



ROMANS

“The Chief Part of the New Testament
and the Very Purest Gospel”

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Bible Class Notes
Prepared for
Our Savior Lutheran Church
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Dedication

This work is dedicated

To the members of the Wednesday Morning Bible Class of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas. Their love for the Word of God and their eagerness for the careful study of that Word enabled and inspired the preparation of these notes;

and

In Memory of Dr. Rudolf Schäfer (1878 - 1961), the foremost Lutheran artist of the modern era, whose illustrations adorn these pages. Dr. Schäfer's remarkable work embodies the Biblical theology of our Church with unique effectiveness and power.

Introduction

I. Testimonies to the Significance of the Epistle

The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans has played a uniquely significant role in the history of the church. We begin our study with a series of testimonials from authorities both ancient and modern as to the importance of this magnificent letter.



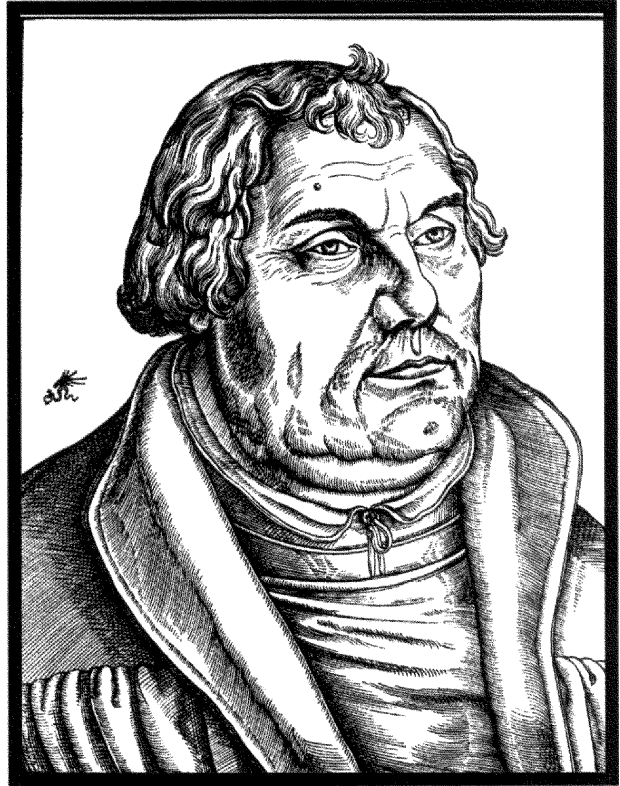
"The Conversion of St. Augustine"
by Benozzo Gozzoli

"But when a profound reflection had, from the secret depths of my soul, drawn together and heaped all my misery from the secret depths of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by as mighty a shower of tears...I flung myself down, how, I know not, under a certain fig tree, giving free course to my tears and the streams of my eyes gushed out, an acceptable sacrifice unto Thee. And, not indeed in these words, but to this effect, spake I much unto Thee: But Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry forever?...Why is there not this hour an end to my uncleanness? I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or a girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house, chanting and often repeating, "Tolle lege! Tolle lege!" (Latin - "Take up and read!")...So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting, for there I had put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell - "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision

for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:13-14) No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, by a light, as it were, of security into my heart, all the gloom of doubt vanished away." (St. Augustine, Confessions, VIII, 12)

"I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God," in chapter 1:17 because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous...At last, by the mercy of God, meditating night and day, I gave heed to the context of the words...and there

I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning...and whereas before the "righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to paradise." (Martin Luther, Preface to Latin Writings, 1545, AE, 34, p.337)



***"Dr. Martin Luther" - 1551
Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Younger***

"This Epistle is the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, which, indeed, deserves that a Christian not only know it word for word by heart but deal with it daily as with daily bread for the soul. For it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled the more delightful it becomes, and the better it tastes...In this Epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know, namely, what is law, gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, and the cross; and how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, be he righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe, and even toward our own selves. Moreover, this is all ably supported from Scripture and proven by St. Paul's own example and that of the prophets, so that one could not wish for anything more. Therefore it appears that he wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For, without doubt, whoever has this epistle well in his heart, has with him the light and power of the Old Testament. Therefore let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually. To this end may God give His grace. Amen." (Martin Luther, Preface to the Book of Romans, 1546, AE, 35, p.380)

"Forasmuch as this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and the most pure "evangelion," that is to say, glad tidings, and that we call gospel, and also a light and way unto the whole structure; I think it meet that every Christian man not only know it, by rote and without the book, but also exercise himself therein evermore continually, as with the daily bread of the soul. Truly, no man can read it too often, or study it too well; for the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is; the more groundly it is searched, the more precious things are found in it, so great is the treasure of spiritual things that lie hidden therein." (William Tyndale, Doctrinal Treatises, p. 484)

“I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” (Charles Wesley, Journal, 1878)

“Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformation in the history of the church have been directly related to the Book of Romans...It has been said that Romans will delight the greatest logician and captivate the mind of the consummate genius, yet it will bring tears to the humblest soul and refreshment to the simplest mind. It will knock you down and then lift you up. It will strip you naked and then clothe you with eternal elegance. The Book of Romans took a Bedford Tinker like John Bunyan and turned him into the spiritual giant and literary master who wrote "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "The Holy War."...It is no wonder that Frederick Godet, the Swiss commentator, once exclaimed, "O St. Paul! Had thy one work been to compose the epistle to the Romans, that alone should have rendered thee dear to every sound reason." An anonymous poet wrote these moving words that capture much of the heart of the Book of Romans:

*O long and dark the stairs I trod; With trembling feet to find my God
Gaining a foothold, bit by bit, Then slipping back and losing it.
Never progressing, striving still With weakening grasp and faltering will,
Bleeding to climb to God, while He Serenely smiled, not noting me.
Then came a certain time when I Loosened my hold and fell thereby;
Down to the lowest step my fall, As if I had not climbed at all.
Now when I lay despairing there, Listen, a footfall on the stair,
On that same stair where I afraid, Faltered and fell and lay dismayed.
And lo, when hope had ceased to be, My God came down the stairs to me!”
(John MacArthur, Commentary on Romans, I, p.xii,xiii.)*

“Romans has always been highly praised, and it is beyond question the most dynamic of all New Testament letters, even as it was written at the climax of Paul's apostolic career. Early given the first place in the list of Paul's letters, Romans still holds that place in our Bibles in spite of the actual chronology of Paul's letters...To this day, the truth laid down in Romans forms the Gibraltar basis of doctrine, teaching and confession in the true evangelical church...In his "Table Talk" Coleridge feels constrained to say: "I think St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the most profound work in existence.” (R.C.H. Lenski, Romans, p.8,9)



“The Apostle Paul” - 1521

Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder

III. Authorship and Origin

The great missionary apostle Paul is the undisputed author of the Letter to the Romans. Hardly a voice, from the early church to the present, has ever been raised against his authorship. The historical references included in the letter agree with the facts of the life of Paul. The doctrinal content and style of the letter is also fully consistent with that of the apostle. Lenski notes:

“All the old orthodox, as well as all the old heterodox testimonies without a single exception ascribe this epistle to Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ. Stronger even than this united ancient testimony is that embedded in the epistle itself. The great chorus of commentators, down to the present day, presents a full harmony on this point. So few have been the later efforts to shake this fact by means of hypotheses that they scarcely deserve mention.” (Lenski, p.5)

The letter was written in the middle of the first century, between 55 and 58 AD, at the conclusion of St. Paul's third missionary journey. The apostle is in the Greek city of Corinth, making preparations to return to Palestine with the offering from the Gentile churches for the saints in Jerusalem. Paul viewed his work in the eastern Mediterranean as virtually complete and he was looking forward to establishing a base of operations in Rome for outreach to Spain and the West.

At this moment in history the city of Rome was at the pinnacle of her glory. As the glorious capital city of a thriving empire, Rome had become a vast cosmopolitan metropolis, with contingents from throughout the Mediterranean world among her citizens. Rome harbored a large Jewish community. Some scholars estimate that 40,000 to 50,000 Jews lived in Rome at this time. A century earlier, the Roman orator Cicero had lamented: *“For you know how numerous the Jews are, how*

clannish, and how they can make their influence felt.” (Bruce, p.380). In 41 AD, the newly crowned emperor Claudius prohibited public assembly among the Jews, and when that failed to limit the growth and influence of their community, he expelled all Jews from his capital in 49 AD. Aquila and Priscilla, whom Paul met in Corinth, were Jewish exiles from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2). It would seem that their Christianity predated their arrival in Corinth. The imperial decree was not lifted until after the death of Claudius in 54 AD. Jews from Rome are mentioned among those present at Pentecost in Jerusalem and it may be that they brought their new faith home with them (Acts 2:10). In any case, it would appear that the typical pattern described in the Book of Acts also prevailed in Rome, namely that Christian missionary efforts began in the synagogue and spread out from there.

Ambrosiaster, a fourth century Latin commentator, writes: *“The Romans had embraced the faith of Christ, albeit according to the Jewish rite, although they saw no sign of mighty works nor any of the apostles.”* (Bruce, p.379) The absence of an apostolic founder for the church in Rome finds further support in Paul's comment: ***“It has***



“Peter and Paul” by Rudolf Schäfer

always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.” (Romans 15:20) Thus the Roman Catholic tradition that Peter was the founder and first bishop of the church of Rome, serving in that capacity for twenty-five years, is without reliable historical support. Peter did get to Rome, but not until after Paul's first imprisonment. He was martyred there in 64 AD, prior to Paul's second imprisonment and execution.

The content of the Epistle suggests that by the mid-fifties, the congregation in Rome was predominantly Gentile with a substantial Jewish minority. The relationship between Israel and the church, and Israel's rejection of its Messiah are major themes of the letter. The church appears to have lacked formal organization, and most probably consisted of a cluster of informal household churches. Romans is the most systematic and substantive of the Pauline epistles. It reads more like an elaborate theological essay than a letter. Its reliance upon the Old Testament is also noteworthy. The Epistle quotes the Old Testament fifty-seven times, more than any other New Testament Book. The letter is regarded as Paul's doctrinal system, as summary of his theology, in a sense, the dogmatical and moral catechism of the apostle.



“Paul Entrusts His Letter to the Romans to Phoebe” by Lucas Cranach

III. Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-7)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:8-15)
- III. Theme- The Gospel of Righteousness from God (1:16-17)
- IV. God's Righteous Justice toward Unrighteous Mankind (1:18-3:20)
 - A. Gentiles (1:18-32)
 - B. Jews (2:1-3:8)
 - C. Summary: All People (3:9-20)
- V. Justification - the Righteousness of God (3:21-4:25)
 - A. Through Christ (3:21-26)
 - B. By Faith (3:27-31)
 - C. Abraham the Father of Believers (4:1-25)
- VI. The Results of Righteousness
 - A. The Assurance of Hope (5:1-11)
 - B. The Second Adam's Reversal of the Defeat of the First (5:12-21)
- V. Righteousness Imparted: Sanctification (6:1-8:39)
 - A. Freedom From Sin's Tyranny (6:1-23)
 - B. Freedom From the Curse of the Law (7:1-8:17)
 - C. Present Suffering - Future Glory (8:18-39)
- VI. God's Righteousness to Israel and the World (9:1-11:36)
 - A. The Justice of the Rejection (9:1-29)
 - B. The Reality of the Rejection (9:30-11:24)
 - C. God's Merciful Purpose for Mankind (11:25-36)
- VII. Righteousness Practiced in Everyday Life (12:1-15:13)
 - A. Within the Church (12:1-21)
 - B. Within the World (13:1-14)
 - C. Among Weak and Strong Christians (14:1-15:13)
- VIII. Paul's Plan to Proclaim the Gospel (15:14-33)
- IX. Commendation, Warning, and Greetings (16:1-27)

Romans Chapter 1

Verse 1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God -

Classical Greek and Latin letters typically begin with a “*Salutation.*” These openings followed a fairly standard format in which the author identified himself and the person or persons to whom the letter is addressed, followed by a greeting or salutation to the addressee. The opening paragraph of the letter to the Romans follows this standard format. St. Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1-6). He identifies the Christians in Rome as the group to whom the letter is addressed (1:7), and adds a word of greeting and commendation (1:7). This same pattern can be observed in the other epistles of the New Testament.

“*Paul*” - Paul was born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia to an observant Jewish household, during the first decade of the Christian era. He describes himself as ***“circumcised in the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee.”*** (Philippians 3:6). His father had been granted the privilege of Roman citizenship, which Paul inherited at birth. (Acts 22:27) His Roman cognomen was ***“Paulus.”*** His Hebrew name was ***“Saul,”*** after the first king of Israel who also hailed from the tribe of Benjamin. After his conversion to Christianity, Paul typically identifies himself with his Latin name (Acts 13:9 notes the transition). In keeping with Jewish custom, Saul learned the trade of his father, who was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Saul received his education in Jerusalem, where he studied under the great rabbi Gamaliel, the leading pharisee of the day (Acts 5:38f.; 22:3; Galatians 1:14). Prior to his conversion, Saul was an ardent pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), and an active opponent of Christianity (Acts 7:58; 9:1,2; 26:11). Paul's unique background - trained in the intricacies of Judaic law, from a wealthy family in a cosmopolitan Greek city, with the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship - equipped him for his special role as the major spokesman for the Gospel in his generation (Cf. Galatians 1:15). He truly was ***“God's keynote speaker for heralding the gospel”*** (MacArthur, p.4).

“*A servant of Christ Jesus*” - Paul uses the salutation as a means of introducing himself to the Christians in Rome. In effect, he transforms the formal self-

identification of the sender into a personal confession of faith. He defines his essential identity in a series of three phrases. First and foremost, he is ***“a servant of Christ Jesus.”*** The Greek noun *“doulos”* literally refers to a bond-servant or a slave. It conveys the basic connotation of subservience and usually referred to those who were in permanent bondage from which there was no release but death. The Mosaic law provided the means by which an indentured servant could choose to become the permanent slave of a master whom he loved and respected (Exodus 21:5-6). This is clearly the sense in which St. Paul applies the term to himself. He has given himself wholeheartedly and irrevocably to the Savior Who had rescued him from sin and death. In genuine humility, Paul recognizes that the greatest honor in all the world is to be a slave of Christ Jesus. That which is true of the apostle is, of course, true of every Christian. The New Testament regularly uses this same powerful word in reference to all believers (cf. Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 2:16; 1 Corinthians 7:22). He designates his Master as ***“Christ Jesus”*** (*“Christ”* - Greek, the Anointed One; *“Jesus”* - Hebrew, Savior) using both the Hebrew title of the promised Messiah and the personal name of Jesus of Nazareth.

“Called to be an apostle” - The second phrase defines the authority of Paul's ministry and the basis for the letter which follows. Paul is not merely another slave of Jesus Christ, one among many thousands. He is a part of that select group of men who were directly chosen by the Lord to be His apostles. The Greek noun *“apostolos”*



“The Conversion of Saul”
19th Century Bible Illustration by
Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

means one who has been sent on a mission. The word is used seventy-nine times in the New Testament. In a few of those instances it retains its more general, original sense of a messenger or delegate (cf. Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7). But the word's primary reference in Scripture is to the fourteen men (the Twelve, Matthias as a

replacement for Judas, and Paul) whom Christ personally chose and called to proclaim the Gospel and lead the church with His personal authority (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:15-26). The “*call*” of an apostle comes immediately from Christ Himself (Galatians 1:1). For Paul, that call came in a blinding flash of heavenly light on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-21; 26:12-18) and from that moment on he proclaimed the Gospel which God had directly revealed to him (Galatians 1:11-24).

“Apostle is one of the least appreciated and even most misunderstood words in the Christian vocabulary...The apostles knew that they were to witness in an extraordinary, supernatural sense. Because they were apostles, God spoke authoritatively through them, so that what they said as apostles carried the force of divine teaching or Scripture...By calling himself an apostle in Romans, Paul reminds his readers that he is writing as no mere ordinary man but rather as one who has been given a message that should be received by them as the very words of God.” (Boice, I, p.27)

“The apostles, therefore, were the immediate messengers of Jesus Christ, sent to declare His gospel, endued with the Holy Spirit, rendering them infallible as teachers, and investing them with miraculous powers, and clothed with particular prerogatives in the organization of government of the Church.” (Hodge, p.22)

“And set apart for the gospel of God” - St. Paul asserts that he has been *set apart* by God for the ministry to which he had been called. The verb in the original text (Greek - “*aphorizo*”) is related to the concept of holiness and separation from sin. The same verb is used in reference to the nation of Israel in Leviticus chapter twenty: **“You are to be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be mine.”** (Leviticus 20: 26; cf. also Exodus 13:12; Numbers 8:11-14; 15:20) The word conveys the idea of total consecration and dedication. Some commentators suggest that its use here is an ironic reference to Paul's past as a leader of the pharisees. The term “*pharisee*” means “*a separated one*.” They believed that their careful observance of the traditions of the law set them apart from ordinary people who were less righteous than themselves. Paul had been the epitome of the obsessive, negative, judgmental, self-righteousness of the pharisees. Now God had called him - not to be separated from those who failed to measure up to a legalistic human standard - but to be separated for the sake of the gospel of the almighty God. The apostle acknowledges that the gospel has become the dominant and determinative focus of his whole life (Galatians 1:15,16).

“No language could be more eloquent of the decisive action of God and of the completeness of Paul's resulting commitment to the gospel. All bonds of interest and

attachment alien or extraneous to the promotion of the gospel have been cut asunder and he is set apart by the investment of all of his interests and ambitions in the cause of the gospel.” (Murray, p.3)

“Gospel” (Greek- *“euangelion”*) is a key word in the letter to the Romans. It is used sixty times in this epistle and occurs six times in the introduction. It's first occurrence, here in verse one, comes only nine words into the Greek text. The term means *“good news”* and in the verses that follow the apostle will begin to define the content of the good news. The good news is identified as **“the gospel of God,”** that is to say, God is its source and its author. The authority of the message comes from him (cf. Galatians 1:6-9). This is not man's good news. Rather it is God's good news for man.



“The First Gospel” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 2-4

The Gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding His Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and Who, through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead; Jesus Christ, our Lord.

“The gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures” - The gospel which Paul proclaims did not originate with him. It is the fulfillment of ancient promises from God. The first announcement of that good news took place in the Garden of Eden (cf. Genesis 3:15). The promise of the Messiah was repeated and expanded hundreds of times during the long centuries of the Old Testament. That broad stream of messianic prophecy comes to perfect fulfillment in the life

and ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The core of the apostolic preaching of the gospel was the demonstration of that fact (i.e. Acts 2:14-36; 8:35; 17:2,3). God's inspired spokesmen, the prophets, are the human instruments through whom the promise was presented. The essence of prophetic ministry was that a prophet spoke not for himself, but for God. Thus, they are **“His prophets.”** That which the prophets wrote by divine inspiration is not their own word, but the Word of God Himself (1 Timothy 3: 14-17; 2 Peter 1:16-21). Hence the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, gathered in the **“Holy Scriptures,”** are in a category of their own. They are the place, the only place, where God's great good news can be found. Every Christian ought to be drawn to the Book with an insatiable yearning to hear the Word of God. John Wesley says it well:

“I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf, till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity, I want to know one thing - the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be "homo unius libri" ("a man of one book"). Here, then, I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book - for this end, to find the way to heaven.” (Boice, I, p.34)

“Regarding His Son” - Paul's brief summary of the content of the gospel opens with an acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God. God's gospel deals with God's Son, from its beginning to its end. He is Christianity. Without Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, the second Member of the divine Trinity, the foundation is destroyed and our faith and hope are gone. Lenski categorically asserts:

“The fact that Paul has in mind the second person of the Godhead as confessed in the ecumenical and in other Christian creeds never admitted of either question or doubt. Those who dissent must do so on other than Biblical grounds, which dissent places them outside of the Christian pale.” (Lenski, p.34)

“Who as to His human nature was a descendant of David” - The doctrine of the two natures in Christ is now forcefully presented as the heart of the gospel. Jesus is both true God and true man. The verb **“was”** (Greek - *“genomenou”*) literally means *“came to be.”* Christ was not always human. His humanity began at a specific point in time, at the instant of His incarnation in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary. The

NIV text correctly translates the noun “flesh” (Greek - “sarx”) as “**human nature**” for the reference is not merely to the physical body of Christ but to His humanity. Humanly speaking, Jesus was “**a descendant of David**” and thus the great stream of messianic prophecy finds its perfect fulfillment in Him. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, reigning forever upon the royal throne of David.

“And Who, through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” - Unlike Christ's humanity, which began at the moment of His conception (indicated in the preceding phrase by the verb “**was**”), the divinity of our Lord is from eternity. He has always



“A King of Royal David’s Line”: by Rudolf Schäfer

been, and will always be, true God, the eternal Son of the Father (cf. John 1:1-5; 8:58; 17:5; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 7:3; Revelation 22:17). Hence these words cannot refer to the origin of His divine nature. That is clearly indicated by the change in verbs. Jesus does not become the Son of God. He is **“declared”** to be the Son of God. The precise meaning of the Greek verb (*“horizo”*) is to mark off the boundaries of something. Our English word *“horizon,”* the line which marks the boundary between the earth and the sky, is derived from this Greek term. The NIV's translation of this important phrase tends to obscure the meaning of the original text. The Greek literally says: *“declared as God's Son in power according to His spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.”* It is immediately evident that this phrase is a parallel to Paul's magnificent Christological hymn in Philippians chapter two. Christ's state of humiliation (Philippians 2:6-8) began with His conception in Mary's womb. In perfect submission to the will of the Father (cf. John 5:30), He lived a holy life and died an innocent death upon the cross (*“according to His spirit of holiness”*). Having done all that was necessary for the salvation of mankind, Jesus was then exalted by the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). The glory and power that had always been rightfully His were then restored and He was **“declared as the Son of God in power”** as He rose triumphantly from the dead (cf. Acts 13:29-33). The apostle's language here is fully consistent with Philippians 2 which notes that the Father's exaltation of His Son comes in response to the Son's perfect submission to the will of the Father (**“Therefore God exalted Him...”** vs.9; cf. also John 17:1,4,5).

“Jesus Christ our Lord” - These words are the conclusive climax of Paul's summary of the core of the gospel, as the apostle identifies the Person Who is Himself the gospel. **“Jesus”** fixes His historical identity and emphasizes His role as the Savior of mankind. **“Christ”** is the official title which designates Him as the Anointed One sent by God to deliver His people, whose coming was promised by the prophets of the Old Testament. **“Our Lord”** reflects the exaltation and glory which are His and His alone. The title **“Lord”** (Greek - *“Kyrios”*) is St. Paul's favorite identification for Christ. He refers to Jesus as **“Lord”** 230 times in his epistles. **“Lord”** is the New Testament equivalent of *“Jahweh,”* the sacred name of God in the Old Testament. When Christians used this title in reference to Jesus, they were acknowledging His deity and acclaiming Him as the Holy One of Israel. He is the sovereign Ruler of all and we, as His people, owe Him exclusive and absolute obedience. The **“Lord”** is the Master whom St. Paul acknowledges when he calls himself a slave. The **“Lord”** is the Sender who dispatched St. Paul as his chosen apostle.

