clean and the unclean animals of the law (Lev. 11:1-45; Deut. 14:3-21; etc.), Paul would have said so. If the issue had been Biblical festivals or the Sabbath, Paul would again have said so. In neither case would he ever have called an earnest desire to obey God's law a matter of "doubtful disputations."

Ever since Marcion, all too many churchmen have viewed the Bible as evidence of God's schizophrenic war with Himself, and Paul at war with the law and more. Such a view is blasphemous as well as untenable. In the last century, David W. Forrest ably described the weakness of such a perspective:

For the moral law is no accidental thing, it is the norm and principle of our rational being; it is itself "spiritual," "holy and righteous and good"; (Rom. vii. 14, 12) and therefore the new life of sonship which Christ mediates to us by the Spirit must be brought into some intelligible and necessary relation to it. From the form in which the apostle at times expresses himself, we might be led to imagine that, ideally speaking, there are two ways in which man may be accepted of God: on the one hand, through the perfect keeping of the law, in which case he would *ipso facto* have a title to the divine favour; on the other hand, being unable to keep it, he may be justified through faith

in Christ, who is the righteousness of God, and who fulfils in him the requirement of the law. (Rom. viii. 4) On this view, the latter method would be one devised by God in default of the practicability of the former.

But nothing could be further from Paul's conception. Whatever stainless spirits there be before the Throne keep their estate through their free submission to God as the instruments of His will and power. They have no righteousness of their own as distinguished from that which he confers. It is theirs only because it is *given* them, and they cannot glory as if they had not received it. So, if the final cause of man's existence be to realise his sonship to God, then, however much that may imply a homage rendered, it is based on a grace bestowed and appropriated. He who is the Father of souls is not only their origin and their guide, but the abiding inward Spirit of their sonship, without whose indwelling the sonship could not be. Any theory which assigns to men, fallen or unfallen, a primary and uncommunicated virtue mutilates the moral universe. Instead of One "from whom all good counsels and all just works do proceed," you have innumerable independent centres of goodness among whom God is, though it may be in a supreme and inconceivable degree, only the first and most dominant. This is to deny God altogether, in any valid sense of the name. If He exists at all, He is the life and harmony of the entire creation, and in a moral world the only possibility of real communion with Him is the acknowledgment by the souls whom He has made that of Him and to Him are all things. Had man, therefore, fulfilled the purpose of God regarding him, he would, up to the measure of his capacity, have perfectly kept the law; but this undeviating loyalty would have endowed him with no merit which he could claim as his own, for it was rendered possible simply through his faith, his constant receptivity to the inflow of the one Spirit of good. He would have no standing outside of God, but only *in* Him.

This, then, is the one final concept of the law of God; it is the presence of God's own life ruling in the soul as a guiding, sustaining, quickening power. The same divine Spirit that appoints the duty fulfils it in us, and "boasting" is excluded. (Rom. iii. 27.) How, then, comes it that boasting, or the sense of merit as over against God, is precisely what we associate with the observance of the divine law? Because of the entrance of sin creating a gulf between God and us, which we feel must be bridged over before we regain our essential fellowship with Him. As our conscience tells us that it is *we*, not God, who has created the gulf, so we easily pass in to the delusion that it is *we* who have to build the bridge of reconciliation. The law which we have broken becomes separated in our thought from Him and His life.¹

Forrest was right: such views do 'mutilate the moral universe.'

Paul, in these verses, is not saying that Scripture has nothing to say about eating or drinking, nor about the observance of days. Rather, he makes

¹ David W. Forrest: *The Christ of History and of Experience*, pp. 255-257. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1897) 1908.

clear that these are not issues on which Christians can legitimately divide. In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul says:

16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17. Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

The word translated as *shadow* is *skia*; it means, not something unreal or non-existent, but a *ghost* as compared to the whole man. *Body* is *soma* in the Greek, and it refers to the wholeness of life. Thus, Paul does not say meat, drink, holy days and the like are meaningless but that they are not the body of our faith; Christ is. We cannot say diet and days are meaningless, but neither can we make them matters of judgment.

In v. 2, Paul says some eat “all things,” i.e., all acceptable foods, while others are vegetarians. He does not pass judgment on either group, but only on censoriousness. In this situation, we do not have “the weak” insisting on vegetarianism as a way of life; nor “strong” insisting on eating pork; had such been the issue, Paul would have dealt with it. Certainly, 1 Timothy 4:1-5 attacks vegetarianism as a religious requirement and strongly defends the legitimacy of meats. The Levitical dietary laws are not an issue with either side.

It should be noted that the distinction, so taken for granted by most, between “ceremonial” law, moral law, and civil law does *not* exist in Scripture. All law is simply God’s law.

In v. 3, Paul forbids censoriousness by both the strong and the weak. The strong easily fall into an elitist mentality; the weak seek to reduce true faith to their practice. God is the Lord of both, and receives both to Himself. Both groups had been guilty of equating their practice with God’s way.

Verse 4 comes to the theological premise. We are all God’s property. He is our Lord, not we lords over one another. However great our human rank and status, we are God’s servants, all of us, and God is our Judge. The Lord is able to make both the weak and the strong to stand; neither can stand in his own strength. Some of us may stand, or we may fall, but all of us are under God’s care and judgment, and hence judgment belongs to Him. Paul is not outlawing legitimate judgment by superiors under God, in church, state, family, and elsewhere. Our Lord commands, “Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). It is judgment on minor matters which are not in our jurisdiction which is forbidden. In James 4:12 we have a statement similar to Paul’s, reserving judgment to God on all matters save those specifically assigned to us as His servants: “There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who are thou that judgest another?”

Moreover, Paul, by his comments, makes clear that both the weak and the strong are weak before God. It is of both groups, of any members therefore, or any man weak or strong, that Paul says, "God is able to make him stand." It is not our position but God's grace that alone enables us to stand or to conquer, and the Lord, who gives grace to the weak and the strong, denies it to the self-righteous. And both the weak and the strong can be self-righteous. The weak often see virtue in their weakness as though their conscience is more sensitive and holy. The strong often drift into heresies, feeling they are masters, and some of the strong may later have drifted into gnosticism and like evils.

Growth, Paul tells us in v. 5, is not furthered by Phariseism, censoriousness, nor by hostilities. Hence, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Growth is a personal fact. Churches in which people dare not have a personal opinion provide no place for growth. Paul's concern is reconciliation and growth, not submission one group to another, in minor matters. He never dismisses their concerns as ridiculous nor as indifferent; rather, his counsel is that there be harmony in terms of their common Lord. Our Lord tells us plainly in Matthew 5:17-20 that He has not come to undermine or abolish one jot or tittle of God's law, but He does not say that we are to judge one another and fight over every jot and tittle of the law. We are given no permission to scrap the details of God's word, nor to fight over them. Paul is for no concessions on essentials, and forbearance and grace over peripheral issues. Kasemann's comment here is excellent:

On the other hand, there is an immovable limit. If our conduct no longer manifests belonging to Christ as an ultimate bond, our existence becomes godless. Personal freedom ends solely, but radically, with the Lord. Breadth and restriction, freedom and commitment, coincide.²

Leenhardt felt that the reference to the observance of days could not be to the Sabbath but to something else, perhaps "to practices of abstinence and fasting on regular fixed dates." Such customs can become major issues; some can regard them as a necessity for spiritual health, while others view them as a crutch. "To entertain different opinions is not a bad thing, but what *is* bad is to dispute acrimoniously and divisively, for then we are arrogating to ourselves the right to judge our brother and are usurping the place of the Lord (cf. v. 4)."³

Leenhardt's comment has substance to it. Very early, the church began, for example, to lay down rules for fasting and days of fasting. The so-called *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* outlined the days of required fasting. On

² Ernst Kasemann: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 370. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1980) 1982.

³ Franz J. Leenhardt: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 349. London, England: Lutterworth Press (1957) 1961.

certain days, only bread, salt, “herbs,” and water (a vegetarian diet) were allowed.⁴ Since these requirements had as their background an aversion to meat offered to idols, Leenhardt’s comment has much in its favor.

The church has often divided over trifles and remained complacent over major evils. The importance of trifles to men is that it is the jot and tittle of the law which seems to give men room for the exercise of freedom from God. It is somewhat difficult to defend murder as a necessary act of freedom, but more difficult to stop people who want to be free from God from altering God’s smaller landmarks (Deut. 19:14; Prov. 22:28; 23:10). Moreover, the lust for superiority makes minor matters important. We gain no merit or standing in the eyes of others if we boast, “I have murdered no man,” but it is a subtle means of claiming superiority to speak of much time spent in prayer, or of easy power from God without the disciplines practiced by others.

This is why Paul’s rebuke is aimed at both groups. Both are censorious, because both see themselves as superior because of their ways.

Power in Christ is not a product of man-made recipes and disciplines. It is perhaps not an accident that the most disciplined group in Christendom, the Jesuits, have also been the most distrusted, sometimes rightly and at other times wrongly so. Man’s discipline cannot command or call down God’s grace, although, once bestowed by the Lord, our self-discipline can make us better instruments of God’s grace and Spirit. Man’s formulas cannot bind God nor capture His Holy Spirit.

⁴ “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” Bk. V, Section III, para. xv, xviii; Bk VII, Section II, para. xx, xxi, xxiii, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. VIII, pp. 445, 447, 469. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982 reprint.

56. Judgments (Romans 14:6-13)

6. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

7. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

9. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

10. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

12. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

13. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (Romans 14:6-13)

As we have seen, Paul does not allow us either to disregard or discount the jots and tittles of the law, but neither does he allow us to judge one another in these matters. Very serious matters in the law call for no enforcement by man, only teaching. Tithing is an example of this. In these instances, God reserves to Himself all judgment. The same is true in the minor matters of the law, the jots and tittles.

Moreover, we *must* remember that Paul is here discussing persons who, while differing, take their faith very seriously. Those who observed days and diets, do it because of their desire to be faithful to the Lord, and those who refuse to observe days and fasting likewise do so out of a holy concern. Paul is thus discussing people who are very devout Christians. These are not people who follow one position or another out of social pressure and compliance. Paul is not here concerned with these, but with earnest believers whose actions are God-centered. This is his point in v. 6.

We cannot read these verses in terms of modern perspectives which assume that *sincerity* is enough to assure morality in our actions. Sincerity as a substitute for faithfulness to God's law word has no place in Paul's thinking. Rather, what he tells us is that both sides seek to be faithful to God. One side *may* be weak in their knowledge of what faithfulness requires, and another side *may* be strong, but both are God's servants, and God gives men no justification nor powers of judgment in these spheres. He gives, and Paul exercises it, the power of teaching. What Paul requires us to remember is that both sides seek to serve God with all their heart, mind, and being. Neither should charge the other with unfaithfulness. This

God-centered reference is clear from the fact that Paul four times in this verse uses the term “to the Lord.” There is here an implicit rebuke to those who follow one practice or another for conventional reasons, not “unto the Lord.” Unhappily, often the zealous believers are the ones who most despise and judge those who disagree with them.

Incidentally, v. 6 gives evidence of “the universal custom of thanksgiving before a meal (Matt. xv. 36; Acts xxviii, 35; 1 Cor. x. 30, xi. 24; 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5).”¹

If we are Christians, Paul reminds us in v. 7, we know that we do not live or die for ourselves. We are the Lord’s. This means that everything we do must have a God-centered motive and goal. This is the objective fact about our lives, and we dare not isolate ourselves from this knowledge. As Hodge summed it up,

No Christian considers himself as his own master, or at liberty to regulate his conduct according to his own will, or for his own ends; he is the servant of Christ, and therefore endeavours to live according to his will and for his glory... The sentiment is, ‘We are entirely his, having no authority over our life or death.’²

For Paul, the test of a Christian is both living and dying unto the Lord. We have a sovereign, and His name is not man.

This is stressed further in v. 8. We are not the authors of life nor death, and in neither instance can our purposes govern life and death. We must be governed in life and death by Christ. Paul is not telling us that a Christian should live for others but for Christ. We are all God’s property, and doubly so as Christians, by creation and by redemption.

In v. 9, Paul reminds us of the lordship of Christ. As Murray noted, *first*, Christ in His incarnation had to gain lordship as the new and last Adam. *Second*, He did so by His death and resurrection. *Third*, He gained thereby dominion over both “the dead and the living.” He will thus be judge over all men.³ He is therefore the world-judge. Godet said:

To understand this saying rightly, Eph. iv. 10 should be compared, where the apostle, after pointing to Christ “descended into the lowest parts (the abode of the dead),” then “ascended to the highest heavens,” adds: “that He might fill all things.” Which signifies that by traversing all the domains of existence Himself, He has so won them, that in passing through them in our turn as believers, we never cease to be His, and to have Him as our Lord. Hence the inference expressed v. 10.⁴

¹ E.H. Gifford, “Romans,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, A Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 217. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 662. New York, New York: A.C. Armstrong (1882) 1893.

³ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 182f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1959) 1971.

In v. 11, Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 concerning the universal rule of the Messiah. Paul sees the Last Judgment as an example of this universal power, an open display of His dominion before all creation. With this in mind, in v. 10 he denies us the right to judge one another except where God has given us such a delegated jurisdiction. The area of jots and tittles is not such an area. Our concern (v. 12) should be the fact that all of us must give an account of ourselves to God. He is our Lord, not man.

It is a serious error, however, to see these verses as banning all judgment. Paul has made clear that God has established higher powers over all of us, and given each of us a sphere of authority and judgment according to His law word. Our common sin is to avoid exercising authority and judgment in our proper sphere and insisting on judging others. An instance of this was a man who went to great expense to avoid exercising due authority in his own home. His children, whom he avoided controlling, were sent to costly boarding schools; at his office, he delegated the responsibility for difficult and easy decisions alike to others, lest someone be irked by what he did. At the same time, in matters not under his authority, he was quick to voice and opinion. Paul does not permit us such cheap and lawless judgments.

In v. 13, Paul both sums up vv. 6-12 and begins a new development in his argument; v. 14 makes clear that his comments are especially directed to the strong. The New English Bible (1961) renders this verse, "Let us therefore cease judging one another, but rather make this simple judgment: that no obstacle or stumbling block be placed in our brother's way." *Judgment* is thus required, God-centered, Christ centered, judgment. The beginning of wisdom in judgment is to abandon either a personal or a social standard in favor of a godly one. It is God's law word and Spirit which much govern us, not we ourselves. Our calling is to "judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24), and this means that we do not, by our censoriousness place a stumbling-block in our brother's way. Responsible judgment requires responsible men; irresponsible judgment comes from irresponsible men, and we are called to responsibility and dominion.

Our Lord teaches us to pray, "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). In irresponsible judgment, we insist on our will being done, our judgment being imposed upon others. It is such judgments that Paul condemns. We are not the Judge of the universe.

Both sides, however, are very much interested in being judges; Paul makes clear that those who observe the day and a vegetarian diet judge those who do not, and vice versa. We are all called to be creatures, and we shall be judged by the Lord, but we seek instead to be judges. Ever since

⁴ Frederic Louis Godet: *Commentary on Romans*, p. 458. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, reprint, 1979.

Adam, man has been in rebellion against knowing his place as a creature, but, at the same time, against the moral responsibilities of freedom. Thus, people alternately play god and yet demand that God do everything. Man's idea of God since Adam is a totalitarian one. "If I were God," some say, I would do thus and so, namely, tolerate *nothing* for those I hate, and do *everything* for those I love.

The Israelites, freed from slavery in Egypt, wanted God to do everything and provide for all things, and, at the same time, to retain the freedom to do as they pleased. For this reason, God left them to die in the wilderness. They refused to be a responsible people; they were ready to judge both God and Moses, forgetting that they were not judges but the judged.

Paul is writing to Christians who are more free to judge than to obey God and to help one another. We are neither our brother's keeper nor his judge, simply his brother in Christ. It is easier for us to judge than to obey, and thus we are ready to judge. The Roman church Paul wrote to was directing its energies towards matters of concern to God, not themselves. In our time too, churchmen, leaders and elders, "excel" in usurping God's prerogatives while failing in their own.

57. True Strength (Romans 14:14-23)

14. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

16. Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

20. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

21. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, nor is made weak.

22. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

23. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (Romans 14:14-23)

The justified, who are now just by the grace of God, live the life of the just, i.e., in terms of God's justice, *by faith*. Man's world since the Fall (Gen. 3:1-5) is dedicated to injustice in the name of justice. It takes faith to live in terms of God's justice in such a world. Christ's people, His new humanity, are a new creation in the midst of the old. Added to that fact is the complication of imperfect sanctification: the ways of the old Adam are not fully purged from the new humanity in this life. The life of faith is thus not always easy! To the hostility of the world and its injustice is added the problems of an imperfect nature.

Paul, as he tells us of the life of the just does not directly turn to politics, economics, education, or any like area. The solution to the world's evil is not in any system or form, however good, but in men who are a new creation and turn the world around them into God's realm. Bad men can destroy the best civil government, economic system, or schools. It is godly men who must re-establish godly order. Paul's concern is to discipline us for that task.

Man has a propensity to major in minors, and to substitute trifles for essentials. Paul is dealing with such a problem. In v. 14, he says, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." To word *unclean* is in all three instances *koinon*. *Koinos* means common, communal; it is the basis of our word *koinonia*, communion. *Koinos* means related, partner, and the like, but it can mean to make common, impure, or

defiled and profane. In Acts 4:32, we are told that the believers in Jerusalem “had all things common” (*koina*). In Acts 10:28, Peter says “God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common (*koinon*) or unclean (*akathorton*).” *Akathortos* has reference to ceremonial uncleanness which for the time bars man from the sanctuary.

Paul is clearly stating that the position of the weak is indeed a weak one. He is *not* talking about things plainly forbidden by God, but scruples harbored by earnest but weak believers. Such people feel that they have sinned in eating meats; they are wrong, but the consequences of eating for them is a burden of guilt. They have made distinctions where God has made none, and they live in terms of these distinctions.

In v. 15, Paul tells the strong, “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably (*agapen*). Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.” The word *charitably* has the meaning of manifesting God’s grace. To illustrate what this means, I will cite instances of men who insist on drinking, and in the process, ridiculing friends present who are alcoholics as *weak*. The man who can drink liquor without problems is *strong* in this one area, but can be morally *weak* in other areas. Paul is not requiring the meat-eaters in Rome to become vegetarians; he is denying them the freedom to flaunt their ostensible security and strength at church festivals, feasts, and gatherings. Such behavior is not grace but sin. Paul is attacking Phariseism, and he echoes our Lord’s words:

11. Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of his mouth, this defileth a man.

17. Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?

18. But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.

19. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

20. These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man. (Matt. 15:11, 17-20)

25. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. (Matt. 23:25)

Our Lord is not here denying the validity of the dietary laws, the effect of which on health is very clear. The word for *defile* in these sentences is again *koinos*, a ceremonial uncleanness, i.e., making common that which should be separate and holy. We cannot reduce the faith to externalism; the jots and tittles of the law are very true, but they are not the test of faith. The Pharisees minded the jots and tittles very faithfully, and our Lord commends this while rebuking them sharply for neglecting “the weightier matters of the law, judgment mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Matt. 23:23).

In v. 16, Paul says, "Let not your good be evil spoken of," or, literally *blasphemeison*; a Pharisee *can* be right in his external conduct and yet blasphemous. To be right in the wrong way or spirit is morally wrong. Paul's concern is Levitical holiness by all of us as against an uncleanness which wears the garb of the Lord but manifests another spirit. Our "good," our greater strength and our freedom, becomes blasphemous when it becomes pharisaical.

In v. 17, Paul declares, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Luther commented:

It is as if he were saying, "Your presumption that the kingdom of God is yours is in vain if you disturb the peace because of food and are so eager to defend what you eat and drink, as if the kingdom of God consisted in these things, as now is very frequently the case." The outward food arouses more storms than the inward religion produces peace, and they continue their disturbances during both peace and war. *But righteousness*, as over against God, which comes through faith or by believing; *and peace*, as over against our *neighbor*, which comes about through love for one another and by receiving and upholding one another; *and joy in the Holy Spirit*, as over against oneself, which comes about through hope, by having trust in God and not in those things which one does toward his neighbor or toward God. Be pleasant toward yourself, peaceful toward your neighbor, righteous before God. And nothing so disturbs this peace as the temptation and the offense of the brother, especially in those things which injure his conscience.¹

We see now an important fact emerging. To turn again to the illustration of alcoholics and non-alcoholics, the alcoholic is "weak" in a particular sphere and strong in others, but the non-alcoholic who is a Pharisee is far weaker in every sphere save one. While this analogy is not perfect, it is relevant. The Pharisees were in almost all spheres "superior" and "stronger" men than were Jesus' twelve disciples, but the Pharisees were mostly damned, and, the disciples, but for Judas, are reigning in heaven.

When Paul says, "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink," he plainly refers to both parties. Both sides are majoring in minors. Both are trivializing the Kingdom of God, even as some do now by insisting on the undue importance to them of smoking and drinking, or not smoking and drinking. To do so is to major in trivia and to falsify the nature of Christ's kingdom. The Spirit does not make us triflers, nor does He take us out of this world but makes us the power of God at work in history. The source of our power is the Holy Spirit not our insistence on the jots and tittles we hold to be all important.

¹. *Luther's Works*, vol. 25, *Lectures on Romans*, p. 504. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1972.

"For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (v. 18). "In these things" clearly refers to v. 17, "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It can also refer to our "meat and drink," our eating and drinking; our whole lives must be to the glory of God. According to Leenhardt,

It would be useless to claim to be pleasing to the Lord while at the same time behaving in such a way as to break the bruised reed or quench the dimly burning wick (cf. Matt. 12:20 and Is. 42:1-4). The commandment to love one's neighbor is inseparable from the commandment to love God. It is impossible to render to God authentic worship while despising the weakness of the brethren.²

The Pharisee gains virtue by comparing himself to others, the Christian by loving and obeying God, and His neighbor, in Christ.

To serve Christ faithfully makes us approved of or acceptable to God, and thereby respected by men. We are warned by Scripture against being governed by men's opinions, and yet we are not to be contemptuous of public opinion.

In vv. 19, 20, Paul continues, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat, destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure: but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense." Paul now cites some further weakness of the supposedly strong. He has already made clear that the weak are reducing the kingdom to minor matters. Now he tells the "strong" that it is their duty to *edify*, *oikodomes*, to build, not to "destroy," *katalue*, i.e., to destroy or to tear down completely and totally. How can they be strong if their lives destroy precisely those whom Christ has given new life to? Neither side has any warrant from God to attack the other, nor to kill and destroy them.

All things, Paul says, are *pure*, *kathara*, pure in the sense that they are purged or cleansed; from *katharos* we get our word *catharsis*. *Pure* in the sense of "holy" another word, *hagnos*, from the same roots as *hagios*, holy. This gives us an unusual meaning. How are all these foods, for Paul's reference is to foods, and to days, purged or cleansed? Is it not because God's jots and tittles cover them? In v. 21, Paul cites another point of scruples with the weak, "to drink wine." It is ridiculous to stretch Paul's "all things are pure" to include *all conceivable things*. Paul is a lawyer with a precise mind and style; for him, "all things" refers to the total number of differences between the weak and the strong, i.e., to the particular discussion at hand. He does not say that eating forbidden foods is pure, nor that the days of Saturnalia are pure. Idolatry is certainly not pure, nor

² Franz J. Leenhardt: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 355. London, England: Lutterworth Press (1957) 1961.

blasphemy. "All things" refers to "all things" under dispute; hence, to be sure his reference is correct, he adds wine, apparently a minor area of dispute to the list, and then "any thing whereby thy brother stumbles, or is offended, or is made weak." Some strange conclusions have been claimed by some on the basis of these words. I gained no small animosity from a prominent and highly honored clergyman (who now has a building named after him) when I discovered that he held that "all things are pure" included adultery and fornication; his premise was that this was a doctrine for the "strong" to practice, but quietly, to avoid offense to the "weak."

"The things which make for peace" does not refer to a humanistic peace but to God's peace in terms of God's grace and justice. In Romans 13:10, Paul says, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." The law of God is the way of peace, and no man can be in that law except through Christ.

In v. 21, Paul does not require vegetarianism nor total abstinence from wine. Wine too was offered to the gods before being sold. The inclusion of wine makes clear that the conduct of the "strong" has no reference to setting aside the Levitical diet, since nothing is said there about wine. Verse 22 makes clear what Paul speaks of: it is boasting before others, i.e., the weak, about how strong we are in such matters. If we are indeed strong, says Paul, "have it to thyself before God." In fact, Paul adds, "happy" or *blessed* "is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Our strength is a blessing if it is growth before the Lord; it is condemnation if it is Phariseeism before God and man. It is then humanism and not Christianity.

The great premise set forth in v. 23 is this: "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Again, as in v. 20, where "all things" cannot refer to more than is under discussion, so here "faith" cannot refer to any kind of faith. It is faith in Christ, justifying faith. Paul is simply re-stating in terms of a specific application what he says in Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." Faith is not easy-believism: it is the power and grace of God unto salvation in our lives.

If the "strong" are ready to destroy their fellow Christians with their boasting and Phariseeism, then they are neither strong nor Christian but already damned. If the "weak" likewise attempt to force their weakness onto others, they too are under judgment.

Why do the weak and the strong act so wrongly? Our Lord says, "the children of this world are in their generation wiser (or, more subtle) than the children of light" (Luke 16:8). Georges Simenon, the chronicler of modern man's emptiness and evil, and himself a part of that unregenerate world, wrote in 1966 a novel entitled *The Cat* (*Le Chat*.) The story is about a husband and wife who live together in the bonds of hatred. They live for

hatred; it is the only meaning in their lives. Each fear that the other is trying to poison them. Finally, the wife dies, and, on that very day, the husband falls ill. When taken to the hospital, his final words are, "I was no longer anything."³

Men without faith live for false gods, and in hatred for God and man. This is the essence of elitism, which Paul so plainly condemns as he sets forth predestination. At the heart of elitism is man's will to be his own god and to use, despise, down-grade, and degrade others. Paul saw this danger in the "strong" of Rome, and implicitly also in the weak.

Neither has any justification for judging the other. Both are alike servants of God, who is their Judge. The only premise of their lives can be the glory of the Lord, "for whatever is not of faith is sin." True strength is not in our self-evaluations but from the Lord.

³. Fenton Bresler: *The Mystery of Georges Simenon*, p. 221f. New York, New York: Beaufort Books, 1983.

58. “For Our Learning” (Romans 15:1-7)

1. We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.
2. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification.
3. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.
4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.
5. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:
6. That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God. (Romans 15:1-7)

Paul's concern, as we have seen, is with the weak and the strong in the church and their conflict. It must be remembered that these terms are relative. In v. 1, Paul infers this with his reference, “we then that are strong.” Both sides no doubt believed they were the strong ones! In our day, in those churches where there are disagreements over smoking and drinking, for example, both sides often see themselves as the strong, i.e., as more holy. From this fact arose the problem and the conflict. The strong often feel that it is their calling and duty to govern the weak. As a result, both sides seek to govern each other.

Paul puts the matter on a different footing. Our duty as the strong is “to bear the infirmities of the weak and not to please ourselves.” We prove our strength by being forbearing and thoughtful. Paul in effect has redefined the strong as those who bear the infirmities of the weak rather than pleasing themselves. This means that both sides of the controversy over meats, days, and wine can demonstrate strength in a very simple way. Paul identifies himself with such strength by saying, “we that are strong,” so that if any would be with Paul, they too would show like strength. In a similar context, 1 Corinthians 10:31-33, Paul tells us what strength in such matters is:

31. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.
32. Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:
33. Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

The word *infirmities* is in the Greek *asthenemata* (*asthenema*), and this is the only usage of this Greek word in the New Testament, although another form, *astheneia* is used, meaning a lack of strength. By using this word, Paul

in effect says that to go after the weak is a form of bullying and is hardly commendable! If we are noble, we should behave nobly; if we are strong, we do not behave in a cowardly and contemptible manner. The truly strong are protective and helpful to the weak, not hostile, contemptuous, critical, or lordly towards them.

Hence, (v. 2), "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification." In v. 1, Paul asks us to "bear" the infirmities of the weak; *bear* is *bastazein* (*bastazō*), to support; now he adds that we should "please" our neighbor "for his good to edification," i.e., to build him up into a stronger person. Paul tells both sides that there are more important things at stake than their jots and tittles: the community of Christ, its growth and peace are the key fact. We are to please our neighbor "for his good to edification," however, not to flatter him nor to seek peace at any price. Calvin noted this fact clearly:

There are here two things laid down, — that we are not to be content with our own judgment, nor acquiesce in our own desires, but ought to strive and labour at all times to please our brethren, — and then, that in endeavoring to accommodate ourselves to our brethren, we ought to have regard to God, so that our object may be their edification; for the greater part cannot be pleased except you indulge their humour; so that if you wish to be in favour with most men, their salvation must not be so much regarded, but their folly must be flattered; nor must you look to what is expedient, but to what they seek to their own ruin. You must not then strive to please those to whom nothing is pleasing but evil.¹

There is a too common habit to take single sentences of Scripture, such as "judge not," "God is love," and the like, and to use them to exclude much else in Scripture. Those who indulge in such usage are self-condemned by their refusal to hear any more of God's word than what is useful for their purposes. These words of Paul have been misused in this way.