Verses 5-6

Through Him, and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

“Through Him, and for His Name's sake, we have received grace and apostleship”

- Jesus is the means, the Mediator, through whom Paul and humanity received the undeserved love of God. This is God's amazing ***“grace.”*** *“Grace”* is one of the basic themes of the letter to the Romans. Paul refers to it twenty-two times in this great letter. *“Grace”* is the essence of the gospel, unmerited, unearned favor in which a believer does not and cannot contribute anything of worth. God loves us because it is His nature to love (1 John 4:16). He graciously extends that love to us in Jesus Christ, our Savior. St. Paul gratefully acknowledges his complete personal dependence upon the undeserved love of God over and over again (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:13-16; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5-7). The apostle uses the plural pronoun, ***“we”***, to include the Roman Christians as recipients of the undeserved love of a gracious God. The same Lord Jesus has bestowed the office of apostle (***“apostleship”***) upon His people, the Church. The fact that the Lord had chosen Paul, ***“the least of all God's people”*** (Ephesians 3:8), and ***“the worst of sinners”*** (1 Timothy 1:16) to serve in this office was an incredible demonstration of divine grace and mercy. He says it best in 1 Corinthians 15: ***“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect...”*** (Vs.9-10). The proclamation of this divine grace through Paul's apostolic ministry also takes place ***“for His Name's sake.”*** It gives glory and honor to God as it seeks the salvation of men.

“To call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith” - The purpose and goal of the office entrusted to Paul and the grace which he has been given is to bring the nations to the ***“obedience that comes from faith.”*** The opening words of the NIV text, ***“To call people,”*** do not appear in the Greek original, in which the first seven verses of chapter one form one extended sentence. The Greek simply says *“for the obedience of faith among all nations.”* *“Obedience of faith”* is the key phrase. Paul uses the same words again at the end of the letter where he says: ***“the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith.”***

(16:25-26). The apostle's point is simple but of fundamental importance. Obedience is here regarded as the necessary concomitant result of faith. Faith is no mere act of momentary enthusiasm or a flash of emotional intensity, *“but a commitment of wholehearted devotion to Christ and to the truth of His gospel.”* (Murray, p.14) This is not a matter of human works in addition to faith. Lenski (who prefers to translate the phrase as a compound noun, *“faith/obedience”*) offers this meticulous definition with his typically Lutheran sensitivity to the issue of work righteousness:

“But here the obedience lies in the very act of believing and not in the category of works. God's gospel calls on us to acknowledge, receive, and appropriate it as what it is; and doing this by the power and the grace coming to us in the gospel, in full confidence and trust, is this essential obedience of faith.” (Lenski, p.47)

Martin Franzmann's observations are equally helpful:

“The combination of "obedience" with "faith" is a telling one. Paul knows of no obedience, in the religious sense, which is not faith. Faith is created by the proclamation of the gospel of the Son of God, who came in freedom into the flesh and was designated Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead; it is created by the proclamation of a divine action that is none of man's doing or deserving. Faith is therefore pure receiving; faith is pure relatedness to the redeeming act of God, an act present and at work in the apostolic word that proclaims it. But the apostolic Word also proclaims the Son as Lord, with the right and power to rule. His grace lays total claim to men and therefore faith is always obedience.” (Franzmann, p.26)

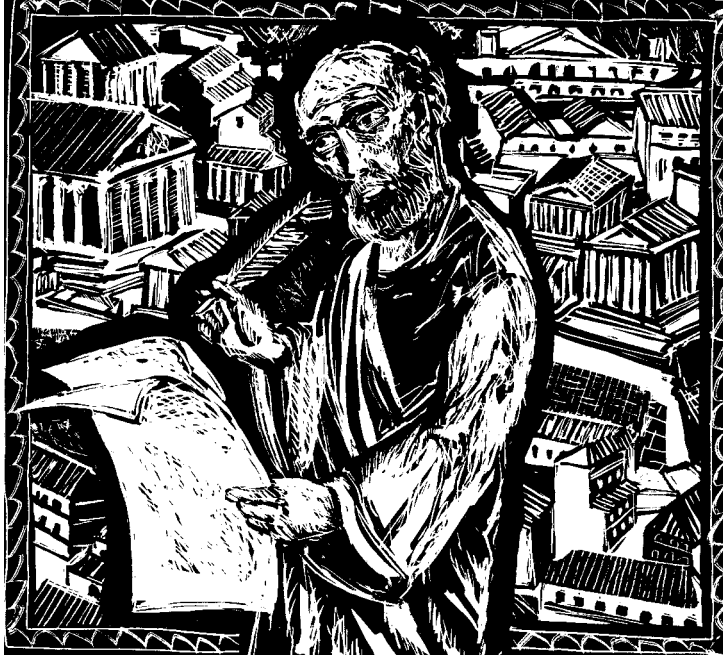
While the NIV's translation ***“among all the Gentiles”*** is possible, it fails to catch the full scope of Paul's message. This is the same phrase that occurs in the Great Commission, ***“Go, and make disciples of all nations...”*** (Matthew 28:19), and it describes the universal mission of the Christian Church. Paul is writing to a congregation that includes a significant number of Jewish converts. Surely he would not omit their countrymen from the outreach of the good news. The inclusive ***“all”*** also serves to support the view that this phrase refers to *“all nations,”* both Jews and Gentiles.

“And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” - Like Paul, and all other believers, the Christians in Rome are people who have been ***“called.”*** The verb is passive. It is God, in Christ, Who does the calling. That calling is to the faith/obedience mentioned in the preceding verse. By virtue of that

call, all of these Roman believers become a part of the great fellowship of faith that is the Holy Christian Church.

Verse 7

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.



“To All in Rome” by Norman Woehrle

“To all in Rome” - After his extended digression about the nature of the gospel, the apostle now returns to the standard salutation formula as he identifies the persons for whom the letter is intended. The designation is terse and to the point. Paul is writing not only to his friends and acquaintances in Rome (cf. Chapter 16), not to Jews or Gentiles as such, but ***“to all”*** the believers in Rome whether they are known or unknown to him personally.

“Who are loved by God and called to be saints:” - The Greek is a bit more precise than the English. It literally reads: *“beloved of God as called saints.”* The Christians in Rome are people upon whom God has lavished His love (Greek - *“agapetois theou”*). *“Agape”* is the characteristic New Testament term for the love of God. It is unconditional, unselfish, and sacrificial. God loves us not because of who we are, or because of any quality or characteristic within us. God loves us simply because it is His nature to love (cf. Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

“We are Christians for one reason only and that is that God has set his love upon us. That is the thing that brings us out of the world and out of the dominion of Satan...And therefore it is not surprising that the apostle here should remind these Christians of this wonderful thing. The world hated them; it persecuted them. They might be arrested at any moment, at the whim of any cruel tyrant who happened to be the emperor, and they might be condemned to death and thrown to the lions in the

arena. They were oftentimes hated of all men, so Paul is anxious that they should realize this, that they are the beloved of God; that they are in Christ, and that God love them in the same way that He loves Christ...Do not rush on to chapters six, seven, and eight, saying: "I want to know about the doctrine of sanctification." My dear friend, if you only realized, as you should, that you are loved by God as He loved His own Son, you would learn the most important thing with respect to your sanctification without going any further." (D.M. Lloyd Jones, p.159,160)

The Christians in Rome are people who the Lord God has called out of the world to live by faith. Hence they are **“saints.”** A saint is one who has been separated from the world and from sin. And yet every believer is *“simul justus et peccator”* (a saint and a sinner at the same time).

"Saints" carries no idea of perfectionism...We are saints because God has made us saints, namely by His call. Our justification of faith constitutes us saints because it has removed our sins from us as far as the East is from the West. The fact that these saints also begin to live holy lives and are thus also separated from all worldlings follows in the nature of the case. Here on earth, these saints still sin daily, and yet daily they are washed by pardoning grace and thus retain their sainthood."
(Lenski, p. 53)

The progression of Paul's thought is logical and concise. The believers are saints by virtue of the fact that they are called by God. The basis for that call is the fact that they are beloved of God.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” - The third and final component in the traditional salutation is the greeting itself. This is the typical formula which occurs in a number of St. Paul's letters (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:2). **“Grace”** (Greek - *“charis”*), as previously discussed, is the undeserved favor of God which comes to us as a free gift by faith in Christ. **“Peace”** (Greek - *“eirene”*) is the traditional Hebrew *“shalom.”* It denotes the sense of well-being and security that is the result of being in right relationship with God. The source of these precious gifts is **“God our Father”** who has revealed Himself as our loving heavenly Father in the sending of His Son, **“the Lord Jesus Christ”** (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:6).

“In Paul, the more typical greetings of Jew and Greek have become a blessing which combines the strength of the word which perhaps more than any other characterizes his gospel (“Grace”) with the richness of the Semitic greeting (“Peace”) - a prayer

for the unbounded and wholly generous outreaching power of God which makes for humankind's best well-being.” (Dunn, p. 25)

Verse 8

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.

The salutation itself is now followed by a few brief introductory comments. Every one of Paul's letters, except Galatians (where the issue in contention was the loss of the very gospel itself), begins with an expression of gratitude for the people to whom the letter is addressed. And so it is also here in the letter to the Romans. This is not merely an example of personal flattery. Paul's thanks are not addressed to the Romans themselves, but to God, whose grace was at work in the lives of these people. The verb is in the present tense, ***“I thank,”*** indicating that even as he begins to write this letter (***“First”***), he is giving thanks to God. For Paul, God is not an abstract theological concept, but a beloved Master ***“through Jesus Christ”*** his personal Savior and Lord. Rome is the first city of the world, the nerve center and capital of a mighty empire. That reality would necessarily result in a position of unique prominence for the Christian community in Rome. The church in Rome was renown throughout the world for its ***“faith.”*** Christians everywhere had heard of and been encouraged by the steadfast faith of the believers in Rome.

Verses 9-10

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

“God...is my Witness” - St. Paul now confirms his declaration of gratitude for the pre-eminence of the faith of the Roman Christians by asserting his eagerness to personally visit with the congregation in Rome. He reverently calls upon God to witness the truthfulness of his constant concern and prayer for the Romans. The apostle regularly utilizes this type of oath (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:23; 11:31; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5). Its use here is indicative of the importance which Paul placed upon assuring the Romans that his failure to visit Rome prior to this time was not indicative of a lack of interest or desire.



"Paul's Arrival In Rome" 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

"Whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son" - Paul's appeal to God as witness is strengthened by his deeply personal identification with the deity. The Romans may never have met this man, but having read this introduction, they will have learned a great deal about him. In the original, the verb ***"serve"*** (Greek - *"latreuo"*) carries the connotation of worship. It is the word that describes the official service of a priest before the altar and the formal cultic worship of God's people in the Old Testament. This connotation also carries over into the language of the New Testament (cf. 1:25; Luke 2:37; Hebrews 8:5; 9:1,6,9; 13:10; Revelation 7:15) as the term is broadened to include every form of divine worship, adoration, praise, and prayer. The most significant development in New Testament usage can be seen in the extension of the concept of worship (Greek - *"latría"*) to include the totality of the Christian life as a worshipful response to God's grace in Christ. Romans 12:1,2 is the classic statement of this view.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - which is your spiritual worship (Greek - “latreian”). Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what is God's will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”

Paul considers his service in ***“preaching the gospel of His Son”*** an act of worship, thru which he glorifies and gives thanks to the God Who has called him as an apostle to preach the good news. The intensity of this worship, the depth and sincerity of his service to God, is indicated by the phrase ***“with my whole heart.”*** The text literally says - *“in my spirit”* (Greek - *“en to pneumatic”*). When the word *“spirit”* is used in reference to the non-physical dimension of a human being in the New Testament, it characteristically emphasizes the soul as it relates to or is influenced by the Spirit of God. The point here is that this is not a matter of external, outward conformity with ritual requirements, like the pharisaic observances, but a dedication which has consumed the very essence of Paul's being. The NIV's translation does well to capture the sense of the Greek. John MacArthur effectively summarizes the contrast:

“Paul had been raised and educated in Judaism. He had himself been a Pharisee and was well acquainted with the other Jewish sects, the Sadducees, the scribes, the priests, and the elders. He knew that with few exceptions those leaders served God in the flesh and were motivated by self-interest. Their worship and service were mechanical, routine, external, and superficial. Paul also was well acquainted with the Gentile world and knew that pagan religious worship and service were likewise external, superficial, and completely motivated by self-interest...During the years before his salvation, Paul himself had worshiped and served God in an external, self-interested way (Philippians 3:4-7). But now that he belonged to Christ, and had Christ's Spirit dwelling, he worshiped and served Him in spirit and in truth, with His whole being. Paul was now motivated by a genuine, inner desire to serve God for God's sake rather than his own, in God's revealed way, rather than his own, and in God's power, rather than his own. He was no longer motivated by self-interest or peer pressure and no longer focused on Jewish religious tradition or even on self-effort to keep God's law. He was not interested in trying to please other men, even himself, but only God.” (MacArthur, p.33)

“How constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times” - The truth which Paul affirmed with God's witness is his unceasing remembrance of the Romans in prayer. Those who serve God with power and effectiveness are, without exception, men and

women of prayer. *“Ora et Labora!”* The ancient Latin maxim summarizes the vital combination that must characterize the powerful, productive Christian life. St. Paul was a man of prayer, and the Christians at Rome figured prominently in those prayers.

“And I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.” - The apostle was firmly convinced that the direction of his life and ministry was governed by divine providence. Like the Lord whom he served, St. Paul was fully submissive to the will of the heavenly Father. So here also, Paul's eagerness to visit Rome is directed ***“by God's will.”*** His sole purpose was to do his Father's will, in his Father's way, at his Father's time. While he might pray consistently and vigorously for a particular outcome, he was nonetheless content to allow the will of God to prevail.

Verses 11 -12

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong - that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith.

“I long to see you...” - The apostle now explains the reason for his eagerness to visit Rome. His motive is not egocentric or self-serving. He is not contemplating career advancement or personal advantage. He wants to go to Rome to give of himself, not to entertain or indulge himself. The purpose of the anticipated apostolic visit is to ***“impart to you some spiritual gift”*** (Greek - *“pneumatikon charisma”*). A ***“spiritual gift”*** is a blessing of God's undeserved love (Greek - *“charis”* - English - grace) which is spiritual in nature and conveyed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Hodge writes:

“The gifts of which the Holy Spirit is the author include not only the miraculous endowments of which such frequent mention is made in the letter to the Corinthians, and the ordinary gifts of teaching, exhortation, and prophesying (1 Corinthians 12), but also those graces which are the fruits of the Spirit. The extraordinary gifts were communicated by the imposition of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:17; 19:6), and therefore abounded in churches founded by the apostles (1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 3:5). As the church in Rome was not of this number, it has been supposed that Paul was desirous of conferring upon the Roman Christians some of those miraculous powers by which the gospel was in other places attended and confirmed. The following verses, however, are in favor of giving the phrase here a wider signification. Any increase of knowledge, of grace, or of power was a charismata pneumatikon in the sense here intended.” (Hodge, p. 37)

Here, as always, the goal of a “*spiritual gift*” is “*to make you strong*,” that is to build up the body of Christ.

“That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by one another's faith.” - Edification is by nature a mutual process. As he seeks to strengthen and renew their faith, St. Paul will himself receive a blessing. It is instructive to note that Paul did not consider himself to be above being spiritually edified by other believers. There is no leader in the church, not even the great missionary apostle to the Gentiles, who does not stand in constant need of that mutual encouragement (cf. Hebrews 10:24,25). John Calvin writes:

“Note how modestly he expresses what he feels by not refusing to seek strengthening from inexperienced believers. He means what he says, too, for there is none so void of gifts in the church of Christ who cannot in some measure contribute to our spiritual progress. Ill will and pride, prevent our deriving such benefit from one another.” (Calvin, p. 24)

Paul's eagerness to seek the mutual encouragement of the Roman Christians ought to be a salutary lesson to leaders in the Church. If the greatest theologian who ever lived, saw himself in need of such support, how much greater is our need for that same support. The ministries of all too many have been undermined by the arrogance which leads the pastor to conclude that he has nothing to learn from his people. William Carey, the great 19th century British missionary to India, expressed his earnest desire for the prayers of his people when he asserted: “*I will go down into the pit itself, if you will hold the rope.*”

Verse 13

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now), in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

“I do not want you to be unaware, brothers,” - This formula is a phrase commonly used in the Pauline letters to indicate the importance of that which follows and lend extra weight to the apostle's words (cf. 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1; 2 Corin-

thians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:13). His identification of the Romans as “*brothers*” makes his remarks all the more personal. He has previously indicated his desire and his prayers in regard to a Roman visit. He now adds that he had actually resolved to make that trip repeatedly (“*many times*”) but that he has always been prevented from carrying out those plans. He repeats this assertion in 15:22 - “*This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you.*” The nature of the hindrances which prevented his journey are not specified in either text. Those hindrances may have been providential, the result of circumstances beyond his control, or they may have revelatory as God directly commanded him in another direction (cf. Acts 16:7).

“*In order that I might have a harvest among you...*”- The purpose of this earnestly desired but often delayed visit to Rome is “*that I might have a harvest among you.*” The noun “*harvest*” (Greek - “*karpos*”) literally means

“*fruit.*” It is used in the New Testament in three different ways: A. For the attitudes that characterize the Spirit led believer (Galatians 5:22-23); B. For the actions that are to result from a living faith relationship with the Lord (Matthew 3:8; Romans 6:21-22; 7:4; Philippians 4:16-17; James 3:17-18; Hebrews 12:11;13:15); C. In a



“*Sowing for the Harvest*” by Rudolf Schäfer

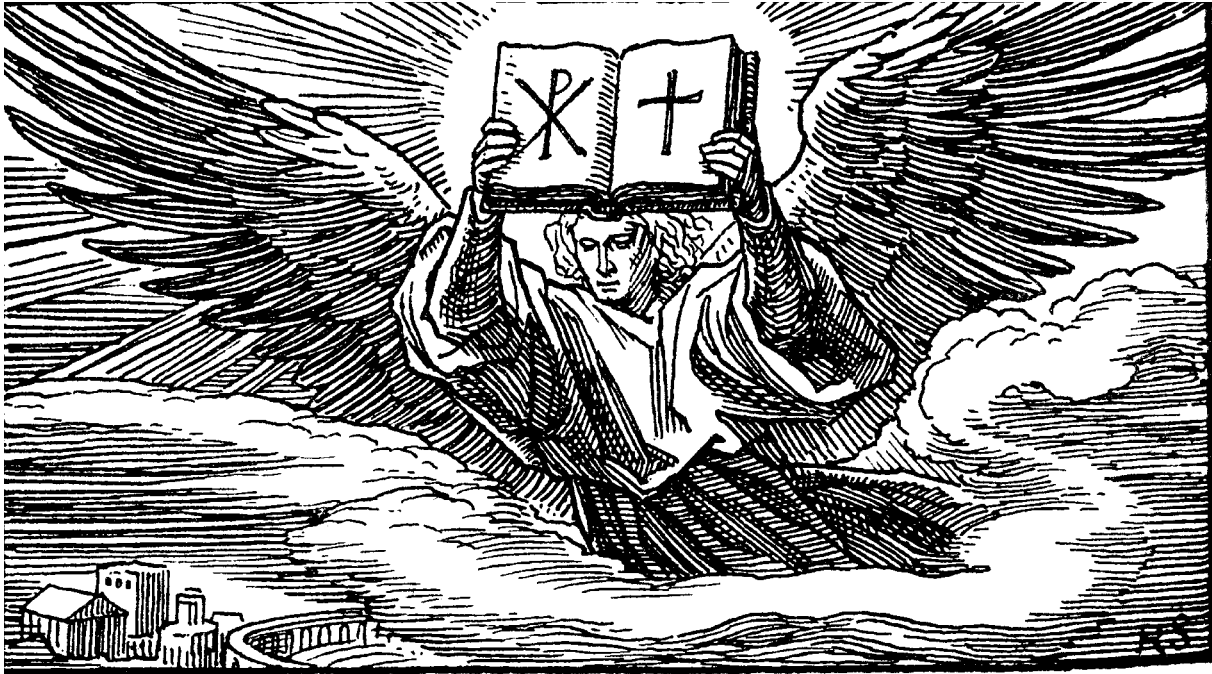
mission context for the increase of converts to Christ and their spiritual growth in Him (Romans 16:5; Philippians 1:22; Colossians 1:22). In this instance, the apostle's emphasis appears to be on the numerical and spiritual growth of the Roman Church.

“Just as I have had among the other Gentiles.” - Paul is the thirteenth apostle, the spearhead of God's mission outreach beyond the twelve tribes of Israel to all the world. His eagerness to visit this predominately Gentile congregation in the capital city of the Roman Empire is fully consistent with that great calling.

Verses 14-15

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

“I am obligated...”- This is a reference to Paul's call from the Lord. His obligation is to preach the gospel to all nations and classes. In 1 Corinthians 9, St. Paul describes that obligation as he declares: ***“Yet when I preach the gospel I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.”*** (vs. 16,17). The gospel is for everyone. Social distinctions, ethnic differences, and national differences are irrelevant. Every descendent of Adam and Eve is in desperate need of the salvation which is offered in this gospel alone. ***“To both Greeks and non-Greeks”*** is a diplomatic softening of the original which says ***“To both Greeks and barbarians.”*** The Greeks viewed themselves as the custodians of the highest and most advanced culture in the world. All who failed to adopt that culture were contemptuously dismissed as ***“barbarians.”*** The negative connotation of that word carries over into English very clearly. Paul deliberately uses the sophisticates' own derogatory label to indicate the irrelevance of their pretension. There is no one so cultured or so educated that they do not need Jesus and His gospel. By the same token, no one is so simple and lowly that Jesus does not care for them. Christ died for the ordinary and the extraordinary. The gospel is for everyone! To the Greek, the next phrase ***“both to the wise and the foolish,”*** is simply a repetition of the preceding contrast. They were ***“the wise”*** and everyone else in the world were ***“the foolish.”*** Paul rejects this human wisdom as utterly worthless (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:13). What better place to proclaim this universal gospel than in the capital city of the world?



"I Am Eager to Preach the Gospel in Rome" by Rudolf Schäfer

Verse 16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

In these magnificent words St. Paul asserts the basic theme of the letter to the Romans. In this thesis statement Paul reveals that which he will unfold and explain throughout the remainder of the epistle. *"In the sixteenth and seventeenth verses of Romans I, we come to sentences which are the most important in the letter and perhaps in all literature. They are the theme of this epistle and the essence of Christianity. They are the heart of biblical religion."* (Boice, I, p.103)

"I am not ashamed..." - As he writes to mighty Rome, the eternal city, the seat of the greatest empire in man's history, the epitome of worldly power, the apostle boldly declares his steadfast confidence in the gospel. The world has never been receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ or to those who proclaim that gospel. That reality has often led the church to make the fatal mistake of compromising or altering her message to suit the inclinations and preferences of men. When we seek to offer the world what it wants; when fear of criticism or rejection leads us to water down the truth we are called to proclaim - then we are guilty of betraying our Lord and condemning our listeners. Paul's supreme passion was to see men saved. He cared

nothing for personal comfort, popularity, or reputation. He offered no compromise of the gospel because he recognized it to be the one and only way to salvation.