Our example in such strength as Paul speaks of is Christ Himself (v. 3). Calvin again is to the point here:

For even Christ pleased not himself, &c. Since it is not right that a servant should refuse what his lord has himself undertaken, it would be very strange in us to wish an exemption from the duty of bearing the infirmities of others, to which Christ, in whom we glory as our Lord and King, submitted himself; for he having no regard for himself, gave up himself wholly to this service.²

In this verse, Paul quotes the Septuagint version of Psalm 69:9. The psalm describes the sufferings of a righteous man; v. 4 of the psalm is quoted in John 15:25; part of v. 9 is quoted in John 2:17; the rest of v. 9 is cited in this

¹ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 514f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

² *Ibid.*, p. 515.

verse by Paul; v. 12 is echoed in Matthew 27:27-30; v. 21 is cited in Matthew 27:34 and John 19:29; vv. 22-23 appears in Romans 11:9; and v. 25 in Acts 1:20. Christ and the apostle saw an inseparable unity between the Old and New Testaments, and they saw Christ as the federal head of all the suffering saints of history, so that none are alone or unique in their sufferings and troubles. Cranfield noted that many have found it surprising that Paul here quotes the psalm instead of citing examples from Christ's life. But Paul, Cranfield pointed out, is calling for "the recognition that Jesus Christ is the true meaning and substance of the law and the prophets (cf. e.g., 1:2; 3:21; 9:30-10:8)."³ John Knox saw in this a reference "to Christ's divine preexistence," which power and glory He was willing to set aside for our sakes (cf. 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-8).⁴

Thus, v. 3 tells us much with respect to the whole of Scripture. Christ is the new or last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-50), the head of the new humanity and the King of the new creation. He is, however, at the same time both a new creation by His virgin birth (Luke 1:1-2:20; Matt. 1:18-25), and yet also connected to the old humanity of Adam (Luke 3:23-38). He is then the Savior of all saints of both the worlds before His coming and after, and He incarnates Himself to sum up, express, and redeem them and all their sufferings and experiences. Hence, Paul can declare that all things work together for good to the called of God (Rom. 8:28). The fact of the incarnation necessitates the kind of interpretation Paul gives us.

Paul stresses this fact in v. 4. The Scriptures not only give us God's law for our learning but also the hand of God in all events. Seeing Christ in David's sufferings, and in the griefs of many nameless saints (Hebrews 11:32-40), we are to have hope, patience, and comfort. Even as Christ is identified by His incarnation with all these saints who cry out, as in Psalm 69, so too He is one with us. We are never alone, nor are we finally defeated. We cannot undermine the present validity of the Old Testament without weakening our strength, hope, and patience.

The word translated as *learning* is *didaskalian*, meaning teaching, or instruction, so that there is nothing abstract about what we are to learn. This verse applies to the whole of the Old Testament and, by implication, the New. Moreover, the meaning of these words cannot be reduced to a purely personal and pietistic level. The experiences of the prophets and kings in the civil sphere are as fully intended for our teaching and guidance as anything else.

In vv. 5-6, we have Paul's prayer for his readers. He tells us that God is "the God of patience and consolation," a remarkable description. God's

³ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 732f. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

⁴ John Knox, "Romans," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. IX, p. 633. New York, New York: Abingdon Press, 1954.

design and restraint in His work of creation and the government thereof require such a description. His long-suffering with us underscores it, and Paul reminds us thereby that we, who require so much enduring patience from God should be patient and like-minded towards one another. "Unity and harmony of worship will be the result of unity of life."⁵ They will best glorify God by a holy peace with one another.

Verse 7 both sums up the foregoing and introduces what follows: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." *Receive* is *proslambanesthe*, and, in reference to Christ, is *proselabeto*; it can mean *welcome*. Luther translated the sentence thus: "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." This conveys the fact of grace more clearly, grace from Christ, and therefore grace through us. This is a command to both sides; both must manifest grace. In Romans 5:8, Paul says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Given this fact, we dare not be Pharisees. Both sides in Rome regarded themselves as the strong; Paul was ready to see one of them as weak. The heart of his argument is that the church belongs to neither, and they have no right to exclude one another. The church is Christ's not theirs, and Christ has redeemed both sides and is the sole lord and judge of both. The church is always wider and greater than we can know. When Elijah felt that he alone remained in his day, the Lord reminded him that he had "seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). These men were invisible to Elijah, and he may have felt them to be worthless, but God knew them to be instruments of His power in His time and place. Very shortly, he added the young Elisha to Elijah's work, and soon a company of young men.

The weak and the strong in Rome saw each other on a limited scale, on one to three issues: meat, drink, and days. In terms of this, each saw the other as weak, and, plainly, one side was right. There was, however, more to each than those issues. Both could not be right on these issues, but in a variety of ways, each had other strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, because the whole of Scripture manifests God's eternal counsel and plan, so too do the whole of our lives. God gives us His word by revelation, but the application of the meaning of that revelation is hammered out in the griefs, problems, and burdens of life. As sinners, we are slow learners, and it sometimes takes the community of Christ our King centuries to learn some very simple facts. The humanistic revolutionists seek a short-cut to learning by means of power. The seizure of power has

⁵ William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam: *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 396. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark (1895) 1968.

as its goal to speed up history and growth; in reality, it retards or destroys it because it denies the fact of man's fall. It substitutes the planning of an elite for the predestination of God, and the result is disaster.

59. The Promise and the Power (Romans 15:8-13)

8. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9. And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11. And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12. And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.
(Romans 15:8-13)

Paul returns again to the subject of circumcision, but in a remarkable context. He begins (v. 8) by declaring Jesus Christ to be “a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.” He then declares the meaning of circumcision to be the ingathering of the Gentiles. Whereas Israel saw it as the mark of their privilege before God, Paul declares that from the beginning it marked the salvation of the Gentiles.

Geerhardus Vos, some years ago, called attention to the meaning of circumcision. From its inception with Abraham, circumcision meant ethical living, a covenanted life. In fact, “the ethical character of O.T. religion is symbolized by circumcision.” Moses set this forth clearly (Deut. 10:16; Deut. 30:6; Lev. 26:41), as did Jeremiah (Jer. 4:4; 6:10; 9:25-26) and also Ezekiel (Ezek. 44:7). Circumcision set forth the fact that “Human nature is unclean and disqualified in its very source. Sin, consequently, is a matter of the race and not of the individual only.” Moreover,

Hereby the danger was created that natural descent might be understood as entitling to the grace of God. Circumcision teaches that physical descent from Abraham is not sufficient to make true Israelites. The uncleanness and disqualification of nature must be taken away. Dogmatically speaking, therefore, circumcision stands for justification and regeneration, plus sanctification (Rom. 4:9-12; Col. 2:11-13).¹

Because circumcision stands for justification and regeneration, it points clearly to the ingathering of the Gentiles. Israel, by making the covenant a racial fact to some degree, was now giving way to the Gentiles, whose election was clearly of grace. If those same Gentiles now see themselves as

¹. Geerhardus Vos: *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*, pp. 102-105. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

naturally superior and as separated by race rather than by grace, they too shall be set aside.

One writer noted recently how groups now are defined "religiously in strange ways." If the term *Christian* is ambiguous in the States, a typical Israeli definition is even more obscure: "'Anyone who isn't a Jew or a Moslem.' In other words, Hitler was a Christian..."² The fact that Hitler planned the total destruction of Christianity makes no difference to such people. When a member of our staff challenged a friend who identified himself religiously as a Jew, the man answered, "My parents kept the festivals," which amounted to saying that his grandparents were practicing Jews, while his parents maintained a nominal tie with the synagogue. Similarly, when I questioned that militantly humanistic conservative once about his lack of faith in the God he vaguely invoked, he responded in amazement, "What do you think I am, a Jew?" To such people, religion is a matter of cultural background.

This is why circumcision is so important to Paul. He has already made clear that its meaning is that man requires conversion, that not generation but regeneration marks the covenant man. Circumcision sets forth in a rite the cutting off of hope in generation and our confidence that only by the circumcision of our hearts can we be God's people. Now Paul turns to circumcision again to show that the ministry of circumcision was inseparably related to the ingathering of all the Gentiles, of all peoples everywhere. Jesus Christ was a minister sent to the Jews to recall them to this covenant task.

In vv. 9-12, Paul gives several verses from the Old Testament to emphasize this covenantal duty and calling as God's purpose:

Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name. (Ps. 18:49)

Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people. (Deut. 32:43)

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. (Ps. 117:1)

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: (Isa. 11:1)

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious. (Isa. 11:10)

² Sharon Donohue, "Let My People Live," in *Moody Monthly*, vol. 86, no. 2, October, 1985, p. 24.

To understand what Paul means, we must understand what the Old Testament says. In Deuteronomy 32:39-43, God sets forth His vengeance on all His adversaries the world over. Most modern translators render the beginning of Deuteronomy 32:43, "Rejoice in His people, O ye nations," but Paul says, "Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people." This is very different; in the modern versions, the nations are to rejoice in Israel, whereas in Paul's version, they are to rejoice with Israel in God's vengeance and the vindication of His justice. The Septuagint is what Paul cites here, and we have reason to believe that it is a correct rendering. The modern versions place a nationalistic meaning on the verse, and this distorts the entire passage. Paul's concern is the Gentile world: all nations in due time shall see the vindication of God's justice and shall rejoice. That vindication was set forth in Christ's crucifixion. God's judgment on sin was necessary, and mankind could make no atonement for its sin. This atonement Christ, the new Adam, accomplished on the cross, and now the justice and vengeance of God, together with His grace, move out into all the world.

In Psalm 18:49, David rejoices that God has delivered him, and he calls on the Gentile nations to rejoice with him, an absurd statement for his day. But David knew that the Lord is God, not of the Jews only, but of the Gentiles also. He therefore summons all nations to rejoice in the Lord their God, who will in time be the Savior of all. David thus wrote with the full expectation of the ingathering of all nations, and that in time to come peoples of nations unknown to him, like ourselves, would joyfully echo his words.

Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm in the Bible, two verses long. It invites all nations and peoples to praise God for His mercy. This short psalm was perhaps a chorus repeated after other psalms as a reminder of the fact that in due time all nations would believe, obey, and praise the Lord God.

Isaiah 11:1-10 tells us that God's great work of world restoration and dominion will be accomplished through a world King, the Messiah, who shall be a descendant of David and Jesse. He shall be an ensign and a sabbath rest from sin and injustice for all the nations.

Paul is simply reminding the converts from Judaism of their own prophecies, and he instructs the Gentiles in God's promises. When we turn to the present, we find that rabbinic commentaries see the world-wide reference in Psalm 18:49, and Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer says of Psalm 117, "its brevity symbolizes the simplicity of the world order which will prevail after the advent of the Messiah."³ The fundamental difference between Paul and the rabbis of his day was over the identity of the messiah:

³. Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer: *Tehillim*, vol. 4, p. 1397. Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1982.

was Jesus the Messiah, or was He yet to come? *Both look for a world-wide theocratic order under the Messiah.*

In v. 13, we have another benediction. The Lord is described as “the God of hope.” Hope here does not mean a wish, or something we long before, but a present certainty in God’s grace and an assured and guaranteed expectancy of future glory. Paul prays that our God of hope fill us all with “joy and peace in believing,” so that we may “abound in hope.” The way to this is “through the power of the Holy Ghost.” This association with *power* is basic to what the New Testament tells us concerning the Holy Ghost.

Over the centuries, a highly neglected area of doctrine has been precisely this, the doctrine of the Spirit. Among the key reasons for this has been the abuse of this particular aspect of faith. In recognizing this fact, we need to see two things. *First*, the Holy Spirit is declared to be the source of God’s power for us. Our Lord, on the Mount of the Ascension, told His disciples, “For ye shall receive *power*, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). Again and again, over the centuries, the church has had serious problems because men have sought power without grace and have used the name of the Holy Spirit blasphemously as a result. As a result, more than a few of the greatest theologians in the history of the church have been wary of a great stress on the Holy Spirit because disorders are too readily invoked thereby. The quest by churchmen for power without grace is both dangerous and seriously disruptive of the life of faith.

Second, the power of the Holy Ghost in us does not negate the necessity for patient growth. We are *saved* sinners who must remember that; in this lifetime, our sanctification is not complete nor our sin totally eradicated in its effect on our being. In some, the power of the Spirit leads to a false and evil pride, with sorry results. In this country, the Great Awakening in Jonathan Edwards’ day led to remarkable results, both good and evil. More than a few assumed that the Holy Spirit had called them to be judges over their brethren and especially over their superiors in authority. Authorities were challenged in the name of the Spirit with a demand for a radical democracy and equalitarianism. Such a sorry condition develops where the doctrine of the Spirit is isolated from the Bible and from other doctrines.

The fact remains, however, that we require “the power of the Holy Ghost” to do God’s work in this world. Too often, otherwise lovely hymns limit the Spirit to inspiring us and filling us with zeal and love, all well and good, but not the limits of the Spirit’s work. Aaron Williams (1770) began with the right emphasis in his hymn:

Lord God, the Holy Ghost!
In this accepted hour,
As on the day of Pentecost,
O come in all Thy power.

Paul tells us to begin with, that the just man, the man justified by Christ's atonement to live in terms of God's justice, shall live by faith. He reminds us now that the just man is not helpless as he faces an unjust world. He is able to stand, endure, and conquer "through the power of the Holy Ghost." God's promise is that the world shall be Christ's realm, and we shall gain all "through the power of the Holy Ghost."

60. The Man of God's Ordination (Romans 15:14-33)

14. And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.

15. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,

16. That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

17. I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

18. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,

19. Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

20. Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation:

21. But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

22. For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

23. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you;

24. Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

25. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.

26. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

27. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

28. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.

29. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

30. Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;

31. That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;

32. That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.

33. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen. (Romans 15:14-33)

Paul has made his point: the just can only live by faith. Now, as he concludes his letter, he again, as in Romans 1:1-16, speaks of his intention to visit the Roman believers in Christ (16:14-29). One reason for his eagerness to visit Rome is his high opinion of the Christians there (v. 14). Paul's missionary journeys had been one conflict after another, both with civil authorities and with Jewish leaders in those cities. Added to this were conflicts with Christians who felt they knew more than Paul did. Paul wanted the opportunity of spending time with a receptive community of Christians. We must remember that Paul, in many of his epistles (as well as in Acts), is required to spend much of his time defending himself against misrepresentation and slander.

Paul apparently recognizes the centrality of Rome as important to the Gospel; a community of believers there who "are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, also able to admonish one another," made Rome's Christians very important to the future. The subsequent importance of the Church of Rome had many roots; Paul here implies two of them; Rome is the center of the empire, and its Christians are very able and mature believers. *Admonish* (*nouthetein*) means to instruct and to warn. The implication is not of a superior teaching an inferior but of friends counselling one another.

In v. 15, Paul tells the Romans that, because of their maturity, he has written boldly, not because they did not understand, but because they did. Paul feels confident that the implications of his letter are understandable to the Romans. God has given grace to Paul for a great calling, and to these Romans He has given grace to have understanding minds. Paul is fully aware of his God-given authority, and he believes that the Romans are aware and appreciative of it.

Paul had neither established nor visited the Roman community, and he thus feels it somewhat bold on his part to write a pastoral letter to them, but he feels akin to them because of their mature faith.

In v. 16, Paul speaks of himself as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" who is now offering up (*prosphora*) the Gentiles to God, an offering sanctified by the Holy Ghost. The word *prosphora* means a bringing, i.e., a sacrifice. It can refer to any of the various forms of sacrifice, but it obviously has no reference to atonement and much to thanks and dedication. The word translated as *minister* is *leitourgon* which meant in Greek a public servant who performed his duties at his own expense, which Paul did. The public service was in some sense priestly. Paul as God's servant-priest offers up the Gentiles to Christ. Murray said of this, "it has its parallel in Isaiah 66:20: 'And they shall bring all your brethren out of all the nations for an offering to the Lord.' It may be that Paul derived this

concept from the Isaianic passage which appears in a context of blessing to all nations and tongues (cf. Isa. 66:18).”¹

At any rate, Paul says he is working to make the Gentiles an acceptable offering. They shall be acceptable when they are sanctified by the Holy Ghost. Paul thus separates the acceptability of man before God from their status as Jews or Gentiles to rest it upon “the gospel of God” and the Holy Spirit. Hodge commented:

In this beautiful passage we see the nature of the only priesthood which belongs to the Christian ministry. It is not their office to make atonement for sin, or to offer a propitiatory sacrifice to God, but by the preaching of the gospel to bring men, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to God. It is well worthy of remark, that amidst the numerous designations of the ministers of the gospel in the New Testament, intended to set forth the nature of their office, they are never officially called priests. This is the only passage in which the term is even figuratively applied to them, and that under circumstances which render its misapprehension impossible. They are not mediators between God and man; they do not offer propitiatory sacrifices. Their only priesthood, as Theophylact says, is the preaching of the gospel, and their offerings are redeemed and sanctified men, saved by their instrumentality.²

This, Paul says in v. 17, is his ground for boasting, in that he is bringing the Gentiles to God in Christ. Other apostles also worked among Gentiles, but Paul was the ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles in a particularly central way. It is sentences like this in Paul which set badly with modern readers who believe that a false modesty is the highest virtue. Paul has no hesitation either to assert his qualifications and achievements and yet also to declare God’s grace to Him in all that he, Paul, is. Paul gives no place to false humility.

He elaborates on this in vv. 18-20. It is not only his work but Christ’s work in him, and in terms of this Paul has an authority over the Gentiles. This power, mission, and authority Christ has confirmed “through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God.” We again have the association of the Spirit with power. Paul says, moreover, that he is not building on other men’s foundations. In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul declares,

10. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

11. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

¹ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 210. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

² Charles Hodge: *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 691. New York, New York: Armstrong (1883), 1893.

Paul declares himself “a wise masterbuilder” who builds on Christ, and he warns other against any false construction on his foundations.

His building work for the Kingdom had taken him to Illyricum, which is now portions of Albania and Yugoslavia.

In v. 18, Paul, who makes clear his importance in the Lord’s work, now says plainly that what he has accomplished is not his work but Christ’s work in and through him. This Christ has done *by* the power of signs and wonders, and *by* the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). Moreover, he adds, thus far he has not preached where others had preached before (v. 20). His work was in virgin territory. Who then had done the work in Rome? Since Rome was the capitol of the empire, it quickly reflected the trends of the various provinces as men moved in and out of Rome, and we can assume that many Jewish and Gentile converts in Rome were converted on trips to various jurisdictions.

In v. 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 52:15, which speaks of the conversion of the nations. He sees his work as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, a bold and very true statement. He is an important part of God’s predestined purpose. All of us have a place in God’s plan and should move in this confidence in the face of all opposition, enmity, and problems.

In v. 22, Paul adds that the urgency of God’s purposes have thus far prevented him from coming to Rome. He longs to visit the Roman community of saints (v. 23), to minister to them for a time, and to receive help from them for a missionary journey to Spain (v. 24). His work in “these parts” is now finished, Paul says; he “has no more place” there as a pioneer, and so he plans to journey westward into Spain via Rome. Paul explains all this because he wants the Roman Christians to understand that he does not move about in terms of men’s wishes nor his own. It seems likely that the Roman community of Christ had invited Paul to come to them, and hence the explanation of what governs Paul’s travels.

In vv. 25-28, Paul tells them why he cannot come directly to Rome. He must go to Jerusalem to minister to the needs of poor saints there, and his Gentile converts, being debtors to their Jewish fellow Christians, have provided funds for their relief. After performing this service, Paul plans to go to Rome, which indeed he did, as a prisoner (Acts 21:10ff.). Some in Jerusalem, being Judaizers, were doubtful of the integrity of Gentile faith, and Paul planned to *seal* (*sphragisamenos*) this fact; the word *seal* here means an official stamp of attestation and security. The Gentile mission would have a further vindication (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 9:1-15; Acts 24:17).

Paul knows that this journey to Jerusalem means facing the hostility of the leaders of Judea. As a result, he asks for the prayers of the Roman community (vv. 29-33). When he comes to them, it will be with “the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.” Meanwhile, the unbelievers in Judea

are determined to destroy them. He wants his service to be accepted by the believers in Jerusalem, so that he may go to Rome thereafter “with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.”

Paul was rightfully fearful of the dangers of a visit to Jerusalem, but even more certain of the necessity for the trip and the meeting with church leaders in that place. He moves thus not in terms of his will but governed by the calling committed unto him by Christ. His benediction thus is for the Roman believers. He wants their prayers, but, whatever happens, Paul knows that he moves under God’s purpose and benediction. He is God’s man, and the Lord is his shield and defender. Paul has his place in Isaiah’s prophecies, and, supremely, his place in God’s plan. Paul’s mature assurance in Christ governs him now in another great testing. He is a man of God’s ordination. He will therefore go to Rome in God’s time and God’s way.

61. The Church in Rome (Romans 16:1-18)

1. I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:
2. That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.
3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:
4. Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.
5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.
6. Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.
7. Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
8. Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord.
9. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.
10. Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.
11. Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.
12. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.
13. Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.
14. Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.
15. Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.
16. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.
17. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.
18. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:1-18)

Paul had as yet not been to Rome, at least since his conversion, but the Christian community in Rome had many Pauline converts. Paul sends greetings to a number of dear friends there, and their number alone constitutes a small congregation. Moreover, some of these had churches meeting in their homes (Romans 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15), so that the church in Rome was marked by a strong Pauline influence.

This letter to the Romans is sent by the means of a traveller to Rome, Phoebe, who is described (v. 1) as a “*diakon tes ekklesias*,” a servant or deaconess of the assembly or congregation at Cenchrea or Kenchrea, a port of Corinth and about nine miles from that city. Phoebe is a pagan name in

origin, and she was apparently a Gentile convert. She travels alone to Rome and is called a deaconess, indicating that she was an older widow, a deaconess, and with some means. This fact is apparent in that she is in v. 2 a "succourer of many"; the word in Greek is *prostatis*, usually a legal term in Greece describing a citizen who was the defender of resident aliens who had no civil rights. "Ye may assist" is *parastete*, to stand by, again a legal term for standing with someone in court. *The Apostolic Constitutions* have references to deaconesses; Phoebe is the first to be called one. It tells us something of what this first known deaconess did to know that she was also a public defender of Paul and other Christians who were Jews or other aliens; she was a "succourer of many." A myth promoted by anti-Christians, beginning with Pliny, holds that they were slaves and ignorant people; casual references like this make clear the falsity of this charge. The converts were from all classes, and people of note were numerous among them. We are not told what Phoebe's "business" in Rome was, but the Christians there are told to assist her in whatever matter in which she may have need of help.

In v. 3, Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila. In Acts 18:2,26, we are told by Luke that Priscilla and Aquila, banished for a time from Rome with other Jews by Claudius, were in Corinth when Paul arrived. They were also instrumental in the instruction of Apollos, a Jewish disciple of John the Baptist. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, apparently from Phillippi, he sent to the Christians in Corinth the greetings of Priscilla and Aquila, and the church in their house (1 Cor. 16:19). This one couple, with business establishments and homes in three cities, had a church in their home in all three places. They were by occupation "tentmakers," a term which included a variety of other products in leather (Acts 18:3). They left Corinth together with Paul for Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19, 24-26), apparently still another business site as well as a church (2 Tim. 4:19), which would make a fourth congregation.

Thus, *first*, we see evidence of the first legal defense operation under the leadership of a deaconess, Phoebe, and, *second*, the fact that home churches were under the auspices of prominent Christians.

Third, Paul in other letters has much to say about the subordinate place of women in marriage and in the church, and he has been much abused for this. However, his high regard for godly women and their abilities is evident here as elsewhere. We have already noted his reference to Phoebe. In v. 6, we are told of Mary, "who bestowed much labour on us," and in v. 12, Tryphena and Tryphosa, "who labour in the Lord," are referred to. There are references also to Julia, and to the sister of Nereus, as well as to Priscilla. Rufus' mother is described by Paul as "his mother and mine" (v. 13). Rufus is referred to in Mark 15:21 as a son of Simon the Cyrenian, who

was compelled to bear Christ's cross. The family was apparently well known to Paul, and Simon's wife particularly dear to Paul.

Fourth, some of the names were common slave names, among them *Rufus*. This may not have been true of Rufus himself, but Ampliatus (or Amplias) was a common slave name, as was "the beloved Persis" (v. 12). Phlegon (v. 14) is a name we encounter in Xenophon as a dog's name, and it was often given to slaves, as were Hermas and Hermes. The same is true of Stachys and Urbane (v. 9). The term "household of" Aristobulus and of Narcissus may refer to the slaves thereof, or, possibly, another two home churches. These slave names can refer to freedmen, but it is clear that Christianity was reaching all classes, including slaves.

Fifth, the names refer to both Jews and to Gentiles, indicating not only their unity in the church but perhaps also the Pauline influence.

Sixth, Paul refers to Priscilla and Aquila as "my helpers in Christ" (v. 3), and says that Andronicus and Junia "are of note among the apostles;" this is noteworthy. Cranfield comments on Paul's natural ease in describing anyone engaged in some aspect of Christ's mandate as fellow workers (cf. vv. 9, 21; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; Philemon 1, 24); "he did not regard his apostleship as a professor who takes himself too seriously might regard his professorship (there is here no high and mighty sense of superiority)." At the same time, Paul was fully aware of his own importance.¹

Seventh, Paul apparently had relatives in Rome who were Christians. Paul does at times refer to all Israelites as his kinsmen according to the flesh. If this were the case here, he would certainly have so named Priscilla and Aquila, and other Jewish believers. The fact that he does not means that he is referring to members of his own family when he calls Andronicus and Junia "my kinsmen" and denotes that they were "also in Christ before me" (v. 7). Herodion is also called "my kinsman." He sends also the greetings of "my kinsmen," Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (v. 21). The faith divided families in Israel, and Paul's family was one among many so divided.

Eighth, in vv. 17-18, Paul warns them against heretics. He does *not* say "heretics among you," but is rather preparing them for the coming of such men. Paul describes heretics as (a) men who cause "divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned"; (b) they are men who do not serve Christ "but their own belly," i.e., their advantage and advancement; (c) they are often appealing because of their "good words and fair speeches" which "deceive the hearts of the simple." Honest men are more concerned with pleasing God than man. (d) They are to "avoid" all heretics. The word *avoid* is *ekklinatē*, turn away. Paul does not advise

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 785. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

pleading or efforts to convert heretics; he wants them to be given no opportunity for their “good words and fair speeches.” Men are not converted by argument, and heretics are not to be given a forum of even one man. Heretics, Calvin noted of this verse, “ingratiated themselves by a bland address.”² However gracious and courteous the godly man may be, he cannot compromise God’s truth, and he must at times therefore appear as harsh and unbending. Over the centuries, more than a few of the greatest leaders in the church have been subjected to much abuse for precisely this fact, whereas heretics have been praised for their more pleasing ways. More than once Scripture warns us against compromise with troublemakers and heretics. Paul puts it very simply: “avoid them.”

² John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, p. 550. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1947) 1948.

62. Benediction (Romans 16:19-27)

19. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

20. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

21. Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsman, salute you.

22. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.

23. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.

24. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

25. Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

26. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

27. To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.
(Romans 16:19-27)

Paul, in writing to the churches, often used a secretary, and dictated his letters (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Col. 4:18; 2 Thess. 3:17). In v. 22, his secretary, Tertius, inserts his greetings. It tells us something about the writers of commentaries that they do not call Tertius a secretary but an *amanuensis*, which means secretary also. However, using *amanuensis* proves that they are scholars and authorities because they can use such words. Tertius acted as Paul's secretary.

Paul sends greetings from some of the Corinthian believers and his associates. We know Timothy (Acts 16:1-3); Lucius may be the one referred to in Acts 13:1, and Jason may be the same as the man of Acts 17:5-9; Paul's relative Sosipater may be the man of that name cited in Acts 20:4 as Sopater. There is no other reference to Quartus, but we meet the name Gaius in 1 Corinthians 1:14 and Acts 20:4, and Erastus in Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20. It is likely that these men were Christians who at times worked with Paul. Gaius is host to Paul and the whole church (v. 23), i.e., he made his home available not merely to a local congregation but to travelling Christians.

The fact that these various persons sent greetings to the Roman Christians is important. It is not a case of the Church in Corinth wishing the Church in Rome well. It is a case of individuals greeting Roman congregations as personal friends, either from having lived in Rome or having been visited by many of them. Since Greco-Roman inns were also houses of prostitution, and girls were furnished as a part of the room service

and overnight charge, both Jews and Christians routinely stayed at the homes of fellow-believers, men such as Gaius, “mine host, and of the whole church” (v. 23). We see also why hospitality is so strongly stressed as godly virtue and necessity.

In Corinth as in Rome we see prominent people as believers. Gaius was a man of means, able to be the host of travelling Christians in great numbers. Erastus was the *chamberlain* of Corinth; the word is *oikonomos*, a family manager, used here of a city’s manager. This probably meant the treasurer, or, possibly, the manager of public properties. In Corinth, a marble paving block was uncovered in more recent years reading in Latin, “Erastus, commissioner for public works laid this pavement at his own expense.” The inscription dates from the first century, our Erastus’ time. Although an aedile or city commissioner and a city treasurer are differing offices, Cranfield said it was “possible for the same man to have held both offices at different times.”¹

There are some other interesting facets to these closing lines. Again as in Romans 1:8, in 16:19, Paul expresses his appreciation for the faith and strength of the Christians in Rome. In 1:8, he says “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.” This is not intended as hyperbole. Paul was, for example, confident that Phoebe, in coming to Rome, would be helped there in her work, apparently the legal defense of Christians. It would be naive to believe that Paul was the only Christian who was a Roman citizen who filed an appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11). The Christians in Rome may well have taken an active part in such battles. This is not mere supposition. In Philippians 4:22, we have a greeting from the church in Rome to the church in Philippi, “All the saints salute you, and especially those of Caesar’s household” (*kaisaros oikias*). We are often told that this refers to slaves and freedmen, but A.T. Robertson was more accurate in noting, “The term can apply to slaves and freedmen and even to the highest functionaries.”² A man in an imperial household in antiquity could be at one and the same time a slave and yet holding an office comparable to today’s cabinet members in the White House. Paul, writing from Rome, may have been re-assuring the Philippian believers that he was in good hands by making special note of the greetings of the members of Caesar’s household. We know that Jews had often exerted influence on members of Caesar’s staff, and Christians obviously continued this. Much later, even the anti-Christian Diocletian for some time relied on a Christian contingent in his household. The Christians in Rome were very early likely to have been active in the defense of their faith in the imperial court.

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, p. 807. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

² A.T. Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 463. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1931), reprint.

Paul, however, stresses the fact that he prefers to have them “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (v. 19). *Simple* is *akeraious*, guileless, free from evil. He does not want the Romans, who are in close proximity to the pagan imperial power, to become specialists in evil, i.e., well informed on anti-Christian conspiracies by various officials rather than “wise unto that which is good.” Our Lord, in His letters to the churches in *Revelation*, condemns those who specialize in knowing “the depths of Satan” (Rev. 2:24), or the deep things, the conspiracies, of evil forces and persons. Our strength is not in the knowledge of evil but in knowledge and power of the triune God. I have over the years and still regularly receive shelves-full of books and papers about conspiracies from people who seem to believe that salvation comes through the knowledge of evil!

In these few verses, Paul gives us three benedictions, in vv. 20, 24, and 25-27. No man in the New Testament is more prone to bestowing benedictions than Paul. This in itself is significant because a benediction is the pronouncement of a blessing by someone in authority under God upon those under his care. In Scripture, benedictions are pronounced by men like Isaac, Jacob, and Moses, by patriarchs. In some churches to this day, only an ordained pastor can bestow a benediction; others can only invoke it. Thus, the benediction, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with *you* all evermore. Amen,” is to be pronounced by pastors, bishops, and the like, whereas all others must say, “with *us* all.” In the first two benedictions, Paul says “with *you*.” In the third, he invokes God as “Him that is of power to establish *you*.” Paul writes and speaks as a Biblical patriarch second to none. However respectful on occasion of the leaders in Jerusalem, he sees his calling and commission as directly from Jesus Christ. While ready to subordinate himself on occasion to the authorities in Jerusalem, as witness Acts 21:17-26, he saw himself as a patriarch in Christ and with a special vocation. He was right, of course. Paul was not only an apostle of Christ but a patriarch of both Old and New Testaments in his faith and power. He writes with a full sense of his authority, and his benedictions reflect it. Most of the benedictions used by the church to this day are Pauline.

63. Crushing Satan's Power (Romans 16:19-20)

19. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.
20. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. (Romans 16:19-20)

In Genesis 3:15, God tells Adam and Eve indirectly, as He passes judgment on the serpent: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The serpent refers to the devil who acted through him. Our Lord refers to Satan as "a murderer from the beginning," because death came through his work. He says moreover of Satan that "there is no truth in him... for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44). John tells us, "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

Genesis 3:15 is the first prophecy of the incarnation; it is moreover a prediction of victory. The prediction concerning the seed of the woman who shall "bruise" Satan's head is particularly striking because it refers to the seed, not seeds. As Hengstenberg noted, "It is certainly, however, not a matter of chance that the posterity of the woman is not broken up into a plurality." It is in Christ, "the Redeemer, who comprehends within Himself the whole human race," that the victory is made possible. Moreover,

And it is not less significant, and has certainly a deeper ground, that the victory over the serpent is assigned to the seed of the woman, not to the posterity of Adam; and though, indeed, the circumstance that the woman was first deceived may have been the proximate cause of it, yet it cannot be exclusively referred to, and derived from, it.¹

The seed of the woman refers to the Virgin Birth indirectly; it also sets forth the fact that salvation enters the world through a woman, Mary, not through a man, for men would then be even more proud than they already are.

Paul refers to Genesis 3:15 after praising the Roman Christians for their faith. *Because* they are men of *obedience*, they are men of victory. Hence, God shall bruise, or, literally, crush Satan under their feet shortly. We should note, *first*, that Paul praises the Romans for their obedience, and this makes them blessed of God. It is not their obedience, however, which

¹. E.W. Hengstenberg: *Christology of the Old Testament*, vol. I, p. 29f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1956 reprint.

crushes Satan. *Second*, “the God of peace” crushes Satan under their feet. This is the blessing of God to the obedient. We have here not only a plain reference and citation of Genesis 3:15, but also of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Blessings follow obedience, and curses pursue disobedience. *Third*, with the coming of Christ, the way to blessing and victory has been greatly opened up: the Redeemer has come. He indwells in His Church and saints, and He gives them victory. This prophecy of Paul’s is a specific, local prophecy to the Church in Rome. They were not without problems. The Christian Jews had been banished for a time together with all other Jews. They also faced hostility because they were Christians. Thus, a sizable number of people in the early church faced a double prejudice and hostility in the Roman Empire, as Christians, and as Jews. There would, however, be a victory shortly for them. *Shortly* is *entachei*, with or in swiftness, quickly. The Roman believers were on the brink of a local victory for their obedience.

Fourth, the prediction of Genesis 3:15 has also a long-range historical scope. It means that throughout history, and culminating in the grand triumph before the end, Christ’s people and Kingdom shall crush Satan’s head, i.e., destroy his power. There is thus a local, a progressive, and a culminating fulfillment. The joy of the incarnation and of the Christmas season is the assurance of this fact. There is a reference to this fact in Revelation 12:4-9.

Fifth, immediately prior to these two verses, in vv. 17-18, Paul warns against heretics. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul says

13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
14. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Paul presupposes here the whole train of Satan’s history: the temptation and the Fall in Eden, the temptation of Christ and Satan’s failure, the birth of the new Adam in Bethlehem and of a new humanity with Christ’s resurrection, and the existence of Christ’s Body, the new humanity and the beginnings of the new creation. What Satan accomplished in Eden he seeks to accomplish in the Church. He again appears as man’s liberator, “an angel of light.” His ministers claim to be the true ministers of Christ and of righteousness or justice. Instead of God’s justice, they proclaim, however, “social justice,” humanistic justice. They are “false” and “deceitful workers,” and their “end shall be according to their works.” The Roman Church, whom Paul felt sure would avoid heretics, would soon crush Satan’s head in their particular battle.

Calvin's comment on v. 20 is especially good:

What follows, *God shall bruise Satan, & c.*, is a promise to confirm them, rather than a prayer. He indeed exhorts them to fight manfully against Satan, and promises that they should shortly be victorious. He was indeed once conquered by Christ, but not in such a way but that he renews the war continually. He then promises ultimate defeat, which does not appear in the midst of the contest. At the same time he does not speak only of the last day, when Satan shall be completely bruised; but as Satan was then confounding all things, raging, as it were, with loose or broken reins, he promises that the Lord would shortly subdue him, and cause him to be trodden, as it were, under foot. Immediately a prayer follows, — that the grace of Christ would be with them, that is, that they might enjoy all the blessings which had been procured for them by Christ.²

Calvin is right: Paul gives the Roman Church a *promise*, not simply a *prayer* on their behalf. This is a patriarchal benediction. A benediction can include a prayer, and this does, but it is essentially a prophecy.

Paul's prophecy to the Romans applies to all who will receive it. If they avoid heretics, live in obedience, and are "wise unto that which is good," they shall crush Satan's head or power. "Good" is *agathon* (*agathos*). When our Lord says, "No one is good, except one, God," the word *good* is *agathon*, and *agathos* (Matt. 19:17; Mk. 10:18; Luke 18:19). God is *the good*, and to be "wise unto that which is good" is to be wise unto the triune God and His law-word.

² John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 551. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1947) 1948, reprint.

64. Grace and Faith (Romans 1:16-17)

16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17)

Our purpose now is not a review of Romans; that letter is itself a summary statement of God's purpose and is its own summary. Rather, one or two aspects of Romans need re-emphasis because of the errors of our time.

The history of doctrine is a much neglected area of study. We find that some doctrines are generally believed for centuries but without full clarity until an assault on those doctrines forces a re-thinking of all premises. Thus, the doctrines of the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture have been affirmed over the centuries by Catholics and Protestants, yet only with the rise of modernism has serious attention been given to them. The atonement was believed, but, beginning with St. Anselm, serious attention was given to it because of certain contrary opinions, and, from Anselm through the Reformation, the doctrine came into sharper and clearer focus. Men of faith had previously not doubted it, but henceforth men of faith had a clearer understanding of atonement.

The same has been true of the doctrine of justification, and of faith. Romans 1:16-17 are very important to Protestants and yet one of the greatest of the church fathers, St. John Chrysostom, gives relatively little attention to them in his *Homilies on Romans*. He does see faith as a gift of grace, stating, "For you do not achieve it (righteousness before God) by toilings and labors, but you receive it by a gift from above, contributing one thing only from your own store, 'believing.'"¹ Salvation in the Old Testament era was the same as in the Christian era, by grace through faith.² Again, Chrysostom, in commenting on Romans 3:31, saw faith as establishing the law:

What was the object of the Law, and what the scope of all its enactments? Why, to make man righteous. But this it had no power to do. "For all," it says, "have sinned:" but faith when it came accomplished it. For when a man is once a believer, he is straightway justified. The intention then of the Law it did establish, and what all its enactments aim after, this hath it brought to a consummation. Consequently it has not disannulled, but perfected it. Here then three

¹ St. John Chrysostom, "The Epistle to the Romans, Homily II," in Philip Schaff, editor: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. XI, p. 349. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956 reprint.

² *Ibid.*, p. 350.

points he has demonstrated; first, that without the Law it is possible to be justified; next, that this the Law could not effect; and, that faith is not opposed to the Law. For since the chief cause of perplexity to the Jews was this, that the faith seemed to be in opposition to it, he shows more than the Jew wishes, that so far from being contrary, it is even in close alliance and cooperation with it, which was what they especially longed to hear proved.³

Clearly, Chrysostom had an excellent grasp of the meaning of *justification*, even though he does not use the term *per se*. Moreover, while his understanding is sharp, his focus is general because justification was not the issue to him that it was to the Protestant reformers.

Later, in Gottschalk of Orbais, who died in 868 after 18 years in captivity because of the enmity of Hiucmar, we have a clear vision of the meaning of grace and predestination. Florus saw the attack on Gottschalk as “a hidden way of charging Augustine with heresy.”⁴ The battle against Gottschalk was more local than church-wide.

In the later middle ages, the states and empire regained control over the church and wanted the popes and bishops to be less Christian and more congenial to political priorities. As a result, theology within the church became weak and blurred, and such concepts as indulgences were promulgated. W.H. Kent, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (1910), admitted the abuses of indulgences while defending its doctrinal premise.⁵ Cardinal Ratzinger, in being asked about the disappearance of the concept of indulgences, answered:

I would not say ‘disappeared’, but it has lost a lot of meaning since it is not plausible in terms of today’s thinking. But catechesis has no right to surrender the concept. We need not be afraid to admit that — in a particular cultural context — pastoral practice has a hard time making a particular truth of faith understood. This may be the case with ‘indulgences’. But the fact that there are problems translating a truth into current language in no way means that the truth concerned no longer exists. This applies to many other areas of faith.⁶

The cardinal’s perspective is based on his doctrine of the church, not on indulgences *per se*. Now this was the same issue to a large measure in Luther’s day. It is often assumed that it was Luther’s lectures on *Romans* which created the crisis. But Luther began those lectures three years after he joined the faculty at the University of Wittenberg in Saxony. (He had

³ *Ibid.*, Homily VII, p. 380.

⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan: *The Christian Tradition, A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, p. 94. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

⁵ W.H. Kent, “Indulgences,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. VII, pp. 783-788. New York, New York: The Encyclopedia Press (1910) 1913.

⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori: *The Ratzinger Report*, p. 147. San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 1985.

earlier taught there in 1508-1509, and returned in 1511.) The lectures on Romans began on November 3, 1515, and they continued to September 7, 1516. His comments on Romans created no stir. Catholic leaders did not arise in protest. Luther was simply another theologian lecturing on the Bible. However, when on October 31, 1517, he posted the *Ninety-Five Theses*, the repercussions were quick. In 14 days, Luther's *Theses* had traversed all of Germany.⁷ It was only when the *Theses* had covered all of Europe that Luther's teachings on *Romans* came under attack. Of late, Catholic scholars have written in appreciation of Luther, as witness Jared Wicks, S.J.: *Luther and his Spiritual Legacy* (1983). The 500th anniversary of Luther's birth in 1983 was marked by "the enthusiastic participation of many Catholics in the celebrations." Cardinal Ratzinger, in commenting on Luther, singled out Luther's doctrine of the church as the main point of disagreement.⁸

This does not mean that other differences than ecclesiology did not exist. However, the medieval church had contained more than a few differences without rupture, but it did not tolerate a threat to the doctrine of the church. Having said this, we must now ask, did the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith clarify or aggravate the question of salvation? The answer is that first there was a clarification, and then an aggravation and misunderstanding. Both Luther and Calvin maintained the sovereignty of grace in salvation; this requires the doctrine of predestination. If grace is a sovereign gift from above, then it is the act of God, not of man, and salvation is willed by God, not by man. As long as predestination was affirmed, the doctrine of justification remained intact. The rise of Arminianism changed this. Although its roots are in some aspects of Scholasticism, Arminianism went much further than any heterodox thinking on the subject among major Scholastics had done. The result was easy-believism. *Faith* became a verbal contract whereby, if we say "yes" to Jesus, He is forever bound to save us. Arend ten Pas has cited a number of examples of this kind of thinking in our time, as witness these comments by R.B. Theime:

You can even become an atheist; but if you once accepted Christ as your Savior, you can't lose your salvation... Do you know that if you were a genius, you couldn't figure out a way to go to hell?...You can blaspheme, you can deny the Lord, you can commit every sin in the Bible, plus all the others, but there is just NO WAY!"⁹

⁷ Kurt Lanad: *Martin Luther's 95 Theses*, p. 4. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1967.

⁸ Ratzinger and Messori, *op. cit.*, p. 157f.

⁹ Arend J. ten Pas: *The Lordship of Christ*, p. 19f. Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978.

Ten Pas then cites Paul, who says, as against this easy-believism, "... you are saved, *if you hold fast* the word which I preached unto you" (1 Cor. 15:2; cf. Heb. 3:6; John 15:6; Mt. 24:13).¹⁰

This perversion of the doctrine leads to many monstrosities. One young man declared that he had converted a group of homosexuals, every one of them. I asked how many had left their place of sin to follow him to church; none had. A few days ago, a woman, with apparently more money than sense, wrote to me asking for a list of all the publishers of humanistic textbooks in public schools. She boasted that she almost always converted all whom she visited, and she was sure that, after visiting all the publishers, all would be converted, the textbooks changed, and the public schools fully Christian. Can any absurd medieval legend surpass this? Does this not dishonor God as much as the Dominican Tetzl's preaching of indulgences, with his statement,

Remember that you are able to release them (suffering loved ones in purgatory), for

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings.
The soul from purgatory springs.¹¹

We face a serious problem today because the faith is misrepresented.

When we began our study of *Romans*, we saw that what Paul says is not, the just shall be *saved* by faith, but that the just *live* by faith. Now let us examine the statement which has become the identifying mark of Arminianism, *saved by faith*. Is this what Paul sets forth? As a shorthand statement, it has some validity, but Paul, in his plainest statement of the meaning of salvation, gives us the place of faith very clearly:

4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,
5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:
7. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.
8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
9. Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

We have here the unity of doctrine, in that salvation, justification, the Kingdom of God, the church as Christ's body, and the new creation, are all set forth. Hodge said of v. 5,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹¹ Roland Bainton: *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 78. New York, New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950.

We are said to be ‘quickened together with Christ.’ This does not mean merely that we are quickened *as* he was, that there is an analogy between his resurrection from the grave, and our spiritual resurrection; but the truth taught is that which is presented in Rom. 6. 6, 8. Gal. 2, 19, 20. 2 Cor. 5, 14. 1 Cor. 15, 22-23, and in many other passages, viz, that in virtue of the union, covenant and vital, between Christ and his people, his death was their death, his life is their life, and his exaltation is theirs.¹²

The church is thus more than a human institution, and God’s purposes in our salvation is His grace. He saves us by grace in order to manifest “the exceeding riches of his grace” (Eph. 2:7). Salvation is entirely and exclusively by grace. We receive God’s grace by faith which is itself the gift of God. Thus, God not only gives us the gift of His grace, but the faith to receive it. Our faith manifests His grace and receives His grace. Thus, it is not *our* faith *in itself* which saves us, but the grace of God. Thus, it is no act of believing on our part which saves us, but God’s sovereign grace.

Moreover, now being saved, the just shall live by faith. We live and move and have our being outwardly in a false world which rejects God and seeks to establish its own justice and law. At the same time, in Christ we live in the true world of the triune God, by whom all things were made, and to whom all are accountable in terms of His justice and law. We cannot allow ourselves to be governed by sight, nor by self-confidence, nor by any of the aspects of the tempter’s realm; we dare not be our own gods, determining good and evil, justice and law, for ourselves. We live by faith, knowing by God’s grace that His Kingdom prevails, His government increases, His justice and law prevail, and that “of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:7). We live by faith because we have received grace and are now the people of the Lord’s grace and covenant, of His law and justice, and members of His new creation and humanity in Jesus Christ, God became flesh for us in grace and mercy. Believing and living in terms of this, we are the heirs of benediction.

24. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

25. Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,

26. But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

¹². Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 113. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint.

27. To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.
(Romans 16:24-27)

Afternote

Some scholars have seen fit to propagate the notion of a conflict between Paul and James, and between Jesus and Paul, and between Paul and Peter. This is mythical and does little more than to give such men opportunities for “scholarly” interchanges of ideas. In our present context, Peter is not our concern, but let us stress again the fact of agreement on faith and works between our Lord, Paul, and James. Our Lord makes it clear in Matthew 7:15-20 that faith without works is dead, that a good tree bears good fruit, and those who have no consistency between their profession of faith and their works are false prophets and wolves in the flock. Paul makes clear throughout Romans that faith does not make void the law but rather establishes it (Rom. 3:31). James is emphatic that faith without works is dead (2:14-26).

It is important to note that one scholar of late has written very ably on Paul and the law. C.E.B. Cranfield says that for Paul, the law is God’s law, and the law’s goal and meaning is Jesus Christ. “*For Paul, the law is not abrogated by Christ.*” Paul’s term, in Romans 3:21, “apart from the law,” is shorthand for “apart from (or, without) works of the law” (3:28). Moreover, “*For Paul, the giving of the Spirit is the establishment of the law,*” because the Spirit frees him “more and more to give up tampering with God’s commandments in the hope of exploiting them for his self-justification” (p. 861). Thus, says Cranfield, Paul’s “authority cannot be justly claimed for that modern version of Marcionism which regards the law as a disastrous misconception on the part of religious men from which Jesus decided to set us free” (p. 861). “We are true to Paul’s teaching, when we say that *God’s word in Scripture is one.*”¹

Turning now to the question of justification, let us examine the Lutheran and Catholic statements of the Reformation era. The Augsburg Confession declares:

Article IV--Of Justification

Also they teach (the churches with common consent among us) that men cannot be justified (obtain forgiveness of sins and righteousness) before God by their own powers, merits, or works; but are justified freely (of grace) for Christ’s sake through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and their sins forgiven for Christ’s sake, who by his death hath satisfied for our sins. This faith doth God impute for righteousness before him. Rom. iii and iv.²

Luther’s Small Catechism reads

¹ C.E.B. Cranfield: *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. II, pp. 845-862. Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1979.

² Philip Schaff: *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. III, p. 10. New York, New York: Harper & Brothers (1877) 1919.

The Second Article. Of Redemption.

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned man, secured and delivered me (even) from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood, and with his innocent sufferings and death; in order that I might be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead, and lives and reigns forever. This is most certainly true.³

The Council of Trent, of course, also spoke on the matter of justification, as would be expected. Their declaration needs to be compared to the foregoing:

Chapter III. Who are justified through Christ.

But though *He died for all* (2 Cor. v. 15), yet do not all receive the benefit of his death, but those only unto whom the merit of his passion is communicated. For as in truth men, if they were not born propagated of the seed of Adam, would not be born unjust, — seeing that, by that propagation, they contract through him, when they are conceived, injustice as their own, — so, if they were not born again in Christ, they never would be justified; seeing that, in that new birth, there is bestowed upon them, through the merit of his passion, the grace whereby they are made just. For this benefit the apostle exhorts us, evermore *to give thanks to the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light, and hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the Kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption, and remission of sins.* (Coloss. i. 12-14)

The foregoing is also of interest because of the plain reference to being “born again” and the “new birth.” Yet I have had both Catholics and Protestants tell me that Catholics do not use those terms. That Catholics and Reformers had differences is very true, but they *then* centered more on the doctrine of the church, its authority, and its rites, and, related to that; the authority of Scripture. Time widened the differences, and *Romans* gained a more central role in the polemics which followed, so that the doctrine of justification gained a centrality it did not have in the very beginning. Moreover, both Catholics and Protestants pushed their differences on justification to extremes. “Faith alone” versus “faith and works” became a key issue. In the process, it tended to be neglected that Paul did not say that the just are *saved* by faith but that the just shall *live* by faith. The truth has always been, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God* (Eph. 2:8).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

1. Malignant Churches and “Christians” (Galatians 1:1-5)

Paul’s letter to the Romans was not the key issue which precipitated Luther’s reformation. Paul’s letter to the Romans was the subject of Luther’s lecturing in 1515-1516. Then in 1516-1517 the lectures on Galatians followed. Bainton said of Luther’s studies of these two works, “These studies proved to be for Luther the Damascus road.”¹ But it was *The Ninety-Five Theses* that precipitated the Reformation, and at issue was the authority of the Church. We should remember that, long before Luther, St. Thomas Aquinas had held views on *Romans* similar to Luther’s.

Luther himself gave centrality in his experience to *Galatians*, and he stressed the separation of works from faith; he rejected any attempt “to couple works with faith as joint concomitants of justification,” according to Fallows.² Luther felt very strongly about *Galatians*. As Pelikan (and others) have noted, one of his table remarks held, “The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle, to which I am betrothed. It is my Katie von Bora.”³

Calvin also felt strongly about Galatians and commented:

... he (Paul) argues... that we are justified in the sight of God by Free Grace, and not by the works of the Law...

... First, the question could not be settled (by Paul) without assuming the general principle, that we are justified by the free grace of God; and this principle sets aside not only ceremonies, but every other kind of works. Secondly, Paul did not attach so much importance to Ceremonies as to the wicked doctrine of obtaining Salvation by Works. Let it be observed, therefore, that Paul had good reasons for recurring to first principles. It was necessary to go to the fountain, and to warn his readers that the controversy related, not to some insignificant trifle, but to the most important of all matters — the method of obtaining salvation.⁴

Was this, however, the great point of difference with Rome? That differing views existed cannot be denied, but it can be questioned whether the view of informed Catholic scholars on justification was as different from Calvin’s and Luther’s as the views of Wesleyans and Calvinists were in the 18th century. The truly great gap had to do with the doctrine of the church.

¹ Roland Bainton: *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther*, p. 60. New York, New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.

² John Prince Fallows, editor: *Commentary on Galatians by Martin Luther*, p. vii. Erasmus Middleton translation. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1979.

³ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor: *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, vol. I, p. ix. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963.

⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 18. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

Let us note too the statement of a twentieth century Catholic commentator on Galatians, John F. Rowan, who, after discussing the question of whom the letter was addressed to, said:

The solution of this question makes little difference as regards the teaching of the Epistle, that is, that justification and salvation are not to be had through the Mosaic Law, but through faith in Christ.⁵

Could Luther disagree with that? Was that in fact really the problem?

Galatians must be considered together with *Romans* because, while written to a different situation, it stands also on the premise, "The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11).

The differing situation was the Galatian scene. Augustus in 25 B.C. had formed the province of Galatia. Its nucleus was the country of Galatia, where, in the third century B.C. Gauls, Gaels, or Celts had settled. Pontus was added to this province, part of Phrygia, and most of Lycaonia. The Gauls were now the north Galatians, with their center at Ancyra, now Ankara. South Galatia had been evangelized by Paul, in particular Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Scholars have argued intelligently in favor of this letter having been addressed to North Galatia, or to South Galatia. This is not our concern, because, *first*, I have no competence to judge either way, and, *second*, my concern is Paul's relevance here to us, to God's word to our time. With this in mind, let us turn to his letter.

1. Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)
2. And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:
3. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,
4. Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:
5. To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:1-5)

Paul begins by placing himself beyond the criticism and control of his readers. He is an apostle, he declares in v. 1 of the Revised Version of 1901, "not from men, neither through man (or, a man)." Luther's comment here is of interest:

God calls us in two ways, either by means or without means. Today He calls all of us into the ministry of the Word by a mediated call, that is, one that comes through means, namely, through man. But the apostles were called immediately by Christ Himself, as the prophets in the Old Testament had been called by God Himself. Afterwards the apostles called their disciples, as Paul called Timothy, Titus, etc. These men called bishops, as in Titus 1:5ff.; and the bishops called their

⁵ John F. Rowan, "Galatians," in The Catholic Biblical Association: *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 502. 1942.

successors down to our time, and so on to the end of the world. This is a mediated calling since it is done by man. Nevertheless, it is divine.⁶

Luther's doctrine of apostolic succession should be noted. Paul, however, asserts more than Luther at this point cites; Paul sees his calling as separate from the other apostles and more directly supernatural, coming by revelation. Calvin said of this verse, "in the church we ought to listen to God alone, and to Jesus Christ, whom he has appointed to be our teacher. Whoever assumes a right to instruct us, must speak in the name of God or of Christ."⁷ Father John F. Rowan stressed the same facts.⁸

Sanday said of the statement, "not of men, neither by man," "Two distinct prepositions are used: —"not of" (i.e. *from*) "men," in the sense of the ultimate source from which authority is derived; "neither by" (or, *through*) "man," with reference to the channel or agency by which it is conveyed."⁹ Paul is emphatic because there was a major effort to belittle his calling, his teaching, and his person.¹⁰ This was both foolish and dangerous to do, because, in opposing Paul, they were opposing God. If any man wages war against the Lord's faithful servants, he had better have a confirmed revelation from God to do so, or the clearest warrant from Scripture that he must speak as he does. Failing that, he is waging war against God, a common occupation.

Paul makes clear the supernatural calling which is his: he comes to his calling by revelation. He was called by "Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Paul's office is grounded in the eternal will of the Father and the historical fact of Christ's death and resurrection. After the resurrection, the disciples replaced Judas in the Twelve, and one key aspect of the qualification was that he be "a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Paul's experience with Christ was not a mystical affair: the historical, resurrected Christ revealed Himself to Paul and called him.

Conybeare and Howson held that *Galatians* and *Romans* were "written nearly at the same time." They see parallels in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6; Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:17; Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11; "and the argument about Abraham's faith in Rom. iv. compared with Gal. iii." The resemblance, however, they saw as deeper than parallels, despite the different view of the two churches by Paul.¹¹

⁶ Pelikan, *op. cit.*, I, p. 17.

⁷ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 21. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

⁸ Rowan, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

⁹ W. Sanday, "Galatians," in C.J. Ellicott, editor: *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 7, p. 426. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, n.d.

¹⁰ C.A. Anderson Scott: *Foot-Notes to St. Paul*, p. 156. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

In v. 2, Paul includes in the salutation and the general rebuke of the epistle "all the brethren which are with me." These others are not joint writers. They are not, as Lenski noted, in my company, "*meta*, but *sun*," with, "in the sense of supporting me."¹² He addresses the "churches" of Galatia, in whatever part of the province they may be: they have a common error.

Then, in vv. 3-5, a benediction follows. There is none of the usual commendation of a church, as in other epistles, but still a benediction. The word *benediction* comes from the Hebrew *berakkah* which comes from a verb meaning "to fall on one's knees." In Judaism, from ancient times, benedictions began with the words, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord," to which, in prayers, were added the words, "our God, King of the Universe." The two laws of benedictions were, *first*, that every benediction must have the name of God, and, *second*, every benediction must acknowledge God's kingship.¹³ But there is more. A benediction, to be received, requires us to fall on our knees in the sense of acknowledging God's sovereignty and kingship and receiving and obeying His law word. If not, the benediction becomes a curse. Paul, hoping to recall the Galatians to Christ, pronounces the benediction without praise and sets forth the lordship of Christ in salvation. Our redemption is all of grace. God the Father ordained the way of salvation, and God the Son "gave himself for our sins that he might redeem us from this present evil world." Hence, all "glory for ever and ever" must be ascribed to God: man contributes nothing to his redemption.

As Wuest noted, the word *evil* is here not *kakos* but *poneros*, from whence we get our word *pernicious*. Satan is "the *poneros* one," he who seeks to corrupt and drag down all others with himself. The world is evil in this sense: it seeks to drag down all men and the Christian Church together with itself. "Paul says that the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus is that which will rescue the poor lost sinner from the clutches of the pernicious teachings of the Judaizers."¹⁴ While *kakos* is a more general term, *poneros* carries more clearly the fact of malignancy. "This present evil world" is not content to be evil: it wants to destroy or corrupt all that is good.

Paul has given us a summary statement in these verses of Christ's atonement and resurrection. Having been resurrected, Christ ascended into

¹¹ W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson: *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 479. London, England: Longmans, Green, 1905.

¹² R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretations of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, p. 25. Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press (1937) 1946.

¹³ "Benedictions," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 4, pp. 484-489. Jerusalem, Israel: Keter, 1971.

¹⁴ Kenneth S. Wuest: *Galatians in the Greek New Testament*, p. 34. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1944) 1974.

heaven, and, as Simeon noted, “took upon him the government of the world. This is the end he ever keeps in view, in the chastisements he inflicts and in the blessings he bestows.”¹⁵

An important question here is why Paul calls these Galatian groups, given their views, *churches*. The answer is that many assemblies far gone into false beliefs were called churches in the New Testament, and the references in Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 to synagogues or assemblies of Satan may refer in part to some such groups. A *church* incurs by that name both special blessings *and* also special curses, for “judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). The greater the responsibility, the greater the culpability. Jeremiah 7:8-16 is important in this context. Jeremiah said of the people of Judah, antinomians to the core, that they said in effect, “We are delivered to do all these abominations” (Jer. 7:10). Simeon said of the church of his day,

The truth is, that Christians in general differ very little from either Jews or Heathens. Christianity occupies their heads; but heathenism their hearts. They pretend to have faith: but, as for “the faith that overcomes the world,” they know nothing about it. Their whole life, instead of being occupied in a progressive transformation of the soul after the Divine image, is one continued state of conformity to the world: and, instead of regarding “the friendship of the world” as a decisive proof of their “enmity against God,” they affect it, they seek it, and they glory in it.¹⁶

The Galatians were malignant churches and peoples. They had attacked Paul and had challenged his credentials. Paul does not compromise, nor does he assume that sweetness and honeyed words are the answer. He attacks them unsparingly in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁵. Charles Simeon: *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, vol. 17, *Galatians, Ephesians*, p. 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint of 1847 edition.