“The unpopularity of a crucified Christ has prompted many to present a message which is more palatable to the unbeliever, but the removal of the offense of the cross always renders the message ineffective. An inoffensive gospel is also an inoperative gospel. Thus Christianity is wounded most in the house of its friends.” (Wilson, p.24)

The rhetorical device that Paul utilizes in this phrase is called “*litotes*” - that is a dramatic understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by a negative of the contrary. Paul is declaring his pride and confidence in the value, the validity, and the veracity of the Gospel. The apostle seeks to decisively dismiss any suspicion on the part of the Romans that his failure to come to Rome was the result of a hesitancy to proclaim Christ's gospel in the world's greatest city. While men may scorn and reject the message of salvation, it remains, nonetheless, the most absolutely essential truth in the life of every human being. Sinful human beings, puffed up by their own intellectual arrogance, have always scornfully dismissed that Gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25). The Second Century Greek philosopher Celsus derided Christianity and her gospel as a religion fit only for fools. Christian teachers, he said, prey upon the simple-minded. Their basic guideline is: “*Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent (for such qualifications are deemed evil by us); but if there be any ignorant or unintelligent; or uninstructed, or foolish persons, let them come with confidence.*” He contemptuously concluded: “*It is only foolish and low individuals, and persons devoid of perception, and slaves, and women and children of whom the teachers of the divine word wish to make converts.*” (*Origin Against Celsus*, ANF, 4, p.483) That same ridiculous arrogance can be observed among the intellectuals of our own day. It appears even within the church itself as learned theologians find themselves unable to trust in the absolute authority of God's inspired and inerrant Word. Jesus had warned: “***Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed of when He comes in His glory.***” (Luke 9:26). There is nothing more tragic than a Christian who is ashamed of Christ - a believer who is afraid or unwilling to boldly confess his dear Lord even in the face of all the world's ridicule and scorn. Joseph Grigg's classic hymn says it well:

*“Jesus and shall it ever be, a mortal man ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee whom angels praise, whose glories shine through endless days*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Sooner far let evening blush to own a star.
He sheds the beams of light divine o'er this benighted soul of mine.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Just as soon, let midnight be ashamed of noon.
'Tis midnight with my soul til He, Bright Morning Star bids darkness flee.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? That dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend?
No, when I blush be this my shame, that I no more revere His name.*

*Ashamed of Jesus? Yes, I may when I've no guilt to wash away,
No tear to wipe, no good to crave, no fear to quell no soul to save.*

*Til then nor is my boasting vain - til then I boast a Savior slain;
And oh, may this my glory be, that Christ is not ashamed of me.”
(TLH, #346)*

“Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone...” - Two reasons are now provided for the apostle's unshakable confidence in the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel is **“the power of God.”** The Greek word for power in this verse is *“dunamis”* from which our English word dynamite is derived. The explosive, life transforming power of God is present in the Gospel. Lenski writes:

“The gospel is God's power of love and grace towards sinners. It is wholly unmerited by them and is embodied in the gift of His only-begotten Son, John 3:16. It has been well said that love is the strongest power in the world, and God's love in Christ Jesus is the greatest love of all. All this power and love and grace is found in the gospel. God Himself and all His love and grace are ever in the gospel. God and His saving Word cannot possibly be separated from each other. Even omnipotence cannot save sinners, but God's power of grace in the gospel can and does save them. God's grace produced the gospel as the one means by which to reach the sinners's heart in order to bestow salvation upon him.” (Lenski, p. 73)

That power which the good news of the Gospel conveys is identified in the literal words of the text as *“with the effect of bringing about salvation.”* The Greek preposition (*“eis”*) generally denotes purpose, but in this context its intent is stronger as it indicates the result or effect of God's power in the Gospel. The Gospel is itself the power which accomplishes our salvation. Rome was no stranger to power. And yet, not all the might of her great world empire could save one lost soul. Only the gospel, scorned and rejected by the high and mighty of this world, has the power to save. In all the universe there is no other power that can save as much as a single soul.



“The Song of Moses” by Rudolf Schäfer

The noun “**salvation**” (Greek - “*soteria*”) is drawn from the Old Testament. It denotes radical deliverance from a desperate situation. When Israel was trapped by the chariots of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, only a miracle could have saved them from utter destruction. God sent that miracle as He parted the waters before them, and Moses rejoiced: “*The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation.*” (Exodus 15:2). The concept of **salvation**, however, includes more than mere deliverance. It is also the condition of safety and security that results from that act of deliverance. This word is one of the basic terms in Paul's theological vocabulary. He uses it 48 times in his New Testament letters, 13 times in the letter to the Romans. This magnificent **salvation** is the free gift of God's grace by faith - *of everyone who believes.*

The verb “**believes**” is in the present tense indicating action that is currently taking place and will continue indefinitely into the future. Thus Paul's focus is not exclusively on the initial act of faith but also on faith as the foundation and substance of the ongoing Christian experience. The term carries the basic idea of trust and reliance. The New Testament is careful to note that this ongoing trust is not the result of human action or effort. It is the undeserved gift of God's grace. Faith is “*the confidence wrought in the soul by the divine power of the gospel and by this alone. Being saved is simplicity itself: by working confidence in the heart, the gospel bestows salvation.*” (Lenski, p.76) As St. Paul affirms elsewhere: “***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.***” (Ephesians 2:8,9). There is no difference or distinction among men. The text is clearly and unequivocally universal. Faith is the one and only way to salvation for all sinners: “***everyone...first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.***”

Verse 17

For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

“***A righteousness from God is revealed...***” - “***Righteousness***” (Greek - “*dikaiosune*”) is the key concept in the letter to the Romans. Various forms of this crucial term will occur 35 times in the balance of the epistle. In the Greek text, the phrase begins with these words to emphasize their significance. It is of crucial importance to clearly recognize the “*forensic*” (of, pertaining to, or used in a court of law) nature of this word. The justification of the sinner is a juridical act of God, the divine Judge who pronounces the believer righteous and by that pronouncement places the believer into the status of righteousness. The “***righteousness from God***” (Greek - “*dikaiosune theou*”) is the forensic act of the righteous God the Judge in declaring the sinner to be justified, that is, pronouncing a verdict of “*Not Guilty!*” on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. Luther rightly declares the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake to be the crucial heart of Christianity: “*The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our conscience before God. Without this article the world is utter darkness and death.*” (Plass, II, p. 703)



“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit” by Herman Kaulbach - 1910

The German Lutheran Pietist, Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf, captured the meaning of this all important idea beautifully in a little hymn that became the daily prayer of generations of Lutheran children:

*“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit, das ist mein Schmuck und Ehrenkleid;
Damit will ich vor Gott bestehn, wann ich zum Himmel wird eingehn.*

*Jesus Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress,
With these will I stand before God victoriously on the day when I arrive in heaven.*

*Ich glaub' an Jesum, welcher spricht; "Wer glaubt, er kommt nichts in's Gericht,"
Gott lob, ich bin schon absolvirt, und meine Schuld is abgefuhrt.*

*I trust in Jesus who has said, "Whoever believes in me will not come under judgement."
Praise God! I have already been absolved and my guilt has been taken away.*

*Das heilige unschuldige Lamm, das am dem rauhen Kreuzesstamm,
Für meine Sund' gestorben ist, erkenn ich für den Herr und Christ.*

I acknowledge the holy, innocent Lamb, who died for my sin upon the rough wooden beam of the cross, as the Lord and the Christ.

*Ich glaube, daß Sein treues Blut genug für alle Sünden tut;
Und daß es Gottes Schätze füllt und ewig in den Himmel gilt.*

*I believe that His precious blood is a sufficient ransom for all sin;
That it has filled God's treasury to overflowing and will hold good forever in heaven.*

*Drum soll auch dieses Blut allein mein Trost und Meine Hoffnung sein;
Ich bau im Leben und im Tod allein auf Jesum Wunden rot.*

*And therefore, this blood alone is my hope and my trust,
I build upon the red wounds of Jesus alone in life and in death."*

Like the **“wrath of God”** in the verse which follows, this **“righteousness from God”** is **“revealed.”** The former is the Law, the latter, the Gospel. Were it not for the act of divine revelation nothing could be known about this **“righteousness from God”** for by nature man knows only of his own righteousness, the result of his own good works. As the apostle declares in Romans 10:3 - **“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.”** (cf. also Philippians 3:9) This justification is appropriated by the individual through faith. Paul's assertion of the instrumentality of faith - **“a righteousness that is by faith from first to last”** - repeats and parallels his earlier emphasis that the gospel is **“the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”** The righteousness of God is revealed and offered in the Gospel as a perfect gift. It becomes ours as a result of faith. That faith, of course, is itself a gift of God's grace. Lenski correctly insists:

“Thus faith is in no sense a human work. It is the operation of God wholly and in all its stages. There is absolutely no synergism in either its conception or its continuance. Faith is passive as to its production and its nature; it is kindled, is awakened, and then is kept alive. It is never self-wrought. To think so is an illusion.” (Lenski, p.83)

Faith is the vital combination of three components: knowledge (Latin - **“notitia”**), assent (Latin - **“assensus”**), and trust (Latin - **“fiducia”**). Faith is essentially trust, personal reliance upon the promises of the Gospel and the Savior who offers those promises to His people. It is that trust that sets saving faith apart from mere historical faith. Charles Spurgeon writes:

“Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing; for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation...Faith is the eye which looks; the hand which grasps; the mouth which feeds upon Christ.”
(Boice, p.108)

“Just as it is written: *‘The righteous will live by faith.’*” - This segment concludes with the reminder that the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is no innovation. Earlier in this chapter the apostle emphasized the fact that the Gospel **“*had been promised beforehand through the Holy Scripture*”** (vs.2) and he now quotes from the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk (2:4) to illustrate that reality.

Excursus - Martin Luther and Romans 1:17

For Martin Luther the text of Romans 1:17 and a proper of understanding of **“*the righteousness of God*”** which that text declares were of crucial importance. It is not an exaggeration to assert that this single passage was determinative for Luther's identity, both as an individual Christian, and as a theologian and leader of the Reformation. In his classic *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century*, Merle D'Aubigne contends that the inspired words of this short verse became *“the very soul of his theology; his stronghold in every danger; the principle which gave energy to his preaching and strength to his charity; the foundation of his peace; the encouragement of his labors, his comfort in life and in death.”* (II, p.70) In 1518 Luther was deeply involved in a study of the New Testament Epistles of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews in preparation for a series of lectures at the University of Wittenberg. His study chamber was on the third floor of the Tower of the Augustinian Cloister in that city. For this reason Luther's evangelical breakthrough is often described as the *“Tower Experience”* (German - *“Turm Erlebnis”*). His stumbling block was the concept of *“the righteousness of God.”* The Reformer would later recall:

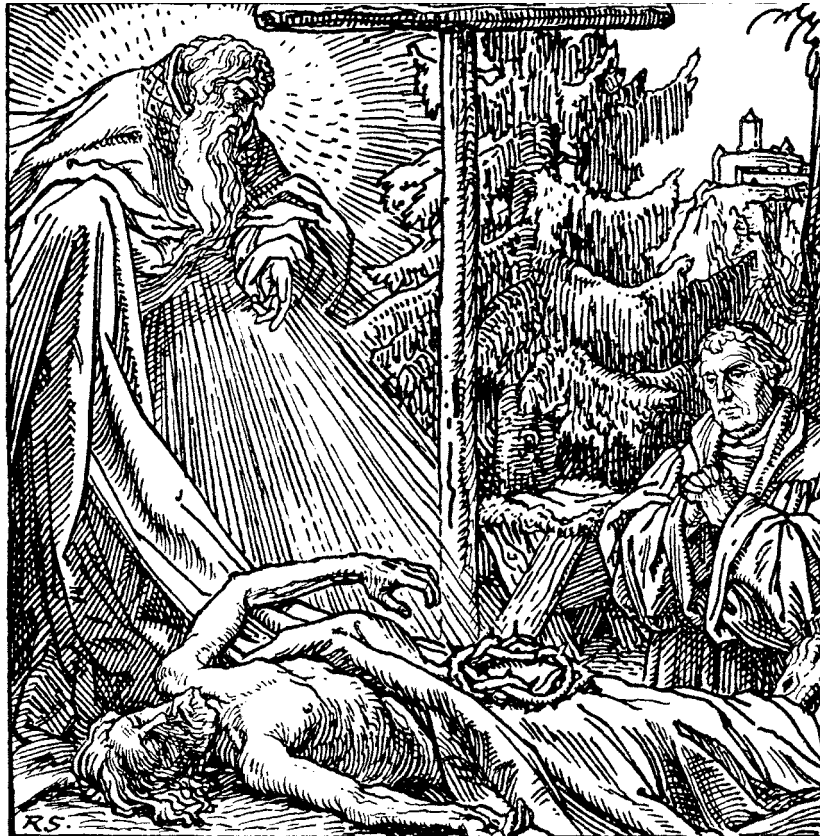
“These words “righteous” and “righteousness of God” struck my conscience as flashes of lightning, frightening me each time I heard them; if God is righteous, He punishes...Certainly I had been possessed by an unusually ardent desire to understand Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. Nevertheless, despite the ardor of my heart, I was hindered by the unique word in the first chapter: “the righteousness of God is revealed in it.” I hated that word “righteousness of God” because in

accordance with the usage and custom of the doctors, I had been taught to understand it philosophically as meaning, as they put it, the formal or active righteousness according to which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unjust...As a monk I led an irreproachable life. Nevertheless, I felt that I was a sinner before God. My conscience was restless and I could not depend on God being propitiated by my satisfactions. Not only did I not love, but I actually hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Thus a furious battle raged within my perplexed conscience, but meanwhile I was knocking at the door of this particular Pauline passage, earnestly seeking to know the mind of the great apostle.” (Saarnivaara, p.36,37)



“Martin Luther’s ‘Tower Experience’” by Rudolf Schäfer

Tormented by a conscience which would allow him no rest, Luther desperately searched the pages of Scripture. It always came back to that one single idea, *“the righteousness of God.”* Finally the answer came; *“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of Romans 1:17.”* The blessed sweetness of pure Scriptural Gospel swept away the temptations of the enemy (German - *“Anfechtungen”*) which had driven him to the brink of despair. Now the



"Sola Gratia" by Rudolf Schäfer

situation was completely changed. The burden had been lifted from his weary shoulders and he was free from the guilt and fear that had haunted his life. From that moment on, nothing in this world - no hardship, peril, threat, or danger - would ever move him to abandon the wonderful peace that he had been given in the Gospel of Jesus. The words of Romans 1:17 which he once had bitterly hated, now became the sweetest in all of Scripture. This text had become for him an open gate to paradise. These are Luther's own words:

"Day and night I tried to meditate on the significance of these words: 'the righteousness of God is revealed in it as it is written: `The righteous shall live by faith.' Then, finally, God had mercy on me and I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that gift of God by which a righteous man lives, namely faith, and that this sentence is passive, indicating that the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, `The righteous shall live by faith.' Now I felt as though I had been reborn altogether and had entered Paradise. In the same moment the face of the whole Scripture became apparent to me. My mind ran through the Scriptures, as far as I was able to recollect them, seeking analogies in other phrases, such as the work of God by which He makes us strong, the wisdom of God by which He makes us wise,

the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. Just as intensely as I had before hated the expression 'the righteousness of God' I now lovingly praised this most pleasant word. This passage from Paul became for me the very gate to Paradise...Thus my soul was refreshed, for it is the righteousness of God through which we are justified and saved through Christ. These words became more pleasant to me. Through this word, the Holy Spirit enlightened me in the tower."
(Saarnivaara, p.36,37)

Thus, through the careful study of the Bible, did the Lord prepare the great Reformer of His Church, who was to call Christendom back to the pure Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Protestant Reformation did not find its origin in the intensity of religious piety or devotion, or in the Pentecostal outpouring of visions, signs, and wonders. The Reformation began in the meticulous study of Holy Scripture, the written Word of God. Romans 1:17 is rightly called "*Martin Luther's Text.*" Seldom, if ever, has one single Bible text served so obviously as the driving, molding force of a great man of God.



Verse 18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

"The wrath of God is being revealed..." - The wonder of God's amazing grace in Christ cannot be understood without a clear recognition of the total depravity of man. Church history makes it abundantly clear that whenever man's sinfulness is minimized or compromised the end result is always a loss of the Gospel. Modern, man-centered Christianity has little to say on the subject of ***"the wrath of God."*** Contemporary preachers look down with condescending scorn on the stern puritan preachers of the past like Jonathon Edwards who reduced entire congregations to tears with fiery sermons about ***"Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God."*** In a misguided attempt to achieve relevance, the Church of today seeks to make the Gospel of Christ attractive to men in a variety of ways:

1. We minister to man's *"felt needs,"* identifying a lack or longing which the listener will acknowledge, which then becomes the point of contact to gain a hearing for the Gospel - presented as an answer to meet whatever your self-perceived need may be. Unfortunately, sinful man

is universally unable to recognize what his needs really are (i.e. Adam and Eve's fig leaves) (cf. 2 Timothy 4:3).

2. We present the Gospel as the promise of earthly, material reward, if only the listener will accept Jesus. Jesus wants to make you wealthy, healthy, and successful, if you will become a believer. The most flagrant example of this approach is the notorious “*prosperity gospel*” proclaimed by prominent TV evangelists who offer untold wealth in return for faith and the appropriate contribution to their ministry.

3. We present the Gospel by the route of personal experience, stress what Jesus has done for us and commend Him to other people so that they might have the same wonderfully fulfilling experience.

Paul takes an entirely different approach which is God-centered, not man-centered. He recognizes that in the end what matters is not whether we feel good or have our felt needs met or receive a meaningful experience. What matters is whether we come into a right relationship with God by faith in Christ. For that to happen we must first come to see things as they truly are. That is the function of the Law which presents the grim reality that we are under God's wrath and in danger of eternal condemnation at His hands because of sin. In his magnificent essay *Law and Gospel*, Dr. C.F.W. Walther writes:



Dr. C.F.W. Walther

“There is nothing kind or comforting on Mt. Sinai...How beneficial is a sermon in which the preacher begins with the Law in all its severity and expounds it spiritually! Many people will think: ‘If what he says is true, I am lost!’ To be sure, some will think: ‘That is no way for an evangelical preacher to act!’ Yes indeed, he must act that way or he is not an evangelical preacher. If the Law does not precede, the Gospel cannot succeed. First Moses, then Christ: first John the Baptist, then Christ. At first some people will think, ‘O, how terrible that is!’ But then the preacher, with eyes aglow, comes to the Gospel. Now the

people are glad and they understand why the preacher first proclaimed the Law, namely so that they could see how polluted they are with sin." (Walther, p.57)

Hence the inspired apostle begins by showing at length that all men are utterly lost and cannot possibly be saved except by the wonderful gospel righteousness of God. The concept of the **"wrath of God"** "is clearly and frequently emphasized in Holy Writ. J.I. Packer writes: *"One of the most striking things about the Bible is the vigor with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God's wrath."* (Packer, p. 134,135) The Old Testament includes nearly 600 important passages on the subject. The **"wrath of God"** is completely unlike the capricious anger or malice of human beings which flares in a fit of temper and then quickly disappears to be replaced by remorse and regret. Human anger is often the result of selfish annoyance or impatience. The **"wrath of God,"** on the other hand, is the necessary result and expression of His essential holiness. This contrast is clearly expressed in the terminology of Scripture. The Greek language has two main words for wrath or anger. One is *"thumos,"* from a root which means *"to rush along fiercely or to be in the heat of violence."* It is typically used in reference to uncontrolled fury, a fit of temper or rage, which flares and then disappears quickly. With the single exception of a verse in Revelation, which describes the final outpouring of God's wrath, *"thumos"* is never used in reference to God in the Bible. The other word is *"orge"* from a root which means *"to slowly increase or gradually ripen."* This is the word which the Bible characteristically uses to describe the **"wrath of God."** The **"wrath of God"** is God's constant, consistent, righteous anger over all that is evil and that thereby denies His nature as a righteous, holy God. God could not be holy and not be angry with sin. Holiness cannot tolerate unholiness (cf. Habakkuk 1:13). John Murray's careful definition is precisely to the point: *"Wrath is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is in contradistinction of his holiness."* (Murray, p.35) George Rodgers said it well when he wrote: *"God's righteous anger never rises, never abates: it is always at flood tide in the presence of sin because He is unchangeably and inflexibly righteous."* (Rodgers, I, p.40) Paul uses the term **"wrath"** (Greek - *"orge"*) 10 times in the Letter to the Romans. As James Boice correctly observes:

"His point is not that God is suddenly flailing out in petulant anger against something that has offended him momentarily, but rather that God's firm, fearsome hatred of all wickedness is building up and will one day result in the eternal condemnation of all who are not justified by Christ's righteousness." (Boice, p.132)

Those who flinch from the concept of God's righteous wrath fail to recognize that even among human beings outrage and indignation against cruelty, crime, and vice have always been recognized as essential elements of human goodness. The fact that our modern culture has lost its capacity for outrage and has come to tolerate even the vilest manifestations of evil is the clearest possible indication of our utter moral collapse. God is absolutely intolerant of evil because He is absolutely good. His holy fury against sin is the decisive demonstration of that goodness. Those who have come to soft-pedal the wrath and judgement of God would do well to ponder John MacArthur's penetrating assessment:

“How could One who delights only in what is pure and lovely not loathe what is impure and ugly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin, which by its very nature violates that holiness? How could He who loves righteousness not hate and act severely against all unrighteousness? How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with complacency on virtue and vice equally? He cannot do those things, because He is holy, just, and good. Wrath is the only just response a perfect, holy God could make to unholy men. Righteous wrath is therefore every bit as much an element of God's divine perfection as any other of His attributes.” (MacArthur, p.74)

R.A. Torrey, a great Bible teacher of the 19th century, makes the same point in an even more forceful and comprehensive way when he contends:

“Shallow views of sin and of God's holiness, and of the glory of Jesus Christ and His claims upon us, lie at the bottom of weak theories of the doom of the impenitent. When we see sin in all its hideousness and enormity, the holiness of God in all its perfection, and the glory of Jesus Christ in all its infinity, nothing but a doctrine that those who persist in a choice of sin, who love darkness rather than light, and who persist in the rejection of the Son of God, shall endure everlasting anguish, will satisfy the demands of our own moral intuitions...The more closely men walk with God and the more devoted they become to His service, the more likely they are to believe this doctrine.” (Torrey, p.311)

Having heard the Gospel promise that **“the righteous will live by faith”** (vs.17), we now hear the stern pronouncement of the Law which warns that those who do not live by faith will not live - they will perish **“on the great day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgement will be revealed.”** (2:5). As the Gospel is salvation and life, so the Law is damnation and death. In Verse 17 a **“righteousness from God is revealed in the Gospel.”** The identical verb is used in Verse 18 to indicate that the **“wrath of God”** is also **“being revealed.”** In both instances the verb is in the present tense to



“The Flood” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

describe a process of revelation which is now in constant progress. The **“wrath of God”** over against the evil of sinful man has been **“revealed from heaven”** time and time again since the Fall. The sentence of death was pronounced; the earth was cursed and made subject to the bondage of decay; and fallen man was driven from Paradise. In the waters of the Flood and the fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, God has revealed His wrath. The rise and fall of men and nations as the cup of God's wrath was poured out upon them is a part of that same process of ongoing revelation. The universal dominion of death, disease and misery, the cataclysms and catastrophes of nature, and the horror of Christ's suffering and death, have all served to reveal the dreadful **“wrath of God from heaven.”** With Christ's first coming, this weary world finally entered **“the last days”** (Hebrews 1:2). All the revelation of wrath in these last days is what Martin Franzmann has called *“the upbeat of that final dreadful music*

of damnation” (Franzmann, p. 40) which will sound forth when Jesus comes again.

The object of God's righteous wrath is **“all of the godlessness and wickedness of men.”** **“Godlessless”** (Greek - *“asebia”*) refers to a lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God, a failure that inevitably leads to some form of false worship. **“Wickedness”** is a broad term which includes every form of immorality. **“Wickedness”** is the inescapable result of **“godlessness.”** Irreligion always manifests itself in immorality and immorality is the evidence of irreligion.