¹⁶. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

2. The Anathemas (Galatians 1:6-10)

6. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7. Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

10. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.
(Galatians 1:6-10)

Paul wasted no time: he plunges into his attack on the Galatians. He is amazed at the speed with which they are “removed” from the triune God who called them into the grace of Christ. The word “removed” means turned deserter or turncoat; they have gone over to “another gospel” which is no true gospel but a perversion (vv. 6-7). Paul calls them apostates when he applies the word *metatithemi*, removed, to them. They are deserters, apostates, and malignant men, a part of the evil world they were called out of. Wuest said of *metatithemi* that it means “to transpose two things, one of which is put in the place of the other.”¹ This means that the Galatians are worse than open enemies of Christ. From within the church, they betray the gospel of Christ. They had been called from the sphere of God’s curse into the sphere of His grace, but they were there under false pretenses. “Another gospel” is “heteron evaggelion”; they are heterodox, not orthodox, but Paul says that even this is to say too much for them. While Paul says, “there be some that trouble you,” or disturb you mentally, the guilt is theirs; they have themselves turned apostate and have listened readily to falsity. They listen to men who seek to “pervert the gospel of Christ.” i.e., to turn it into its opposite. We have many such people with us in our time. Paul writes with vehemence; he feels very strongly about the sin of the Galatians, and he makes sure they know it. Today, church papers on great evils, and papal encyclicals as well, are carefully and diplomatically worded, lacking in Paul’s moral passion. Among Catholics and Protestants alike, too often righteous indignation is frowned on and kindly statements are preferred.

¹. Kenneth Wuest: *Galatians in the Greek New Testament*, p. 35. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Erdmans (1944) 1974.

In vv. 8-9, Paul twice pronounces a *curse* on all who preach a false gospel. According to Croskery, this is directed at the false teachers.² Technically, this is true, if we limit *preach, evangelizetai*, to the formal ministry. It can mean anyone who speaks of or tells another of ostensible good news; thus, it covers all in Galatia who heard the false gospel, assented to it, and witnessed one to another or to others favorably to its errors. Meyer described the curse as “indirect.”³ It is indirect in the sense that no man is named, so that it applies to all who in any way are party to another gospel. Calvin saw the heart of that true gospel as Christ’s mediatorial office and declared, “we are *removed from Christ*, when we fall into those views which are inconsistent with his mediatorial office; for light can have no fellowship with darkness.”⁴ In 1635, Luther wrote, “By the grace of God we here in Wittenberg have acquired the form of a Christian church.”⁵ This gives us an indication of Luther’s thinking: the issue for him was at least in part the church and its place in God’s plan.

Paul pronounces a curse on all who alter the gospel. Ridderbos observed, “And not only is the truth more than the highest-ranking minister of God, but as the *gospel* — which constitutes the norm of the divine redemption in the world — it is so holy that anyone who independently modifies it brings the curse of God down upon his head.”⁶

Paul is here saying nothing new. He says, “*As I’ve said before, so I say now again*, If any man preach any other gospel... let him be accursed.” This had been Paul’s teaching in person; it had been the apostolic preaching of all of God’s servants. Paul uses both “we” and “I” to make this clear. This letter was saying nothing new. He precludes any appeal to any other apostle; when he refers in v. 2 to “all the brethren” who agree with him, Paul may well have referred to the leaders in Jerusalem and elsewhere, to John, James, Peter, and the rest. His anathemas against the Galatians have a common assent.

The word accursed or curses is literally *anathema*; it refers to that which is devoted to God; the Septuagint uses *anathema* to translate the Hebrew *herem*, ban or banned, that which is set apart to be annihilated. It cannot be redeemed (Lev. 27:28). A person who is accursed contaminates everything

² T. Croskery, in H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, editors: *The Pulpit Commentary: Galatians*, p. 46. New York, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, n.d.

³ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 18. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers (1884) 1983.

⁴ John Calvin: *Commentaries on Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 29. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor: *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, chapters 1-4*, p. 45. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963.

⁶ Herman N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 50. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

he possesses (Josh. 7:24-25). He is given over to annihilation. We can understand why Paul names no man. This sentence from God hangs over the head of all unless they separate themselves from heresy. To curse or "To ban is the right of the conqueror (Jos. 11:21; 1 Sam. 15:3ff.)."⁷ God as the great and ultimate conqueror is thus the one true author of anathemas. Whereas in the Canaan conquest, God directed Israel to enforce a particular judgment, as on Jericho, normally a curse removes the person from human judgment to God's judgment, i.e., to total and ultimate judgment unless there be repentance. Paul stops short of a full anathema by naming no man, and he thereby sets forth where the curse applies in order to enable men to escape it. His hard and blunt language is thus a form of mercy.

In v. 10, Paul answers the charge of being a man-pleaser: "For do I now persuade men, or God?" C.A. Anderson Scott rendered this, "*am I now seeking to curry favour with men* (as my opponents say I do by making things easy for the Gentiles), *or is it God I seek to please?*", a telling paraphrase.⁸ Paul was being charged by the Judaizers with preaching an easy salvation, of grace rather than works, of accommodation to men rather than to God. Lenski ably and beautifully described Paul's statement:

Paul meets all this with sudden, smashing questions. Indeed, does anybody who is trying to please men approach them with anathemas? The present tense is conative: "Am I now trying to get the approval of men — seeking to curry favor with men?" If at any time before I have spoken softly, is this now soft language? And have we not before, when we were with you Galatians, spoken in the same uncompromising way (v. 9)?⁹

Paul is determined to hit hard, to smash the confidence of the Galatians and to awaken them to the enormity of their evil. Paul's gospel is the gospel of grace, which means that salvation is entirely the sovereign act of God. Similarly, judgment, being accursed, is the sovereign act of God and is the other face of God's sovereignty in salvation. Their false gospel places saving power in man's hands by works and opens up the way for their reprobation. Machen said of the anathemas:

So here Paul says — if the original sense of the word is to be regarded as still in view — that the punishment of the man who attempts to lay violent hands upon the gospel of Christ should be in God's hands; that man should be regarded as beyond men's power to help; he should be

⁷ H. Aust, D. Muller, "Anathema," in Colin Brown, editor: *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. I, p. 413. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1967) 1975.

⁸ C.A. Anderson Scott: *Foot-Notes to St. Paul*, p. 157. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

⁹ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, p. 43f. Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press (1937) 1946.

regarded as having fallen into that state about which the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."¹⁰

Paul knows that the true preaching of the gospel goes against the grain of fallen man's nature; it is not he but his enemies who are the pleasers of men. Paul was ready to be "all things to all men" in the sense of approaching them on their level with grace (1 Cor. 9:19-23) in order to save them, never to please them. In spite of his graciousness, he was commonly accused of ulterior motives (1 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Cor. 9:12-18; 2 Cor. 10:1-6; 11:7-15). Men who are determined to find fault will never lack excuses to criticize. Such men want conflict, not reconciliation. But Paul says, if I at all compromise the gospel to please men, "I should not be the servant of Christ." His point is clear: he says, I am the servant of Christ, and you face His curse unless you repent.

¹⁰. John H. Skilton, editor: *Machen's Notes on Galatians*, p. 48. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1973.

3. Paul's Calling (Galatians 1:11-24)

11. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.
12. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.
13. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:
14. And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.
15. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,
16. To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:
17. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.
18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.
19. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.
20. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.
21. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia;
22. And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ:
23. But they heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once before he destroyed.
24. And they glorified God in me. (Galatians 1:11-24)

Paul begins (v. 2) his letter by making clear that "the brethren," other leaders in the churches, are with him in what he has to say. Now he begins to recount some personal history in order to make clear that he speaks by the direct and inspired authority of Jesus Christ. His calling as an apostle has come to him by revelation. Paul was ready on occasion to listen to the counsel of other apostles, as Acts 21:15-26. Paul, however, knows how great his commission is to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and also to set forth the truth of God. He does not hesitate to correct Peter on a critical point, and also James and Barnabas, and it is clear that they accepted his rebuke (Gal. 2:8-13). At the same time, Paul acknowledges the power of Peter's work. Paul thus asserts his *prophetic apostleship*. The Old Testament prophets spoke directly from God, not under the authority of the king or of the high priest. Paul was very familiar with this prophetic power, and he himself manifests it and asserts it. He is the New Testament prophet, in that he alone, like the prophets who said, "Thus saith the Lord," speaks from the Lord. John in *Revelation* is also a prophet, but his other writings are apostolic. In vv. 11-12, we have Paul's blunt statement to the Galatians that

they are face to face with God's man, one chosen by revelation. Because Galatia was a Gentile province, Paul refers to "the Jews' religion" (v. 14), as something outside the experience or close knowledge of many. Hence too he sets forth his status in terms of a current revelation rather than an ancient prophetic office.

Some scholars have worked painstakingly to piece together the chronology of Paul's three years after his conversion (v. 18) in terms of comments in various letters and Acts. Part of the problem is that Paul is not concerned with giving us an accounting of his time but of his calling, and so his citations have a different focus.

Paul, moreover, is making a very important point about *authority*. On the authority of the Sanhedrin, Paul had persecuted Christians (vv. 13, 23); his authority then had a human legitimacy which he never denies. Paul is never an enemy of such authority. A startling instance of this appears in Acts 23:1-5:

1. And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.
2. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.
3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?
4. And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?
5. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Two points here are of particular interest to us. *First*, the high priest's order was doubly contrary to law. Smiting a Roman citizen was a crime in Roman law, and Paul was known to be a Roman citizen. It was also against God's law to strike an unconvicted man (Deut. 25:1-2), and an injustice (Lev. 19:35). Nicodemus earlier had summed up the matter thus: "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51). The high priest had acted lawlessly and in contempt of the very law he was required to uphold.

Second, Paul responds to the statement, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" by stating that he did not know that Ananias was the high priest. Paul was no longer closely in touch with Jewish affairs and was thus not aware of the identity of the man who gave the order. Paul does not retract his statement; instead, he cites God's law in Exodus 22:28, "Thou shalt not revile the gods (elohim, judges), nor curse the ruler of thy people." Let the high priest be lawless: Paul will obey God's law. This response is certainly a rebuke to Ananias; it makes clear that Paul respects God's law fully, and Ananias not at all. Given this fact, it is still an apology. Paul does *not* say that his statement was in error, but rather that he was in error by making

it. This is an important distinction. The law of God recognizes that authorities in church, state, family, and other spheres as well are not infallible and can err. We do not have the freedom to correct them at will, nor to obey them whatever they say or do. No human authority is absolute, but it is all the same *authority*. Dissent must be legitimate and orderly under most circumstances. Paul's next step (Acts 23:6-9) was to divide the council by calling attention to the issue of man's resurrection from the dead, an issue which divided the Sadducees and Pharisees. By this strategy, Paul put the Pharisees on his side!

We see Paul's respect for authority but, at the same time, his practical wisdom in dealing with it. Men who insist on their authority most wisely are those who respect it in others. Paul's autobiographical comments have as their purpose his insistence on his authority as second to none, humanly speaking.

In this context, v. 15 is very important. In Jeremiah 1:4-5, God tells Jeremiah that He called him from his mother's womb, and before that. Paul as also a prophet says, that God by God's sovereign "good pleasure," "separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace." Calvin's comment here is excellent:

Paul's words... assert, that his calling depends on the secret election of God; and that he was ordained an apostle, not because by his own industry he had fitted himself for undertaking so high an office, or because God had accounted him worthy of having it bestowed upon him, but because, before he was born, he had been set apart by the secret purpose of God.

Thus, in his usual manner, he traces his calling to the good pleasure of God. This deserves our careful attention; for it shows us that we owe it to the goodness of God, not only that we have been elected and adopted to everlasting life, but that he deigns to make use of our services, who would otherwise have been altogether useless, and that he assigns to us a lawful calling, in which we may be employed. What had Paul, before he was born, to entitle him to so high an honour? In like manner we ought to believe, that it is entirely the gift of God, and not obtained by our own industry, that we have been called to govern the Church.¹

At the time of his conversion, Paul says, he had "profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation" (v. 14), or, he had advanced or made progress to the point that he was a prominent person in the leadership in Jerusalem. His conversion was thus a religious event of great consequence.

John Brown, in his analysis of these verses (11-24), summarized it thus: The thesis to be proved is the supernatural source and authority of Paul's

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 41. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

apostleship. *First*, Paul cites his character as a Jew, a man of great stature in his learning, and a foe to Christians. *Second*, Paul tells of his conversion and call. *Third*, after his conversion, (a) he “conferred not with flesh and blood;” (b) he did not go up to Jerusalem; (c) he went into Arabia; (d) and he then returned to Damascus. *Fourth*, three years later, he went to Jerusalem, but only for three days, and he saw only Peter and James. *Fifth*, he then went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia and was not personally known to the churches of Judea.²

The reference to James, “the Lord’s brother” (v. 19), is interesting. “The form of this sentence is such that we cannot tell whether Paul regarded James as an Apostle or not. It might mean, ‘I saw no other Apostle except James,’ or, ‘I saw no other Apostle, but I saw James.’”³ What is clear is that Paul regards the two most important men in the church to be Peter and James, and he meets with them as an equal. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5,7,8, tells us that Christ in His resurrection appearances, besides presenting Himself to the Twelve, and to over 500 brethren, made personal appearances to Peter (Cephas), James, and Paul. The three thus have a place of note in God’s plan. Since Paul tells us in Galatians 2:1-2 that, after 14 years, he went to Jerusalem “by revelation,” the inference is that prior to that time Paul avoided personal contact with the apostolic fellowship in Jerusalem because God forbid it. Paul’s calling was unique; he was not called to be under Jerusalem nor to be in controversy with it, only to serve His Lord.

Moreover, in vv. 23-24 Paul tells the Galatians something they well knew, that the churches which had once feared Paul now “glorified God in me” because their former persecutor was now Christ’s apostle in power. As Ridderbos noted, Paul reminds the Galatians “that these churches did *not* doubt the genuineness and integrity of Paul’s calling and preaching” even though some of these churches had previously suffered because of Paul, whereas the Galatians had received only good from him.⁴

It is important to note here that Paul stresses the fact that his *calling*, not his *gospel*, is unique. Meyer was correct in stating, “ver. 23 rests on the legitimate assumption that Paul preached in substance no other gospel than that which those churches had received from Jerusalem.”⁵ Meyer then added unhappily that “the special peculiarities” of Paul’s preaching only appeared later, whereas in fact Paul’s preaching remained consistent. The

² John Brown: *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians*, pp. 59-69. Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1957 reprint.

³ C.A. Anderson Scott: *Foot-Notes to St. Paul*, p. 157. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

⁴ Hermann N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 74. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

⁵ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 37. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson (1883) 1983.

peculiarities came from the Judaizers, not from Paul: Paul's preaching is an apostolic preaching. God used Paul's great learning and power to protect the apostolic word from the tamperings of men. In the early, formative years of Paul's ministry, the Lord kept Paul in isolation from Jerusalem in order to enable Paul to develop his understanding of the relationship of the gospel both to the Greco-Roman world, its thought and its culture, as well as to Judaism. As a Roman citizen of wealth and note, and a former leader in Judaism, Paul was used by the Lord to set forth the uniqueness, power, and implications of the Gospel. We cannot do without Paul, nor have we yet caught up with him. Peter in 2 Peter 3:15-16 speaks of the wisdom given to Paul. "Given him" is *dotbeisan autoi*; "wisdom" is *sophian*. Peter tells us that Paul's writings represent wisdom from God, so that Paul, like himself, speaks from the Lord. It is amazing that so many scholars see an implied criticism of Paul in Peter's words! Peter calls Paul "our beloved brother," and he says of all who misinterpret Paul, that they "wrest" them, "as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). This is Peter's promise from the Lord: misinterpret Paul, and you will destroy yourself. As our Lord says of all Scripture, "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). The word "broken" is *luthenai* (luo), meaning that we cannot loosen the full force of any word of God.

4. The Council of Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10)

1. Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.
2. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.
3. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:
4. And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:
5. To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.
6. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:
7. But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter;
8. (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)
9. And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision.
10. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. (Galatians 2:1-10)

Fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem, Paul returned to attend the council of the church (Acts 15:4-33). The issue had been created by the Pharisees who had come into the church and whose stand with regard to Gentile converts was that entrance into the church *required* two things, circumcision, and keeping the law of Moses. This meant that *baptism* and *God's sovereign grace* had been replaced by the requirements of the Pharisees; works had replaced grace, and salvation had been redefined.

As against this, Peter gave his witness, that God had first used him, "a good while ago," to convert the Gentiles. In the conversion of Cornelius, Peter said, in a plain challenge to any Pharisees within the church, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Peter then "*commanded* them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:47-48). Peter was aware of the hostility of the Judaizers, or the Pharisees in the church, to such a baptism, and hence he *commanded* it. When Peter then went to Jerusalem, he faced their opposition: "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11:3). Here we see the issue: the Judaizers were

for evangelizing the Gentiles, but for them this meant making them Jews first and then Christians. *Judaism for them was the mediator to Christ. For Paul and others, salvation was not through Judaism but through Christ.* The Judaizers said, be circumcised, keep the law, and *then* you can come to Christ. For Paul, a man cannot keep the law without Christ and the Spirit; when he is made a new creation in Christ, then a man can begin to keep the law. The Council of Jerusalem agreed. To avoid offense to Jewish converts, and to make clear that the faith requires a law and a different life, the Council said that those being converted and baptized be required as “necessary things,” to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (Acts 15:28-29). Three of these four requirements have to do with diet, the other with sexual acts. All four were simple matters; if a person coming forward for baptism were unwilling to be faithful in these matters, he would be unwilling to grow in grace or in sanctification. Sadly enough, those who today insist on seeing the decision at Jerusalem as a vindication of their antinomianism are *unwilling* to obey these simple dietary rules, and are often lax with respect to fornication. It should be noted that it is Peter and James who at the Council of Jerusalem speak decisively against the Judaizers. Paul and Barnabas simply report on the “miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (Acts 15:12). The Council commended Paul and Barnabas in its letters, and it also sent out two men to give a like report orally (Acts 15:25-27).

According to Acts 15:2, the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem for the council. In Galatians 2:2, Paul says he went “by revelation.” Paul sees himself as called by the Lord and responsible to Him; at the same time, he is never defiant of church authorities, so that the coincidence of both is responsible for his trip to Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas communicate with the men “of reputation,” men of eminence, men of recognized and due authority. He does so “lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (v. 2). This does not mean that Paul was not sure of his position, or that he feared God had misled him. Rather, knowing only Peter and James, and them only slightly, he wondered whether or not the leadership in Jerusalem was of the Lord and worth serving. He took with him Titus, *an uncircumcised Gentile*, as a test case, a test of Jerusalem, not of himself. The church in Jerusalem did *not* require circumcision of Titus (v. 3).

Looking back at the Council, Paul now says that he believes the Judaizers were (and are) a conspiracy against Christ and His church. They “came in privily,” or secretly, “to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (v. 4). We see such subversions of the church today by Marxists and other humanists; we should not be surprised that it took place in the earliest days of church

history. At no point, and for not an hour, did we yield a single point to them (v. 5). As against his opposition, Paul was confident in his apostolic authority. In v. 6, it seems clear that some of Paul's opponents were prominent men in Judea; he is *not* here referring to James, Peter, and John, to whom he refers later, in v. 9. Luke in Acts 15:4-33 makes clear that Peter and James stood with Paul and Barnabas, and John is not mentioned as speaking. Paul's accusers were not the apostles, and at one point at Antioch the Judaizers opposed and briefly affected Peter (Gal. 2:11-14), and even Barnabas was also influenced. In the Antioch episode, the emissaries were associated with James, but Paul does not blame James, which may or may not mean something. What he does say (v. 7) is that, after the presentation, in which he, Barnabas, Peter, and James were prominent, all concerned (v. 9) gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship." It was a clear-cut and unequivocal victory. Their enemies then had to adopt more subtle and indirect tactics. Indeed, the Council apparently saw Peter and Paul as the two leaders of the church, the one in his ministry to the circumcision, the Jews, the other, Paul, to the Gentiles, or the uncircumcision (vv. 7-8). All that the Council asked of Paul and Barnabas was "that we should remember the poor (in Judea); the same which I was also forward to do" (v. 10).

Much had been made of Paul's reference in v. 9 to "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars." No disrespect is even implied here. Rather, Paul says that these three men, in Kenneth Wuest's translation, "those who in reputation were looked upon as pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." Paul's implication is this: if you disagree with me, you disagree with the three men whom the church regards as its pillars. In vv. 11ff., Paul adds that Peter was ready to take correction from Paul. In other words, Paul's position is no aberration in the church: it is central to its faith. "The right hand of fellowship" was a public act by Peter, James, and John; it made unanimous the Council's decision, because none would dare an open dissent from Paul, Peter, James, and John.

It is important to note that in v. 2 Paul says that, before the open Council meeting began, he met secretly or "privately" with the leaders, Peter, James, John, and possibly a few others. These leaders thus went into the Council prepared and in a firm agreement with Paul. This was not church politics; it was done to protect the divine integrity of the Gospel from the devices of men.

The requirement of help to the poor is revelatory of the Old Testament nature of the church. Charity is basic to the law and the prophets. No group in Israel dared depart from this requirement. "The Pharisees taught that almsgiving, the study of the Torah, and the temple service were the

three pillars on which the world stood.”¹ Paul’s ministry was marked by such a concern, so that he was happy to continue in this course.

A final word: Paul describes the opposition as “false brethren,” i.e., pseudo-Christians. He does not say that at that time he recognized them as such, only that he and the leaders in Jerusalem were concerned and were careful in dealing with their opposition. Subsequent events seem to indicate that Paul first recognized their falsity.

¹. Raymond T. Stamm, “Galatians,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 10, p. 476. New York, New York: Abingdon Press, 1953.

5. Defender of the Faith (Galatians 2:11-21)

11. But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.
12. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.
13. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.
14. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?
15. We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,
16. Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.
17. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.
18. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.
19. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.
20. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
21. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:11-21)

At the Council of Jerusalem, the apostles faced the challenge of the Pharisees in the church who believed that Judaism was the mediator to Christ; before becoming a Christian, a man had to be circumcised and to keep the law and then he could become a Christian. The Council ruled against these Pharisees; the law is not the means of salvation but of sanctification. To become a Christian means to know the grace of God through faith. Four simple requirements alone could precede baptism, three of them relating to diet, the fourth to sexuality. These *requirements* were a roadblock to antinomianism. If a man before baptism were unwilling to meet these simple things, how could he be baptized? Would he not be totally contemptuous of God's law thereafter? The apostles were seeking to do two things in their Council decision. *First*, they denied that Judaism is the mediator to Christ, or that salvation is by works of the law. The position taken by the Pharisees was unbiblical and faithless to the Old Testament. *Second*, while trying to prevent a works salvation, they were also seeking to forestall and ban antinomianism and any contempt for the law, and hence the requirements which they imposed.

But, Paul tells us, the Pharisees, while compelled to give assent because of the stand of Peter, James, and John, continued their attempted subversion by means of a less open and more devious strategy. Paul says that this led to serious problems in Antioch. The Judaizing Pharisees, or their representatives, came and influenced Peter, Barnabas, and others, leading men to be “dissembled” and “dissimulation.” In the Greek, the word *dissembled* is *sunupokrithesan*, and *dissimulation* is *hypokrisei*; both words are forms of *hypokrisis*, or *hypocrisy*, a pretense. This Phariseeism led to hypocrisy even on the part of these great leaders of the church.

What was it that led to this hesitancy and then hypocrisy on the part of Peter, Barnabas, and others? Was it an actual message from James, the brother of our Lord? The text in v. 12 does not say so. Robert Young’s literal translation of the clause is this: “for before the coming of certain from James.” Two other versions give these readings:

Before certain persons came from James, he had been in the habit of eating with the Gentile converts. (Twentieth Century New Testament)

It happened like this. Until the arrival of some of James’ companions, he, Peter, was in the habit of eating his meals with the Gentiles. (J.B. Phillips)

These men did *not* come with a specific message from James; had they done so, Paul would have made clear his opinion of James’ error, as he did Peter’s. They may have been members of James’ church or synagogue (assembly). Robertson commented that these men tried to give the impression that they represented James. “No doubt these brethren threatened Peter to tell James and the church about his conduct...”¹

What was the problem? We are told that Peter had been *eating* with the Gentiles. Had Peter been eating blood, or “things strangled”? As a life-long Israelite, Peter would have been sickened at such food. No such charge of violating the mandate of the Council of Jerusalem is once mentioned. Had Peter been eating foods in violation of an order by the Council which was largely of his own making, humanly speaking, Paul would say so, and Peter’s critics would have made much of it.

What then was the *eating* problem? It was forbidden, and is still forbidden to Orthodox Jews, to eat with Gentiles. Moreover, a variety of extra-Biblical rules and regulations concerning utensils prevailed. Neither such eating nor such niceties with respect to utensils are Biblical, although there is a superficial plausibility. There are some rules with respect to clean and unclean cooking. Also, in Scripture eating is a form of communion with both God and man; it is a time for prayer and for fellowship. Among

¹. Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 287. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House (1931) reprint.

some peoples of antiquity and in some instances into the 20th century, eating with someone has been a treaty of peace or a covenant act. The Pharisees had taken these things and legislated all details to set up standards of super-holiness and unwarranted separations.

All this was for Peter and Barnabas, and the others as well, a gray area, and they reacted with confusion and hypocrisy. And all this was no small grief to Paul.

These visitors were apparently people of note, distinguished Pharisees who were supposed converts. Lenski noted, of v. 12:

“From James” is scarcely the same as “from Jerusalem.” These people were not sent by James, did not represent him. They were from the circle about James, in close association with him.²

They were persons of note, or represented persons of note. On the mission field, very often a prominent convert, even while having no position within a church, can exercise an undue influence because of his status and power. Paul, a man of great note himself, was ready to deal with such men and best equipped to do so. He cites the Council of Jerusalem, because it vindicated him; he now cites the Antioch incident, because it again vindicated him. He reviews what is common knowledge to remind the Galatians that the cause of Paul is the apostolic faith. Men like Peter and Barnabas accepted Paul’s rebuke and correction: can the Galatians be so foolish as to think themselves wiser than Paul and the apostles?

“The truth of the gospel,” (v. 14) this is Paul’s concern. He defends it against both Judaizers and against antinomians. *First*, he declares plainly to the Pharisees and their adherents that “a man is not justified by the works of the law,” that no man, Jew or Gentile, can be justified by the works of the law (v. 16). The covenant privilege of the Jews is not another way of salvation than by the electing grace of God. The word *justified* has reference to a court of law: it is a legal term. Men stand justified before God’s court not by anything other than the atonement of Jesus Christ. It is through the law, God’s court and Christ’s atonement, His death in our stead, that we are “dead to the law” (v. 19), i.e., we have been legally executed in the person of Christ for our sins. “The law” here means God’s indictment of us and the death penalty passed against us. When a man is legally executed, that law or death penalty no longer has a case against him: the man is “dead to the law.” When we see ourselves as sinners before God we are “crucified with Christ,” and Christ now lives in us, and we live in terms of His life, covenant, and law. We give ourselves to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us (v. 20).

² R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, p. 95. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press (1937) 1946.

Second, Paul speaks against the antinomians. In v. 17, he says, in the translation of Conybeare and Howson, “But what if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we have indeed reduced ourselves also to the sinful status of unhallowed Gentiles? Is Christ then a minister of sin? God forbid!” Lubbers comments on this

Paul now asks a very telling and arresting question. He asks “Is therefore Christ the minister of sin?” It would seem that seeking to be justified by faith in Christ would need to lead to that conclusion. If there were absolutely no need to keep the law in order to be justified, then the law could be set aside and men could lead lawless lives. To that terrible position, it seems, the free grace in Christ must lead. Christ, instead of making men keepers of the law, makes men transgressors of the law by this teaching of the truth of the Gospel. And so Paul asks the question whether those who seek to be justified in Christ are not in the ministry of sin, rather than in the ministry of grace!³

We must add that Paul thus closes the door to either a works religion, salvation by law, or an antinomian religion, “grace” with lawlessness.

As against the Pharisees, he says that a works salvation, or salvation by law, means that “Christ is dead in vain.” Why the death of God’s incarnate Son if another way of salvation is possible? We cannot be made just by our own works, because this would place God in a position of obligation to us, a preposterous and blasphemous notion.

Paul concludes, “I do not frustrate the grace of God” (v. 21). The word *frustrate* is *atheto*, to make void. Paul’s implication is clear. Anyone who relies on the law or works for justification is denying and making void the grace of God. Again, if any see God’s grace as the denial of the law and its validity, they make “Christ the minister of sin” (v. 17), and thereby also deny or make void the grace of God. Such men in effect write a new Bible, or they will revise and edit the existing one, either eliminating most of the Old Testament, or most of the New, as the case may be. Paul will not be such a transgressor (v. 18). He will not rebuild the whole false structure of Phariseeism which he destroyed in Christ. He had pulled down the framework of Phariseeism; if he gave it any ground, whether presented by Jewish notables or briefly assented to by Peter, Barnabas, and others, he would prove himself to be a transgressor.

³. George C. Lubbers: *Freeborn Sons of Sarah, An Exposition of Galatians*, p. 47. Grand Rapids, Michigan: River Bend Publications, n.d.

6. God's Prerogative (Galatians 3:1-6)

1. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?
2. This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
3. Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?
4. Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain.
5. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of law, or by the hearing of faith?
6. Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. (Galatians 3:1-6)

The controversy between Paul and the Pharisees in the church was essentially over Biblical faith. Pharisaic rules had gained a place as mediators to Scripture and to God. Paul in return opposes this again and again by citing the Old Testament. In this case, his reference is to Genesis 15:6, "And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." In first century (A.D.) Judaism, both religious "conservatives" and "liberals" were non-Biblical in their doctrines. Because of the Christian belief in the resurrection, it was easier to attract Pharisees than Sadducees into the church, and it was thus somewhat easy to accommodate Christian faith to Pharisaic premises. Paul, by waging uncompromising war against Phariseeism, as had Jesus Christ, was opposing an important group of church members. These members were not only prominent people, but often the most learned. Paul was thus battling to preserve Biblical faith as set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament revelation, from either destruction or absorption into Israel as a sect thereof. He was not speaking as a diplomat nor as a peacemaker, but as a prophet. He wrote, in Calvin's words, "to penetrate into the consciences of men."¹

Paul addresses them (v. 1), not as brothers, but as *Galatians*, and, even more, as "foolish Galatians." If they are not in the truth, they are not his brothers. He writes with vehemence. Paul is not interested in a scholarly debate over theology; he speaks with authority to reprimand and to correct them. He calls them foolish or senseless, making clear that their views have no standing whatsoever. They have become *bewitched* or *fascinated*; the word in Greek is *ebaskanen* (*baskaino*), and it means to charm a person, to

¹. John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 80. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

praise him in order to mislead him into an evil stance or into slandering someone. Paul in vv. 1-5 asks a series of challenging questions.

The first question, “who hath bewitched you?”, is designed to show them as emphatically not wise men; they have been duped and are pawns, however self-important they may feel. This is the reverse of flattery; Paul seeks to deflate their arrogance and sin. On the other hand, as James Fergusson long ago noted, heretics use “fair words” and “a mist of seeming reason” to “deceive the simple.”²

For the Galatians to disobey the truth is monstrous, because, Paul says, before their “eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you” (v. 1). Raymond T. Stamm suggests a reference here to the “spectacular processions” of pagan cults, which frequently occurred to set forth the images and symbols of their savior-gods.³ This seems to be the case. But how is Christ “evidently set forth”? The word *evidently* translates *proe-graphē*, to write before, i.e., proclaimed, placarded, openly set forth. No doubt, Christ was openly proclaimed by Paul in his preaching, perhaps in some miracles, and also in the gifts of the Spirit. But Paul is more specific: Jesus Christ is set forth “crucified among you,” or openly portrayed as crucified. John Brown’s comment is excellent:

It is not impossible that there may be here an allusion to the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, in which the death of Christ is “showed forth” — in which, by the significant emblems of bread and wine — broken bread and poured-out wine — broken bread eaten, and poured-out wine drunk, are presented to the mind through the medium of the senses, these truths, “that Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Son, suffered and died in our nature, in our room, and for our salvation, and that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”⁴

Crucifixion was not a remote fact but a current reality to people throughout the Roman Empire, in Galatia and elsewhere. It was a gruesome and painful death. For a crucified man to be the source of miracles, of power, and of the dramatic presence of the Holy Ghost was an awe-inspiring fact. It made the Lord’s Table and the elements thereof all the more telling.

Paul demands, “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (v. 2). This was a blunt reminder to the Galatians that they had come to the faith as sinners. They

² James Fergusson: *An Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians*, p. 48. Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.

³ Raymond T. Stamm, “Galatians,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X, p. 496. New York, New York: Abingdon Press, 1953.

⁴ John Brown: *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 105f. Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1957 reprint.

received God's grace unto salvation, and the gifts of the Spirit, before they began to obey the law, and their moral reformation and their obedience to God's law were the results, the fruits of grace and faith; their works did not bring on either God's grace or Spirit. The Gentiles of Galatia were strangers to the law *before* receiving Paul's word of grace and God's gift of the Spirit. In their senseless heresy, they were *reversing* God's order: good works, the keeping of God's law, are a *result* of grace, *not the cause of grace*. Stamm is correct in saying that Paul opposes the gospel (and grace) to the traditions of the fathers. It is in the hearing of the word which creates the faith that the Spirit is received.⁵ Paul begins "This only," meaning, "one question will reveal your error and inconsistency."⁶ As Lubbers noted, "The second question is really the crucial question in the mind of Paul to which the correct answer determines the matter in the minds and experiences of the Galatians."⁷ As Strauss noted, "There could be but one answer; the gift of the Spirit was an act of God upon those who would receive Him by faith."⁸ Only God gives His Spirit: man cannot command it.

The issue is the basic one: who is the creative power in life and the universe, God or man? If man by his works can save himself, or can contribute to his salvation, then man can not only obligate God and place God in debt to man for salvation, but man can by his creative works add to creation. Man can then add his law to God's law, so that he can be, to a degree at least, his own god, knowing or determining good and evil for himself (Gen. 3:5). Then man can also develop his own plan for a new paradise on earth and be assured of its success. Under the guise of the gospel, the whole program of the tempter and of fallen man would be re-established. Precisely, because Phariseism had the appearance of holiness and fidelity to God's law it was especially evil; it attempted to marry heaven and hell in common cause.

In his third question (v. 3), Paul asks, "Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" In answer to his second question, the Galatians must acknowledge that they had "begun in the Spirit," with the preaching of faith (v. 2). Since they were saved by God's grace, were they now to trust in the flesh, in their human nature? The word *epiteleisthe* (*epiteleo*) means you are being perfected or are perfecting yourselves. Were they moving from a trust in God to a trust in themselves? Are they so senseless as to believe this is the better way? Meyer translated,

⁵ Stamm, *op. cit.*, p. 497.

⁶ J.R. Dummelow: *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 951. New York, New York: Macmillan (1908) 1935.

⁷ George C. Lubbers: *Freeborn Sons of Sarah*, p. 60. Grand Rapids, Michigan: River Bend Publications, n.d.

⁸ Lehmann Strauss: *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 34. New York, New York: Loizeaux Brothers (1957) 1958.

"Are ye so foolish?" as "Are ye to such a degree irrational?", which gives Paul's blunt meaning.⁹

Dummelow, in one comment, sums up a great deal of the evil perpetrated by commentators. He wrote, "*Spirit* and *flesh* denote the characteristics of Gospel and Law respectively — the spheres to which they belong."¹⁰ Such a view puts conflict in the Godhead and His actions, between God's Gospel and God's Law; this is blasphemy. The conflict Paul speaks of is between God's way of salvation as against man's way. God's law is not given to us as the way of salvation; it is *covenant* law, the way of life for the redeemed or covenanted man. Men seek to establish a sphere of independence from God; they try to become themselves *creative* so that their work contributes to God's future order, or even supplants it. The conflict is not within God; it is man against God.

In his fourth question, Paul asks, "Have ye suffered so many things in vain? if it be yet in vain" (v. 4). J.G. Machen held that *suffered* in the Greek is a neutral word, and Paul thus was asking, "Have ye experienced so great things in vain?"¹¹ The word is *epathete*, a form of *pascho*, and J.H. Thayer's *Lexicon* tends to confirm Machen's comment. Lightfoot did not agree with such an interpretation.¹² Both Stamm and the Revised Standard version support the use of *experience* as the more accurate rendering, however.¹³ All that the Galatians have thus far experienced will be for nothing if they do not repent, and Paul hopes they will.

We then come to Paul's fifth question: "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (v. 5). Luther rightly held that "true righteousness does not come through the works of the Law; it comes through hearing with faith, which is followed by the powerful deeds and fruits of the Spirit." However, he preceded this sentence with the statement, "the righteousness of the heart ignores all laws, not only those of the pope but also those of Moses."¹⁴ This statement, from Luther's 1535 lectures, shows how Luther moved from a valid position on justification to over-statements which opened the door to antinomianism.

Sanday pointed out that "worketh miracles among you" means in the Greek "not so much 'causes miracles to be wrought in your midst' as

⁹ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 105. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson (1883) 1983.

¹⁰ Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 951.

¹¹ John H. Skilton, editor: *Machen's Notes on Galatians*, p. 169. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973.

¹² J.B. Lightfoot: *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 135. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint of 1865 printing.

¹³ Stamm, *op. cit.*, X, p. 499f.

¹⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor; *Luther's Works, vol. 26, Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, p. 226. Saint Louis, Missouri, Concordia, 1963.

‘implants in you miraculous powers.’”¹⁵ This question is a restatement of v. 2, but expanded to include the fact of the power present in the life of the believer. This power is the gift of the Spirit, not a result of human activity. The implication is that the Pharisees should all have this power if a works justification were the truth. God who supplies the Spirit supplies the power to men in sovereign grace, not in response to man’s efforts to justify himself. Marcion omitted Galatians 3:6-9 in his “recension of the epistle, as repugnant to his leading principle of the antagonism between the Old and New Testaments.”¹⁶ He had to maintain two differing gods and two plans of salvation; the Old Testament and the New he regarded as essentially two different religions. Since Marcion, all too many commentators have been, like him, antinomian but by reinterpreting rather than discarding various Scriptures.

In v. 6, Paul cites Genesis 15:6, “And he (Abram) believed in the LORD: and he counted it to him for righteousness.” It was *after* God declared Abraham to be justified that God ordered Abraham and all the males in his household to be circumcised (Gen. 17:10-27). Abraham himself was ninety when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:24-26). In terms of this, Paul declares that faithfulness to the Law is a *result* of justification; it is the expression of our covenant status before God, of His grace in us. Paul does *not* cite Abraham to set aside the Law but to show that salvation is by God’s sovereign grace, and it is then manifested in our works.

Genesis 15:6 is cited by 1 Maccabees 2:52, but in a context which suggests that Abraham’s faith was a matter of works. The preceding verse, 1 Maccabees 2:51, says, “And call to remembrance *the works of the fathers...*” A contemporary Jewish commentator states, “God accounted this unswerving faith displayed by Abraham as an act of righteousness.”¹⁷ Such a view makes faith a form of *works*; it becomes man’s belief which saves him, and this is the same as modern Arminianism, which has affinities with Phariseeism. Calvin, however, said of Galatians 3:6 and Genesis 15:6,

... that person is righteous who is reckoned as such in the sight of God. Now, since men have not righteousness dwelling within themselves, they obtain this by imputation; because God holds their faith as accounted for righteousness. We are therefore said to be “justified by faith,” (Rom. iii. 28; v.1.) not because faith infuses into us a habit or quality, but because we are accepted by God.

But why does faith receive such honour as to be entitled a cause of our justification? First, we must observe, that it is merely an instrumental

¹⁵ W. Sanday, “Galatians,” in Charles John Ellicott, editor: *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. VII, p. 442. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, n.d.

¹⁶ Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁷ Rabbi Meir Zilotowitz, translation and commentary; Rabbi Nosson Scherman, overviews: *Bereishis (Genesis)*, vol. II, p. 512f. Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1978.

cause; for, strictly speaking, our righteousness is nothing else than God's free acceptance of us, on which our salvation is founded.¹⁸

Paul uses Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, as his proof that the Pharisees are alien to their father after the flesh. Abraham's salvation and Paul's are identical. Justification has not changed over the centuries.

Paul is opposing men who claim to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, and, in some manner, they no doubt did. However, by allowing man's works to have a part in man's justification, they were implicitly humanistic and were allowing the tempter's premise in Genesis 3:5 to enter into Christianity. If any degree of ultimate determination with respect to good and evil, whether it be questions of morality and law, or questions of justification and salvation, be allowed to man, then man is to that degree given ultimacy and a place in the godhead. Lancelot Law Whyte, in *The Universe of Experience* (p. 6), said "...it has long been held that whoever denies (the transcendent) God asserts his own divinity. In dropping God, man recovers himself. It is time that God be put in his place, that is, *in man*, and no nonsense about it."¹⁹ This is an exceptionally telling statement, and theologians need to see the force of it. To the degree that God's ultimacy, sovereignty, and absolute predestination in all things is infringed upon, to that degree man asserts his own freedom and divinity. Hence, Paul's insistence against the Pharisees in the church on salvation by God's sovereign grace alone. Others might feel that these Pharisees were good, moral churchmen whose views could be accommodated since they were faithful in many things. Paul saw that any such accommodation was surrender. Moreover, since the act of salvation, as well as creation, it totally God's act, it is not man's prerogative to make accommodations. If I have no right to give away my neighbor's property without sin, I certainly have no right to alter or to surrender what is God's prerogative and His alone.

Men as sinners refuse to take sin too seriously; in their acts of sin, other priorities govern them than God's law and the fact that they are sinning against the Lord. As Christians, men are prone to rest content with the fact of salvation rather than to insist on the full integrity and purity of their faith. Men are prone to be intolerant about their real or imagined "prerogatives," and indulgent about God's prerogatives. *Not so Paul.*

¹⁸. Calvin, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

¹⁹. Douglas R. Groothuis: *Unmasking the New Age*, p. 21. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1986.

7. Salvation: The Death of Autonomy (Galatians 3:7-14)

7. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.
8. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.
9. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.
10. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.
11. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.
12. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.
13. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:
14. That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:7-14)

To understand the Pharisees is to understand ourselves. The Pharisees wanted the best of all possible worlds. They sought to be both theistic and humanistic at one and the same time. They were also elitists and maintained a sense of racial and class superiority over others. At the same time, they were a dedicated people and commonly exercised leadership because they earned it. Although the Sadducees were the Judean governing group in New Testament times, the Pharisees later prevailed and became the orthodox Judaism which we know today, and even modern, liberal forms of Judaism reflect its perspective.

It should be noted, moreover, that, not only did Phariseism enter the church, but it continued over the centuries to retain in some cases an equivocal view of Christianity. Some Pharisees held that Christianity was a weaker form of Judaism which God was using to bring the Gentiles to Himself. Others were ready to accept the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ but not His messiahship. An instance of this in our time is Dr. Pinchas Lapide, who believes in Jesus' literal resurrection from the dead but not His messiahship. He was part of the preparation for the messiah. Because the messianic kingdom as envisioned by Jewish orthodoxy did not begin with Jesus' resurrection, He was not the messiah.¹

¹. Pinchas Lapide: *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1983.

A form of this Phariseeism is very prevalent in some fundamentalist circles, namely, the belief that Jesus is the savior now but not our *lord* until the millennium.

Paul answers the Pharisees in the church by turning to Abraham. Abraham was called and chosen by God's sovereign grace, not because of his circumcision or law-keeping. A basic doctrine of Phariseeism was its belief in Abraham's works of supererogation, i.e., that Abraham's works of merit were so far in excess of his duty that he accumulated, according to some rabbis, enough merit to save all his descendants to the end of time. In one of His parables, our Lord undercut this belief in works of supererogation, saying:

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded of you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10)

This attitude of Phariseeism is commonplace in all quarters. I have encountered men who feel that, given their great services to the church, they are entitled to have God overlook an occasional act of adultery. Nations and races too are routinely guilty of Phariseeism; by their works accomplishments, or their sufferings, their cultural heritage, and so on, they see themselves as not only *chosen* by God but an *asset* to God and necessary for His Kingdom. Men see themselves, not God, as central to history. When I first went to an Indian reservation as a missionary, I asked some Shoshones the meaning of that name, and why they called themselves that. I learned that "Shoshone" was a name which other Indians gave them; their own name for themselves was *The People*. Older Indians in a few other tribes confirmed the same fact about themselves: each saw its tribe as "The People," and others as limited by a descriptive name.

Paul turns to Abraham to undermine this perspective. Abraham is chosen by God and made just by God's grace, not by his personal merit or works. Implicit and explicit in all that Paul continues to say is what Calvin briefly summarized thus: "there is no place in the church for any man who is not a son of Abraham."² And we are son's of Abraham only by God's grace through faith, not through blood or works. It becomes dangerous, however, if we separate faith from grace; it then becomes a work of man. Luther's language at times gave grounds to such an opinion, as witness a part of his comment on v. 7:

Faith is nothing else but the truth of the heart; that is to say, a true and right opinion of the heart as touching God. Now, faith only thinketh and judgeth rightly of God, and not reason. And a man doth think rightly of God, when he believeth His word. And when he will

² John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 87. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

measure God without the word, and believe Him according to the wisdom of reason, he hath no right opinion of God in his heart, and therefore he cannot think or judge of Him as he should do.³

Luther is right that “a man doth think rightly of God, when he believeth His word,” but “the heart” has no more truth than “reason;” both are alike fallen, and, when redeemed, still imperfect.

For Paul, “the children of Abraham” is a moral term, not a racial one. God did not call Abraham to establish a blood line but a faith line. According to Genesis 14:14, Abraham had in his household 318 armed men; this did not include the children, nor the older men who remained with the camp, to protect it and the livestock. This would mean that there were perhaps about a thousand males and as many females in Abraham’s household. All these males were circumcised into the covenant (Gen. 17:23). With Isaac’s birth, the covenant people (with Ishmael separated) were one one-thousandth Abrahamic by blood. With vast additions over the generations from other peoples brought into the covenant, this means that the Hebrew people, as Abraham’s “seed,” were Abraham’s sons by faith, not by blood. All of these generations of Hebrews were saved in the same way as Christians are saved. Rather than being a new religion, Christianity is the valid and true continuation of the Old Testament faith. It is they who are the sons of faith who are Abraham’s children.

In v. 8, Paul declares that God promised the conversion of the Gentiles through faith in the appointed seed, Jesus Christ (Gen. 22:17-18). When God dealt with Abraham, He had all nations in view to the end of time, and ourselves also, as the children of Abraham. Abraham suffered many things, but he was also richly blessed by God, and we “which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (v. 9). No difference is made; as Abraham was blessed in his personal life, so we too are blessed when we walk by faith.

There is a curse on those who “are of the works of the law” (v. 10). *Works* is *ergon*, activity, enterprise. Works are under a curse when they represent human activity apart from God and His sovereignty. Such works seek to vindicate man’s autonomy and to justify man before God and humanity. Such works posit the possibility of creating an order outside of God and thus represent the premise of Genesis 3:5, every man as his own god. Men can use God’s own law to attempt to justify themselves before God by uniting God’s law, as filtered through man’s hand, as a means of furthering their autonomy. (This can be compared to a woman who left her husband and required a sizable cash settlement because “I’ve given you a son and am now entitled to my freedom.”) The law, however, requires total obedience. In citing the curse, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, “Cursed be

³. Martin Luther: *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 135f. John Prince Fallows, editor; Erasmus Middleton, translator. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979.

he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.” This verse was a part of Israel’s covenant affirmation; it is not a word to any outside the covenant, for they were not interested in it. It was preceded by the building of an altar, and by peace offerings (Deut. 27:5-7). In chapter 28, the curses and blessings for disobedience and obedience are spelled out. Paul like Moses is writing to a people who are also outwardly in the covenant. Like Israel before Jordan, they are told of the curses on unfaithfulness. Their salvation from Egypt had been by God’s sovereign grace and saving act. Their response of gratitude meant covenant faithfulness, law-keeping, not law-breaking. Their sins in the wilderness had delayed their entrance into Canaan because they had sought autonomy, not theonomy, man’s law and way, not God’s. Covenant grace requires covenant faithfulness. To attach oneself to the works of the law was to attempt a false obedience. Israel refused to enter Canaan when God required it (Numbers 13:1-14:10), and then tried to enter, claiming to be obedient, when God forbade it (Num. 14:40-45). “Works of the law” has reference to man’s lawless attempts to serve God, not to the obedience of faith. The obedience of faith is God’s work of grace in us. The curse pronounced in Deuteronomy 27:26 and cited by Paul in Galatians 3:10 is upon lawlessness. To walk outside of God’s grace, in autonomy, is a form of lawlessness. To put oneself outside of grace, and to attempt to walk by works, whether it be by man’s law or God’s law, is to assert autonomy from God. If we believe that by circumcision and the keeping of the law we can justify ourselves before God, place Him in our debt to give us salvation, and thereby free ourselves to live our lives in terms of our order, we are under the curse of the law. It is certainly clear that, humanistically speaking, there are advantages in keeping God’s law, but we are commanded to keep it because He requires it.

No man, says Paul in v. 11, is ever “justified by the law in the sight of God”; the just can only live by faith; Paul here cites, of course, Habakkuk 2:4. In v. 12, again Paul cites the Old Testament, “The man that doeth them shall live in them.” The reference is primarily to Leviticus 18:5, but also to Nehemiah 9:29, and to Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21. In Leviticus 18:1-5, we have the prologue to a variety of sexual sins: incest, sexual intercourse during menstruation, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and the like. Can anyone imagine for a moment that Paul believes these laws are abolished? Rather, what Paul says is that justification is through the atonement of Jesus Christ, not the works of the law. In Romans 3:9-31, Paul tells us that the *works* of Jews and Gentiles “are all under sin,” and that none are righteous through their own works. To *live* by the law as our justification is to pass under the *sentence* of the law, for “There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10).

The law is a “curse,” a sentence of death, to all of us, but “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (being our substitute, accepting the death penalty for us): for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree” (v. 13). The man whom God’s law sentences to death is accursed, and so too are all who seek justification by means of the law, for they imagine a vain thing (Ps. 2:1).

The purpose of all that God began in Abraham and manifested in Christ is “that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (v. 14; cf. Romans 4:9,16). “The promise of the Spirit” refers again to the Old Testament, to Jeremiah 31:33; 32:40, and Ezekiel 39:29, among others.

The just can only live by the grace of God unto faith. Faith in us is not our act primarily but God’s grace at work in us. It is the “evidence” of God’s unseen power (Heb. 11:1). This faith is not easy-believism; it results in works (Rom. 3:31; James 2:14-26; Matthew 7:16-20).

To allow *either* man’s faith or works a place of determination in our relationship to God is to supplant grace with works, and Christ’s atonement with our self-atonement, our self-justification. This is the meaning of autonomy, self-law. In autonomy, we establish, by our faith or by our works the means to God and to salvation. We say that autonomy rather than grace and then theonomy is alone valid. Phariseeism made men into junior partners with God, and very independent ones at that. So too does every doctrine that weakens God’s grace, God’s covenant, God’s law, and the total ultimacy of Jesus Christ in our salvation. Only those are justified who live by faith, and man cannot live by his works, his beliefs, or anything else save the every word of God our Savior (Matt. 4:4). The cross of Christ obliterates our sin, our claim to autonomy, to make us a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

8. No Annulment (Galatians 3:15-22)

15. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.

16. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

17. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.

18. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.

19. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

20. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

21. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

22. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

(Galatians 3:15-22)

We come now to a passage of central importance. For us, with our man-centered perspective, the argument has primarily to do with us and our salvation. For Paul, the whole issue is a God-centered versus a man-centered faith. In v. 16, Paul emphasizes this plainly: the promises of God are not primarily to Israel nor to the church but to Jesus Christ. They were made to "Abraham and his seed," which is not plural, so that it does not refer either to Jews or to Christians but to Jesus Christ. We receive of that promise only if we are in Christ by virtue of God's grace and its manifestation in our faith (v. 22). The covenant and the promise thus have essential reference to Jesus Christ. Adam was the federal head of the old humanity in God's original institution of the covenant. Now it is the second and last Adam, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:45-50). Our atomistic focus on ourselves is thus invalid; the focus is on Christ.

Why then the law? *First* of all, *every* covenant is by nature a covenant of law; it is a treaty, a legal pact between two parties, so that to speak of a covenant is to speak of law. At the same time, *second*, when a covenant or legal treaty is made between two parties one of whom is greater, and the other lesser, as between God and man, the treaty or covenant is not only a legal fact but an act of grace on the part of the greater partner. Thus, our covenant is both law and grace. It was law and grace when made to Adam, and it was both of these and promise when made to Abraham. The penalty for breaking the covenant, i.e., sinning against its law, was always death.

The law was *added* 430 years later, i.e., the *written* form of the law as given to Moses. Why? Paul says, “it was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (v. 19). The way the law was given stresses its importance. Israel saw itself as the heir of the promise, and the Messiah as its possession, and the church has often been guilty of the same sin. The law, and the futility of justification by the law, make clear to those who will see that neither the power to effect justification nor the promises to the Seed are to us but to Jesus Christ. Israel read the promise as to itself, and so too does the church all too often. It is to the “seed, which is Christ” (v. 16).

Human contracts, says Paul in v. 15, cannot be altered, changed, or wiped out unless both parties are in agreement. God’s covenant with us being a matter of grace, no man can annul it. Humanly speaking, this is a fact; how much more binding is God’s covenant. No man can annul or alter it, nor add to it. In Judea, “To be legal a Jewish will had to conform with the Mosaic law of inheritance” (Num. 27:8-11; etc.).¹ God’s unchanging word requires all to conform to it, not God’s word to man’s.

Note that Paul here finally call the Galatians “brethren.” He does not relent at all, however, in his argument. As against Phariseism, he asserts God’s prerogative. In St. Chrysostom’s words,

If a man, says he, makes a covenant, does any one dare to come afterwards and overturn it, or subjoin ought to it? for this is the meaning of “or addeth thereto.” Much less then when God makes a covenant; and with whom did God make a covenant?²

The promise was made immediately to Abraham but to his seed essentially, for the promise extends beyond Abraham’s life. The promise is thus to Christ (v. 16), and the law protects the promise to Christ by making clear that none other can keep the law perfectly and effect justification or make atonement. In v. 19, Paul says that there is a single mediator in the covenant. This marks it as a covenant of grace, because in a covenant of works *both* parties have a mediator. As Ridderbos noted,

And in the making of the covenant with Abraham, too, in Gen. 15, the fulfillment of the law is in symbolic form made to depend wholly upon the divine deed. Abraham is deliberately excluded — he is the astonished spectator (*cf.* Gen. 15:12, 17).³

¹ Raymond T. Stamm, “Galatians,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. X, p. 512. New York, New York: Abingdon, 1953.

² St. John Chrysostom, “Galatians,” Philip Schaff, editor: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. XIII, p. 28. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956, reprint.

³ Herman N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 131. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

Dummelow made a like point with reference to the making of the covenant:

Now when a mediator is employed, it means that there are two parties making a bargain; but in the case of Abraham there was but one party — God — making promise out of His own free-will. (21) It is evident, then, that the Law cannot affect God's promise. The Law is subordinate to the Gospel, but it serves the ends of the Gospel — otherwise it would have been sufficient of itself, and the Gospel need never have been given. (22) And the way in which it serves the ends of the Gospel is by convicting men of sin, and forcing them to realize that they can only be saved by God's mercy through faith in Christ.⁴

Now, when Paul says that it is impossible for the Law to “disannul” the covenant and its promises, he is thereby stating that the Law only *confirms* the covenant and its promises. The Law convicts men of sin; it bars self-justification, and it points plainly to the covenant man, Jesus Christ. Thus, when the Pharisees in Judaism and in Christianity, and their heirs, the antinomians, annul the law by their re-interpretations, or set it aside altogether, they also set aside the covenant and its promises. They are then in Zion only as beggars by the roadside.

J. S. Howson said, of v. 18, summing up a common opinion:

The phrase “no more” is simply logical, not having any reference to time. St. Paul sums up in a simple antithesis all he has said in this paragraph. Law and Promise are mutually exclusive, just as Law and Faith are mutually exclusive. The antithesis in fact is the same, except that in the one case it is expressed on God's side, in the other on man's side.⁵

If a man promises something to his son, and then protects that promise by law, are the two mutually exclusive? If the law establishes theft as lawless and evil, can I no longer have faith in God's judgment on stealing? How can men talk such nonsense? Did all reason cease because Luther damned it?

Luther was very thoroughly right in his comment on v. 19, when he said, in part:

Therefore the grumbling, “If the Law does not justify, it is nothing,” is a fallacious conclusion. For just as the conclusion is not valid if one says: “Money does not justify; therefore it is nothing. The eyes do not justify; therefore I shall pluck them out. The hands do not justify; therefore I shall cut them off” — so this conclusion is not valid: “The Law does not justify; therefore it is nothing.” To each thing one must attribute its proper function and use. When we deny that the Law justifies, we are not destroying or condemning it. But to the question,

⁴ J.R. Dummelow, editor: *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 951f. New York, New York: Macmillan (1908) 1942.

⁵ J.S. Howson, “Galatians,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, p. 517. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

“Why, then, the Law?” we give an answer that is different from the one given by our opponents, who, in their distorted thinking, imagine for the Law a function and use that does not lie in the nature of things.⁶

The law “was added,” not to alter the immutable covenant, but to reinforce it and to preserve the integrity of its promise and grace.

The reference to angels in v. 19 is a citation of Deuteronomy 33:2 (cf. Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2). The mediator of v. 20 is Moses; normally, Paul says, there are two mediators, one to represent each party, but, because “God is one,” and He is the only power because this is a covenant of grace, there is only one mediator.

Paul continues, in vv. 21-22, to point out that the idea that the law is to be opposed to God’s promises, i.e., to His grace, is blasphemy. Rather, the law confirms grace, it confirms the promises.

A mediator is necessary because there is a state of separation.⁷ The law stresses that fact of separation to bar presumption on man’s part, on Pharisaic attempts to separate the promise and grace of God from sovereign mercy and credit it to works and human merit. Life is a gift no law can give, and God’s law tells what the *way* of life is; life itself is Jesus Christ (John 1:4; 14:6). Charles Simeon said of the law and the Christian,

In order to establish the perpetuity of the law as a rule of life, let it be remembered that the law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God. It arises necessarily out of the relation which we bear to him and to each other... No change of circumstances whatever can alter its demands. In whatever situation we be, it must be our duty to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves: nor can this law by any means be dispensed with. In truth, God cannot dispense with *any part of* this law; for if he did, he would authorize men to *despoil themselves* of his image, and to *rob him* of his glory.