“Of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” - One of the most basic characteristics of sinful man is an inherent, unyielding opposition to the truth of God. Despite the testimony of conscience, the clear evidence of nature all around us, and the revelation of God's inspired and inerrant Word, man continues to stubbornly and defiantly cling to the lie. R.C.H. Lenski comments:

“Here Paul explains in one little clause how, despite the constant revelation of God's wrath, men go on in their wickedness; whenever the truth starts to exert itself and makes them feel uneasy in their moral nature, they hold it down, suppress it. Some drown its voice by rushing on into their immoralities; others strangle the disturbing voice by argument and denial...These denials and these arguments are not altruistic; they are the efforts of the ungodly to suppress the disquieting truth in the interest of their own ungodliness. They face an inescapable alternative in their moral nature, an either - or; either to yield to the truth and give up ungodliness and unrighteousness, or to hold firmly to these two and then of necessity to squelch the truth.” (Lenski, p. 93)

The verb **“suppress”** (Greek - *“katechein”*) means *“to hold down, restrain, or repress.”* It is an excellent term to describe man's obstinate, willful resistance to the message of Law and Gospel (**“the truth”**). That suppression places sinful man in a state of denial, in conflict not only with the revealed truth of Scripture, but also with his own most basic instincts, and the clear evidence of his environment and experience. Lenski's comments once more are precisely to the point:

“This fact of the wrath from heaven constantly breaks through the clouds of human perversions, false reasonings and philosophies, blatant denials and lies, beneath which men seek to hide in helpless efforts to escape...We must not be confused by the follies of atheists and moral perverts or by heathen blindness concerning God. Man's moral nature remains and instinctively responds to the revelations of this wrath wherever they occur. Conscience makes cowards of us all. It is a hopeless

effort to destroy man's moral nature and to rid him of his reactions to the judgements of God.” (Lenski, p. 91)

Verses 19-20

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

“Since what may be known about God is plain to them...” - God has chosen to reveal something of Himself in nature. God, to the extent that He can be known, can be clearly discerned in that which He has made. This visible manifestation of Himself can be universally known by man. Thus the vast majority of mankind has no knowledge of God not because that knowledge is not readily available to them but because they rebel against that knowledge and reject it (***“who suppress the truth by their wickedness”*** - vs.18). They are not ignorant of God but rebellious against Him: not atheists, without God, but anti-theists, against God. This assertion of man's natural knowledge of God is linked to the preceding declaration of God's righteous anger at the godless and immorality of man with the explanatory conjunction ***“since”*** (Greek - *“dioti”*). Men cannot seek to excuse their godless immorality on the basis of ignorance of a God who has hidden Himself from them. On the contrary, the apostle insists, God is constantly revealing Himself to them every day - ***“by His whole work of creation, by countless beneficent providences, by ever-renewed retributions, and by man's own mind, especially by his moral nature and his conscience.”*** (Lenski, p.96)

“For since the creation of the world...” - Paul now explains the means by which the Creator God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creatures. This divine self-disclosure has been available from the beginning of time - ***“For since the creation of the world.”*** It is universal in its scope, available to each and every human being. When God determined to bring the universe into being from nothing He simultaneously created a natural theology which clearly reveals His identity and His nature. A striking oxymoron (a contradiction in terms) serves to emphasize the apostle's point - ***“God' invisible qualities....have been clearly seen.”*** That which is invisible, not perceived by the senses, becomes visible in the things which the Creator God has made - ***“being understood from that which has been made.”*** This natural



"Jahweh at the Burning Bush" by Rudolf Schäfer

revelation is not dim or uncertain for that which it uncovers has *"been clearly seen."* *"God's invisible qualities"* are defined in the text as *"His eternal power and divine nature."* While not comprehensive or exhaustive, this carefully chosen combination serves to highlight the essential characteristics of God. The concepts of eternity and omnipotence are at the core of God's nature. He is *"Jahweh,"* the Great I AM. He has always been and will always be. He has no beginning or point of origin but is the source of all that is. His omnipotent power is eternal - without beginning

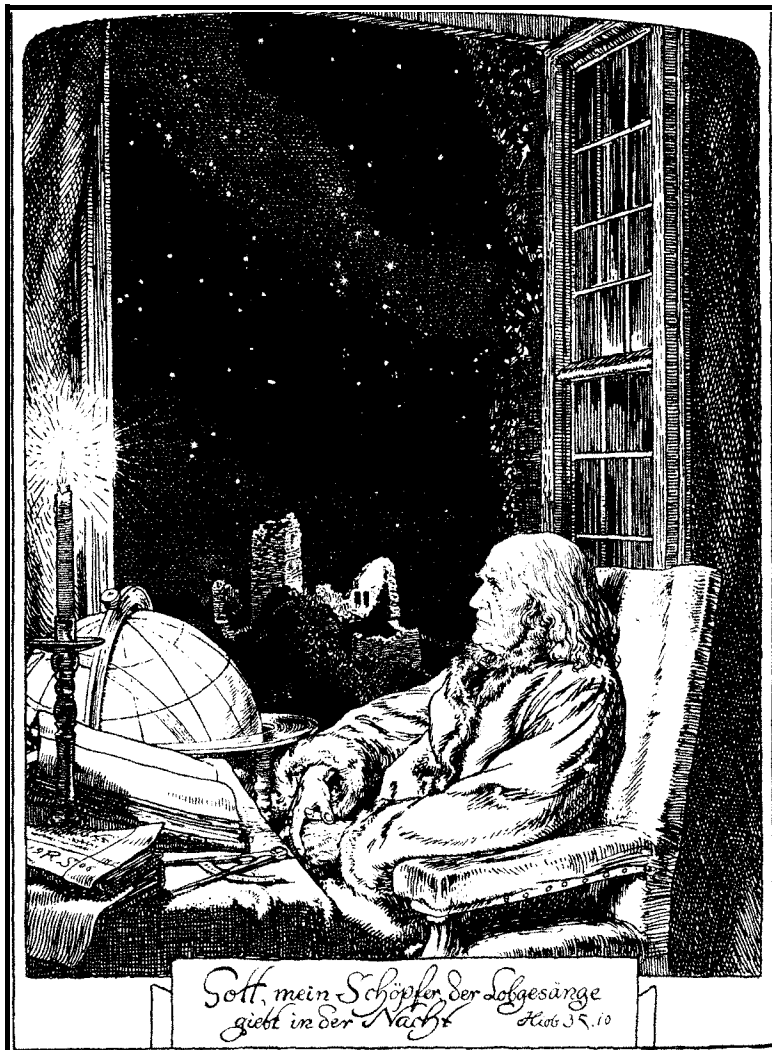
and without end - because He is eternal. Paul's reference to *"divine nature"* is more general and describes *"the sum of the invisible perfections which characterize God...the totality of that which God is as a being possessed of divine attributes."* (Murray, p.39) Scripture emphatically and repeatedly affirms this natural knowledge of God as the following sampling of passages indicates:

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

"The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him and consumes

His foes on every side. His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim His righteousness and all the peoples see His glory.” (Psalm 97: 1-6)

“We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless idols to the living God who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them...Yet He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” (Acts 14:15,17)



*“God My Creator, Whose Songs of Praise Fill the Night”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

The vast majesty of the natural world and its incredible intricacy proclaim the reality and the glory of the Creator God so clearly and unmistakably that only ***“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”*** (Psalm 14 :1). Therefore, unrighteous, unregenerate man ***“are without excuse.”***

*“No human being is infinite. Infinitude belongs exclusively to God. Yet, in spite of our finite nature, human beings do seem to have an almost infinite capacity for some things. One of them is for making excuses for reprehensible behavior...Our text says that in spite of our almost infinite capacity to make excuses, we are all ***“without excuse”*** for our failure to seek out, worship, and thank the living God.”* (Boice, p.153,154)

Verse 21

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

“For although they knew God...” - Paul now continues his description of the tragic results of man's stubborn rejection of the knowledge of God which all people could possess through God's extensive disclosure of Himself in the works of nature. In Verse 18 we learned that sinful man is guilty of stubbornly suppressing the self-evident truth of God. The problem is not that they do not or cannot know God, but rather that they refuse to know God.

“They neither glorified Him as God” - Fallen mankind exhibits its rejection of God by its refusal to give Him the glory that is His due. A bit of etymology will be most helpful in understanding the intent of the text. The Greek word ***“glorified”*** (*“dokeo”* - *“to glorify”*) originally meant *“to appear”* or *“to seem.”* As for the noun *“glory”* (Greek - *“doxa”*), the term's root meant *“opinion”* - that is, how a person or thing appears or seems to the one observing it (i.e. the English words *“orthodox”* - one who holds the correct opinion; *“heterodox”* - one who holds a different opinion, and; *“paradox”* - a contradictory opinion). Originally the Greek words *“dokeo”* and *“doxa”* were neutral, used in reference to both good and bad opinions, but eventually they came to be used especially and then exclusively in reference to good opinions. From that point, the words evolved to mean *“praise”* or *“honor”* - the glory which was due to one about whom such good opinions were held. This use of the word has come into the English language in the term *“doxology”*, which is a song of praise. With that background, the appropriateness of Paul's use of the word in the context of sinful man's refusal to *“glorify”* God is quite clear. Unregenerate humanity will not *“glorify”* God because it does not hold to a right opinion about Him. It refuses to acknowledge His sovereign power, holiness, and perfect love, and therefore will not praise and *“glorify”* Him. Thus, mankind's refusal to *“glorify”* God is the direct result of its suppression of the truth. John MacArthur writes:

“The worst deed committed in the universe is the failure to give God honor or glory. Above everything else God is to be glorified. To glorify God is to exalt Him, to recognize Him as supremely worthy of honor, and to acknowledge His divine attributes. Since the glory of God is also the sum of all the attributes of His being, of all that He has revealed of Himself to man, to give God glory is to acknowledge His glory and extol it. We cannot give Him glory by adding to His perfection, but by praising His perfection. We glorify Him by praising His glory! As the Westminster



“Adam and Eve After Their Expulsion from Eden” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Catechism eloquently declares, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!” ... But recognizing God's glorious attributes and acts and glorifying Him for them is precisely what sinful man do not do. Millions upon millions of people have lived in the midst of God's wonderful universe and yet proudly refused to recognize Him as its Creator and to affirm His majesty and glory. And for that willful, foolish rejection they are without excuse as they stand under God's righteous judgement.” (MacArthur, p. 84)

“Nor gave thanks to Him” - The unbelief of rebellious mankind further results in ingratitude. Like their refusal to **“glorify”** God, so also their failure to give **“thanks to Him”** is based upon a willful unawareness of the most basic facts about God and a deliberate failure to recognize their absolute dependence upon His merciful goodness. Every human being on the face of the earth is totally dependent upon the gracious providence of God every moment of His life. It is God alone who gives you **“rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”** (Acts 14:17) The edifice of natural man's ingratitude is erected upon the foundation of his suppression of the truth and his refusal to glorify His Creator. Thankfulness must be the hallmark of all those who truly know God. In contrast, ingratitude is one of the basic characteristics of those who suppress the truth about God.

“But their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” - Choices have consequences. St. Paul now proceeds to describe the dreadful consequences of man's obstinate rejection of the Creator God. Man's rebellion against God robs him

of the reason with which mankind was created in the beginning. The word ***“thinking”*** (Greek - *“dialogismois”*) refers generally to the working of the human mind but in the New Testament, the word always carries a very definite negative connotation. It could well be translated with the English word *“rationalization”*. No matter how impressive or meticulous, godless reasoning is never more than the rearrangement of error. The rationalizations of unregenerate man are empty and useless. The apostle uses the classic Old Testament term ***“futile”*** which originally referred to an empty puff of wind (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:2,14; 2:1,11,15,17). Such rationalization leads nowhere; accomplishes nothing; and achieves no real goal. It is utterly and completely worthless. But the empty mind does not remain empty. Sin makes fools of those who have turned their backs on God. ***“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”*** (Psalm 14:1; 53:1) Their empty minds and ***“foolish hearts”*** become like vacuums which draw in falsehood and darkness to replace the truth and light that have been rejected. We flounder helplessly and hopelessly around in the darkness that we have brought down upon ourselves.

Verses 22-23

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

“Although they claimed to be wise...” - The moral and intellectual degeneration of sinful man also results in religious degradation. The sheer folly of man's ridiculous pretensions is revealed. The word ***“wise”*** in the original is the Greek *“sophoi”* from which a large number of English words are derived - i.e. *“sophistry,” “sophisticated,” “sophomore,”* and *“philosophy.”* The search for wisdom apart from and in defiance of God has been the cause of humanity's downfall since Adam's fateful encounter with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But sinful man fails to recognize that ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”*** (Proverbs 1:7). The human attempt to replace this genuine wisdom with its own speculations and philosophizing is the ultimate demonstration of foolishness. It is even more pathetic when these futile, foolish, worldly speculations are allowed to infect the church. The sad story of modern theology tells a tragic tale of theologians who have accepted the unfounded foolishness of unregenerate man above the flawless truth of God's inspired Word. The impotence and irrelevance of much of Christianity today is the consequence of their foolishness. Martin Lloyd Jones perceptively observes: ***“The whole drift toward modernism that has blighted the church of God and nearly***

destroyed its living gospel may be traced to an hour when men began to turn from revelation to philosophy.” (MacArthur, p.88) The folly of those who are infatuated with this worldly wisdom is described by the Greek verb **“they became fools”** (*“emoranthesan”*). This powerful term means *“to become silly”* or *“foolish,”* It is drawn from the root word *“moros”* which means *“fool,”* as in the English derivative *“moron.”* The greatest fool in all the world is the man who exchanges God's wisdom of truth and light for man's wisdom of deceit and darkness.

“And exchanged the glory of the immortal God...” - Now we come to the climax of this silliness. **“The glory of the immortal God”** is *“the sum total of His attributes as these constitute His essence, the sum of the perfections of His being, but as shining forth to us and revealing what God is to us.”* (Lenski, p. 105) That **“glory”** is made manifest the wonder of creation. Among the Children of Israel, the glory of God was revealed in the *“shekinah”* (Hebrew - *“the One Who Dwells”*) which rested over the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and later the Temple (cf. Exodus 40:34-35; Leviticus 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 5:13). Thus the prophets frequently refer



“The Lord Who Sits Enthroned Between the Cherubim”
by Rudolf Schäfer

to God as *“the Lord enthroned between the cherubim”* (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 37:16; Ezekiel 9:3). This visible manifestation of God's Glory was the assurance of God's presence in the midst of His people. The apostles of the New Testament apply this powerful image to Christ Who *“dwells (literal - tabernacles) among us”* and in Whom we behold the *glory of the Only Begotten of the Father* (cf. John 1:14).

The incredible foolishness of sinful man is further emphasized by the fact that it is the **“glory of the immortal God”** which they recklessly cast aside. Eternity is of the

essence of God. He is above and beyond the limitations of time, without beginning and without end. Amid the change and decay of everything in this world, He alone is forever the same - the constant, unfailing Refuge of those who trust in Him. That confidence is beautifully expressed in Thomas O. Chisholm's classic hymn "*Great is Thy Faithfulness.*"

*"Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord God, our Father!
There is no shadow of turning with Thee.
Thou changest not; Thy compassions they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be!
Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided -
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me."* ("HS98 #899)

And what does sinful man receive in exchange for the "***glory of the immortal God?***" He fashions his own false gods - helpless, lifeless idols, created by his own perverted imagination. The ridiculous nature of the exchange is heightened by the text's effective use of contrast. Real "***glory***" is abandoned in favor of empty "***image.***" The "***immortal God***" is replaced by "***mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.***" It is a fool's exchange indeed! The prophets scornfully dismiss the folly of idolaters who bow down before gods which their own hands have fashioned (i.e. Isaiah 44:9-17) St. Paul's language here is strongly reminiscent of a scathing denunciation of idolatry in the Apocryphal "*Wisdom of Solomon*":

"A skilled woodcutter may saw down a tree easy to handle and skillfully strip off all its bark, and then with pleasing workmanship make a useful vessel that serves life's needs, and burn the castoff pieces of his work to prepare his food and eat his fill. But a castoff piece from among them, useful for nothing, a stick crooked and full of knots, he takes and carves with care in his leisure, and shapes it with skill gained in idleness; he forms it like the image of a man, or makes it like some worthless animal, giving it a coat of red paint and coloring its surface red and covering every blemish in it with paint; then he makes for it a niche that befits it, and sets it in the wall, and fastens it there with iron. So he takes thought for it, that it may not fall, because he knows that it cannot help itself, for it is only an image and has need of help. When he prays about possessions and his marriage and children, he is not ashamed to address a lifeless thing. For health he appeals to a thing that is weak; for life he prays to a thing that is dead; for aid he entreats a thing that is utterly inexperienced; for a prosperous journey; a thing that cannot take a step; for money-making and work and success with his hands he asks strength of thing whose hands have no

strength...But the idol made with hands is accursed, and so is he who made it; because he did the work and a perishable thing is named a god. For equally hateful to God are the ungodly man and his ungodliness for what was done will be punished together with him who did it. Therefore, there will be a visitation also upon the heathen idols because, though part of what God created they became an abomination, and became traps for the souls of men and a snare to the feet of the foolish.” (“Wisdom of Solomon,” 13:11-19; 14:8-11)

The idols of this world are powerless delusions. As the French philosopher Voltaire sarcastically observed: “*God made man in his own image and man returned the favor.*” Every form of idolatry is a form of self-worship. And yet the Bible warns that the devil and his demons are all too happy to take advantage of the ungodliness

of men by impersonating the characteristics which the man-made gods are supposed to have, thus, endowing the idol with supernatural power from hell. Through these false signs and wonders Satan encourages and perpetuates the superstitions of foolish men (cf. Exodus 7:11,22; 8:7) In reference to the idol worship of the Gentiles, St. Paul notes: ***“The things which Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:20). The variations of idolatry within our culture today are endless. The proliferation of the New Age



***“The Idols of Ancient Egypt”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

Movement, astrology, and other occultic practices demonstrates that even the coarsest forms of idolatry have maintained their allure among modern sophisticates. Many of our contemporary idols are more subtle and therefore more dangerous. John MacArthur properly denounces the “*pandemic moral and spiritual pollution of modern society*” as “*a degenerative and addictive form of idolatry*” (MacArthur, p.95). As the poet J. H. Clinch wrote:

*“And still from Him we turn away,
And fill our hearts with worthless things;
The fires of greed form the clay,
And forth the idol springs!
Ambition's flame and passion's heat,
By wondrous alchemy transmute earth's dross
To raise some gilded brute to fill Jehovah's seat.”*

Verses 24-25

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

“Therefore God gave them over...” - The fearful, cumulative, self-reinforcing consequences of sin are now described in grim detail. The very wickedness of men, by which they have suppressed the truth, becomes the means of their punishment. *“Men do what they want to do, but God makes of what they want to do a hell of His imposing...In doing what they want to do they become the executors of God's wrath upon themselves.”* (Franzmann, p. 41)

What follows is the result of what precedes. Each of the three phrases in vs. 24-32 reveal a different dimension of God's judgement upon sin. Each phrase begins with a conjunction (vs.24 - ***“Therefore:”*** vs. 26 - ***“Because of this:”*** vs. 28 - ***“Furthermore”***) which links the penalty to man's rejection of God, described in the preceding verses: that is, man's rejection of God despite God's clear revelation of Himself (vs.19-21); his rationalization of his rejection (vs. 18b,22); and, his creation of substitute gods of his own design (vs.23).

The terrible refrain ***“God gave them over”*** is repeated three times (vs.24,26,28). In each instance, the word order of the Greek text is unusual in that the verb occurs before the subject for special emphasis. *“Give them over did God”* would be a literal translation. The verb ***“gave them over”*** (Greek - *“paradidomi”*) is extraordinarily intense. Paul uses it elsewhere of giving one's body to be burned (1 Corinthians 13:3) and of Christ's giving Himself up to death (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2,25). The term has a judicial flavor and is often used in reference to judgement (Matthew 5:25; 10:17,19,21; 18:34; 2 Peter 2:4) or being sent to prison (Mark 1:14; Acts 8:3). In this

passage the word describes the judicial act of God in which the sinner is completely handed over to his sin and its destructive consequences. This involves first of all, the removal of the restraints which God normally places upon sin through conscience and outward hindrance. Stöckhardt writes:

“Wherein does this divine arrangement consist? Through His Holy Spirit God disciplines and holds sinful man in check, at least outwardly. He instills them with fear and terror of sin. One who has inwardly conceived wicked plans, He warns concerning the actual deed, as He warned Cain before he became a murderer. The Lord admonishes the conscience. In the way of the evil intention, He places all sorts of outward hindrances, and thus attempts to restrain the outburst, or at least the coarse outbursts, of the evil lusts of the heart. If, however, man despises these divine exhortations and increase ungodliness, God completely gives the ungodly up to his sins, so that nothing stands in the way of the gratification of all his lusts.” (Stöckhardt, p.13)

But this action is not merely passive non-interference with the natural consequences of sin. God's wrath is expressed in His abandonment of defiant sinners to more intensified and aggravated cultivation of the lusts of their own hearts. His punitive justice hands the sinners over completely to their sins in an accelerating downward spiral of destruction. Those who have abandoned God are abandoned by God as He uses sin itself to punish the sinner. *“Men who so love the cesspool of sin are sent into it by justice; what they want they shall have.”* (Lenski, p.109) As the Lord declares in the Psalm: ***“Israel did not obey me, so I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart to walk in their own devices.”*** (Psalm 81:11,12) James Dunn offers this helpful assessment:

“But now the spiral of man's sin and sinning is given a sharper twist: God determines the consequences of man's sin. God handed them over; the word denotes a measured and deliberate act, but also the resigning of direct control over what is thus passed on. It is this last aspect which is the clue to what follows. They wanted to pursue the desire of their own hearts, and so God gave them over to what they desired; He did not, it should be noted, give them their desires, rather He gave them to what they desired and the consequences of what they desired. God handed them over to the freedom for which they yearned; not their freedom to them, but them to their freedom. The control of God once removed left them like a faulty rocket plunging out of control. For what this vaunted liberty consisted in was nothing other than freedom to indulge in immorality which insulted themselves and their bodies. The desire to be independent of God in achieving its end showed itself to be nothing higher than the desire for a degrading impurity.” (Dunn, p.73)

“In the sinful desires of their hearts for sexual impurity...” - The spiritual condition of man is not determined by his outward circumstances but by the inner condition of his heart. Sin is not merely what we do. It is what we are by nature. The individual transgressions of God's Law which we commit are the symptoms of the spiritual disease with which we are afflicted. They are not the disease itself. Accordingly, Scripture tends to focus its warnings against sin on the lusts in which the actions originate - ***“the sinful desires of their hearts.”*** The term ***“of their hearts”*** refers to an individual's identity and personality, including mind, feelings, and will. Using the term in this way, wise King Solomon once advised: ***“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”*** (Proverbs 4:23); and sadly noted: ***“The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives.”*** (Ecclesiastes 9:3). Jesus declared: ***“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.”*** (Matthew 15:19-20) The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed: ***“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.”*** (Jeremiah 17:3)



“The Wisdom of Solomon”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

The word which the NIV renders as ***“sexual impurity”*** (Greek - ***“akatharsia”***) is a general term for uncleanness, often used in reference to decaying matter, especially the contents of a grave. In an ethical context the word usually referred to or was closely associated with sexual immorality. Paul uses the word nine times in his New Testament epistles. Those who indulge in such ***“sexual impurity”*** diminish and degrade themselves.

Human sexuality was designed by the Creator God as the physical expression of the love and commitment between a man and a woman within holy marriage. This uniquely human capacity was the direct result of our creation in the image of God with the ability to love (cf. Genesis 2:18-25). When human sexual activity becomes the pursuit of mere physical pleasure, the Creator's intent is frustrated and our identity as creatures originally fashioned in the image of God is denied. Sexual activity is then just one more egocentric effort to satisfy my own physical needs and emotional desires. Those whom I use to achieve those selfish goals become mere sex objects through which I attain my own satisfaction. The inescapable result of this approach to human sexuality is personal degradation - ***“for the degrading of their bodies with one another.”*** This is what the apostle has in mind when he warns the Corinthians against the unique personal damage potential of sexual sin - ***“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”*** (1 Corinthians 6:18; cf also vs.12-19). When we demean our sexuality, we are tampering with a crucial component in our nature as creatures originally fashioned in the image and after the likeness of God.