That the law is still a rule of duty to the people of God, appears from that injunction of St. Paul in the thirteenth chapter to the Romans: “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another *hath fulfilled the law*.” Then, specifying the duties contained in the second table of the law as essential constituents of true love, he adds, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law*.” Consequently, if it is our duty to exercise love, it is our duty to fulfill the law, which is in all respects identified with love.

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor: *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, p. 306. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963.

⁷ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 145. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson (1883) 1983.

But to insist on this is needless: for, instead of the law being superseded by the Lord Jesus Christ, it is in his hand more imperative than ever, and comes to us with tenfold obligations to obey it.⁸

The New English Bible renders the first part of v. 22, "But Scripture has declared the whole world to be prisoners in subjection to sin." The Law makes it impossible for men to claim righteousness before God. Men in their natural Phariseism are ready to say, "I'm not such a bad guy; I'll take my chances with God." The law of God is death to all such claims; hence the unpopularity of God's law with men who seek their own unmediated standing before God.

Wherever men seek an unmediated status before God, they also create their own law. The Pharisees of old did so by their traditions. Modern man seeks to create a humanistic justice by means of his social planning, laws, and education, to enable himself to establish a just order apart from God. History gives us the continuing shipwrecks of all such efforts. For all such men, their laws are attempts to force their particular doctrines of justice and order on men and societies. In so doing, they affirm the claim of the tempter in Genesis 3:5, that man as his own god and law, can determine good and evil, establish the true paradise on earth, and declare God to be irrelevant and wrong.

By its antinomianism, the church affirms the validity of such efforts. It declares that man can provide *the way* (John 14:6) by his own thinking and legislation, and that truth is a matter of humanistic discovery rather than God's law-revelation.

But, as Simeon said, for God to permit any part of His law to be dispensed with is to allow men to rob Him of His glory and "to despoil themselves of his image." Men then set aside grace for their works and law, and men then remake themselves in their own image. But, because God is the Lord, the sovereign, the conclusion of all such efforts is death (Prov. 8:36). God's law cannot be annulled, nor His grace denied.

⁸. Charles Simeon: *Expository Outlines on the Whole Bible*, vol. 17, *Galatians, Ephesians*, p. 128. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1847) 1955.

9. Abraham's Faith and Ours (Galatians 3:22-29)

22. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.
23. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.
24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.
25. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.
26. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.
27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.
29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:22-29)

Paul here speaks of faith, and "the promise by faith" (v.22). In v. 23, we are told, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." An interpretation which warps the meaning of Galatians holds that "before faith came" means, before the coming of Jesus Christ in history.

Is Paul saying that before Jesus Christ, man came to God by law and works, and after Christ by faith? If this be true, then why did Paul say, "by faith" Abraham was justified (Gal. 3:6)? But Paul's reference is not to Abraham, nor to the believers before Christ, but to us. The subject of the sentence in v. 23 is not Abraham but *us*; *we* is the word used. Paul is not talking about historical time but psychological time. Prior to our receiving grace, we are under the law. Whether or not we know the Bible, we know the revelation of God, our Creator, in every atom of our being, but we hold or keep down the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18; cf. vv. 18-21). All things visible and invisible witness to God, so that we are indeed without excuse.

Thus, Paul says that, up to the point of our conversion, the law acted as a restraint upon us. People often report that, long before their conversion, some sense of God's law was a brake on their behavior, or, a plague to their conscience. In this sense we are all kept under the law prior to our regeneration. All this was "before faith came: (v. 23). We are *passive*: faith comes to us by God's sovereign grace. It is not our believing but God's gift.

This is why Abraham is so essential a witness for Paul. The grace of God unto salvation saved Abraham, and all the untold saints of the Old Testament era, and it saved Paul, and it saves us.

Faith always has looked to Jesus Christ, who declared to the Pharisees, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). The sacrificial lamb always typified Jesus Christ.

Kenneth S. Wuest translated v. 23 thus: "But before the aforementioned faith came, under the law we were constantly being guarded, being shut up with a view to the faith about to be revealed."¹ Wuest clearly makes this an historical matter, coming at a particular time in world history rather than at a moment in our lives. There was a time, indeed, where Abraham received God's gift of faith, and a time when we received it. But the subject of the sentence is *we*, and the *we* does not refer to persons at a particular point in general history, but to all of us who receive God's grace.

Dispensationalism does indeed limit the application of this text to a particular time, but Paul's point is that salvation in all ages is the same. In every age, the law has had its function, and so too, God's grace.

The Messiah, the Promised Seed through whom all the nations were to be blessed, had come. All men are justified through faith in Him, both Abraham, Paul and ourselves. The law was given as God's justice, not as a means of atonement, and the law speaks of the necessity of atonement. The sacrificial system, typifying Christ, is, after all, a part of the law, so that the law, in setting forth God's justice, also declares the necessity for atonement. To oppose law and grace is not only incorrect and invalid, it is immoral. The law requires the Gospel by requiring atonement. There is no opposition between the law as given to Moses, and the promise as given to Abraham, nor is there a conflict between God's law and God's grace, for then God would be at war with God, a blasphemous idea.

Then in vv. 24, 25, Paul says,

24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

25. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The accurate word is not "schoolmaster" but *paidagogos*, a child-leader, a pedagogue. Such a person was usually a slave who took the child to the tutor. The pedagogue then sat, listened, and watched the child to make sure that he listened and learned. When the schooling was completed, i.e., when the person was brought to Christ and justified, the compulsion to live in terms of the law was transferred from a pedagogue or child-leader to Christ's working in us by His Holy Spirit. By analogy, we do not go through all our schooling in order to abandon it but to apply it. With faith, the law is now written on the tables of our heart; it is internalized. It is the law, God's law, that brings us to Christ. When the child-leader's work is accomplished, it is simply that the law of God is now not only a part of

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest: Galatians in *The Greek New Testament*, p. 109. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1944) 1974.

Scripture but of our being. We now walk the pedagogue's path to Christ because it is our path, a part of our life and functioning.

Then Paul continues, (v. 26) "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (v. 27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We are the children of God, not by ritual, although the rite of baptism is important, but "by faith in Christ Jesus." It is a living relationship, not an artificial one. We have been taken out of the fallen human race of Adam and made a new creation in Christ and members of the new humanity of the last Adam. We have "put on Christ," we have become enrobed in Him so that our status as human beings is altered.

Earlier in the twentieth century, George S. Duncan commented on v. 27 with telling insight:

His appeal to them is enforced by arguments which serve to remind us what the source of the Galatian trouble really was. The Judaizers had approached Paul's Galatian converts with the old idea of the special regard which God had for Israel; even as Christians, they argued, Gentiles could not win acceptance with God without first becoming, through circumcision, incorporated members of God's chosen people. Paul will have none of it. Circumcision may make a man an *Israelite*; but baptism makes him a *Christ's man*. This is the sole direct reference to baptism in the Epistle; but its introduction at this point is a reminder of the significance which Paul attached to it. In baptism the believer on his part professed his faith in Christ; and God, on His part accepted his faith and gave him His Holy Spirit. To put the same truth otherwise, at baptism the believer became united to Christ. The metaphor in this latter phrase is from putting on a garment ('have put on Christ' *Authorized Version*); but in Scripture it denotes that the wearer becomes in a subtle way identified with what he puts on (cf. the Old Testament thought of clothing oneself with righteousness, with strength, etc., and Paul's use of the same metaphor in Rom. xiii. 12; Eph. iv. 24). Thus when a man is baptized, he becomes so thoroughly identified with Christ that it is no longer he that lives, it is Christ who lives in him. No matter what that person was before, in Christ he is a new creation (cf. vi. 15). Hence, the apostle reminds his Gentile converts that there is no need for them to put themselves right by becoming like the Jews; for the Jew and the Gentile alike become new men when they put on Christ.²

Paul's conclusion in vv. 28 and 29 is simple and direct:

28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

² George S. Duncan: *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, p. 122f. New York, N.Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1984.

What Paul here tells us is that whatever our human differences are, and they are real, there is no difference with respect to salvation. No human status confers any advantage with respect to God's sovereign grace. We have inescapable differences on the human scene, but, with respect to salvation, God's sovereign and electing grace is totally determinative. These verses give no ground for any utopian social revolution. Rather, they assert the total sovereignty of God in salvation. Thus, Paul is saying that God pays no attention to human differences with respect to salvation. We have here no declaration of equalitarianism but rather of God's sovereign grace.

Since we are all God's new human race only by His sovereign and electing grace, human pride is ruled out. We cannot project our human differences onto God's sovereign will. We must be ruled by Christ, and by God's sovereign word, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. We have no "advantage" other than the sovereign grace of the triune God.

10. The Meaning of the Resurrection (Galatians 3:27-29)

27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:27-29)

In these verses, Paul stresses something very important to his statement of the Gospel. For example, he tells us elsewhere

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. 4:24)

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. (Col. 3:10)

Paul tells us that because of Jesus Christ's coming as our new Adam (1 Cor. 15:45-50), we are a new man, a new creation, because Christ has destroyed the power of sin and death by His atonement and resurrection.

No man can become a member of the new humanity except through Jesus Christ, His atonement, resurrection, and regenerating power. We have no status before God in terms of our race, status, sex, or works. What Paul declares in Galatians 3:28 he says elsewhere also:

For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. (Rom. 10:12)

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. (Col. 3:11)

In the place of human merit and elitism, God establishes status only in Jesus Christ, His resurrecting power, and His saving grace. All are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, so that we are now members of the new humanity in Christ. Before the sovereign grace of God, all human differences, however real, are as nothing. Because Christ has abolished the law of commandments as an indictment, a death sentence, against us, it is nothing for Him to render all human works and status null and void before the Father. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:13-18:

13. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the

cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17. And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

The “twain” referred to in v. 15 are the Jews and the Gentiles. “They were separate, hostile bodies, alike dead in trespass and sins, equally the children of wrath. They are created anew, so as to become one body of which Christ is the head. . . They are one, and they are *new*, i.e., renewed.”¹

When Paul says that we “are all one in Christ Jesus” in Galatians 3:28, he echoes John 17:21; 10:16; Romans 12:5, and 1 Corinthians 1:10.

In every era, men seek to establish their elitist standards and make themselves into the gods of creation. The history of salvation records God’s continuing action against this pretension. God deliberately smashes all these humanistic pretensions which rest on the tempter’s premise of Genesis 3:5, that every man can be his own god and determine law, and good and evil, for himself. Paul states this clearly in 1 Corinthians 1:22-31:

22. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25. Because of the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31. That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

This same fact is stated also by James, who tells us, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5). Thus, the New Testament plainly opposes to man’s elitism the death and resurrection of Christ. God reduces all man’s efforts and pretensions to nothing and establishes His new creation on Jesus and His

¹. Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 136f. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1950.

resurrection. Christ's resurrection, Paul tells the Corinthians, is the firstfruits of the new creation (1 Cor. 15:20).

The problem in Corinth with respect to the resurrection was one of skepticism or unbelief (1 Cor. 15:12-19). In Galatia, there was a difference; because of the influence of Pharisees within the church, the resurrection was not doubted, but its significance was not recognized. In either case, the resurrection, the central fact of all history, was reduced to meaninglessness, or an isolated fact.

Paul, however, stresses the meaning of the resurrection again and again by stressing its context. In Galatians 1:1, Paul tells us that God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. It is *not* a human potentiality but a divine miracle. The meaning of the resurrection is powerfully set forth by Cornelius Van Til. The Greeks, Van Til points out, were ready to believe that great possibilities are inherent in the natural world. Aristotle had concerned himself with monstrosities as an aspect of natural potentiality in a cosmos which has apparently a measure of the accidental in it. The Greek mind thus was ready to consider the possibility of bodily resurrections as an aspect of our natural potential while rejecting it as God's ordained purpose.² As we have seen, Pinchas Lapide, in *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (1983), gives us the perspective of a modern Pharisee. For Lapide, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact of history, and no more. The Old Testament records at least one isolated instance of this kind of event; why should Christ's resurrection have a cosmic meaning and the man resurrected in II Kings 13:20-22 have none? Under the influence of Phariseism, the Galatians were ready to believe in the resurrection but not in the meaning thereof.

Paul tells the Galatians that Christ's death had as its purpose our redemption from sin and "this present evil world" (1:4; cf. 3:11, 13-14). This redeeming and risen Christ is our source of grace (1:6). We are free men in Christ (2:4), because we are made just or righteous before God, freed from the death penalty of the law, and made a new creation (2:16-17, 21; 3:24). We are crucified with Christ, who is our representative and who makes atonement for us (2:20). Because Christ was crucified for us, we are crucified to the world; we live in terms of His new creation rather than the impulses of Adam's fallen humanity (6:14-16).

The atonement and resurrection give us victory over sin and death, and the freedom of the new creation. If we replace God's grace unto salvation with human works and elitism, we are "fallen from grace," and "Christ is become of no effect" unto us (5:4). Paul therefore summons us to freedom in Christ's resurrection and new creation, saying, "Stand fast therefore in

² Cornelius Van Til: *Paul at Athens*, pp. 1-7. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: 1954.

the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5:1).

In both Romans (1:17) and Galatians (3:11), Paul declares that the just shall *live* by faith. This living by faith is the resurrection life. It means that the world of the Fall, of Genesis 3:5, has been judicially sentenced by Christ's atonement and resurrection, and we now have the mandate to reclaim all things for Christ. Christian reconstruction is resurrection theology, and its foundation is the atonement.

In the world of Adam and the Fall, men seek to establish a paradise without God, and a justice that denies God's justice. The result is the reign of death, the prevalence of frustration and envy. The hostility of this humanistic world order is directed against God (Ps. 2:1ff.) and His rule of law. As with Aristotle, all possibilities must be natural ones, which is another way of saying that only man can be god. Only from the natural, with man as its head, can there emerge the possibility of a just social order. No less than Paul, the humanist wants a world in which "all are one" (Gal. 3:28), but not in Christ. All are to be one in terms of man's autonomy and ultimacy. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is part of God's heavenly laughter (Ps. 2:4), and the warning to the nations is very clear:

10. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.

11. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.

12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him. (Ps. 2:10-12)

11. Heirship (Galatians 4:1-7)

1. Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;
2. But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.
3. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:
4. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,
5. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,
6. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.
7. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:1-7)

A serious problem in all Biblical interpretation is that our minds are infected by both the Greek philosophers and Darwin to think of man's history as evolution. No such idea exists in Paul's mind. We err seriously if we read the child and man metaphor in evolutionary terms. A child is not retarded, nor is a child lacking in understanding. The child simply lacks maturity of experience and accumulated knowledge, and legal status, even if wiser than the adults around him. With this in mind, we can better understand Paul. From Job's day to ours, all too many men, like Job's friends, have assumed that wisdom was born with them and their era. Without agreeing with Lubbers' conclusions, we must recognize that he sees the meaning of the change from children-heirs to adult-heirs: it is a legal change, a law-fact: "We are now not any longer *de facto* servants, but we have arrived at the permanent *status* of being legally sons of God. Thus we are on the statute books of God."¹ Both the terms *child* and *servant* appear as designations of a legal status before God. Moses speaks of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as *servants* of God (Deut. 9:27). Again, Psalm 105:6 speaks of Abraham as God's *servant*. Psalm 34:22 refers to the Old Testament saints as God's *servants*; God refers to the prophets as His *servants* (Jer. 7:25), and so on. Supremely, Christ came as the suffering *Servant* of the Lord, the *righteous servant* who justifies many (Isa. 53:11). He is the Son from all eternity, but He establishes His Sonship by His suffering, death, and resurrection to become the *firstfruits* of the new creation (1 Cor. 15:20, 23). Paul, in v. 1, makes clear that his use of the word *child* is to indicate that the future *heir* is no different than a servant. Why so? Because until Christ by His death and resurrection judicially destroyed the power of sin and death, the inheritance was only a *promise*, not a new creation begun by

¹. George C. Lubbers: *Freeborn Sons of Sarah*, p. 110. Grand Rapids, Michigan: River Bend Publications, n.d.

Christ, the *firstfruit*, at His resurrection. Paul is dealing with a legal fact, heirship and an inheritance, not an evolutionary fact. A man makes himself foolish in God's sight if he assumes that his *sonship* means a higher spiritual state than that of Abraham or Isaiah. The higher status is a *legal fact* created by Christ's resurrection; it is a legal fact which is retroactive to all the saints of the past. Just as their atonement by animal sacrifices signified a legal fact, i.e., substitutes for the coming Lamb of God, so too *the promise* set forth a change of status to be realized through Christ.

The last words of 3:29 are, "and heirs according to the promise." Paul is now telling us what this means. We can thus see that Paul, among other things, sees the law in three senses. *First*, the law is a death sentence against all who are born of Adam. In Christ's atonement, this sentence is fulfilled or put into force against us in the sense that we are crucified with Christ or in His person and are thereby freed from the law as a death penalty. *Second*, because the law sets forth righteousness or justice of God by which we must live, it is our way of sanctification, our manner of life in the Spirit. *Third*, the law is linked to the *promise*, and the law confirms the *promise* (3:15), which is our heirship in Christ. In this sense, the law is a confirmation of the will or testament.

John Gill held that Galatians 4 as a whole "discourses concerning the abrogation of the ceremonial law, under which the Old Testament saints were, being as children under tutors."² In other words, the law under which they were under tutelage was the sacrificial law; with the atonement, there came sonship because Christ thereby became the new Adam and the firstfruits of the many sons of God by the adoption of grace. There is no implication of inferiority but rather a differing legal status in the two eras. The tutelage has to do with Christ's atonement and His headship of the new creation. John F. Rowan was correct in seeing the meaning of v. 1 as legal; the child-heir differs in no way from a slave "in the eyes of the law."³ Paul is emphatically not rejecting the law like Marcion, as Mackintosh inferred, but is resting his argument on the law.⁴

In v. 2, Paul says we are under guardians and stewards "until the time appointed of the father." This is unlike Greek, Roman, or Mosaic law: it has reference to God's plan for man's history. *Guardians* controlled the heir's person, and *stewards* his property.⁵ This does not mean a repressive care but a protective one until such a time as Christ's atonement and resurrection release man into sonship and the new creation, the Kingdom

² John Gill: *Gill's Commentary*, vol. VI, p. 388. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1980 reprint.

³ John F. Rowan, "Galatians," in *A Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 512. The Catholic Biblical Association: 1942.

⁴ Robert Mackintosh, "Galatians," in Arthur S. Peake, editor: *A Commentary on the Bible*, p. 860. London, England: Jack, 1920.

⁵ Rowan, *idem*.

of God. Thus, the Old Testament saints were protected by God's grace from the false heirs who claimed the Kingdom until such time as God the Son could come to destroy the power of sin and death. The text presupposes the father alive and preparing the realm for the son's dominion.

In v. 3, Paul speaks of a "bondage under the elements of this world." Luther referred this to the Law of God, and added that Paul's "words sound violently heretical." He declared that Paul "deliberately chooses these loathsome names, which show the power and function of the Law clearly and accurately, in order to frighten us away from the Law in the matter of justification."⁶ But Paul is arguing from the law, not against the law. Many interpretations have been given for the "elements of the world." Scott held it to be astrological spirit-forces, something very alien to Paul.⁷ A.T. Robertson saw it as the law.⁸ M.R. Vincent saw it as (1) "the crude beginnings of religion," which implies an evolutionary view of God's law, or, (2) elements of the physical world, such as the heavenly bodies, or, (3) as the personal, elemental spirits of being, and preferred this last interpretation.⁹ All these meanings are irrelevant to Paul's thinking, to the New Testament, and to God's word.

John Gill held that the *elements* referred to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament.¹⁰ Meyer read it as "the *rudimenta ritualia*, the *ceremonial character of Judaism and heathenism*."¹¹ Lightfoot pointed out that the original meaning of "the elements" was "the letters of the alphabet." It could here mean (1) the physical elements of the universe, or, (2) "the alphabet of learning, rudimentary instruction."¹² Duncan agreed with this.¹³ Raymond T. Stamm saw four possible meanings: (a) the letters of the alphabet, or, elementary knowledge; (b) the basic elements of the physical universe; (c) the large elements, i.e., the sun, moon, planets, and stars; or (d) Spirits, angels, and demons who were supposed to enslave the heavenly bodies. Stamm favored this last meaning.¹⁴ Now, what do these various

⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor: *Luther's Works, Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1-4*, vol. 26, p. 362f. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963.

⁷ C.A. Anderson Scott: *Footnotes to St. Paul*, p. 165. Cambridge, England: University Press, 1935.

⁸ Archibald Thomas Robertson: *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV, p. 301. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker (1931) reprint.

⁹ M.R. Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. II, p. 983. MacDill AFB, Florida: MacDonald Publishing Co., reprint.

¹⁰ Gill, *op. cit.*, VI, 390.

¹¹ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer: *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 168. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson (1883) 1983.

¹² J.B. Lightfoot: *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 167. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, reprint of 1865 edition.

¹³ George S. Duncan: *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, p. 134. New York, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934.

¹⁴ Richard T. Stamm, "Galatians," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. X, p. 521f. New York, New York: Abingdon, 1953.

meanings have to do with St. Paul's argument? The answer is, on the whole, nothing.

Conybeare and Howson said of "the elements of the world" that it means literally "the elementary lessons of outward things."¹⁵ Let us remember Gill's statement that the "ceremonial" law is referred to; this is best centered on the sacrifices. Rowan had seen this clearly, stating: "The meaning is that the ritual of Judaism was an elementary instruction preparing the way for the perfect doctrine of Christianity."¹⁶ What this means is that the sacrificial system and its rites were a limitation on man's full awareness of the meaning of God's promise. The sacrifices both pointed to Christ's atonement and also limited the saints full grasp of the kingdom and its power. The sacrifices set forth the way into the promise, but Christ's sacrifice on the cross released us into the new creation and the world of the promise.

That this is the meaning becomes clear from vv. 4-7; they speak of Christ's coming and redemptive work, and of our adoption as sons and heirs of God through Christ. Because Christ has come, there is now a change in our legal status: we are "no more a servant, but a son." Chrysostom said, of vv. 4-5,

Here he states two objects and effects of the Incarnation, deliverance from evil and supply of good, things which none could compass but Christ. They are these; deliverance from the curse of the Law, and promotion to sonship. Fitly does he say, that we might "receive," "(be paid,)" implying that it was due; for the promise was of old time made for these objects to Abraham, as the Apostle has himself shown at great length. And how does it appear that we have become sons? he has told us one mode, in that we have put on Christ who is the Son; and now he mentions another, in that we have received the Spirit of adoption.¹⁷

All this happened "in the fulness of time," i.e., God's perfect timing. Prior to that time, we were comparable to heirs, children, who could not yet receive their estate, and to servants or slaves who had no claim to the estate. Both terms describe the saints of the Old Testament. They were servants of God, and by grace chosen as His family.

The term in v. 4, "His Son, made of a woman," points to the virgin birth. As Lenski noted, the phrase "pointedly omits mention of a human father. Why? Because this is God's Son who is co-eternal with the Father. He

¹⁵ W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson: *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 487. London, England: Longmans, Green, 1905.

¹⁶ Rowan, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ St. John Chrysostom, "Commentary on Galatians," Philip Schaff, editor: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. XIII, p. 30. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956 reprint.

became man by way of ‘a woman’ alone.”¹⁸ He became one of us, born under or subject to the law, “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (v. 5). As one of us, yet God of God, He makes atonement for us and thereby alters our legal status. There is a double alteration for the people of His day. *First*, those who were believers, Old Testament saints, and alive in that day, ceased to be servants and became sons, adopted sons. *Second*, all of us in every era since then who are saved by His grace receive that same adoption.

There is also a *third* factor. The Holy Spirit in us now prays within us, and we cry, Abba, Father, because we know our standing by grace in the household of God (v. 6). We thus have a new status and are heirs of God’s Kingdom (v. 7). Paul speaks of these things also in Romans 8:15-17, again in the context of our redemption and Christ’s resurrection and our being made alive in Christ (Rom. 8:11):

15. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:15-17)

Because there is a legal change in our status to sons and heirs, there is also an inner change to joy, even in suffering or tribulation (2 Cor. 7:4). We are now heirs of God’s Kingdom and citizens of the new creation.

The Pharisees in the church were seeking to reduce Christians to the status of servants. Their whole position negated heirship, because their perspective, *first*, saw the Kingdom as future rather than begun with Christ’s resurrection; *second*, it thus reduced believers to the status of servants, not sons; *third*, it looked to the law for justification rather than sanctification and dominion; and, *fourth*, it imposed an elite leadership on believers and thereby increased their bondage.

Modern antinomians see the Pharisees as right when they insist that, prior to Christ, men were justified by law. Against this, Moses himself is a witness. The sacrificial system given by God through Moses set forth the elements of Christ’s atonement and our heirship. No man was ever saved in the Old Testament apart from the atoning blood of Christ as set forth typically in His substitute, the sacrificial lamb. To believe that God ever allowed salvation by works of the law is to say that God could be indebted to man, could owe man something for what man contributed to God. To

¹⁸ R.C.H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, p. 200. Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press (1937) 1946.

believe that Scripture ever or anywhere gives us such a plan of salvation is to give ground to the Pharisees and pervert God's word.

12. From Freedom into Bondage (Galatians 4:8-20)

8. Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.
9. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?
10. Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.
11. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.
12. Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.
13. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.
14. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.
15. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.
16. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?
17. They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.
18. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.
19. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,
20. I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. (Galatians 4:8-20)

In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) our Lord sends out His disciples into all the world, to reclaim it for Him. In *Revelation*, we are shown a series of judgments God sends on the unbelieving world to dispossess the false heirs and to give the earth to His adopted sons and heirs.

To turn back from the status of heirs to servants is an amazing retreat, and it fills Paul with grief. They, the Galatians, have turned “again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage” (v. 9). The Galatians were previously pagans. They had previously done “service unto them which by nature are no gods” (v. 8). In v. 8, the Galatians are pagans; in v. 9, they are turning *back* to the elementary or rudimentary aspects of the faith as promoted by the Pharisees in the church. There is here a seeming contradiction. If the elementary things were the sacrifices of atonement, then in what sense did the Galatians return to something which they had not known when they worshipped false gods? If, as many hold, the “elements” stands for the law, how could the Galatians return to a law they did not believe in as pagans, or a covenant to which they were outsiders? Lubbers holds that “the term refers to the

basic elements which form the teaching of all works-religions, whether they be outright Paganism or Jewish legalism.”¹ J.S. Howson said of v. 9,

again. . . again. This is not merely repetition, but repetition with a new and additional emphasis. In Bishop Ellicott’s language, it was not simply a *relapse* into bondage, but a *recommencement* of its principles. Having given up external formalism in one shape, they were now ready to renew it in another. It startles us to see Heathenism and Judaism thus clasped together: but St. Paul by no means says that Heathenism is as good as Judaism. Viewed simply as external rudimentary religions, they were alike in character; and in no way could the Apostle have more severely condemned the Judaic system of justification than by this co-ordination.²

Phariseeism had turned Old Testament faith into a works religion and thereby paganized it. To turn to Phariseeism (in a Christian guise) is tantamount to a return to paganism. They thereby exchanged freedom for bondage or slavery. For Paul, all faiths other than Christianity are *slavery*. He assumes, however, that, despite their dereliction, they are the heirs of grace, because, he says, they were known *by* God rather than finding Him by their own efforts, something which is impossible for fallen man. The word *know* is commonly used in Scripture to mean far more than an awareness of a body of data. In Matthew 11:27, we are told, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.” Again, in John 17:3, we read, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” This is personal, experiential knowledge and is knowledge which is inseparable from life.

In v. 10, Paul continues, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.” This is very clearly a reference to the Old Testament law, to sabbaths and other observances. For many commentators, Paul’s words here make clear the abandonment of the law. Had Paul been one who neglected such observances, the Pharisees would have made much of that fact. James and the elders said that the charge against Paul by his enemies was “to forsake Moses,” to abandon circumcision, and to walk no more “after the customs.” *Customs* is *etbeisin*; it has reference to usage, sometimes prescribed by law, or to a manner of life. There were thus three main charges. *First*, “to forsake Moses” meant to the Pharisees to abandon a religion of works. Paul, by denying justification on any ground other than sovereign grace, denied the Pharisaic interpretation of Moses. *Second*, Paul never forbade anyone “to circumcise their children.” What he did was to deny the Pharisaic meaning of circumcision. *Third*, *customs* does not refer

¹ George C. Lubbers: *Freeborn Sons of Sarah*, p. 126. Grand Rapids, Michigan: River Bend Publications, n.d.

² J.S. Howson, “Galatians,” in F.C. Cook, editor: *The Holy Bible, With Commentary, New Testament*, vol. III, 521f. London, England: John Murray, 1881.

to the law, because the law is covered in the first charge, forsaking Moses. The second charge, circumcision, meant to the Pharisees forsaking Abraham, who instituted it at God's command. The third charge was thus abandoning the Pharisees, of which Paul had been one (Phil. 3:5). When the riot against Paul broke out in the Temple, the cry against him was, *first*, that Paul was "against the people," i.e., that everywhere he taught all men to be anti-Jewish; this accusation was used in those days also to deny opponents a hearing. *Second*, Paul was against "the law"; *third*, against "this place," i.e., the Temple, and, *fourth*, that Paul had supposedly brought Greeks in the Temple deliberately to pollute it. The four men who accompanied Paul were Jews; Paul saw the Temple ritual and sacrifices as realized in Christ, but he was respectful of what God had ordained. Of course, Paul's constant appeal to the law makes clear that he insisted on restoring the law to its rightful place in the covenant. As for being against the Jews, Paul was rather filled with grief over the dereliction of his own people, and in prayer for them (Rom. 10:1). In fact, he went so far as to say, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). Yet this evil charge is still repeated.