“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie...” - The underlying cause of mankind's godlessness is re-emphasized. At the root of humanity's sinfulness, and God's judgement upon that sin is a fundamental rejection of the Creator and His truth. A deliberate, voluntary trade has taken place - ***“they exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”*** God and His Word have been cast aside and thrown away as worthless. Through His prophet Jeremiah, God had warned apostate Judah, ***“You have forgotten Me and trusted in falsehood.”*** (Jeremiah 13:25) Fallen mankind is captivated by falsehood and lives in bondage to Satan who is the ***“Father of Lies”*** (John 8:44). The Greek text actually says ***“the lie”*** referring not to falsehood in general but to the specific lie of idolatry, the worship of ***“created things rather than the Creator.”***

“Who is forever praised! Amen.” - This doxology is a spontaneous outburst of adoration evoked by the mention of God as ***“the Creator.”*** It comes as a blessed interruption in the midst of this sordid description of mankind's' perversity. ***“Perhaps unable to continue discussing such vile things without coming up for air, as it were, Paul inserts a common Jewish doxology about the true God.”*** (MacArthur, p.104) It is a natural and irrepressible tribute of reverence toward the God whom men have dishonored by their idolatry. The apostolic affirmation of the blessedness of God is sealed with a solemn ***“Amen.”*** This is a transliterated Hebrew word which means *truth* and came to be used in a number of other languages as an emphatic expression

of the speaker or writer's confidence in the verity of that which has been said. The role of the “**Amen**” in Jewish and Christian prayer and praise was well established even at this early date. Its usage is quite common in the Pauline epistles (cf. Romans 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 1 Corinthians 16:24; Galatians 1:5; 6:18; Ephesians 3:21; Philippians 4:20; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16; 2 Timothy 4:18). Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* explains the development of this important term in this way:

“In the OT the word is used both by the individual and the community (1) to confirm the acceptance of a task allotted by men in the performance of which there is need for the will of God, (2) to confirm the personal application of a divine threat or curse, and, (3) to attest the praise of God in response to a doxology. In all these cases, “amen” is the acknowledgment of a word that is valid, and the validity of which is binding for me and then generally in this acknowledgment. Thus “amen” means that which is sure and true. In Judaism the use of Amen is widespread and firmly established. An extraordinary value is attached to its utterance. In synagogue, though not in temple worship, it occurs as the response of the community to the detailed praises which the leaders utters with the prayers or on other occasions and to each of the three sections into which the priests divided the Aaronic benediction of Numbers 6:24-26. It was the confession of the praise of God which was laid on the community and which the community was to affirm by its answer. And it was the confession of the blessing of God which was pronounced to the community and which the community was to make operative by its Amen...There is a shift in meaning in the few instances in which it is a concluding wish at the end of one's own prayers. In such cases it is not so much a confirmation of what is, but rather hope for what is desired...In the New Testament and the surrounding Christian world the Hebrew is usually taken over as it stands. It is used in three ways: (1) It is a liturgical acclamation in Christian worship... (2) Christian prayers and doxologies mostly end with Amen...It expresses the fact that in divine service prayer and doxology have their place before the people whose response they evoke or anticipate...Christ Himself can be called “the Amen” in Revelation 3:14. He Himself is the response to the divine Yes in Him. And to the extent that in Himself He acknowledges and obediently responds to the divine Yes which is Himself, He is the reliable and true Witness of God. (3) Jesus uses the Amen before his sayings 49 times in the Gospels to show that as such they are reliable and true and that they are so because Jesus Himself in His Amen acknowledges them to be His own sayings and thus makes them valid.” (TNDT, 1, pp. 335-337)

Verses 26-27

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

“Because of this...” - This phrase parallels the ***“Therefore”*** of verse 24 and links the perversions now described with the godlessness and suppression of the truth which introduced this section. For the second time the ominous phrase ***“God gave them over”*** is heard. But whereas he first spoke of godlessness and uncleanness in general he now advances to ***“shameful lusts”*** and forcefully demonstrates his point with specific application to the most shameful of these passions. Homosexual abominations are cited as the most overt evidences of the degeneracy to which God in His wrath had given over the nations. In Verse 24, Paul warned of ***“sinful desires.”*** The escalation of evil which the apostle has in mind is signaled by the use of a much stronger word in this phrase. ***“Desire”***(vs.24, Greek - *“epithumia”*) means a single evil yearning which may yet be controlled. ***“Lust”*** (vs.26, Greek - *“pathe”*) means a constant burning passion, a conflagration that overwhelms all constraint and controls a man completely. Yearning mutates into lust; lust metastasizes into compulsion; and soon an entire lifestyle had been engulfed in evil. Lenski observes:

“God removed all constraint so that desires grew to passions, and from the desires He gave them up to these passions. The judgement is increased. Base desires carry men into acts of vileness, but reaching their climax in passions, they not only plunge men into scattered vile acts, they drown them in vileness.” (Lenski, p.113)

“Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.” - Lesbianism, the practice of female homosexuality, begins the presentation of these ***“shameful lusts.”*** Charles Hodge explains: *“Paul first refers to the degradation of females among the heathen, because they are always the last to be affected in the decay of morals and their corruption is therefore proof that all virtue is lost.”* (Hodge, p.42) The apostle indicates the degrading nature of this perversion in that he does not use the Greek word *“gune”* which is the ordinary term for women, but rather *“theleia”* which simply means the female of the species and may be used in reference to any animal life form. The same linguistic shift is also present in the following phrase which describes male homosexuality. Those who indulge in such things have



*"The Creator" Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder
From the 1534 Edition of Luther's Bible*

descended to brutish level of being nothing more than creatures of sex, without the most basic dignity of a human being. The term "*relations*" here refers to sexual activity and specifically to the act of intercourse. For the third time in this section (cf. vss. 23,25) the verb "*exchanged*" occurs to indicate the deliberate action of reciprocal giving and receiving. "*Natural relations*" are given up and replaced by "*unnatural ones*" just as "*the glory of the immortal God*" was given up and replaced by "*images made to look like mortal man*" (vs. 23) and, "*the truth of God*" was given up and replaced by "*a lie*" (vs.25). From beginning to end, man's downfall is a series of horrible trades

in which that which is good, right, and true is cast aside in favor of that which evil, wrong, and false. The contrast between "*natural*" and "*unnatural*" is crucial for a correct understanding of this passage. In the immediate context of Romans 1 Paul has argued that knowledge of God is plainly available to men in the world of nature which God has created. Therefore man's failure to glorify God and his suppression of the truth of God are inexcusable. In the following chapter, the apostle will further argue that every human being possesses an instinctive recognition of right and wrong in the natural law, or conscience, written by God in the hearts of men. In this context,

Paul's understanding of the words **“natural”** and **“unnatural”** is clear.

“In the New Testament, the “natural” pertains to the created world, and its present general order as ordained by God, ranging from ordinary living things such as animals or plants or biological processes to the fundamental, original condition of things, without artificial intervention - either their innate characteristics or inherited condition. God has ordained the natural function for sexual relations in His creation order; the normal, and normative, pattern of male and female becoming one flesh. God's creation ordinance, with the specific distinction between male and female, intended for heterosexual relations to be “natural.” Man's inherited condition, and ordinary biological process, the essential character of his sexuality where there is no artificial intervention and willful reorientation, is therefore heterosexual. This information is clearly known from creation and conscience even by those who disorder the natural function of sex (Romans 1:32). There is, in the Biblical perspective, no such thing as “natural homosexuality.” It is always, at base, a perversion of the created order.” (Bahnsen, p.56,57)

“In the same way, men also abandoned natural relations with women...” - The practice of male homosexuality receives the same scathing denunciation as its female counterpart. It is difficult to imagine how the language of the text could be any stronger or more straightforward. This unequivocal denunciation is completely consistent with every other Biblical text on the subject of homosexuality (cf. Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:9-11) The opening words of Paul's comments on male homosexuality closely parallel his stern critique of lesbianism. As lesbians **“exchange natural relations for unnatural ones”** so also male homosexuals are guilty of having **“abandoned natural relations with women.”** Homosexual activity is contrary to nature itself, as the natural order reflects the Creator's design and intent.

“Were inflamed with lust for one another.” - Homosexual passion is presented as an uncontrollable blaze which consumes and destroys those who indulge in it. The Greek words used in this phrase do not occur elsewhere in Scripture. A similar passage in the Old Testament Apocrypha warns:

“Let neither gluttony nor lust overcome me, and do not surrender me to a shameless soul...The soul heated like a burning fire will not be quenched until it is consumed; a man who commits fornication in the body of his flesh will never cease until the fire burns him up. To a fornicator all bread tastes sweet; he will never cease until he dies.” (Sirach 23:6,16,17)

Paul paints a grim picture of perversion that turns in upon itself in a tightening spiral of self-destruction. One is reminded of the Sodomites who were so passionately consumed with their lust to rape Lot's guests that even after they were struck with blindness they still "*wearied themselves trying to find the doorway*" into Lot's house (Genesis 19:11). The compulsive nature of male homosexuality in modern America, where it is not unusual for homosexuals to have scores of different sexual partners a year, is indicative of the accuracy of the Biblical indictment. Men who engage in sexual intercourse with other men are guilty of having "*committed indecent acts.*" The Greek text literally says - "*males with males committing that which is shameless.*" These same terms are used in the Greek Old Testament in reference to the vilest abominations and defilements of the Canaanites for which the penalty among the people of God was death (cf. Leviticus 18).

"And received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." - The judgement of God is never arbitrary or capricious. The punishment always fits the



"The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah"
Woodcut from the 1534 Edition of Luther's Bible

crime. Throughout this segment the theme has been the abandonment of defiant sinners to the consequences of their sin. Those who have chosen to live in sin are ever more enslaved by those sins as the divine Judge “*gives them over*” to the punishment which they have decreed for themselves. This is particularly true in specific reference to homosexual behavior. The text notes that the “*penalty*” which they have “*received in themselves*” is precisely that which is “*due...for their perversions.*” Long before the advent of AIDS, the 19th century commentator W.J.T. Shedd described that penalty as “*the gnawing, unsatisfied lust itself, together with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of debauchery.*” (Murray, p.48) Pestilence sweeps through the homosexual community today, spilling over to strike down IV drugs users and hemophiliacs. It is difficult to dispute John MacArthur's grim conclusion: “*The appalling physical consequences of homosexuality are visible evidence of God's righteous condemnation. Unnatural vice brings its own perverted reward. AIDS is frightening evidence of that fatal promise.*” (MacArthur, p.107)

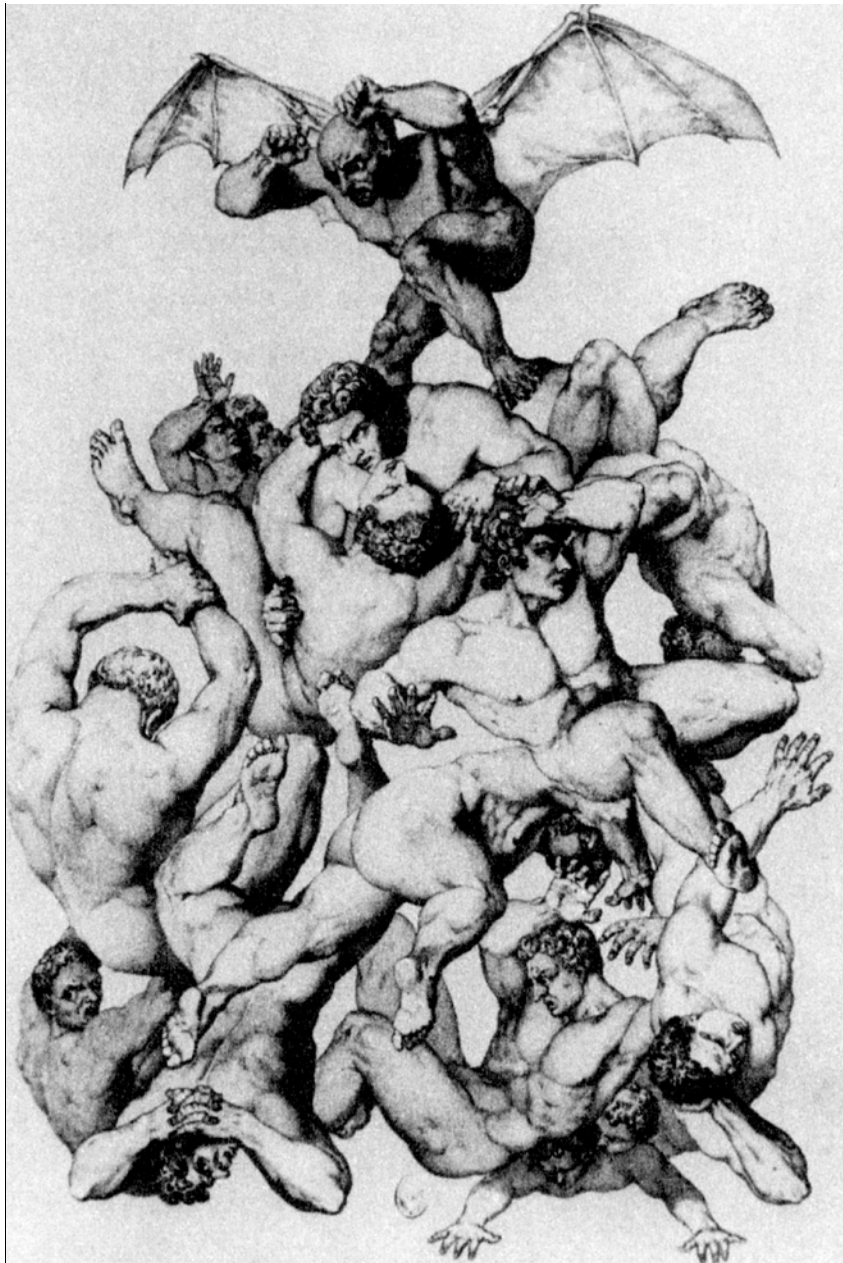
Verses 28-32

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, greed, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents, they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, they also approve of those who practice them.

“*Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile...*” - The grim catalog of “*the godlessness and wickedness of man*” (vs.18) against which “*the wrath of God is being revealed*” (vs. 18) comes to its dreadful climax in these verses. To gaze upon the reality of man's total depravity, here graphically described, is, as one commentator remarked, like “*lifting the lid of hell*” (Boice, p.186).

The apostle reiterates the essence of the problem as he repeats the basic accusation against sinful mankind for the fifth time in this segment - “*they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*” (cf. vss. 18,21,23,25). Paul leaves no room for doubt about the direct link between humankind's rejection of God and its

disordered state. All of the chaos and confusion with which humanity struggles every day all stems from the basic refusal to recognize God. The verb ***“think”*** (Greek - *“dokimadso”*) means to *“test, examine, prove by testing, or accept as proved.”* It was often used in reference to coins which were carefully tested on a scale and only those having full weight of gold or silver were accepted. The rest were disapproved, rejected, and cast aside.



“The Fall of the Damned” - 19th Century French Engraving

“The implication then is of a deliberate act of disqualification. It was not simply a case of humans being distracted by something else and losing sight of God: they gave God their consideration, and concluded that God was unnecessary to their living...They tested God and found him wanting. They discounted God as a factor in shaping their lives.”
(Dunn, p.66)

“He gave them over to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done.” - For the third and final time God's judicial abandonment of impenitent sinners to pronounced. Man has chosen to exclude God from his life. That choice to be free of God has been at the root of all evil since the very beginning (cf. Genesis 3:5). The thrice repeated ***“they exchanged”***

clearly underscored humankind's responsibility for the sad state of affairs in which they find themselves. But the creature cannot exclude the Creator. This is clearly evidenced by the threefold repetition of the awesome ***“He gave them over.”*** God remains in control and rebellious humanity cannot escape His righteous judgement upon sin. Righteousness through faithful dependence on the Creator leads to salvation. Unrighteousness through self-deceitful pride and self-indulgent desire leads to the wrath of God and self-destruction. The tragic irony of man's disqualification of God in the preceding phrase (Greek - *“dokimadso”*) is emphasized by the use of the adjective ***“depraved”*** (Greek - *“adokimon”*) in reference to man's mind. The term comes from the same Greek root and literally means *“disqualified.”* Man tested God and decided that He failed the test. Only a mind that is itself substandard, disqualified, would have considered making God the subject of such a test. The mind of the creature depends upon the light of God to function properly. When that mind scorns God and is abandoned by Him it is inadequate, unqualified for the task of understanding reality. The mental incapacity of the mind that fails to stand the test reveals itself in unacceptable behavior - ***“to do what ought not be done.”***

“They have become filled with every kind of wickedness...” - In the preceding paragraph the description of divine retribution upon sin had been restricted to sexual perversion. With the catalog of sins which follows, the apostle reminds us that the judgement of God falls upon all sin. The moral corruption of men is pervasive. We do not dabble in sin - we are completely immersed in it - ***“filled with every kind.”*** The list is not exhaustive but representative. It includes 21 vices, three times the perfect seven. The vices mentioned appear to have been chosen at random. John Murray notes:

“The apostle's mind ranges freely over the vices which came within his own observation in his contact with the various races and conditions of men. And no doubt his mind also ranged freely among the many sources of information available to him respecting the moral state of the nations in his own generation and in those that preceded. We are impressed with the length of the list and with the variety of vice. But after all, this is only a selection.” (Murray, p.50)

“Wickedness” (Greek - *“aidkia”*) is a generic term for unrighteousness of every sort, everything that is opposed to divine law and holiness. ***“Evil”*** (Greek - *“poneria”*) refers to maliciousness and viciousness. ***“Greed”*** (Greek - *“pleonixia”*) literally means *“a desire to have more.”* It is strongly negative term used for insatiable



“The Triumph of Death” by Pieter Bruegel - 1562

covetousness and ruthless self-assertion. There is, of course, a proper and necessary kind of ambition. But when that ambition becomes a compulsive need to succeed and always have more no matter who gets hurt, then ambition has become sinful **“greed.”** **“Depravity”** (Greek - *“kakia”*) means badness and ill will - a deliberate wickedness that delights in doing other people harm. **“Envy”** (Greek - *“photonos”*) is the word used by Aristotle to describe the person who takes everything in the worst possible way. Someone who is consumed by a jealousy provoked by the success and happiness of others.. **“Murder”**(Greek - *“phonos”*) is defined as the senseless, wanton killing of human beings. **“Strife”** (Greek - *“eris”*) means contentiousness and rivalry. The root of this Greek word means *“to debate.”* **“Deceit”** (Greek - *“dolos”*) is the self-serving treachery which is often accompanied by **“malice”** (Greek - *“kakoethia”*), spite and bitterness. The Greek is a combination of the two words *“evil”* and *“habits.”* The malicious person is one who is set against other people and is out to harm them. **“Gossips”** (Greek - *“psthirstas”*) is a colorful word which means whisperer, rumor-monger, or tale-bearer. **“Slanderers”**(Greek - *“katalalous”*)

is a somewhat more negative term used in reference to malicious back-biters. There is some debate among scholars as to whether **“God-haters”** should be understood in an active sense (those who hate God) or a passive sense (those who are hated by God). The Greek word in the original text is actually passive. Our list of moral undesirables continues with three closely related terms: **“insolent”** (Greek - *“hubristes”*) - the intolerable pride that sets a human being up against God, **“arrogant”** (Greek - *“huperephanos”*) - a feeling of personal superiority that causes one to look down upon others with contempt, and **“boastful”** (Greek - *“alazon”*) - seeking the admiration of others with false claims about what you are or have done. Man, who has spurned the Creator, is himself creative only in a negative sense. As sin's self-perpetuating momentum carries on, fallen humanity demonstrates a deadly creativity in constantly devising innovative ways to practice unrighteousness - **“they invent new ways to do evil.”** One of the hallmarks of the end times is the blatant disregard for the basic structures through which God orders His creation (cf. 2 Timothy 3:2,3). At the center of all human society is marriage and the family. Those who are **“disobedient to parents”** are the bitter fruit of a culture that has spurned the will and the way of God. *“Godless parents raise godless children and thus get to taste the bitter fruit of their own sowing in their own offspring.”* (Lenski, p.122) In a closing quartet of corruption we are told that by nature men are **“senseless”** (Greek - *“asynetous”*) - without moral understanding, stupid as to the things of God; **“faithless”** (Greek - *“asynthetous”*) - drawn from a root which means to break a covenant or commitment - these are people who cannot be trusted; **“heartless”** (Greek - *“astorgous”*) - without the natural affection which is to distinguish human beings from brutish animals particularly within the family, i.e. a patricide or matricide, or a parent that abandons or kills their own children; **“ruthless”** (Greek - *“aleneenomas”*) - without mercy, delighting in cruelty and exalting in the use of power to exploit others.

“Although they know God's righteous decree...” - All of the aforementioned vice and viciousness is not committed in innocent ignorance. Human beings know better. The reality of God and the revelation of His righteous wrath are evident throughout creation. In addition to this natural revelation of God, the apostle will shortly add the witness of conscience, the natural law in every man's heart (cf. 2:14,15). Truly, **“men are without excuse.”** (vs. 20). People do not recognize God because they do not want to recognize Him. They instinctively **“suppress the truth in unrighteousness”** (vs.18). Listen to the stern words of Christ:

“Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: light has come into the world but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” (John 3:18-20)

“They not only continue to do these very things but also continue to approve of those who practice them.” - At the bottom of this wretched pit of degradation is the consensus of men in pursuit of iniquity. Our eagerness to encourage others in the commission of the same damnable sins that we are committing demonstrates the completely willful nature of our actions. To justify our own sins is bad enough, but to approve and encourage others to sin is immeasurably worse. Murray asserts:

“To put it bluntly, we are not only bent on damning ourselves but we congratulate others in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in damnation. We hate others as we hate ourselves and render therefore to them the approval of what we know merits damnation.”
(Murray p. 53).

Our modern culture's willingness to tolerate, sanction, and encourage any and all behavior, no matter how deviant or perverse it may be is indicative of the pathetic moral depths to which we have fallen.

Dr. George Stöckhardt wrote the following prophetic denunciation of the decadence of western culture over a century ago. His words were true then and they are infinitely more applicable today!

“Since Paul speaks of natural man estranged from God, this description of morals also fits the generation of our day. One cannot better characterize the religious and moral condition of our civilized world than with these words of the apostle. It is a God-forgetting, idolatrous generation which lives upon the earth. Who thanks God for His goodness, to which men owe their life and all blessings? The religion, the pseudo-religion of the world is the deification of the creature. The world deifies her great men, her heroes, deifies herself, her own power, wisdom, excellence, and achievements. The philosophical contemplation and adoration of God are nothing else than changing God into the image of weak, mortal man. Man view God and divine things according to human standards. The generation of this age is an adulterous one. The world feasts her eyes upon and delights in the lusts of the flesh,

shame and filthiness. Man's carnal desires are no longer satisfied by common adultery but long for the unusual, the refined enjoyment. The unnaturalness and unchastity of the apostle's time have today only assumed another form and appearance. It is a murderous generation in which we live. Avarice, insatiable envy, is the mainspring of commercial life. Man has no consideration for his neighbor. Everyone strives to rise in the world and thus ruins and tramples upon others. It is idle scorn and mockery when the world writes humanitarianism or universal love upon her standard. And this stream of destruction rushes incessantly forward. One can no longer check and restrain this disgraceful state of things. In vain are all attempts at reform. Men are, as it were, chained to unrighteousness by iron fetters. And why? A destiny rules over the activities of the children of men. God has given them up to their corrupt ways. Knowledge of God and morality has not altogether ceased. Man still hears proclaimed what is right before God and men. But whatever exists of truth serves only to call forth opposition, to goad men on to do the opposite of what is right. Therefore, men have no excuse. The world is continually driving herself forward to the abyss, to the Day of Wrath and the righteous judgement of God." (Stöckhardt, p.17)



"Death and His Demons Tormenting the World"
Woodcut by Hans Weidnitz, 1533



*“The Pharisee and the Publican”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

Romans Chapter 2

Verse 1

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things.

“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else” - Having condemned the blatant immorality and crass wickedness of mankind in no uncertain terms, the apostle now directs his attention to moralists, those who might

well have agreed with his condemnation of the world in general, but who would, at the same time, have exempted themselves from that condemnation. His words apply with equal force to stoic Gentiles and self-righteous Jews both of whom labor under the illusion that their own high-minded ethical sensitivity sets them apart from the great majority of mankind which fails to measure up to their lofty moral standards. In fact, the innate human tendency to cling to the pretense of self-righteousness poses one of the most deadly threats to the only way to deal with the reality of man's unrighteousness, the righteousness of God by faith in Christ. This delusion must be destroyed if the Gospel is to stand. Martin Franzmann correctly notes: *“As long as man still has the righteousness and pride and strength to judge his fellow man, he is not ready for the beggary of faith, he is not ready to receive the radical rescue of the righteousness of God.”* (Franzmann, p.44,45)

The verse begins with the connective **“Therefore”** which links the entire previous section with that which follows. This term is typically used in Greek to denote an inference or conclusion drawn from that which went before. That linkage is further indicated by Paul's repetition of his earlier word **“without excuse”** (cf. 1:20. These two references are the only times in the New Testament that St. Paul uses this word. Greek - *“analogetos”*). In this instance the assertion of excuselessness comes in the dramatic form of a personal challenge, **“You, therefore, have no excuse, you...”** so that anyone who might have thought himself exempt from the preceding indictment may now recognize its application to him.

The moralist mind-set inevitably leads to relative righteousness and judgmentalism. Hence the apostle identifies the moralist as **“you who pass judgment on someone else.”** The concept of **“judgement”** is crucial in this segment. Forms of the word (Greek *“krino”*) occur eight times in the chapter. It is used in the typical judicial sense of passing judgement upon someone or something. The concept is strongly reminiscent of Christ's admonition in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Do not judge or you too will be judged, for in the same way that you judge others, you too will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”** (Matthew 7:1,2; cf. also Mark 4:24; Luke 6:36,37). In this regard, William Hendrickson offers a very important distinction:

“Does this mean that all manner of judging is absolutely and without any qualification forbidden, so that with respect to the neighbor we are not allowed to form and/or express any opinion whatever, at least that with regard to him we must never voice an adverse or unfavorable opinion?...It is clear that no such wholesale

condemnation of forming an opinion about a person and expressing it can have been intended... What then did Jesus mean?...The Lord is here condemning the spirit of censoriousness, judging harshly, self-righteousness, without mercy, without love. To be discriminating and critical is necessary; to be hypercritical is wrong.”
(Hendrickson, p.356,357)

The hypocrisy of the moralist, who condemns others in self-righteous disdain, is revealed in that **“you who pass judgement do the same things.”** Those who indulge in self-righteousness make two very serious mistakes. First of all, they underestimate God's standard of righteousness, failing to recognize that the demands of the holy Law of God are absolute, not relative. This is the theme of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew.5-7). Secondly, they underestimate the depth of their own sinfulness. Human beings have an incredible ability to overlook our own faults while exaggerating the faults of others. To use our Lord's image, we might call this tendency the speck and beam syndrome (cf. Matthew 7:3-5).



*“The Summons to Judgment”
by Rudolf Schäfer - 1932*

Verses 2-3

Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?

“Now we know...” - The apostle now expresses a matter of common knowledge. The basis in *“truth”* for the judgment of God is obvious to all and beyond reasonable dispute. That which God does is true by definition. Unlike the judgment of human beings, which is subject to error, God is not capable of doing that which is not right or saying that which is not true. This is axiomatic. The personal favoritism which enables the moralist to condemn others for things of which he himself is guilty does not apply to the absolutely impartial judgment of God. Here precisely the same standard will be applied to all. That dreadful impartiality ought to strike terror into the heart of every moralist. No *“mere man,”* particularly one who has presumed to sit in judgment on his fellow men, could dare to stand before the judgment seat of the Almighty. God knows all things. The carefully concealed hypocrisy of men is fully revealed to Him. None will *“escape God's judgment.”*

Verse 4

Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

“Or do you show contempt...” - The moralist considers himself safe and secure, resting comfortably on his own ethical achievements. He wrongly perceives the *“kindness, tolerance and patience”* of God to be indications of divine approval. Thus he is guilty of showing contempt these gracious attributes of God. The NIV's translation, *“you show contempt,”* is an apt rendering of the original. The Greek verb *“kataphroneo”* - literally means *“to look down upon”* something or someone and to underestimate their true value. It often carries the connotation of disregarding or even despising. Man sees permissiveness and toleration in God's forbearance. This is a fatal misreading of the divine purpose. God's longsuffering is meant to give man time for repentance. Peter offers a more accurate assessment of the situation:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our brother Paul wrote you with the

wisdom that God gave him.” (2 Peter 3:9,15)

Three attributes of God are cited, ***“kindness, tolerance, and patience.”*** ***“Kindness”*** (Greek - *“chrestotes”*) refers to God's goodness. Our English word *“God”* originally meant *“The Good.”* All goodness there is comes from God. As the Apostle James reminds us: ***“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”*** (James 1:17). The classic theologians of the Middle Ages correctly referred to God as *“summum bonum,”* that is the chief or the highest good. The second attribute of God in our text is ***“tolerance”*** (Greek - *“anoches”*). The term's root meaning is *“to hold back.”* It is often translated as forbearance or delay. Sin justly deserves punishment and yet God holds back His righteous wrath so that fallen man may be given time to repent. Man foolishly misunderstands this forbearance as permissiveness and often persists in his sin. Finally, Paul cites the ***“patience”*** of God. The Greek word is *“makrothymia.”* This intriguing term actually means long suffering. It is sometimes used of a powerful ruler who does not exercise his right to vengeance against the enemy who has wronged him.

The goal of God's ***“kindness”*** in these matters is ***“repentance”*** (Greek - *“metanoia”*). This crucial concept refers to a basic change of heart and mind. In the moral realm it refers to a basic change of mind about sin - a change from loving sin to renouncing it and returning to God for forgiveness. Biblical repentance includes the following components: 1. recognition of sin; 2. contrition, that is, sorrow for sin; 3. faith in forgiveness for Christ's sake; 4. willingness, wherever possible to undo the damage caused by the sin; and 5. conscientious resolve not to repeat the sin in the future.

Verse 5

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgement will be revealed.

“Because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart...” - To toy with the patience of God is to court disaster. Such recklessness is pure folly, the result of ***“stubbornness and your unrepentant heart.”*** The word ***“stubbornness”*** translates the Greek *“sklerotes”* which means *“to become hardened.”* The hardening of the heart is a

regular theme in Scripture (cf. Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; Matthew 19:8; Mark 3:5; 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Hebrews 3:8,15; 4:7). Sin desensitizes man spiritually. The progressive impact of unrepented sin makes man more resistant to the will and Word of God. The **“unrepentant heart”** eventually becomes as hard and unresponsive as stone (cf. Ezekiel 36:26). In the English language, the medical term *“sclerosis”* is based on this same Greek word. *“Arteriosclerosis,”* for instance, refers to the hardening of the arteries. *“The hardening of the arteries may take a person to the grave, but the hardening of his spiritual heart will take him to hell.”* (MacArthur, p.120)



“The Day of Judgment”

1493 Woodcut by Michael Wohlgemut

“You are storing up wrath against yourself...” - The apostle had introduced the concept of God's **“wrath”** in 1:18 (**“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”**) The righteous anger of a holy God against the sinful corruption of humanity is not merely a future threat: it is present reality. That **“wrath”** is already being revealed as the devastation of sin wreaks its havoc throughout the world every day (cf. pp.33-37). Paul uses the effective image of the

miser who slowly, painstakingly accumulates his treasure. James Boice observes:

“There is an interesting image suggested by Paul's language at this point, for Paul speaks of the stubborn and unrepentant person “storing up wrath” for the day of God's judgment. It is the image of a greedy individual, a miser, who has been storing up wealth which, contrary to his expectations, is destined to destroy him. I think of this man as storing up a great horde of gold coins, placing them in an attic above his bed where he thinks no one will find them and where they will be safe. He keeps this up for years, amassing a great weight of gold. But one day, while he is sleeping and oblivious to his danger, this great weight of gold breaks through the ceiling of his bedroom, comes crashing down onto his bed, and kills him. He thought of his wealth as salvation, but it was death.” (Boice, p.220)

The day is coming when God's **“kindness, tolerance, and patience”** will come to an abrupt and eternal end. On that day the **“wrath”** that has slowly accumulated through all of the ages will be poured out upon rebellious mankind. The Lord's **“righteous judgment”** will be **“revealed”** before the eyes of every human being who had ever walked upon the face of this earth. For those whose sins have not been cleansed in the blood of Jesus it will be a grim and horrible day of reckoning. The ancient prophet Zephaniah provides what may be Scripture's most vivid description of that day:

“That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.” (Zephaniah 1:15-18)

The greatest hymn of the medieval era, *“Dies Irae,”* (*“The Day of Wrath”*) was written on the basis of this text, every word of which breaks like a clap of thunder upon the conscience of the sinner. Its author was Thomas de Celano, friend and biographer of St. Francis of Assisi. Never has the dreadful nature of the final judgment been more effectively expressed. The text has inspired many of the great composers of classical music. Scores of versions appear in works of the master



*“The Final Judgment”
17th Century Bible Illustration by Matthäus Merian*

composers. This hymn also appears in virtually every historic hymnal of the Christian Church.

*“Day of Wrath”
by Thomas de Celano*

*Day of wrath, O day of mourning! See fulfilled the prophet’s warning;
Heaven and earth in ashes burning.
Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth, through earth’s sepulchers it ringeth,
All before the throne it bringeth.
O what fear man’s bosom rendeth when from heaven the Judge descendeth
On Whose sentence all dependeth.
Death is struck and nature quaking, all creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.
Lo, the book, exactly worded wherein all hath been recorded,*

*Thence shall judgment be awarded.
 When the Judge His seat attaineth and each hidden deed arraigneth,
 Nothing unavenged remaineth.
 What shall I, frail man, be pleading, who for me be interceding
 When the just are mercy needing?
 King of Majesty tremendous, Who dost free salvation send us,
 Fount of Pity, then befriend us.
 Righteous Judge, for sin's pollution grant Thy gift of absolution
 Ere the day of retribution.
 Faint and weary Thou hast sought me, on the cross of suffering bought me,
 Shall such grace be vainly brought me?
 Think, good Jesus, my salvation caused Thy wondrous incarnation;
 Leave me not to sin's damnation!
 Guilty now, I pour my moaning, all my shame with anguish owning:
 Hear, O Christ, Thy servant's groaning.
 Bows my heart in meek submission, strewn with ashes of contrition;
 Help me in my last condition!
 Worthless are my prayers and sighing; yet, good Lord, in grace complying,
 Rescue me from fires undying.
 Thou the sinful woman savedst; Thou the dying thief forgavest;
 Thus to me true hope vouchsafest!
 With Thy favored sheep then place me, nor among the goats abase me,
 But to Thy right hand upraise me.
 While the wicked are confounded, doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
 Call me with Thy saints surrounded.
 To the rest Thou didst prepare me on Thy cross, O Christ, upbear me.
 Spare, O God, in mercy, spare me."*

The language of the Apostle is most helpful in understanding the purpose and significance of the great Day of Judgment. Popular impressions to the contrary notwithstanding, the purpose of Judgment Day is not to decide who is going to heaven and who is going to hell. For the overwhelming majority of humankind that will have already been decided at the moment of death. In fact, the souls of the dead will have already been in either heaven or hell, depending upon their spiritual condition at the moment of death. Neither those who are alive and remain unto the coming of our Lord to be snatched up with Him together in the clouds nor those who greet His coming with desperate fear and frantic but futile attempts to escape will be in any doubt whatsoever as to their eternal fate. The purpose of Judgment Day is not the announcement of a decision as to anyone's salvation or damnation. Instead, the Day of Judgment will demonstrate the perfect righteousness of God, the Judge. That is clearly indicated by the unusual Greek syntax of this verse. The phrase St. Paul

uses in reference to Judgment Day is literally translated “*God's righteous judgment's revelation day.*” Before the entire universe of men and angels the verdict will be announced, and all will know and acknowledge that verdict as righteous and true. Lenski notes:

“The last day and its final judgment will clear up everything, answer every question, dissipate every doubt. The righteous judgment of God will be revealed and no creature will find even the least flaw in its perfection. This is strange in a way and yet true. Every judge, by virtue of being a judge, is himself judged by any and every verdict. Any unjust verdict of his condemns, first of all himself as being guilty for pronouncing it; any just verdict acquits him in the same way. The fact that God should apply this to himself, that he should be concerned about his judgments and the verdict that he renders upon himself by means of them, may seem strange, and yet it is not, for he is righteousness itself. The fact that on the last day not a soul will even question a judgment of his will be due to the revelation God makes and of the moral nature of those to whom it makes it when they stand at last face to face with him. (Lenski, p. 144)

Verses 6-8

God will "give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking, and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

“God will “give to each person...” - What now follows has been rightly described as “*the lightning stroke that kills all moralism, root and branch*” (Lenski, p.146). Paul here expounds the Law in all of its mortal severity and Judgment Day as the culmination and fulfillment of the Law's just demands. No man can endure it and live. The false hopes of those who dream of earning their own salvation are revealed as delusion and self-deception. The demands of the Law are absolute. Those who would earn their own salvation must obey the Law perfectly.

Scripture is completely consistent in describing the evidentiary role of works on the Day of Judgment (cf. Isaiah 3:10-11; Jeremiah 17:10; Matthew 16:27; 25: 31-46; John 5:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 6:8; Revelation 20:11-15). This is the result both of the nature of faith which invariably reveals itself in the deeds of love which are the result of our experience of the love of God in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-24,26) and the nature of Judgment Day as the revelation of the righteous



"God Will Give Each Person According to What He Has Done"
 1540 Woodcut by Hans Holbein

judgment of God. Good works are empirical, while faith is not. Hence the good works which are the fruit of faith serve as the public evidence in this public judgment. In the individual secret judgment of each man during his life and at the moment of death, faith and unbelief alone are decisive. In order, however, to demonstrate the rightness of this judgement in public, before all of creation, works serve as the evidence which can be seen by all. Good works, deeds of love that flow from the love of Christ are the unmistakable evidence of faith. Evil works, deeds of selfishness and sin, are the unmistakable evidence of unbelief. Thus judgement, not salvation is by works. John MacArthur summarizes:

"Salvation is not by works, but it will assuredly produce works. The presence of genuinely good deeds in a persons life reveals that he has truly been saved, and in God's infallible eyes those deeds are a perfectly reliable indicator of saving faith. In the same way, the absence of genuinely good deeds reveals the absence of salvation. In both cases, deeds become a trustworthy basis for God's judgment. When God sees works that manifest righteousness, he knows if they come from a

regenerated heart. When he sees works that manifest unrighteousness, he knows if they come from an unregenerated heart...Paul's point in the present passage is that a person who possess the life of God will reflect the true character of God, and that it is on the basis of that reflected godly character that he will be judged. It is just as impossible for a person having eternal life to indefinitely fail to reflect God's character as it would be for him to indefinitely hold his breath. Eternal life induces spiritual breathing just as surely as physical life induces bodily breathing. John Murray succinctly noted that "works without redemptive aspiration are dead works. Aspiration without good works is presumption." (MacArthur, p. 130,132)

The perfect justice of God's judgment is affirmed with quotations from Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12: ***"One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done."*** (Psalm 62:12) ***"If you say, 'But we knew nothing about this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done?"*** (Proverbs 24:12)

The righteousness of God's judgment can be seen in that every human being, without exception, will be judged on the completely objective basis of their own deeds. No one will be passed by. No one will be allowed to slip through. The basis of judgment will be the same for all for the justice of God is perfect.

"To those who by persistence in doing good..." - All of humanity falls into one of two categories, the saved and the damned. The former are here categorized by a life of ***"persistence in doing good."*** The deeds in question in this section, whether good or evil, are not isolated actions but consistent lifestyle patterns. All Christians sin, but sin cannot be allowed to have dominion in the heart where Christ is Lord. The Christian life is a daily struggle to put our faith into practice, to overcome the ever present temptations of devil, the world, and our own sinful nature as we move on toward the goal. The word ***"persistence"*** means to ***"endure"*** or to ***"stand firm."*** Jesus uses the same word in Matthew 24: ***"But he who stands firm to the end will be saved."*** (Matthew 24:13). It literally means ***"to remain under"*** and describes carrying a burden or bearing a load. Its use here emphasizes the struggle that is the Christian life. Lenski observes:

"In a wicked world we are constantly tempted to throw off the burden, to remain under it no longer, to run free in the false freedom of those who do evil as they please. Only those who hold out shall be saved. It is faith, faith alone, that holds

out; Paul kept the faith. The continuance in faith is evidenced by the endurance in the good work.” (Lenski, p.150)

The aspirations of the Christian in that daily struggle are summarized with three important nouns. The first is **“glory”** (Greek - *“doxa”*). The highest goal of a believer is to live a life that glorifies God. **“Whether, then, you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”** (1 Corinthians 10:31). At the same time, we eagerly anticipate the glory that will be God's gift to us in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17; Colossians 3:4). The believer seeks not the fading glories of this transitory world (*“Sic transit gloria mundi.”*) but the everlasting glory of the eternal God. Secondly, the Christian seeks **“honor.”** Once again, the term is used not a self-serving, worldly way but in reference to the honor that comes from God. Those who have fought the good fight and finished their course will be honored by the heavenly Father as He says one day: **“Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”** (Matthew 25:21). Finally, the true believer seeks **“immortality,”** the long awaited day when the



“The Resurrection of the Dead” 16th Century Engraving by Giorgio Ghisi

ancient curse of death will be lifted. ***“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:53). The gift of God to those who live by faith is ***“eternal life.”*** This is one of the most beautiful and powerful words in the New Testament. ***“Eternal life”*** in the Bible is a matter of quality not quantity. Every human being, even the damned, will have eternal existence. But for those who are unsaved that eternal existence will mean the endless torment of Hell. ***“Eternal life”*** can be realized only in Christ, as by faith we are restored to the abundant life of harmony with the Creator for which mankind was created in the beginning. Jesus defined that life perfectly when He said: ***“Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*** (John 17:3)

Verses 8-9

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile;

“But for those who are self-seeking...” - Now comes the other side of the contrast as the characteristics of those in the second category are presented. The life of the believer is characterized by ***“persistence,”*** the willingness to stand firm, struggle, and patiently endure. The life of the unbeliever is characterized by ***“self-seeking.”*** The NIV translation is a bit weak. The Greek word (*“erithia”*) literally means ***“selfish ambition, the desire for complete and immediate gratification of my own desires.”*** The root meaning of the term refers to a hireling or a mercenary who does what he does simply for money. As long as he gets paid he doesn't care what he does or for whom he does it. It is a most fitting designation for the dilemma of sinful men. The devil uses man's love for immediate gratification as the bait in the trap of temptation. We are lured into evil by glittering promises of pleasure with no thought of the implications or consequences of our actions. The endless cry of sinful man is ***“I want what I want and I want it now!”*** The life that is lived to scratch our every itch and satisfy our every desire as quickly as possible masquerades as freedom. But in reality it is ever increasing bondage as we become slaves to our own selfish pleasures and needs. The shackles of that slavery will drag us down into the depths of Hell. Paul has already informed us that the unrighteous ***“suppress the truth by their wickedness”*** (1:18). He now returns to that theme. The ***“self-seeking”*** are those who ***“reject the truth and follow evil.”*** The ***“truth”*** about God is clearly revealed in nature

and in His Word. That **“truth”** is spurned in favor of **“evil.”** Note once again the implication of a deliberate act of choosing. The alternatives are weighed. A decision is made. **“Truth”** is cast aside and replaced by **“evil.”**

The fourfold consequences of that fatal mistake are detailed. First **“wrath”** (Greek - **“orge”**) the strongest kind of anger; anger burning at a fever pitch. This is the personal, passionate anger of the holy God. It includes, to use Martin Franzmann's phrase **“the high and sober majesty of the Judge”** (Franzmann, p. 47). **“Wrath”** is coupled with **“anger.”** The Greek (**“thumos”**) represents agitated, vehement indignation - from a root which has to do with moving rapidly: the violent breathing of an enraged man in pursuit of an enemy. The consequences for **“every human being who does evil”** are **“trouble and distress.”** **“Trouble”** (Greek - **“thlipsis”**) originally described the exertion of extreme pressure and is sometimes translated as **“affliction, anguish, or persecution.”** Revelation 14 uses the term in its original sense to describe the crushing of the grapes of wrath in the winepress of God's judgment (Revelation 14:18-20). **“Distress”** (Greek - **“stenochoria”**) literally means a place of confinement or extreme constriction, to be hemmed in with no way of escape. The combination of the two terms here calls to mind the sort of desperation described by Christ's warning to the women of Jerusalem of the coming judgment when doomed sinners would cry out **“to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”** (Luke 23:30). Under the absolute justice of the Divine Judge these consequences will fall without exception upon **“every human being who does evil.”** This horrible punishment will come **“first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.”** The Children of Israel were the firstborn of God, the beloved **“apple of His eye”** (Deuteronomy 30:10). They were the recipients of God's promises and the witnesses to the fulfillment of those promises. But now, having abused their place of priority in the grace of God, the Jews have a priority in punishment. The prophet Amos had written: **“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all of your iniquities.”** (Amos 3:2). Israel must stand first and foremost under the judgment of God. Those who were first in salvation opportunity will also be first in judgment responsibility. The **“Gentile”** (Greek), however, is not exempt from that punishment. He too will be judged and condemned.

Verses 10-11

But glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.

“But glory, honor and peace...” - The dreadful punishment of the wicked was described only once but the gift of God's grace is presented twice in this segment. The words ***“glory”*** and ***“honor”*** which appeared earlier (vs. 7) are now repeated for emphasis. In this instance the blessing of ***“peace”*** is added. This is the equivalent of the Hebrew *“shalom,”* the sense of invincible security and well-being which is God's gift to all who place their trust in Him. The order of salvation is also re-emphasized, - ***“first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”*** - in the same way that the apostle had earlier emphasized the order of judgement. The phrase here echoes Paul's previous usage in chapter one: ***“for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew and then for the Gentile”*** (1:16). So that no one will mistake his basic point the apostle concludes with the universal generalization - ***“For God does not show favoritism.”*** All will be saved on the same basis, and all will be judged on the same basis. Neither the Jewish legalist nor the Gentile moralist can expect special treatment on the basis of their own self-perceived advantages. God absolutely does not play favorites. The Greek word (*“prosopolemptes”*) literally means *“to receive a face,”* that is to give special consideration to a person because of who he is (cf. Acts 10:34; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17). That why justice is symbolically presented as a blindfolded woman who cannot see those who appear before her so that all may receive the same treatment. Unfortunately such impartiality is seldom experienced within the justice systems and courts of men. Partiality is the way of the world. God does not play favorites. Those who presume to stand before Him on the basis of who they are or what they have done will find themselves sadly disappointed.