Was this Paul then against the observance of days? Calvin's comment here was to the point:

He adduces as an instance one description of "elements," the observance of days. No condemnation is here given to the observance of dates in the arrangement of civil society. The order of nature out of which this arises, is fixed and constant. How are months and years computed, but by the revolution of the sun and moon? What distinguishes summer from winter, or spring from harvest, but the appointment of God, — an appointment which was promised to continue to the end of the world? (Gen. viii. 22) The civil observance of days contributes not only to agriculture and to matters of politics, and ordinary life, but is even extended to the government of the church. Of what nature, then, was the observance which Paul reproves? It was that which would bind the conscience, by religious considerations, as if it were necessary to the worship of God, and which, as he expresses it in the Epistle to the Romans, would make a distinction between one day and another. (Rom. xiv. 5.)

When certain days are represented as holy in themselves, when one day is distinguished from another on religious grounds, when holy days are reckoned a part of divine worship, then days are improperly observed. The Jewish Sabbath, new moons, and other festivals, were earnestly pressed by the false apostles, because they had been appointed by the law. When we, in the present age, make a distinction of days, we do not represent them as necessary, and thus lay a snare for the conscience; we do not reckon one day to be more holy than another; we do not make days to be the same things with religion and the worship of God; but merely attend to the preservation of order

and harmony. The observance of days among us is a free service, and void of all superstition.³

Without agreeing at all points with Calvin, his basic point can be accepted. God has given us a routine of days, both the weekly sabbath and the natural seasons of the year. We observe them, because our lives move in terms of them. We do not observe them to be saved. We can go a step further and say, we do not observe the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," in order to be saved, but, *because* we are saved, we live by all the commandments. Paul did *not* ask the Galatians to end all observance of the Lord's day; he did challenge the premise of their observance.

How did Phariseeism "observe days"? We know how strictly the Sabbath observance was prescribed: no more walking than so many feet; no eggs laid on the Sabbath were to be eaten; and so on and on. Keeping the Sabbath "holy" was reduced to minute regulations rather than a joyful celebration of faith.

In *Law and Society (Institutes of Biblical Law, vol. II)* I cited a recent case of Phariseeism in the church. A woman whose husband attempted to rape their daughter was denied a divorce on the ground that, because of her intervention, successful entrance was not accomplished (p. 689f.). I recently encountered a like judgment in the medieval era. Before his marriage, a man attempted sexual intercourse with his bride's mother and failed only because he discharged too quickly and thus failed to enter her. Divorce was not granted, because it is only "by the mingling of bodies, the *commixtio carnis*, that a couple becomes one flesh in the mingling of sperm." (In this case, the man confessed apparently to provide grounds for a divorce for incest and hence was dishonest in his motives. All the same, the "solution" was in the tradition of Phariseeism.)⁴

In vv. 11-20, Paul expresses his grief over the waywardness of the Galatians, saying (v. 12), "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all." Like much in this passage, this is not easy to understand, because Paul's strong emotions bad him to terse statements. Paul, Luther pointed out, is saying, "Take the same attitude toward me that I take toward you."⁵ Think as I do, says Paul, of the basic issues. You have not hurt me at all but rather have injured yourselves. I fear for you, Paul says, and I fear I worked in vain among you (v. 11). When I first came to

³ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 124. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948 reprint.

⁴ George Duby: *The Knight, The Lady, and the Priest*, p. 175. New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 1983. Alain de Lille's manual on confession stated that a sinner guilty of a sexual offense "should be asked whether the woman with whom the sin was committed was pretty. If so, the penance should be lightened" (p. 261). It would appear from this that sinning with an attractive woman was advantageous, in that one could plead diminished responsibility!

⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan, editor: *Luther's Works*, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1-4*, p. 415. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1963.

you, Paul continues, you did not despise my infirmity of the flesh" (v. 13-14). It was a temptation for you then to despise my infirmity, but you "received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." What this infirmity was, we are not told. However, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, speaks of his many sufferings, beatings, stonings, and more, most of which *Acts* does not record. It is possible that he went to Galatia badly disfigured from one such episode, looking less like Christ's ambassador and more like an outcast from prison. Perhaps the reference in v. 15 to the Galatians being ready, if possible, to give Paul their eyes cites one kind of injury Paul had suffered. The Galatians loved him then. Are they now his enemies because he tells them the truth about themselves (v. 16)? Apparently, before the writing of this letter, some kind of opinion from Paul had reached the Galatians, and they were offended.

The Pharisees, Paul continues, are courting you, but dishonestly so; they seek to isolate you from me, your pastor, in order to affect you and shape your minds (v. 17). It is good only to be zealously courted for the truth at all times; your faithfulness to the Lord should not require my presence at all times (v. 18).

Paul calls the Galatians "my little children." Wuest noted, "It was a Jewish saying, 'If one teaches the son of his neighbor the law, the Scripture reckons this the same as though he had begotten him.'"⁶ It is this usage that underlines our Lord's references to His disciples as "children." Paul here says he is travailing "in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Their embryonic faith needs more maternal care and attention (v. 19).

Paul concludes (v. 20) by wishing to be present with them; he could then, if he found his fears to be unfounded, change his tone and be possibly more kindly. As things stand, Paul confesses his perplexity and doubt concerning the Galatians.

We have a particularly noteworthy comment by Paul in v. 18. Paul makes clear that the Galatians must have a mature faith, not a continuing dependency on him and his presence. The church has too often relied on a *star-system*, an outstanding pastor on whom everyone is dependent rather than a congregation of *disciples* who are strong in the faith. The star-system makes it easy to be a church member. It places the burden of faith on the pastor, who is given a prominent role other than teacher of God's word. The results are deadly for the life of faith. It leads from freedom into bondage. Phariseeism, as a form of elitism, has always encouraged this.

At this point, an important area of confusion exists. Men like Paul, who speak the truth bluntly, are seen as "authoritarian" and domineering, whereas the modern Pharisees and elitists are seen as congenial and

⁶ Kenneth S. Wuest: *Galatians in the Greek New Testament*, p. 129. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans (1944) 1974.

democratic. The elitist manipulates people and is hence seen as the more cooperative person; he does not believe in confrontation with the truth of God. Paul never made personal demands; he never promoted himself. His concern was that God's truth be presented without compromise or dilution; he sought to please God, not man. He confronted men with God's authority, not man's. His goal is set forth in v. 19: he will not cease from his labors with the Galatians "until Christ be formed in you." This is a bold goal, and a necessary one. Paul requires the same of all of us, Christ in us as our life and law.

13. The Two Jerusalems and the Inheritance (Galatians 4:21-26)

21. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?
22. For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman.
23. Be he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise.
24. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar.
25. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.
26. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.
(Galatians 4:21-26)

Paul as usual is here very blunt. In v. 21, he challenges the Galatians : you want to be under the law; why not then hear the law? He refers then to the life of Abraham, and his relations with Sarah and Hagar, and his sons by them, Ishmael and Isaac. It is important to recognize that what for us is *history* is for Paul a part of the *law*: Men today divide the Old Testament into the law, the prophets, history, and “wisdom literature.” For the New Testament and our Lord, all of Scripture is law: every word of God is a binding word. At times, reference is made to “the law and *the prophets*,” the law and the inspired word concerning the law and its application, a term which includes the historical books and the “wisdom literature.” The modern division makes it possible to relegate much of the Old Testament to a limited relevance, something Scripture condemns. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16, “*All* scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” “All scripture” is “*pasa graphe*,” *all* or *every* passage of the Bible is God-breathed and profitable for teaching and more. “Profitable” is “*ophelimos*,” giving increase. Thus, we are told that every passage of the Bible is necessary for our increase in knowledge of doctrine, in correcting and reproving us to grow in Christ, and for teaching us God’s justice and making us just. This tells us that for Paul and the Bible, all of Scripture is God’s inspired word and the ground of our increase in Him. Hear the law, Paul says, and hear all of it.

Paul then gives us what he calls an “allegory,” “*allegoroumena*,” the word *allegoreo* comes from *allos*, other, and *agoreuo*, to speak in public, in the *agora* or market-place. It means that what one speaks of means not only what it says, here about history, but it also illustrates something of greater import; it reveals something more.

The historical facts are clear. God had promised Abraham that his posterity would in time inherit at least all of those areas of the earth then

familiar to him (Gen. 15). Later on, God made clear that Abraham's seed would be the heirs of all things and the source of blessing to all nations (Gen. 22:17-18). When Sarah saw herself childless, she assumed that, while the promise applied to Abraham, it did not apply to her. Therefore, as an act of faith in God's promise and in love for Abraham, she gave her maid Hagar to Abraham to conceive a child by her (Gen. 16). This was in conformity with the legal practice of the times. Later, God made clear, some time after Ishmael's birth, that Sarah would have the promised Seed, despite the advanced age of both Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 17). The promised child was Isaac.

Paul tell us that certain things are made plain by this history-allegory-law. Two sets of facts emerge:

1. Man's efforts, intelligent, dedicated, and however wise and devout, are human works. As against this, we have God's work and revelation: "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25). Thus, however earnest and strict the works of Pharisees may be, they are human efforts, and they are presumptuous as they seek to replace God's work with man's effort.
2. The contrast is thus between sovereign grace, and man's works, man's believing, man's wisdom and zeal. Grace comes from God, from above, and works from man, from below.
3. Paul is undercutting the efforts of "Christian" Phariseism. These churchmen saw the true covenant as *Sinai*, as works of law, whereas for Scripture the covenant at Sinai is simply an aspect of the original covenant. We have seen (Gal. 3:15-29) that for Paul the law was given later to reinforce the covenant promise given to Abraham. Paul is *not* saying that God gave two conflicting covenants, but rather that two views of the covenant are in conflict within the church. These two views are comparable to the conflict between Sarah and Isaac on the one hand and Hagar and Ishmael on the other. These two views of the covenant cannot both be true; one means slavery to a false faith, however full of zeal, the other freedom in Christ.
4. This conflict can be compared to a battle between two realms, one productive of slavery, the Jerusalem below, and the Jerusalem from above which gives freedom and is the mother of us all who are in Christ. Thus, to seek justification by the law is to be outside of Christ.

This contrast between the two Jerusalems is not restricted to Paul. In Psalm 87, we are told of the heavenly Zion or Jerusalem, and peoples of various nations who are born in the City of God. John in Revelation has much to say about the two cities. At times, the earthly city is called Babylon (Rev. 17:1-18:24), with references making clear that John has the earthly Jerusalem also in mind. We are also told of "the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God" (Rev. 3:12; 21:2, 10). Paul thus spoke of things familiar to Old Testament saints, and also to the church of his day.

When Paul calls the incident of Abraham's two sons an allegory, he does not undermine the historical meaning but rather underscores it. There is, he says, a difference between the son of a dowered wife and the son of a concubine. The son by the wife is the heir. Genesis 25:1 tells us that, after Sarah's death he "took a wife," Keturah. The word used is *ishbah*, but, in Genesis 25:6, she and Hagar are both called *concubines*, and in 1 Chronicles 1:32, Keturah is called a concubine, *pilegesh*. A concubine then was a secondary wife even if the only wife of a man. The husband gave her no dowry, and her sons received no inheritance, at best only gifts, as with the sons of Keturah (Gen. 25:6), and nothing to Ishmael (Gen. 21:14). The sons of the dowered wife received the inheritance. This was a fundamental fact of the laws of inheritance. As a result, Paul's facts were clear to every Israelite, and no less clear to the Pharisees in Galatia and elsewhere. Paul is using this historical fact as an instance of law: hence it is a *legal* allegory, an allegory setting forth law. The whole of Scripture is God's law. Our Lord cites Psalm 35:19 as law in John 15:25, "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'" Again we see Paul as the careful lawyer, with a total obedience to God's law-word, setting forth the meaning of Scripture against the abuses of the Pharisees in the church. Just as our Lord spoke out against the Pharisees in Israel, so Paul condemns those in the church.

There is a curious history of misinterpretation, both Jewish and Christian. Ridderbos cited the fact that some Jewish theologians saw Isaac's birth as fatherless, some kind of virgin birth. Other Jewish scholars saw Abraham and Sarah as originally sexless, only later receiving "the organs of procreation."¹ A talent for absurdity marks all groups of every kind.

Paul in the use of this law, and the allegory of the two sons, "turns the tables on the Jewish-Christian propagandists by using an allegory of the scriptures in the Jewish manner."² Paul is able to do this because he takes God's law far more consistently and literally than do his opponents. He demonstrates too that mere physical descent does not establish heirship, a fact dispensational premillennialists should note. He is furthermore declaring that now the true heirs of the promise are those who are in Jesus Christ, who is the true seed of Abraham. Because of this fact, that the promise is to the seed, singular, not to physical seeds, the many of Israel and Judea, it is therefore applicable *only* to those who are in Christ. Paul is not contrasting grace to the law and pitting Sinai against Calvary, but old physical Israel to the new Israel of God in Christ (Gal. 6:16). As

¹ Herman N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 175. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

² G. Henton Davies, Alan Richardson, and Charles L. Wallis, editors: *The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary*, p.485. Revised edition. New York, New York: Harper (1932) 1955.

Dummelow noted, with respect to v. 21, Paul depends on the law for his vindication: "The very law in which the Judaizers trust is shown to be against their contentions."³ Had Paul argued against the law, his enemies would have easily bested him; what the Judaizers then could not do, our present-day antinomians are now doing: they see Paul as one who broke with the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

There may be a deliberate play on words in vv. 24-25. Mt. Sinai is a rocky mountain. In Arabic, the name Hagar means *a rock*, "and some authorities tell us that Mount Sinai is so called by the Arabs."⁴ The earthly Jerusalem is built on a rocky area of hills. Thus, the Pharisees in the church looked to their rock, whereas it is the Lord alone who is the Rock (Matt. 16:18). Paul tells them, you claim to be eager to be under the Law, but *the Law, which is the Lord's word, is against you* (v. 21). In these verses, Paul is writing past the Galatians to the Pharisees in the church; he uses the Law in terms of the teachings established by the sages over many generations, i.e., regarding every word as important and as revelatory of the mind of God. As Scott noted,

Both the impatience and the method of argument are explained if, as has been suggested, the persons present to Paul's mind when dictating these paragraphs were not the Galatians themselves but the intruding Judaizers — to whom Paul in these paragraphs is saying practically, 'On your own theory of Scripture you ought to know better.'⁵

The covenant of works is not a Biblical concept but an invention of the Pharisees which has extensively influenced all branches of the church. As against the bondage or slavery created by such a false faith, Paul sets forth the true covenant, a covenant of grace which requires holiness of us and therefore it is also a covenant of law. *Because* we are redeemed, we manifest our salvation in our law-keeping. The law now expresses our redeemed heart, not any longer an indictment of death against us. For the Pharisees, their false covenant is bondage, "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (v. 26). This true Jerusalem is the true Holy City, whereas Jerusalem in Judea was full of violence, injustice, deceit, murder, and hostility to the Lord of Glory. This heavenly Jerusalem is referred to in the Old Testament in Psalm 87, Isaiah 54, Ezekiel 40-48, Zechariah 2:1-3, Haggai 2:6-9, and elsewhere. This new Jerusalem belongs both to this world and the world to come, to heaven and to earth, to the present and to the future. It is the City of God, the realm of freedom in Christ. It cannot exist outside of Christ, because He is the Head thereof, and the Adam of the new

³ J.R. Dummelow: *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 954. New York, New York: Macmillan (1909) 1942.

⁴ W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson: *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 489. New York, New York: Longmans, Green, 1905.

⁵ C.A. Anderson Scott: *Footnotes to St. Paul*, p. 168. Cambridge, England: University Press, 1935.

creation. For Paul, this is far more than a matter of hope: it is also a legal promise and God's law-word. Christ having sealed the covenant and inheritance with His own blood, there can be no alteration of its legal terms.

14. Anthropomorphic Religion (Galatians 4:27-31)

27. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

28. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

29. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

30. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

31. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. (Galatians 4:27-31)

The religions of Paul's day were anthropomorphic, i.e., they remade their god or gods in man's image. As a result, what was predicated of man had to be predicated of the gods. The church fathers regularly called attention to the absurdities and the immoralities of the pagan gods. Thus, Firmicus Maternus wrote:

It is difficult to make the tally of all their adulteries, and to say who corrupted Aymone, who Alope, who Melanippe, who Chione and Hippothoe. Your god, forsooth, is said to have done these deeds. That very god who, as they maintain, corrects with stern oracles the sins of erring mankind, loves Sterope, kidnaps Aethysa, ravishes Zeuxippe, woos Prothoe, and fondles Arsinoe in adulterous desire. But of that throng of corrupted women one girl vanished and thus vanquished the amatory god: Daphne was one whom the god who divines and foretells the future could not find nor ravish. Another person lets himself be used as a woman, and then seeks consolation for his womanized body: well, let him consider Liber and how he repaid his lover even after death the libidinous reward he had promised, by an imitation of shameful coitus. If anyone in the heat of preternatural passion arms himself to encompass the murder of his father, let him take Jupiter as exemplar. Whoever thirst for his brother's blood may follow the pattern of the Corybantes. Those who crave incest should look to the examples set by Jupiter: he lay with his mother, wedded his sister, and, to round to the full crime of incest, approached his daughter also with the intent to corrupt her.¹

Such accounts are common in the writings of the church fathers. Some called attention also to the fact some perversions were "invented" by the gods, i.e., Jupiter was cited as "the inventor of pederasty."² Jupiter planned the murder of his father Saturn but failed in the attempt.

¹ Clarence A. Forbes, translator and annotator: *Firmicus Maternus: The Error of the Pagan Religions*, ch. 12: 3, 4; p. 67f. New York, New York: Newman Press, 1970.

² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Why did the philosophically sometimes sophisticated Greeks and Romans, and other pagans as well, accept such gods? The key is Dostoevsky's comment, If God does not exist, everything is possible. For Dostoevsky, this possibility was a horror. For the epistemologically self-conscious pagans, it was freedom. Their religions were anthropomorphic; hence, their gods acted as degenerate fallen men will act when there is no law over them. They readily explored every repulsive possibility. For the pagans, this was religiously credible. Moreover, since their gods were deified men, these gods revealed what human potentiality is capable of attaining. As a result, their world of desired possibilities represented the developed depravities of fallen men.

Thus, the pagan gods were highly credible for pagan men, whereas the God of Scripture was offensive and impossible. The Greeks and Romans believed in ghosts or spirits; immortality was a common belief among them. The resurrection was difficult to accept, and the church fathers stressed it heavily because it was both basic to the gospel and a stumblingblock to the pagans. But this was not all. Regeneration was for them, as for our modern pagans, another incredible doctrine in its Biblical sense. They believed in man's potentialities but not in God's regenerating and renewing power. Closely related to this was the forgiveness of sins. Overlooking sins, winking at them, or trying to continue as though they did not exist, such attitudes were common. Julius Caesar applied it to his enemies, and they lived as a result to kill him. Caesar had hoped that his clemency would elicit a cooperative response from his enemies: he did not expect more than a pragmatic compliance, certainly nothing resembling regeneration. Rufinus (b. A.D. 345) wrote:

Pagans habitually make fun of us, saying that we deceive ourselves if we imagine that mere words can wipe out offences which have actually been committed. "Is it possible," they say, "for one who has committed murder to be no murderer, or for the perpetrator of adultery to be represented as no adulterer? How then is someone who is guilty of misdeeds like these going to be suddenly made holy?"

Faith, as I have pointed out, supplies a better answer to such charges than reason. He who has promised forgiveness is King of all things: He who assures us of it is Lord of heaven and earth. Are you reluctant for me to believe that He who made me a man out of mere clay can transform my guilt into innocence? Will He who caused me to see when I was blind and to hear when I was deaf, and who restored my powers of walking when I was lame, prove incapable of recovering my lost innocence for me?³

Since paganism *then as now* has no true forgiveness of sins, it cheapens sin as well as forgiveness. Sin becomes an ineradicable part of the human scene,

³ J.N.D. Kelly, translator, annotator: *Rufinus: A Commentary on the Apostle's Creed*, sect. 40; p. 77. New York, New York: Newman Press, 1954.

and men accept it with complacency. Forgiveness then becomes a casual unconcern with sin and its consequences.

Paul faced such a world of anthropomorphic religion. Phariseeism was very much a part of it, although morally and intellectually a superior part. *Payment* for services rendered is basic to the human scene, a necessary part of it. If man is anthropomorphic in his religion, he ascribes to God a mentality like his own: he remakes God in his own human image. God must therefore be bought with works of law. The revelation given by God, His law-word, is thus put to work to serve man's anthropomorphic theology.

Paul meets this humanism head on. In v. 27, he cites Isaiah 54:1, a statement which defies the humanistic order. The barren woman will have more children than the fruitful wife. The true believer and the true church may seem barren, but to them the Lord gives the great increase. Isaiah refers to Sarah's long barrenness and sees it as revelatory of God's sovereign over-ruling of man's plans in history and in terms of His purposes. The saints in every era, during the Babylonian captivity and after, in the early church and until now, are to see themselves as heirs of the promise in Christ. "The Church is the fruit of God's sovereign grace, not of human effort."⁴ Since Isaiah 54:1 follows Isaiah 53:1-12, the Suffering Servant and His justifying of His people, it is clear that Paul has in mind Christ's atonement as the great source of the power, growth, and fertility of the redeemed in Christ. Paul is saying that the barren, the Gentiles, will be blessed, whereas "the married wife," physical Israel, will be set aside for a time because of its denial of grace. Isaiah 54:2 was used by William Carey to set forth his missionary mandate in Asia. Paul's point in v. 31 is that, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, in Christ we are not reckoned as either but as citizens of the Jerusalem from above. We are, like Isaac, "the children of promise" (v. 28). Just as Ishmael persecuted young Isaac, so too, Paul says, physical Israel is now persecuting the true Israel of God, those "born after the Spirit" (v. 29). What is the solution? The Scripture says Paul, in Genesis 21:10, orders the bondwoman and her son to be cast out (v. 30). Hence, the Pharisees within the church must be cast out. The difference between Phariseeism and Christianity is irreconcilable. "Very important again is the characterization of the dual conflict by means of the words *born after the flesh* and (*born*) *after the Spirit*."⁵ The able Lightfoot was again very heavy-footed here with his antinomianism, stating, "The Law must disappear before the Gospel."⁶ Paul writes, not about a conflict between the

⁴ Herman N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 180. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.181.

⁶ J.B. Lightfoot: *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, p. 184. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan (1865) reprint.

law and the gospel, but between grace and blood. By adoption, an act of grace, the people of Christ, Jew or Gentile, are the heirs of the promise to Abraham, not the physical descendants. Anthropomorphism had projected man's concept of payment and man's concept of blood inheritance onto God's plan. Against this, Paul speaks strongly and clearly. It leads to a humanistic slavery, but we are to be free in Christ (5:1).

The problem of anthropomorphism is very much with us today. Modernism insists on a naturalistic God, i.e., one roughly as subject to a scientific world view as man supposedly is. In the United States, the transcendentalists and Unitarians were vehement champions of anthropomorphic religion. Theodore Parker held, "The orthodox place the Bible above the soul, we the soul above the Bible."⁷ Hence, Parker held, "In the soul let redemption be sought."⁸ For him, man was his own savior. His anthropomorphism was a radical one. Because man at times needs a God to depend on, therefore, Parker held, God must exist: "I am, therefore God is."⁹ This was a logical inference from Descartes' premise, "I think, therefore I am." Since Parker, the need for God has been denied by many, but not their anthropomorphism. As the humanists view the universe, they project their emptiness upon it. Because their lives have no coherence, they insist on cosmic meaninglessness and chance, on brute factuality. The psalmist declares:

1. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.
2. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.
3. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.
4. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (Ps. 19:1-4)

This psalm, a celebration of the law of the Lord, tells us that all creation speaks of God and His law-word. The humanist, however, suppresses this truth in his injustice (Rom. 1:18). Instead of hearing the heavenly word, he reads his emptiness into the heavens and the earth. The end or conclusion of anthropomorphic religion is empty men and an empty faith.

⁷ John Edward Dirks: *The Critical Theology of Theodore Parker*, p. 64. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press (1948) 1970.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

15. Liberty in Christ or Death (Galatians 5:1-15)

1. Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.
2. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.
3. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.
4. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.
5. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.
6. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.
7. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?
8. This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.
9. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.
10. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.
11. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased.
12. I would they were even cut off which trouble you.
13. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.
14. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. (Galatians 5:1-15)

These verses are commonly used by the antinomians to vindicate their position when in fact they condemn them. In v. 4, Paul makes very clear what it is that the Pharisees in the church advocate: justification by the law. Moreover, the Pharisees had a very limited view of the law. Circumcision was equated with salvation. In fact, Paul says, while these men talk about salvation by law, they themselves do *not* keep God's law (6:13). For them, circumcision made a man a member of the covenant and thus within the ranks of the redeemed. The traditions of the Pharisees were observed, but not God's law. Their religion was one of externalism. Indeed, the main value of circumcision for them was that it enabled the Gentiles to avoid persecution by claiming to be Jews (6:12); prior to the Jewish-Roman War of A.D. 66-70, the Jews had legal immunities. Thus, the arguments and appeals of the Pharisees were pragmatic, not theological.

Thus, Paul lets us know incidentally that, prior to A.D. 66, Christians were already facing persecution. They were tempted by the Pharisees in the

church to gain immunity from it by means of circumcision, by becoming Jews, or a sect associated with Judaism.

At this point, Paul gives us a seeming paradox. On the one hand, the Pharisees offered immunity from persecution in return for circumcision and a formal status as Jews. But Paul calls this status bondage or slavery. On the other hand, to become truly Christian meant persecution, but, at the same time, true freedom and deliverance from the slavery of sin, the basic form of bondage (5:1).

This slavery came from accepting circumcision in the Pharisaic sense. There is no profit from Christ, no gain nor salvation, if men are circumcised in terms of such a false faith (5:2). Paul refers here to circumcision as regenerative and redemptive. If someone is circumcised by these Pharisees and into their faith, "he is a debtor to do the whole law" (5:3). "By this St. Paul means to observe the whole legal system as elaborated by the Pharisees (cf. 2:14 and 6:13)."¹ "By resorting to the Law for salvation, as if Christ were not sufficient, you are no longer Christ's people," Paul says in v. 4.²

Ridderbos described Paul's thesis in 5:1-12, as "Everything or nothing."³ It is all Christ's work, or it is nothing; justification has no other ground or source. The position of the Judaizers, or the Pharisees within the church, is similar: it is all circumcision and membership in Abraham's covenant, or it is nothing. Paul demolishes the meaning of circumcision as justification, and he makes clear that Abraham's seed is Jesus Christ (3:16, 29), and we are Abraham's seed if we are Christ's people. As far as justification is concerned, "neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision," has any relevance (5:6). Paul is thus not against circumcision per se but against any use of circumcision or the law as the means of justification. Rather, as Christians we have another way, Jesus Christ, "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (v. 5).

This sentence raises a very interesting point. Paul speaks of justification as an accomplished fact for the Christian, and as *the beginning* of the Christian life. At the same time, he often speaks of our salvation as a future event. Salvation is like a prize which the successful athlete receives when the race is over (1 Cor. 9:24ff.). In Romans 13:11 Paul summons us to effort and says, "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," In Philippians 3:9-14, Paul sees salvation or victory only fully realized in the

¹ Wilfred L. Knox, Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, Alfred Guillaume, editors: *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 536. New York, New York: Macmillan (1928) 1929.

² J.R. Dummelow, editor: *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 955. New York, New York: Macmillan (1908) 1942.

³ Herman N. Ridderbos: *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, p. 185. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1953.

resurrection of the dead; this is a glorious victory and one we should look forward to attaining. This we do “through the Spirit” (v. 5).

The Galatians had begun this salvation-race to victory ably; now they have been hindered by false doctrine (v. 7). Their present persuasion is not from Christ who called them, and in implication in v. 8 is that they are now following Christ’s enemy. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (v. 9), i.e., “evil influence, insignificant in its beginning, can work in the end a vast amount of harm.”⁴

Paul, however, now expresses confidence in the Lord that the Galatians will not go fully astray but will return to their Lord. Those troubling them will be judged (v. 10). These Pharisees, while attacking Paul, were also stating that Paul preached circumcision (v. 11). Paul denied that circumcision was obligatory for the Gentiles, or redemptive for the Jews. He did as a matter of course continue it among Jewish-Christians, and also among those born of mixed marriages (Acts 16:1-3), but he rejected the meaning given to it by the Pharisees.

Paul, disgusted and angry at the perversions of the law and the Gospel at the hands of the Pharisees, adds, I would that these people would cut themselves off, i.e., castrate themselves (v. 12). Paul and the Galatians were alike familiar with the fact that some pagan priests castrated themselves in the service of their goddess. For Paul, the Pharisees are similarly impotent men in their religion and might as well be so in their flesh, for theirs is a dead faith, and they are religiously dead men. The Christian is called to freedom by Christ and by His atoning and regenerating work. He is freed from sin and death for life and justice. Instead of being dead and impotent, he is alive in Christ and a man of power.

This liberty is a calling under God. Its purpose is not to indulge our flesh or human nature but “by love” to “serve one another” (v. 13). Love, Paul says in Romans 13:8-10 is fulfilling the law, putting the law of God into action in our lives and realm. The whole law as it relates to other men is summed up in the commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (v. 14; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31; etc.). The New English Bible paraphrases v. 15 thus: “But if you go on fighting one another, tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual destruction.” Paul’s implication is that serious conflicts exist within the Galatian churches. These are not struggles to defend and develop the faith but conflicts created not by a love of the truth but by a struggle for power. They seek to fulfil the desires of human nature, not to serve Christ (v. 16).