Verse 12

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.

“All who sin...” - The moralist operates with the law as a means of escape from God's judgment. This false sense of security is deadly folly. That is revealed in this verse which describes two routes that lead to the same goal. ***“All who sin”*** will experience the same fate. Sin is the great leveler. Everyone who sins will stand before God condemned. Men are to be judged on the basis of the revelation which God has given them. Hodge correctly notes: *“The ground of judgment is their works; the rule of judgment is their knowledge.”* (Hodge, p.80) Those who have received the special revelation of God's written law, the Law of Moses, will be judged on the basis of that law. Those who have not received the written law will be judged on the



“Moses Receives the Law on Mount Sinai” by Rudolf Schäfer

basis of the revelation which God has given them in nature and conscience. But all will be judged and every sinner will ***“perish.”*** The Law of Moses was the chief identity factor and the boundary marker for the distinctiveness of Israel. Devout Jews prided themselves in the fact that they were the people of the Law and they scorned the Gentiles as those who were without the Law. But the possession or absence of the Law is not the crucial factor. It is sin that is decisive, not the presence or absence of the Law. All who sin will ***“perish”*** with or without the written Law. ***“Perish”*** (Greek - *“apollumi”*) is a strong word. It means to be destroyed but not annihilated. It is used in reference to both physical and eternal death. Jesus uses the same word in John 3:16 - ***“For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”***

Verse 13

For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

“For it is those who hear the law...” - The moralist judge cannot avoid being self-condemned by the very law to which he clings. If the attempt is made to be justified on the basis of law, then that justification must take place not on the basis of mere possession of the law, but on the basis of obedience to it. The verse does not use the ordinary Greek word for hearing (“*akouo*”), but rather a more intense verb (“*akroates*”) which is used in reference to those whose business it is to listen carefully and attentively. James sounds a similar theme: ***“For if anyone was a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”*** (James 1:23-24; cf. also Matthew 7:24-27) The law demands complete conformity. ***“Those who obey the law will be declared righteous.”*** The standard of judgment before the law is actual compliance. Only ***“those who obey,”*** perfectly and without exception, can ever hope to stand before God under the law. This is the first instance in which the key verb ***“to be declared righteous”*** (Greek - “*dikaion*”) is used in the Epistle. It appears fifteen times throughout the letter. The forensic (relating to the court) sense of the term is clearly indicated here.

Verses 14-15

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law...” - The parentheses around verses fourteen and fifteen in the English text indicate that these two verses constitute a digression from Paul's basic argument, as he pauses to demonstrate specifically how Gentiles who are not aware of the written Law can still justly be held accountable to the law before God. In the preceding chapter (1:18-20) the apostle has asserted the excuselessness of all mankind on the basis of God's self-disclosure in nature. That argument is now taken a step forward as Paul contends that while the Gentiles do not possess the specially revealed Law of Moses (***“who do not have the law”***), nevertheless they are not entirely without the law. The law of God is, in fact, made

known to them and brought to bear upon them in another way. Therefore, they are not exempt from responsibility to the law but have become ***“a law for themselves.”*** When we speak today of men who are *“a law unto themselves”* we are usually referring to lawless men who recognize no standard other than their own will or desire. In this text, the meaning of the phrase is exactly the opposite. Every human, by reason of what has been implanted in our nature by God, is subject to the law.

“Do by nature the things required by the law...” - As we observed in chapter one (1:26, p.53), when Paul refers to ***“nature,”*** or to that which is ***“natural,”*** he is reflecting the conviction that God is the Creator of everything and that the order of the created world as it has been ordained by God reflects the will and purpose of the divine Creator. Accordingly, when the text indicates that the Gentiles ***“do by nature the things required by the law”*** we are being told that God has provided a moral sensitivity which is an inherent part of what we are as human beings. John Murray comments: *“What is done “by nature” is done by native instinct or propension, by spontaneous impulse as distinguished from what is induced by forces extraneous to ourselves.”* (Murray, p.73) The Gentiles' knowledge of the law's demands was neither taught nor acquired by exposure to the Law of Moses. It is instinctive, unlearned knowledge, the vestige of the image of God in which mankind was first created (Genesis 1:26-27). The basic standards of human decency which have characterized every human culture and civilization since the dawn of time bear witness to the reality of the natural law within man.

“Since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts...” - Paul; now proceeds to explain how this could be possible. The two verses are linked together with the preposition ***“since,”*** indicating that Verse fifteen will explain the basis for that which had been asserted in Verse fourteen. ***“Gentiles who do not have the law, do by nature the things required”*** because God has caused ***“the requirements of the law to be written on their hearts.”*** The Law of Moses was ***“written”*** by the finger of God upon two tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18). But the moral law had existed long before Mt. Sinai, written by God upon the heart of every descendant of Adam and Eve. The Ten Commandments are merely a summary and application of that moral law for the nation of Israel. The verb, ***“are written,”*** is passive to emphasize that God is the source and author of the law. ***“Their hearts”*** denotes the inward person, the identity and personality of the individual. The language is reminiscent of Jeremiah 31:33 where the prophet foretells a time when ***“I will write my laws on their hearts.”***

“Their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing...” - The word **“conscience”** (Greek - “*suneidesis*”) literally means “*knowledge with*” or “*co-knowledge*.” Conscience is not the law written in man's heart. It operates on the basis of that inner law but is distinct and separate from it. This is emphasized by the word **“also”** in the text. Conscience is part of what I am and yet at the same time it is not merely the equivalent of my “*consciousness*.” Lenski observes: *“I myself know, and conscience too, knows. This is especially apparent when conscience blames me, when I should like to hush it up but find myself unable to do so and may even be driven to desperation by my conscience.”* (Lenski, p. 167) Franz Delitsch offers the following exhaustive definition:

“The conscience, therefore, is man's natural consciousness of the law in his heart. It is the religious/moral determination of his self-consciousness dwelling in the human spirit. Conscience even operates against the will in all forms of the life of man. It is the ethical side of the general sense of truth which remained in man even after his fall; the knowledge concerning what God will and will not have. That knowledge manifests itself progressively in the form of impulse, and judgment, and feeling. The conscience gives witness to the inward law, and therefore thoughts are called forth within a man by the testimony of conscience appear and arise within a man which either excuse or accuse him. These excuses and accusations are in controversy with one another like opponents in a court of law. This process arises both in response to individual actions and overall condition. With this law written on his heart, with this continuous attestation of it by conscience, the Gentile, as says the apostle to the Gentiles, comes to stand eventually before the judgment of God which He executes through Jesus Christ, the Savior not only of man but of humanity.” (Delitsch, 164,165)

The words **“accusing”** and **“defending”** are technical legal terms which describe the judicial process of bringing charges against someone and then making a defense against those charges in court. Conscience functions both negatively and positively. When the action in question is contrary to the law, then conscience accuses, provoking guilt and fear. On the other hand, if the action in question is not contrary to the law, then conscience may serve not as prosecutor but defender. It must also be noted that in either case the conscience of sinful man is never completely or consistently reliable. Franz Pieper emphasizes:

“But since the Fall the conscience does not give a fully reliable testimony concerning the will of God. There is such a thing as an erring conscience. Fallen man regards certain things as permitted, yea, even commanded, which God has forbidden. He will commit idolatry (Galatians 4:8), submit to the Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:11),

or, murder Christians (John 16:2). And fallen man regards as forbidden what God has permitted. He will, for instance, abstain from certain foods (Romans 14:1ff.). Therefore since the Fall the knowledge of God's immutable will is gained with certainty only from God's revelation in His Word, namely in Scripture.” (Pieper, I, p. 532)



“The Last Judgment” by Rogier van der Weyden - 1443-1451

Verse 16

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

“This will take place...” - The apostle now resumes the main thrust of his argument.

In Verses twelve and thirteen, prior to his digression on conscience, he had made reference to being ***“judged by the law”*** or being ***“declared righteous.”*** He now returns to that theme as he warns once again of the coming of the great Day of God's Judgment. All moral judgment takes place in anticipation of the Judgment Day. *“Cancel this day, and the keystone is broken out of the arch of all moral reasoning, all moral responsibility, all moral impetus to do the things of the law.”* (Lenski, p. 172) Every time conscience acts to accuse or defend it is in anticipation of the Final Judgment. Thus conscience is, in Martin Franzmann's words, *“a secret miniature of the Last Judgment”* carried about in the heart of every man (Franzmann, p.51). The typical word order is reversed in the Greek, with the verb preceding the subject to emphasize the action of judgment. Thus literally - *“Judge will God!”* The twisted deliberation of human conscience will be replaced on that day by the absolute certainty of divine deliberation. Nothing will be hidden or concealed. All of ***“men's secret thoughts”*** will be revealed. The awesome reality of absolute judgment is hurled against the self-confidence of the moralist. All hidden motives and every secret thought and desire will be laid bare before the Almighty Judge who alone knows all things. As one of the ancient collects of the communion liturgy acknowledges: *“Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit...”* (cf. Isaiah 66:18; Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrews 4:13).

“Through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.” - The fact that God will judge the world through Jesus Christ is repeatedly attested in Scripture (cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1). The ***“gospel”*** which Paul proclaims declares the reality of that judgment. This is not Gospel in the narrow sense in contrast to the Law, but Gospel as the entire message of salvation, *“a message of divine grace which can forgive and overcome sin but cannot ever compromise with sin. The Christ who is the content of the gospel as the Savior of mankind appears in that Gospel also as the Judge of man.”* (Franzmann, p.51). This ***“gospel”*** recognizes that grace is not cheap. The holy God could not tolerate or overlook sin. And so our salvation was purchased by the payment of an awful price in the blood of God's only Son. Nor is that grace cheap in the lives of God's people. It demands of us what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called *“the cost of discipleship.”* Bonhoeffer denounced *“cheap grace”* as *“the deadly enemy of our church.”* *“Cheap grace”* is *“the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. Baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and*

incarnate.” (Bonhoeffer, pp. 35-36)

Verses 17-20

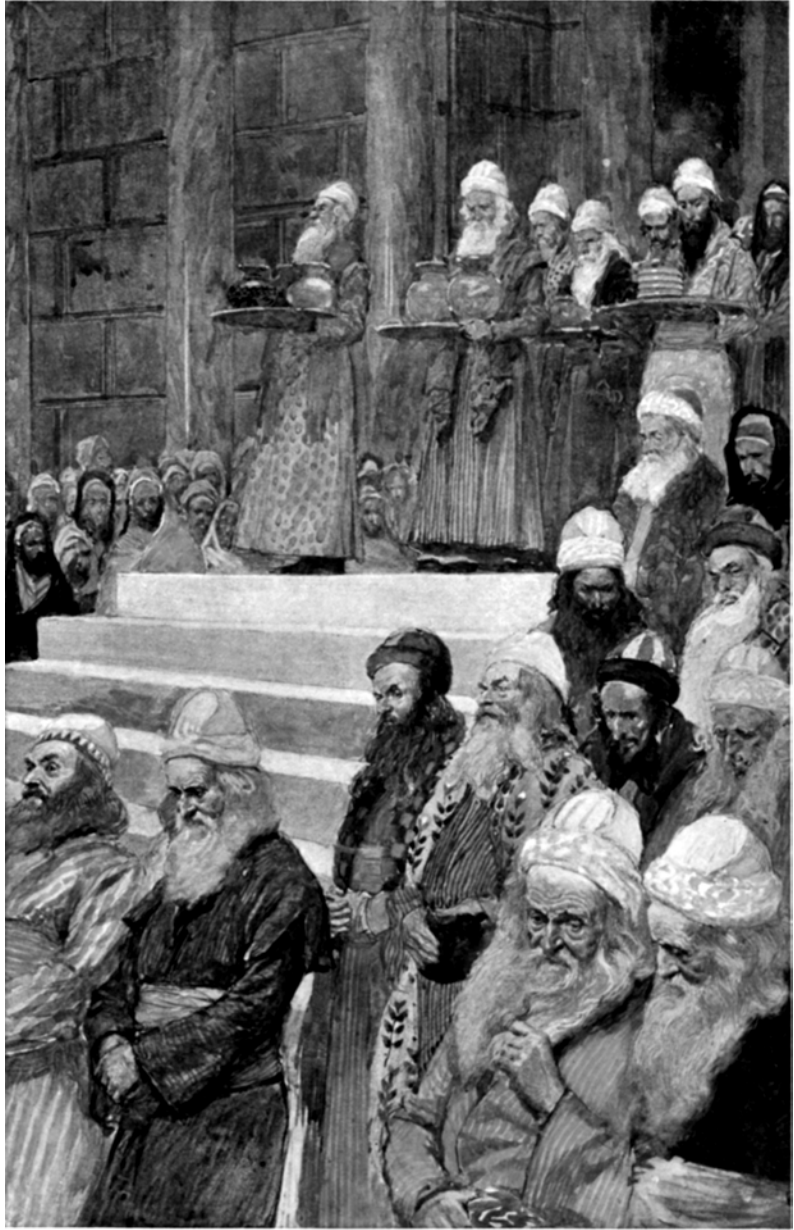
Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship with God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, and instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth -

Having addressed the problem of moralism in general, the apostle now turns his attention specifically to the moralistic legalism of the Jews, the covenant people of God. Paul lists the advantages which the Jews perceived themselves to have and demonstrates the manner in which these blessings from God have been distorted into self-righteous barriers to the righteousness of God which is by faith. John Murray points out that this tragic segment shows “*how close lies the grossest vice to the highest privilege and how the best can be prostituted to the service of the worst.*” (Murray, p.82) Lenski aptly compares this series of phrases to a cluster of boxes within boxes. Each statement contains the next. “*Open the first box and you see the second; open the second and there is the third; and so on to the last.*” (Lenski, p. 179)

“Now you, if you call yourself a Jew;” - The children of Abraham had originally been called *Hebrews*, because they came to Canaan from the Mesopotamian city of Haran beyond the Euphrates River, and were descended from Eber of the line of Shem.(cf. Genesis 14:13; 10:21). They had also been called “*Israelites*” or the “*Children of Israel*” designating them as the descendants of Jacob whose name God had changed to Israel (Genesis 32:28). By New Testament times, a descendant of Abraham was typically referred to as a “*Jew*” (Our English word “*Jew*” is derived from the Greek - “*Ioudaios*” and the Latin - “*Judaeus*”). The term is derived from the name of the tribe of Judah. Its usage is rare until after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom at the end of the period of the divided monarchy. From that time on, the designation “*Jew*” is used to mean a member of the Jewish people or a practitioner of Judaism. The Jews themselves used the term to distinguish themselves, as descendants of Abraham, God's chosen people, from the other races and nations of men, all of which were lumped together under the heading “*Gentile*”(Latin - “*gentes*” nations). The Hebrew name “*Judah*” means “*One who is Praised*” (Genesis 29:35) and the Jews of Paul's day bore that name as a badge of

great honor and pride. They believed themselves to be a unique and specially favored people of God. The name **“Jew”** was associated in their own minds with all upon which they prided themselves.

“If you rely on the Law” - The Greek verb *“epanapauo”* (**“you rely on”**) has the basic sense of *“rest upon.”* It suggests comfort, contentment, and complacency. The phrase thus captures the Jewish attitude toward the Law which Paul intends to criticize - the sense of confident security that enabled the Jew to consider himself superior to others because of his possession of the Law. Texts like Psalm 147:19-20, (**“He has revealed His word to Jacob, His laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know His laws.”**) which were intended to praise the God's amazing grace, became the basis for on-going



“The Chief Priests and Treasurers in the Temple”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

national self-congratulation. Despite the prophets' repeated warnings to the contrary (cf. Jeremiah 7:3-7), the majority of Israel came to believe that they were safe from God's judgment simply because God had chosen to entrust His Law to them. The **“Law”** here means the whole Mosaic system and the way of life which resulted from it, the civil and religious polity of the Jews which created their distinctiveness among the nations. The Jewish apocryphal book 2 Apocalypse of Baruch, written during the intertestamental period, typifies this attitude:



“The Pharisee and the Publican”

“In you we have put our trust, because, behold, your Law is with us, and we know that we do not fall as long as we keep your statutes. We shall always be blessed; at least, we do not mingle with the nations. For we are all a people of the Name; we, who received one Law from the One. And that Law which is among us will help us, and that excellent wisdom which is among us will support us.” (48:22-24)

Charles Hodge offers this pointed observation:

“This they relied upon; the fact that they were within the Church, were partakers of its sacraments and rites; that they had a divinely appointed priesthood, continued in unbroken succession from Aaron, and invested with the power to make atonement for sin, was the ground upon which they rested their hope of acceptance with God. Within that pale they considered all safe; out of it, there was no salvation. Such was the false confidence of the Jews; such has been, and is, the false confidence of thousands of Christians.” (Hodge, p. 92)

“And brag about your relationship to God;” - This verb is used thirty-seven times

in the New Testament and often carries the negative connotation of excessive or self-righteous boasting. When the Jews boasted of their relationship with God, in truth they were bragging about themselves, and the rights and privileges which they enjoyed with God because of who they were. They were convinced that their nation monopolized God's favor and that all the other nations were His enemies. He loved them and them alone. Martin Franzmann summarizes the entire verse in this way:

“The Jew knows the will of God; there is no doubt of that, least of all in the mind of the Jew himself. He wears with pride the name that sets him apart from the nations, he rests in high confidence upon the Law, which God had declared to him alone (Psalm 147:19f.), he exults in the God who is particularly his God, the God of Israel, and clings to Him with a tenacity that both amazes and irritates the nations among whom he dwells.” (Franzmann, p. 52,53)



“A Sadducee”

19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

“If you know His will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed in the law” - Superior knowledge was another of the special distinctions of the Jews. God had indeed entrusted the special revelation of **“His will”** to Israel. The attitude in question is a sort of *“I know something you don't know!”* sense of superiority. The apocryphal Baruch rejoices: *“Happy are we, Israel, because we know what is pleasing to God!”* (4:4). Paul uses the same word **“approve”** in 1:28. In both instances it carries the idea of testing something in order to determine its value, such as precious metals (cf. p. 55). The verb **“instructed”** (Greek - *“katecheo”*) is the term from which *“catechism”* is derived. It is used in reference to any form of oral instruction, especially associated

with the learning by repetition which was the characteristic method of religious teaching among the rabbis of Israel.

“If you are convinced that you are...” - Israel is well aware of its privileged position. Some commentators suggest that the phrases which follow are axioms and slogans by which Saul the Pharisee once lived. Four times, a distinction is drawn between the more privileged and the less. In each instance, the distinction is not an expression of concern or compassion for the disadvantaged, but an assertion of Jewish superiority. They are the ***“guide,” “light,” “instructor,”*** and ***“teacher.”*** The Gentiles, in contrast are the ***“blind,” “those who are in the dark,” “the foolish,”*** and ***“infants.”*** The profound blessing that God had graciously bestowed upon Israel, having given them ***“in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth,”*** had been twisted instead into a source of self-righteousness, superiority, and pride.

Verses 21 -24

You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

“You, then, who teach others...” - To set yourself up as a teacher of others and yet not apply the very principles which you teach to yourself is not only inconsistency but arrogance and hypocrisy. The psalmist sternly denounces such blatant hypocrites:

“What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you. When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in you lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander you own mother's son...Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces with none to rescue.” (Psalm 50:16-20,22)

Paul may well have had in mind our Lord's stinging rebuke of Israel's religious leaders, recorded in Matthew 23. This extended denunciation is Christ's strongest condemnation of the legalism and hypocrisy of the Jewish religious establishment. At the heart of that condemnation is the charge that these moralists fail to apply the



“The Pharisees Accusing Jesus” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

same rigorous standard to themselves which they apply to others:

“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do for they do not practice what they preach...Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to...Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides!... Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!... You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence...Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on

the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness...You snakes, you brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?" Matthew 23: 2-3, 13-16, 24-28, 33)

To possess the law; to know the law and even to teach the law to others is not enough, for God judges by the truth; not by appearance or profession but by actual deeds. Whether the sin was ***"stealing," "adultery,"*** or idolatry, the law demands perfect obedience (cf. the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:17-7:28). The teaching of truth (***"orthodoxy"***) in the absence of living the truth (***"orthopraxy"***) is sheer hypocrisy. The contradiction between profession and practice serves to discredit both God and his truth in the eyes of the world.

Israel's failure to fully obey the law which had been entrusted to them, and the divine judgment which that failure brought upon them had frequently resulted in the scorn and derision of the nations in the past. The heathen misunderstood God's judgement upon His people in the form of defeat and captivity as a sign of the weakness of Israel's God. They failed to recognize it for what it was, a sign of God's justice. Paul argues that Israel's contemporary inconsistency also serves to discredit God before the Gentile world. The Jews claimed to be the custodians of the God's holy Law. And yet they often failed to observe that Law in their own lives. The apostle's words here are based upon Old Testament texts from Isaiah and Ezekiel.

"And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the Lord's people and yet they had to leave his land.' I had concern for my holy name which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.'" (Ezekiel 36:20-22)

"And now what do I have here?" declares the Lord. "For my people have been taken away for nothing and those who rule them mock," declares the Lord. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed." (Isaiah 52:5)

Verses 25-27

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

“Circumcision has value if you observe the law...” - “Circumcision,” the removal of the foreskin of the penis, was instituted by God in Genesis 17:9-14. It was the single most important act which established the covenant between the Lord and the descendants of Abraham.

“Then God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come, every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household, or those bought with money from a foreigner - those who are not your offspring. Whether born in your household or bought with money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'”

Circumcision was not merely symbolic action. According to the command and promise of God, divine power was at work here to apply and seal the covenant of divine grace (cf. Romans 4:11). Thus, Lutheran theologians affirm that circumcision was a genuine means of grace, one of the *“sacraments of the Old Testament.”* Dr. P.E. Kretzmann writes:

“Thus circumcision was a sacrament, a means of grace in the Old Testament, a rite through which God transmitted the blessings of His covenant to the children of Abraham...Above all, circumcision was the seal of the righteousness of faith, Romans 4:11, and a type of Holy Baptism, the corresponding sacrament of the New Testament. Through the water of Baptism, as an external sign, the righteousness of

God, the forgiveness of sins, is sealed unto us.” (Kretzmann, I, p.37; cf. also Pieper,III, p. 214)

However, those who spurn that grace through unbelief and disobedience, forfeit the blessing that God has graciously conferred upon them. Old Testament circumcision, like New Testament Baptism, is not some magical ritual which guarantees salvation simply by going through the proper motions, “*ex opera operata*”. Hence the prophets sternly warned complacent sinners not to trust that the fact of their circumcision would save them despite stubborn and defiant disobedience of God and His Will. Moses wrote: “***Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.***” (Deuteronomy 10:16 cf. also Jeremiah 4:4). Just a few moments before his murder by a Jewish mob, Stephen declared: “***You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!...You always resist the Holy Spirit.***” (Acts 7:51)

It is just this attitude, which viewed circumcision as a mark of superiority and an automatic guarantee of salvation, to which Paul directs his criticism in this segment. Rabbinic Judaism expressed that tragically misplaced confidence in the *Mishnah* with comments like these: “*No circumcised Jewish man will see hell.*” and, “*God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised would be sent to hell. Abraham sits*



“God’s Call of Abram” by Rudolf Schüfer

before the gate of hell and never allows any circumcised Israelite to enter.” (MacArthur, p. 160). It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this ceremony for the first century Jew. James Dunn notes: *“Circumcision was fundamental to the typical Jew's self-understanding, the mark of his religious distinctiveness, the badge of national privilege, the seal of God's covenant favor to Israel as His chosen people.”* (Dunn, p. 127) During the Intertestamental Period, under intense persecution, circumcision became a crucial test of covenant loyalty and a mark of Jewish national distinctiveness (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:48,60-61; 2:46). That sense of uniqueness was heightened by the negative reaction to the practice within the prevailing Greek culture which viewed the circumcision as a distasteful disfigurement of the body.