The Pharisees within Judaism as well as the church were an elitist group; their concern was with form and ritual, with an outward observance. Paul

⁴ George S. Duncan: *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, p. 158. New York, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1934.

in Romans 2:29 denied the premise of such a religion, declaring, "he is a Jew (i.e., a covenant man) which is one inwardly." Some generations later, an Arab, Mohammed, who was influenced by Phariseism, insisted that religion, the true worship of God or Allah, is one of externalism. The essential duties, or five pillars of Islam, are pure externalism: 1) the regular repetition of the creed; 2) repetition of prescribed prayers five times daily and at three prescribed places; 3) the duty of almsgiving; 4) the observance of the Feast of Ramadan, with total fasting during daylight hours and eating and drinking after sundown; and 5) pilgrimage to Mecca. Mohammed's "answer" to Paul and Christianity was blunt: "He is a Muslim who is one outwardly."

It is not surprising that Islamic faith is respectfully treated by many scholars and journalists who can only express contempt for Christianity. Like Phariseism and Islam, humanism is a great believer in externalism. Humanity is not to be saved, they believe, by means of Christ's atonement and regenerating power, but by a re-arrangement of man's outer life and world. The right combination of laws and social observances, a foreign policy that offers better externals to all the world with foreign aid, and other like efforts are believed to be the way to a brave new world. The whole modern network of politics, education, the arts and media, the sciences, foreign aid, free trade and protectionism alike, and much, much more constitute a world-wide effort to accomplish the miracle of a new creation by means of externalism, the rituals of humanism.

Freedom, Paul insists, begins, not with circumcision but with Christ's atonement and His regenerating power. Apart from that, we are dead; we have no future, because to rely on Phariseism is a way of castrating ourselves. Conybeare and Howson rendered v. 12 thus: "I could wish that these agitators who disturb your quiet, would execute upon themselves not only circumcision, but excision also."⁵ The word *cut themselves off* is *apokopsontai*, to mutilate or cut off. While Scripture makes clear that eunuchs could be saved (Isa. 56:3, 4; Acts 8:27-39), it nevertheless is emphatic that this deformation of man is contrary to God's law; no eunuch could be a member of the congregation, i.e., have governing power (Deut. 23:1-2), and all forms of self-mutilation were forbidden (Deut. 14:1, 2; Lev. 19:27) including tattooing (Lev. 19:28).

Man is created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28), and it is a deformation of man to see him in any other way. As God's image bearer, man is created to manifest knowledge, righteousness or justice, holiness, dominion, and the law of God, which is written in man's heart and being (Gen. 1:26-28; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24; Rom. 2:14-15, etc.). It is this fact of the image of God in

⁵ W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson: *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 490. New York, New York: Longmans, Green, 1905.

man that is the key to history. To pursue externalism, Islamic ways, Phariseism, or humanism is to work against man's only hope. Man is dead apart from Christ, and he is as capable of creating a new world order as castrated man is of having children. The issue, says Paul, is *liberty in Christ, or death*, and to deny Christ is tantamount to self-castration.

How relevant is Paul's insistence on Christ as freedom versus pharisaic externalism? World events daily confirm the importance of Paul's words. In the early 1980s, when crime waned slightly, articles and books were written dismissing the fears of many with regard to the future. The average age of Americans was rising; the baby-boom youth were now aging and "out-growing" their youthful violence, and so on. Crime was declared to be not a moral failure but a factor in a changed demography from 1960 to 1980. Then in 1985 crime began to climb again in all major categories: murder, rape, assault, robbery, burglary, car theft, and so on.⁶ The experts then began to look for other external factors to account for the rise. Such thinking is the concomitant of slavery.

⁶ Ted Gest, "A crime rise that stumps the experts," in *U.S. News & World Report*, May 5, 1986, p. 24.

16. The Spirit and the Law (Galatians 5:16-26)

16. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.
17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.
18. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.
19. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
20. Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
21. Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.
22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,
23. Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.
24. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.
25. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
26. Let us not be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another, envying one another. (Galatians 5:16-26)

I recall some years ago reading an account by a very successful writer of his early years as a writer. Since he was paid by the word, he wrote as copiously as possible! He sought to increase the wordage in his stories while retaining interest and suspense. For Paul, a reverse process was at work: he wrote as briefly as possible, saying only what was necessary, and seeking to say it with as much impact as possible. He spoke to specific problems, not in generalities as too many modern preachers do. Thus, what Paul writes tells us what the problems were.

In this passage, Paul contrasts the life lived gratifying the flesh, i.e., our human nature, versus the life lived in the Holy Spirit. The reason for his concern appears in v. 25: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." These verses are specific because in Galatia some were sanctimoniously claiming, as against Paul, to live in the Spirit who were probably guilty of a variety of sins. Paul's information is not too specific, and, as a result, he does not name specific persons but does specify sins. These sinners apparently claimed to live in the Spirit while accusing Paul of abandoning the law. Paul rejects the reduction of the law to circumcision, and he accuses the Pharisees of being the law-breakers (6:13). He gives a catalog of the sins of antinomianism, and also the fruits or works of the Spirit. The sins are violations of God's law; the works of the Spirit are in conformity to God's law.

It is an error to equate the sins of human nature to things material or physical, an equation which echoes Manichaeism. As Calvin said, "It deserves notice, that *heresies* are enumerated among the works of the flesh; for it shows clearly that the word *flesh* is not confined, as the sophists imagine, to sensuality."¹ Luther made the same point also.

Findlay was only half right when he stated of Paul here, "He opposes the law of Pharisaic externalism in the interests of the law of Christian love."² Rather, as against Pharisaic externalism and human nature he opposes the Holy Spirit and the law-word of God. It is justification by the law, not sanctification by the law, which Paul opposes (5:4). The issue is inheriting the Kingdom of God (v. 21); the sins enumerated are contrary to the Kingdom, and the virtues are the life of the Kingdom.

The catalogues are as follows. In v. 19, *adultery* (*moicheia*) heads the list. It is an offense against God's basic institution, the family and is treason against God's Kingdom. *Uncleanness* is *akatharsia*, from *katharos*, clean or pure. It refers to the whole range of uncleanness, physical, moral, and religious. *Fornication* (*porneia*) can refer to any kind of lawless sexuality, both physical and mental; it can refer also to prostitution. Here the reference is to lawless physical sexuality, because *lasciviousness* (*aselgeia*) is inclusive of mental lawlessness as well as to a general absence of restraint and decency.

In v. 20, we find *idolatry* (*eidololatreia*, from *eidolon*, a likeness or a phantom, and *latreia*, service), something Paul also warns against in 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; and 10:7,14. In the 1 Corinthians verses as well as here, Paul cites it as a very serious offense, comparable to adultery and consorting with prostitutes. To serve a phantom or an idol we make is to worship our own works.

Next is *witchcraft* (*pharmakeia*), and its meaning here as in the Old Testament is very different from its now common connotation. *Witchcraft* in the Bible refers to dealing in drugs and poisons. Some scholars now like to think of such a business as one of harmless love potions; the fact is that even love potions were often dangerous drugs. Poisoning was especially popular in eras when death by poisoning was less detectable or probable, and hence the popularity of a dangerous class of professional poisoners.

Hatred or enmities is next (*ebthrai*). Man is at enmity with God, Paul tells us in Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21. As a sinner, he is governed by the spirit of enmity against God and man alike; being his own god (Gen. 3:5), he is at war against all others as threats to his autonomy. *Ereis* or strife, *variance*, is the expression of enmity in our relationship with others.

¹ John Calvin: *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 166. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1948.

² G.G. Findlay: *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 340. London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.

Emulations (*zelei*) is today better translated as jealousy. Men as would-be gods manifest their insecurity in being jealous one of another. God identifies Himself as a jealous God, one “who name is Jealous” (Ex. 34:14); the Hebrew word comes from a root meaning, to be zealous, which tells us that God is zealous to protect and further His law against man’s sin. The Greek word *zelos* also has both good and bad meanings, and here the reference is to the evil sense.

Wrath is *thumoi*, literally wraths, and means smoking with rage, hot passion and anger. We see what Paul means by *wrath* readily in our day, in the many people who are constantly in a rage over what goes on in some other country, over the environment, nuclear power, and so on. For constructive action, the people of wrath substitute protest and passion and are very self-righteous because of their wrath.

Strife is *eritheiai*, factions, selfish ambitions, contentiousness, and it is mentioned together with bitterness (*pikria*) in Ephesians 4:31. *Seditions* (*dichostasiai*) or divisions, sunderings, means *dicha*, asunder or apart, and *staiis*, a standing, and it means standing apart from the community either in hostility, indifference, or in an unwillingness to get involved. Such an attitude is sedition against God’s Kingdom. *Heresies* (*haireseis*) comes from a word meaning to choose. We are in heresy when we pick and choose what to believe in Scripture rather than receiving it all as the word of God. Instead of being received, the faith is chosen selectively by the heretic.

In v. 21, Paul lists *envyings* (*phthonoi*), displeasure at hearing of the success of others; it means resentment that someone else has something we do not have. In Mark 15:10 we are told that because of envy (*phthonon*) Christ was delivered over to Pilate for crucifixion. The secret wish of envyings is *murders* (*phonoï*), a refusal to allow anyone to be better than we are. *Drunkenness* (*methai*) refers to the excess of too much wine. *Revellings* (*komoi*) is sometimes translated as rioting in drunkenness. Sins of this sort Paul had warned them about previously, and now warns them again, that “they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.” Thus, Paul makes clear that he is not being academic; he is dealing with the realities in Galatia. Theological and moral errors and sins commonly go together.

As against these sins are the workings of the Holy Spirit in our lives (v. 22). At the head of the list is *love* (*agape*), not man’s love but the gracious, unmerited love of God to us which then is to be manifested to others. Together with love is *joy* (*chara*), delight; it is a benefit of grace; it is a consequence of our freedom in Christ. Next is *peace* (*eirene*), meaning harmony, freedom from molestation, order, and quietness. *Longsuffering* (*makrothumia*) means patience and forbearance. *Gentleness* (*chrestotes*) is kindness, serviceableness, and graciousness; it means a readiness to be useful. *Goodness* (*agathosune*) refers to a beneficial moral power, and *faith*

(*pistis*) is trustfulness, faithfulness. We are faithful to God in Christ, and, in Him, to our responsibilities to the Kingdom, its peoples, and its duties.

In v. 23, *meekness* (*prautes*) is a particularly interesting word. Used of animals, it meant tamed, broken to harness, and hence useful and friendly. Used of men, it has a like meaning; the blessed meek of the Beatitude (Matt. 5:5) are those who are under God's control and harness, and who are friendly rather than hostile to other men. *Temperance* (*eukrteia*) is related to this; it comes from *kratos*, *strength*, and it describes the ability in every area of our lives to exercise strength and self-control. Modern usage has reference to drinking and thus limits the meaning. "Against such there is no law," Paul says. "The works of the flesh" he describes mark the lawless man, whereas "the fruit of the Spirit" marks the godly man in whose being God's law is written and obeyed.

All who are Christ's have crucified their human nature with its "affections and lusts." That crucifixion is not a personal asceticism but our resting on Christ's work. By doing so, we have a new life to rely on. Our *affections* (*pathemasin*) refers to our human experiences and sufferings, i.e., the things which affect us. Romanticism has given a favorable meaning to "affections" which does not exist here. Even as late as Noah Webster's 1828 *Dictionary*, the meaning of "affection" was still partially bad, and, among doctors, it meant a disease, as a gouty affection, and the like. Shakespeare used it to mean what we now call an affectation. Paul means that, while we may now in Christ suffer for justice' sake, we are no longer suffering because of the stupidities of human nature, or at least are being weaned from such sufferings. *Lusts* (*epithumiais*) for Paul could mean strong desires of any kind, good or bad; here it refers to those of our human nature.

In v. 25, Paul concludes, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Paul in v. 14 appeals to the law; now he has shown that the work of the Spirit in man's life is the work of the law. The law of God is not alien to God, Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is harmony with the law. The lordship of the Spirit is manifested in the happy rule of God's law in our lives. By recognizing that our fallen human nature has been crucified, sentenced to death, in Christ, we daily grow in grace by assigning it to death and by heeding the Spirit and His law.

Instead of seeking our own futile glory, warring one against the other as would-be gods, envying one another (v. 26), we now seek God's glory.

This letter is addressed by Paul to "the churches of Galatia" (1:2), but it is not concerned with their institutional but rather their personal faith and life. In the modern era and earlier, society has been institutionally oriented, primarily in terms of the state, secondarily in terms of the church. Scripture, however, assigns a secondary place to church and state. It addresses itself throughout to man; it is personal but not individualistic.

God's law-word requires man to live in community, the family being the basic one, and to govern himself, his family, and his vocation in terms of that law. The modern attitude is that the institutions remain but the generations pass, and so men work to build up the state, and some to build up the church, as though this is primary. There is no resurrection for churches and states: there is for men. The world will continue to flounder in its self-created evils as long as men seek to erect their institutional Towers of Babel, their world-centers for their gospels according to man. Until men cease their institutionalization of faith and life, church and state will both continue to be obstacles to the Kingdom of God, Towers of Babel to be confounded.

17. Grace and Law versus Mechanical Religion (Galatians 6:1-5)

1. Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.
2. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.
3. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.
4. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.
5. For every man shall bear his own burden. (Galatians 6:1-5)

Paul has indicted the Pharisees in the church for externalism. Circumcision has its place in God's law, but it is not equivalent to salvation. Neither is physical descent from Abraham, whose true seed is Christ. The law must be written in all man's being; it is not the way of salvation, but the way of sanctification. The holiness required by the law is manifested in the life governed by the Holy Spirit, so that the fruits of the Spirit are the results of a faithfulness to the law with all our heart, mind, and being.

Phariseeism as externalism reduced the law of God in its meaning and focus. Our Lord accused the Pharisees of doing what God requires, such as charitable giving, with ulterior motives, i.e., replacing what should come from an inner grace with an ulterior motive:

1. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
2. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
3. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
4. That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (Matt. 6:1-4)

The Pharisees, however, have at times been as successful in Christianity as they have been in Judaism. Both Catholics and Protestants have been guilty of it. Thus, B.J. Kidd has called attention to the view of the later medieval era of "the quantitative, assignable, and so marketable value of each Mass," and B.L. Manning said, "The popular view of the Mass was distinctly mechanical."¹ The great Catholic historian, Ludwig von Pastor, said of John Tetzel's preaching of indulgences, which precipitated Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, that it was clearly mechanical, although adding that

¹. Cited in Norman Sykes: *The Crisis of the Reformation*, p. 18f. New York, New York: W.W. Norton (1936) 1946.

“the papal bill of indulgence gave no sanction whatever to this proposition.”²

Within Protestantism today, externalism prevails in both modernist and evangelical circles. For many of the modernists, a formal subscription to the liberal agenda passes as holiness. For some evangelicals, superficials often are seen as equivalent to salvation, i.e., going forward at an alter call, saying ‘yes’ to Jesus in some way, and so on. Arend ten Pas’ *The Lordship of Christ* gives citations from various leaders illustrative of such Phariseeism within the church.³

The Bible, among other factors, defines the fool as an outward believer who in his heart thinks without reference to God. In David’s words, “The fool hath said *in his heart*, there is no God” (Ps. 14:1). External circumstances and personal desires govern the fool, not the truth of God. This is Phariseeism, an external profession of faith with an inner core of self-determination without reference to God.

Paul in these verses sets down the implications of true faith, of loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and our neighbor as ourself (Matt. 12:36-40). It means, in part, being members one of another in Christ (Eph. 4:25).

In v. 1, Paul tells us that the faults of our brethren in the faith should not move us to dislike or contempt, but to a desire for their restoration. We are to remember that we too, being sinners saved by grace, can also be tested and be guilty of a “fault”. The word *fault* is the Greek *paraptomati*, a falling aside, a slip or a lapse. It does not refer to a wilful malicious sin, but to weakness, an as yet insufficient strength in Christ. Thus, this particular text cannot be used with reference to malicious acts, nor to actions which show a contempt for godliness. This latter attitude is set forth in Proverbs 30:20, “Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.” Moffatt’s paraphrase reads, “This is the way of an adulteress: she gratifies her appetite and calmly says, ‘No harm!’” Just as a little food at the corner of one’s mouth is no serious matter but something easily wiped off, so too adultery is a superficial and an external act, the Proverb tells us, to all who regard God’s law as a trifling matter. All our being must be commanded by God’s law-word and Spirit.

In terms of this, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” *Fulfil* is *anaplerosate*, which, as Chrysostom said, means to *complete*.⁴ *The law of Christ* is the whole of Scripture. Because Jesus Christ

² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³ Arend Ten Pas: *The Lordship of Christ*. Vallecito, California: Ross House Books (1978) 1986.

⁴ Saint Chrysostom, “Commentary on Galatians,” Philip Schaff, editor: *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. XIII, p. 43. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1956.

is the second person of the Trinity, every word of Scripture is the word of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It was heresies, a series of them, culminating in Joachimite thought, which gave the Father a dispensation of law and works, the Son a dispensation of grace and freedom from the law, and the Spirit a dispensation of love and spirituality. This is radically wrong and evil. The law of Christ, which requires us to bear one another's burdens, is the law which is set forth from one end of Scripture to the other. We who prosper must bear the burdens of the poor; we who are healthy have a duty to the sick; we who are saved must seek to reach those who are lost; we who have families must help the widows and orphans, the lonely, and strangers.

To be members one of another means that we forsake self-exaltation to work for the Kingdom of God and His justice (Matt. 6:33). In ourselves, we are nothing; in Christ, we are a new creation. Thus, self-promotion is lawlessness, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (v. 3).

Paul's requirement is this: "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" (v. 4). Some of the paraphrases help us to understand this sentence:

Let everyone bring his own work to the test — then he will have something to boast about on his won account, and not in comparison with his fellows. (Moffatt)

Let every man learn to assess properly the value of his own work and he can then be glad when he has done something worth doing without depending on the approval of other. (Phillips)

We are to work for the Lord, not for the approval of men. "For every man shall bear his own burden" (v. 5). We each have our own responsibilities, and this should be our essential concern. God, Paul tells us in Romans 2:6, "will render to every man according to his deeds." Many other texts refer to God's rewards for works:

For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. (Job 34:11)

Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work. (Ps. 62:12)

If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doeth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works? (Prov. 24:12)

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jer. 17:10)

Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jer. 32:19)

For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. (Matt. 16:27)

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Rom. 14:12)

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his labour. (1 Cor. 3:8)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. (Rev. 2:20)

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. (Rev. 20:12)

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Rev. 22:12)

We are plainly told that salvation is an act of sovereign grace, and act of law whereby Christ in His atonement pays the death penalty for our sins. In the verses cited above, we are told that there is a judgment, and it is according to works, and all of us must face it. There is a necessary link between grace and works. Our justification is God's saving grace through Jesus Christ and His atonement; it is a juridical act in God's court. Taken by itself, it is an example of externalism, but in Scripture it cannot be taken by itself. It is accompanied by regeneration, whereby we are made a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Regeneration is an inward act in our lives by the triune God: it manifests itself in works, i.e., regeneration evidences itself in sanctification, in our faithfulness to God's every law-word. If we could have, *which we cannot*, justification and regeneration each without the other, we would only have externalism. The justified man would then be without righteousness or justice. A man cannot be regenerate or holy (sanctified) without justification, for he would then still be a guilty sinner before God, neither free from sin nor death.

Only the facts of both justification *and* regeneration can enable man to avoid Pharisaic externalism. Externalism reduces salvation to a mechanical affair; it unleashes no regenerating force in society. The commandments of God's law requirements are a series of external acts which have their root

in a redeemed heart: this is the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, and of so much in the Old Testament, as for example its declaration of the meaning of circumcision. Moses declared that God's grace means that "the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deut. 30:6). This union of law and Spirit, of faith and works, of grace and obedience, is set forth by our Lord as the summation of the Scriptures:

37. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt. 22:37-40)

Thus, precisely because there is grace, there are works, the works of the Spirit in us in faithfulness to the law. Because we are members of Christ, we bear one another's burdens.

18. Christian Responsibility (Galatians 6:6-10)

6. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

7. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

(Galatians 6:6-10)

V. 6 in Moffatt's rendering helps clarify the meaning Paul's words stress: "Those who are taught must share all the blessings of life with those who teach them the Word." This is related to what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." *Honor* is in the Greek a word meaning both *pay* and *honor*. Paul, who took nothing from the churches for himself all the same insists that God requires double pay for able presbyters. In Galatians 6:6 Paul means this and much more. "All the blessings of life" are to be shared with able pastors. Contrary to Scripture, too many churches assume that poverty will enhance spirituality on the part of the pastors. Like it or not. Paul insists on not only a well-paid ministry but on the necessity of sharing with them life's blessings. They are important to Christ's Kingdom and His ministry on earth. There is a moral responsibility to Christ to care well for His faithful pastors.

Then, in v. 7, Paul says, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." To treat concern for Godly pastors with contempt, to turn up one's nose at the idea of a pastor living well, is dangerous. It mocks God and His word, and all who do so reap up the moral requirement for obeying God on all that Paul has thus far in his letter written about. We cannot abstract this verse from its context and make it a vague proverbial comment. It does refer to pastoral pay, to bear one another's burdens, and also one's own, *i.e.*, it stresses community and personal responsibility.

In v. 8, Paul says, "For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life." We do damage to Paul's meaning if we limit it to "the sins of the world" such as drunkenness, adultery, fornication, theft, and the like. Paul is writing to Christians who know that such things are wrong. He is trying to arouse them to subtler sins, such as failing to be a brother in Christ to other members and to the pastor. Our human nature, our

“flesh,” has many sins which masquerade as holiness but are in reality less a withdrawal from the world than from our fellow Christians. The contrast is not between sexual sins and the Spirit but between our egocentric human nature and the Spirit. Our new human nature in Christ must transcend our old human nature from Adam. The old humanity of Adam has death as its destiny, whereas in Christ we have eternal life. For a test of whose you are, the old Adam’s or Christ’s, look at your relationship to Christ’s people and to His pastor.

Therefore, Paul says, in v. 9, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” It is difficult for the old Adam to grow weary of indulging in his sin: it is a pleasure, and natural inclination. The new Christians Paul is writing to have problems in “well doing.” Sinning came naturally, virtue must went against the grain of the old man. If “well doing” wearies us, this tells us how much we need to grow in grace. “Doing what comes naturally” means taking the course of least resistance, sinning. Paul knows that for new Christians the habits of sin are stronger than the habits of virtue. He therefore encourages and requires them to disregard the weariness that is common to those for whom the ways of grace are new.

In v. 10, Paul continues, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Paul is not advocating a voluntary communism. He does not ask us to share everything with either the pastor, fellow members, or the unconverted. In 1 Timothy 5:9, Paul writes, “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” As Christians, our *first* level of responsibility is for our family. Irresponsibility here makes us “worse than an infidel” because we then sin against grace and the knowledge of God’s word. The family is our primary area of responsibility under God.

Then, *second*, Christ’s people are our next area of concern and responsibility; “for we are members one of another” (Eph. 4:25). In Acts 6:1ff., we see the early church’s concern and care for its members, and the diaconate is basic to life of the strong church.

Then, *third*, the Christian has a responsibility to all the world (Matt. 28:18-20), to preach to and to minister to its needs. A man who neglects his own family is hardly a good witness to his faith nor a fit man to administer help to others.

The term used in v. 10 for the church is “the household of faith,” or the family of God. Here as elsewhere we see that the family is basic to God’s purpose. He calls Himself *Our Father*, and us His household and family.

If we are truly God’s family, we must begin by giving due honor to those who are His ministers. We must recognize, respect, and obey His word, for

He is the final authority and power. This means surrendering our claim in Adam to be our own god and ultimate authority. We are not gods, and we are God's property. We must be members one of another.

19. The Israel of God (Galatians 6:11-18)

11. Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

12. As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

13. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

14. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

15. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

16. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

17. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

18. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. (Galatians 6:11-18)

Paul's conclusion to his letter is a series of plain-spoken summary statements. He begins (v. 11) by telling the Galatians that he has not written by dictating his words, but by his own hand. His letter is *large*, the word is *pelikois*; it can refer to his handwriting but possibly also to the fact that his words loom large in God's plan and purpose. In v. 17, Paul refers to his importance and closes the door to further discussion: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." There will be no further word from Paul, and, by implication, God's further word will be judgment on the Galatians.

In vv. 12-13, Paul turns again to the Pharisees in the church. As Raymond T. Stamm noted, Paul sums up what he said earlier in 4:17 and 5:10-12. The motives of these Pharisees in the church are, *first*, to put on a good outward surface, to manifest the forms of godliness rather than the reality thereof; *second*, to avoid persecution by passing as a branch of Judaism; *third*, to gain power in the church, to be leaders, no matter what the price.¹

Wilfred L. Knox, summarized vv. 11-18 thus:

His opponents wish to reserve for themselves the natural gratification of being able to claim as Jews to be superior to other Christians, as those who were Jews by birth claimed to be superior to proselytes. They have the further desire to avoid persecution as Christians. Yet they do not really keep the Law themselves; they only keep it in

¹. Raymond T. Stamm, "Galatians," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. X, p. 587. New York, New York: Abingdon Press, 1953.

details, and they wish to make the Galatians do the same in order to gratify their own vanity. But the Christian has no ground for boasting but the Cross, through which he has been crucified to the world. It does not matter whether a man has been circumcised or not; all that matters is that through his death to the world he should have been created afresh and raised to a new supernatural state of life (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).²

This is a good statement but for one problem. Were these Pharisees in the church necessarily Jews? We know that their origin was in the entrance of many Pharisees into the church as Jerusalem (Acts 15:5). We know also that they were active in Gentile circles, in Antioch as well as Galatia (Gal. 2:11-12). It would be a mistake to assume that they made no Gentile converts, or that these converts were not equally zealous Pharisees. In fact, our Lord makes such conversions a culminating offense of the Pharisees:

13. But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

14. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

15. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Matt. 23:13-15)

The Pharisees in Judaism were zealous in converting both Jews in the Diaspora and Gentiles to the faith; the Pharisees in the church were no less active, and we must assume that many Gentile Pharisees already existed. If such conversions to Phariseism had not been common in the church, Paul's letter to the Galatians was pointless.

Paul sets forth the difference between Phariseism and Christianity in vv. 14-15. Phariseism leads to elitism, to, *first*, a self-glorification whereby a man sees his importance as his own work and achievement. *Second*, a man's status before God is made to depend on externals, in this case circumcision. As against this, Paul says, *first*, that the Christian's glory and status depend entirely on his justification through Christ's atonement. His glory is Christ, and in Christ he is now a member of the new humanity. He is crucified, judicially dead to the old order, and he is personally separated from it. *Second*, not only is his justification God's sovereign act of grace, but his new life, his regeneration. He is now a new creature or a new creation. In terms of his relationship to God, as the Twentieth Century New Testament paraphrased v. 15, "For neither is circumcision nor the omission of it anything, but a new nature is everything." Phariseism means

² Wilfred L. Knox, "Galatians," in Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, Alfred Guillaume, editors: *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, p. 537f. New York, New York: Macmillan (1925) 1929.

self-election to the world's elite; regeneration means that God through Christ releases a new power in history through us.

In v. 16, we see that Paul is not given to promiscuous prayers or benedictions. In William's version, "Now peace and mercy be on all who walk by this rule; that is, (the benediction is) on the true Israel of God." To bless someone who is working against Christ's Kingdom is sin. A common saying of our day has it that "Prayer changes things." This is false. Our praying changes nothing: the Lord God alone changes things. Paul no doubt prayed for the conversion of these Pharisees, but he did not cease thereby to counteract their perversions of the faith. Paul commands us to be godly and charitable towards all men (Rom. 12:17-21), but, even as he tells us, "if thine enemy hunger, feed him," he does not obscure the fact that an enemy is an enemy.

His reference to "the Israel of God" is important. For Paul, the old Israel had been cut off from the root, Jesus Christ, and the new Israel grafted in (Rom. 11:13-24; cf. John 15:1-6). As Luther said,

When Paul addeth: "And upon the Israel of God," he toucheth the false apostles and Jews, who gloried and bragged that they were the people of God, that they had the law and the promises. So, it is as if he said: They are the Israel of God, which with faithful Abraham, believe the promises of God offered in Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, and not they which are begotten of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after the flesh.³

Paul thus invokes God's blessing on "the spiritual Israel in opposition to the carnal Israel."⁴

The word *rule* in this verse (16) is *kamoni*, from whence we get our word *canon*. Christians not only have the *canon* of Scripture but in Scripture a canon or rule of life. This canon or rule is the sole, full, and absolute sufficiency of Jesus Christ in our salvation.

In v. 17, Paul bars any more criticism from the Galatians: "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The marks or brands were the physical scars of his many persecutions and beatings (2 Cor. 11:23-28). What, Paul implies clearly, have you Galatians suffered, or these Pharisees in the church? They are ready to disown Christ and become pretended Jews by means of circumcision (v. 12). Being faithless to Christ, they are also faithless to the law they profess to uphold (v. 13), and yet they boast of their faithfulness (vv. 14-15). Paul dismisses his critics: their lives evidence no tested faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

³. Martin Luther: *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 381f. John Prince Fallowes, editor. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979.

⁴. John Brown: *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians*, p. 382. Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Book Club, 1957 reprint.

The benediction (v. 18) is a short one. It is comparable to the benediction in 1 Corinthians 16:23, which is preceded by an anathema on any who do not love the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 16:22). Ephesians 6:24 limits the benediction: "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (or, with incorruption)." Philippians 4:23 is also brief, as is Colossians 4:18, 1 Thessalonians 3:18, and 2 Thessalonians 3:18. 1 Corinthians 13:14 gives us a longer one: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." Thus, Paul's benedictions to the churches all stress *grace*. This the churches all needed more than anything else, then *as now*. In Galatians 3:1, 3, Paul calls the Galatians *foolish*, meaning among other things senseless, unknowing. In the benediction, he calls them *brethren*, which in the Greek original comes at the end of the sentence, just before the *Amen*. They are his brethren if they walk by God's rule of faith and as members of the Israel of God.

Failure to see the church as God's new Israel is basic to much of the foolishness of the modern church. This denial makes men and churches outsiders to the promises of God.

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