Paul is careful not to deny the benefit of circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant of grace. However, when one who has been circumcised rejects the faith and obedience which was the substance of that covenant, to lay claim to the promises of grace and the privileges of the covenant was presumption and mockery. Martin Franzmann correctly emphasizes:

“Circumcision is the sign both of God's gift to the Jew and His claim upon the Jew; the covenant of which it is a sign puts a man under both the promise and the commandment of God; the Jew speaks his Amen to the promise by obeying the law of God...Circumcision is no magic spell but the dealing of the living God with responsible man. If man breaks the law, his circumcision cannot save him; it indicts him.” (Franzmann, p. 55).

Physical circumcision avails for nothing when the heart remains defiant and disobedient. In such circumstances, it is ***“as though you had not been circumcised.”*** Centuries before, the prophet Jeremiah had scornfully lumped the Jews together with their pagan neighbors as men who were ***“really uncircumcised,”*** despite their careful observance of the ancient ritual.

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh - Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole House of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.” (Jeremiah 9:25-26)

“If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements...” - The physical

act of circumcision is not decisive. It is the obedience of faith that truly matters. The Gentile who obeys the requirements of the law will stand before God on the same basis as the Jew, despite the fact that he is not circumcised. The absence of physical circumcision will not be a disadvantage in the eyes of the Lord. To the orthodox Jew, this assertion would have been positively scandalous!

“The one who is not circumcised physically...” - Yet the apostle goes on to press the point even further. Not only will the uncircumcised Gentile who obeys the law stand before God on the same basis as the circumcised Jew; but the Gentile's obedience will also ***“condemn”*** the disobedience of the self-righteous Jew who has broken the law despite all of the advantage which he has enjoyed.

“The charge is sharp indeed! By resting on the law, in the false confidence that what the law requires is a strict observance of the practice of circumcision and the maintenance of the cult with its attendant laws, the devout Jew is actually transgressing the law. He has missed the point of the law and of circumcision. What he counts as doing the law, Paul counts as transgressing the law! In consequence it will not be a case of the faithful Jew passing judgment on the lawless Gentile, but rather a case of the law-fulfilling Gentile (by his faith and life) passing judgment on the law-transgressing Jew.” (Dunn, p.127)

Verses 28-29

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision only outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.

“A man is not a Jew...” - Membership in the Israel of God is not, and has never been, a matter of ethnic descent. To be a Jew ***“inwardly, by the heart,”*** and ***“by the Spirit”*** is a matter of faith not bloodlines. From the beginning it was God's purpose to bless all the nations through the Descendant of Abraham (cf. Genesis 12:2-3). The blessing which God graciously showered upon the Jewish nation always served His consistent purpose for the salvation of humanity. To cherish a single nation, while consigning all the rest to perdition would have been unworthy of God - a total denial of His essential nature. God declared His universal purpose to the Messianic Servant in Isaiah 49: ***“It is too small a thing for you to be my Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for***

the Gentiles, that you may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6) Hans LaRondelle summarizes God's purpose in the selection of the Jews as the chosen people in this way:

“Israel's election did not imply the rejection of the other peoples, but rather their inclusion. Israel was chosen, not just for its own salvation, but to lead the whole world to share in her saving knowledge and blessing. In short, Israel was chosen to represent the attractive character and saving will of Yahweh to the Gentiles.”
(LaRondelle, p. 92)

John the Baptist sternly warned the Jews of his day not to rely upon the false security of their identity as the blood descendants of Abraham: ***“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*** (Matthew 3:9). The recognition that membership in the Israel of God is a matter of faith, not birth is of central

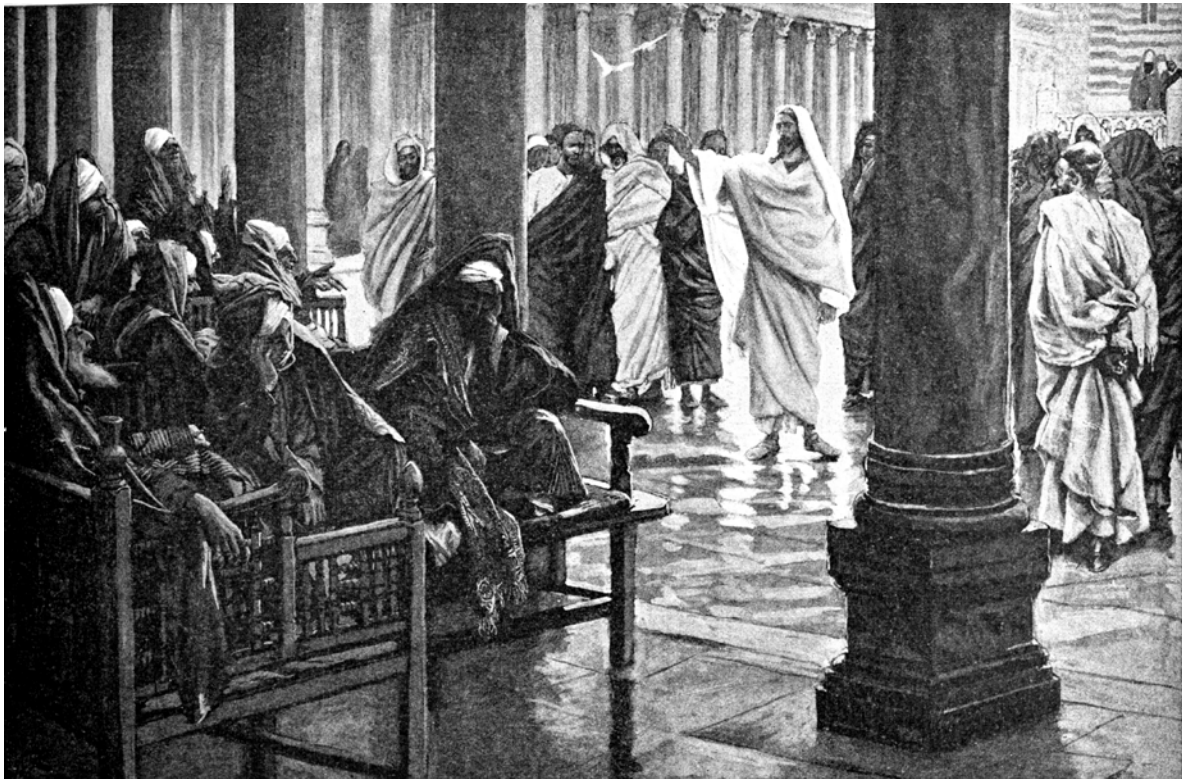


*“The Preaching of John the Baptist”
19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

importance in Romans. The apostle will return to this basic theme many times in the course of the Epistle. For example, in Chapter 9, verse six, he writes: ***“They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.”***

A preoccupation with external forms and ritual is generally indicative of an absence of spiritual vitality and faith. First century Judaism's obsession with outward conformity to ritual and law was symptomatic of the decline of true religion among the Jews. Charles Hodge writes: *“Whenever true religion declines, the disposition to lay undue stress on external rites comes to the fore. The Jews, when they lost their spirituality supposed that circumcision had the power to save them.”* (Hodge, p. 102)

“Such a man's praise is not from men but from God.” - As noted above, the name “Jew” was derived from the Old Testament tribe of Judah. Judah is drawn from a Hebrew root which means “*praise*.” St. Paul's closing remark in this segment thus becomes a pointed reminder of the misplaced spiritual priorities of those who believed themselves to be worthy of praise because of their proud lineage. He who is “*inwardly*” a Jew, whose “*circumcision is circumcision of the heart*,” and who lives “*by the Spirit, not by the written code*” seeks praise not from “*men*” but from “*God*.”



“Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees!”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot



"The Life-Giving Word of God" by Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 3

Verses 1-2

What advantage is there then in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.

"What advantage is there then in being a Jew..." - The apostle had demolished Jewish overconfidence in the privilege of being God's chosen people and legalistic reliance upon circumcision as the authenticating badge of covenant membership. Paul now anticipates and rebuts Jewish objections to his argument. If, indeed, membership in the people of Israel counts for so little, was God's entire relationship

with His Old Testament people pointless? Absolutely not! In rejecting covenant presumption, Paul had not rejected the whole idea of the covenant. In no way did he turn his back on his heritage as a Jew and he now strongly affirms the value God's covenant with Israel (***“Much in every way!”***). To be among the chosen of God was a great blessing. Later in the Letter, Paul details those blessings in this way: ***“Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh.”*** (9:3-5).

“First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God.” - The introductory phrase - ***“First of all”*** - usually implies the beginning of a list in which other items will follow. In this instance that is not the case. The phrase here signifies priority in the sense of importance or significance. The blessing specified here is not the entirety of the ***“advantage...in being a Jew,”*** but it is first and foremost on the list.

The verb ***“have been entrusted”*** (Greek - *“episteuthesan”*) means *“to place something of great value, a treasure, in someone's custody for safe keeping.”* The treasure does not belong to the custodian, but has been given over to his care by its owner. The priceless treasure in this instance is ***“the very words of God”*** (Greek - *“ta logia tou theou”*). The reference in this passage, as in the other three occurrences of the term in the New Testament (cf. Acts 7:38; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 4:11), is to the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The Greek noun *“logia”* is the diminutive form of the term *“logos”* (*“word”*). Its use in reference to the Old Testament is of profound theological significance. In Classical Greek the noun refers to *“an utterance inspired by God, a divine oracle.”* The great Princeton theologian Benjamin Warfield writes on the classical use of the term:

“No lower sense can be attached to "logia" in these instances than that which it bears uniformly in its classical and Hellenistic usage; it means not "words" barely, simple "utterances," but distinctively "oracular utterances," divinely authoritative communications, before which men stand in awe and to which they bow in humility; and this high meaning is not merely implicit, but is explicit in the term. It would seem clear again that there are no implications of brevity in the term; it means not short, pithy, pregnant sayings, but high, authoritative, sacred utterances...It characterizes utterances which are emanations from God.” (Warfield, p.387)

St. Paul's use of this term in reference to the Old Testament Scriptures clearly reveals that he regarded the prophetic writings to be the very Word of God Himself. As

Warfield insists, we have in this text conclusive evidence *“that the Old Testament Scriptures, as such, were esteemed by the writers of the New Testament as an oracular book, which in itself not merely contains, but is the utterance, the very Word of God...nothing other than the crystallized speech of God.”* (Warfield, p.404). Those who assert that the Bible is not, in and of itself, the Word of God but merely contains the Word of God or conveys a divine message to the hearts of believers, must do so in defiance of this clear passage and others.

To have been *“entrusted with the very words of God”* was an unimaginably great privilege as well as an equally immense responsibility. As the poet William Cowper wrote:

*“They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Savior of us all.”*

Verses 3-4

What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."

“What if some do not have faith?” - The difficulty still remains. Having dismissed Pharisaic legalism as just one more form of worthless moralism which cannot justify man before the righteous God, Paul must still contend with the reality that Israel has rejected her Messiah. Despite the fact that the Jews enjoyed the *“advantage”* of having been *“entrusted with the very words of God,”* the great majority of the nation had consistently denied and defied their Lord. As Stephen declared shortly before his martyrdom:

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers; you always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him - you who have received the Law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.” (Acts 7:51-53)

Note that Stephen also emphasizes the great gift of God's revelation to highlight the obstinacy and ingratitude of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. They were the nation which had ***“received the Law that was put into effect through angels”*** and yet they would not believe. They scorned and rejected the prophets and their message. Ultimately they repudiated and crucified the Messiah whom God had sent to deliver them.



“The Giving of the Law at Sinai”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?” - But the unfaithfulness of men does not and cannot invalidate the faithfulness of God. God has kept His covenant with Israel despite Israel's persistent refusal to honor and obey Him. The delicate wording of Paul's question serves as a reminder that not all Jews had rejected the Gospel. ***“But what if some did not have faith?”*** The Lord always preserved unto Himself a faithful remnant that had not ***“bowed the knee to Baal”*** (1 Kings 19:18).

“Not at all! Let God be true and every man a liar.” - The exclamation ***“Not at all!”*** is the strongest negative expression possible in the Greek language. It carries the

connotation that that which is being denied is absolutely out of the question, utterly impossible. The thought that the faithfulness of God could be undone by the unfaithfulness of man is inconceivable to the apostle. The validity of God's promises and the faithfulness of His truth cannot be determined by a public opinion poll. The majority of Israel has rejected the truth of God. It remains true nonetheless. In fact, if every man on the face of the earth rejected the truth of God it would still remain the truth. The truth of God must be affirmed even in the face of universal denial. If that affirmation reveals all of humanity to be liars, then so be it. The truth of God must stand. *"His Word holds, whatever else may break. Where His will and the will of man collide, it is for faith axiomatic that the will of man is false."* (Franzmann, p.59) The connection between truth in this phrase and faithfulness in the preceding phrase is significant. God is faithful because He is true.

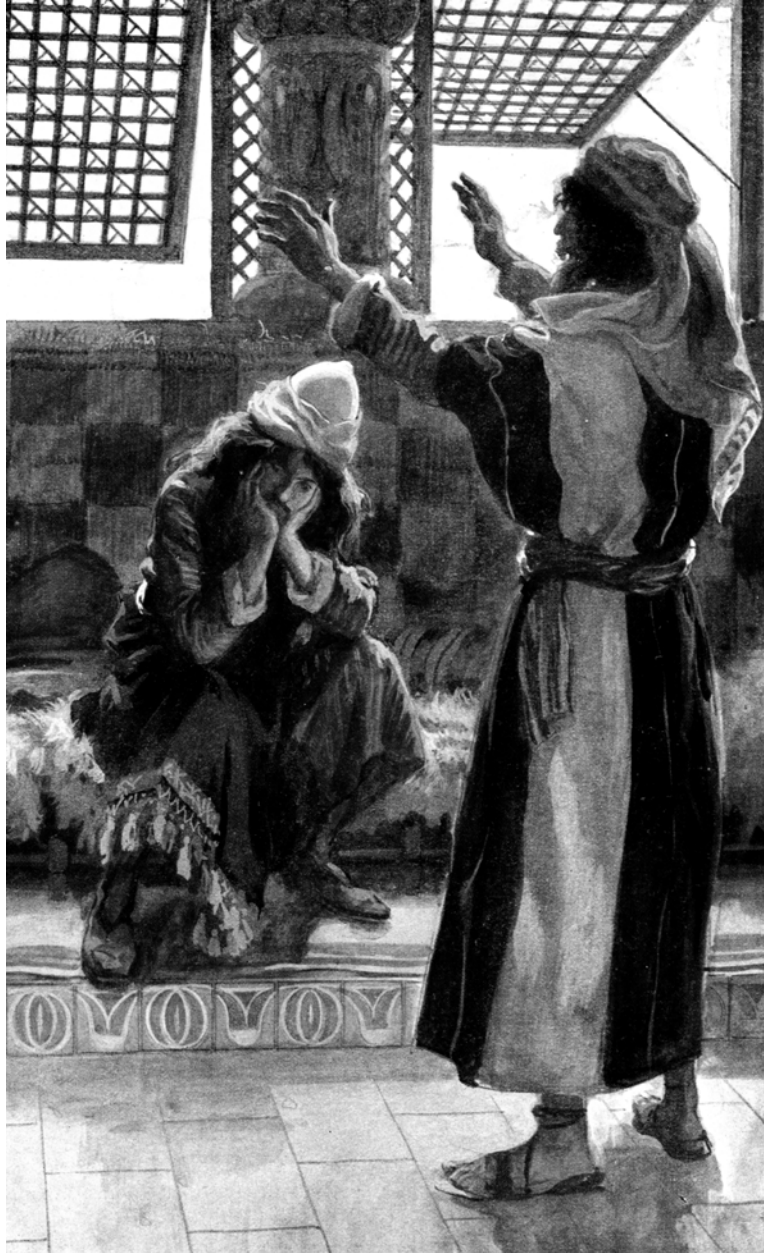
"As it is written: 'So that you may be proved right...' - Paul quotes from Psalm 51:4, the great penitential psalm of David, to illustrate his point. At the moment of his deepest degradation David rejects any pretense of self-justification and makes no attempt to conceal or excuse his sin with Bathsheba so that the righteous judgment of God may be revealed to all. He is completely willing to accept the personal consequences of his action so that God may be seen to be righteous and just.

Verses 5-8

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? Someone might argue, 'If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?' Why not say - as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say - 'Let us do evil that good may result'? Their condemnation is deserved.

"But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly..." - The convoluted reasoning of sinful man can excuse, justify, and rationalize anything. Paul ***argument.***") According to this perverted logic if God's just judgment of the sinner serves to glorify Him then we ought to sin all the more so that God can receive greater glory. Furthermore, if our sinning and God's judgment upon it actually benefits Him then why should we be condemned for our sins? Paul will deal with this theme more explicitly later in the Epistle (cf. 6:1-4). The example, however, is not merely hypothetical. This produces one more example of this twisted thinking

(***"I am using a human*** is a charge which has actually been raised against the apostle by his enemies (***"We are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say."***). It should come as no surprise that the great teacher of salvation by grace through faith without the works of the Law would have been accused of



"The Prophet Nathan Denounces King David"
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

jewelry on a piece of black velvet so the contrast makes the gold appear even more elegant and beautiful. You are charging God with using man's sin to bring glory to Himself, and that is blasphemy. You are impugning the righteous purity of God. Not only that, but if man's

encouraging immorality and lawless living. In the language of theology this position is called "*antinomianism*" (literally - against the law). His legalistic enemies believed that the apostle was encouraging men to sin so that good might come from their sinning. Those who distort and deny the Gospel in this way are consigned to the damnation they will most certainly receive (***"Their condemnation is deserved."***).

Implicit in this impertinent and blasphemous argument is the accusation that Paul is insinuating that God is unrighteous and that His judgment is unjust. John MacArthur effectively paraphrases the charge in this way:

"If God is glorified by the sins of Israel, being shown faithful Himself despite the unfaithfulness of His chosen people, then sin glorifies God. In other words, Paul, you are saying that what God strictly forbids actually brings Him glory. You are saying that God is like a merchant who displays a piece of expensive gold

unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say about God's judgment? If what you say is true, why does God punish sin? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He?" (MacArthur, p.173)

Paul rejects this nonsense in the strongest terms possible, ***"Certainly not!"***. He repeats the same emphatic Greek expression *"me genoito"* which he had used earlier in Verse 4. This idiocy is absolutely impossible. It is not worthy of serious consideration! To challenge the righteousness of God or the justice of His divine judgment is completely out of the question. Any argument which presumes to do so is presumptuous and blasphemous. It must be rejected out of hand. The creature never has the right to sit in judgment over the Creator. That which our limited human reason cannot comprehend must simply be accepted by faith.

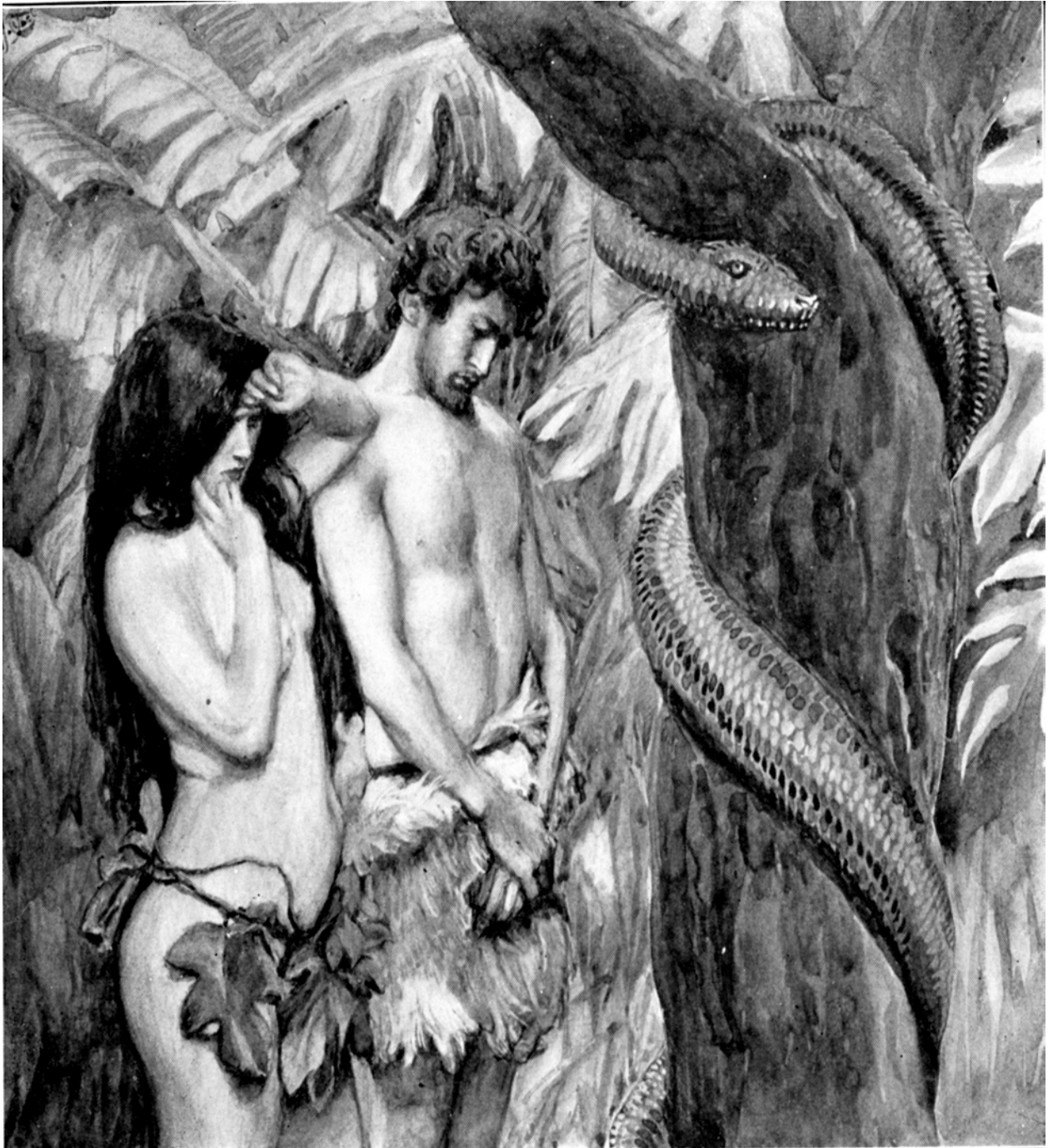
Verses 9-18

What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

"What should we conclude then?" - Paul has thus far eliminated any and every possibility of self-justification. Ignorance is no excuse because of the self-disclosure of God in nature (1:18-23) and the law written in the heart of every man (2:14-16). The immorality of those who have been given over to sinful desire (1:21-32) has been condemned along with all of the pretensions of moralism (2:1-11). Jewish reliance upon ethnic identity, possession of the written law, and the external rite of circumcision has also been rejected (2:17-29). The unavoidable conclusion is that no man can justify himself before God.

"Are we any better? Not at all!" - This universal indictment knows no exceptions. Paul includes himself and all the members of the congregation in Rome, ***"Jews and Gentiles alike,"*** among those who are subject to the dominion of sin, and thus under the wrath and judgment of almighty God. The NIV translation fails to reflect the forensic nature of the language used in the original. The phrase they have rendered

“Are we any better?” actually says *“What then do we plead in our own defense?”* The use of this courtroom jargon then carries through into the next phrase, *“We have already made the charge,”* where the verb *“made the charge”* (Greek - *“proaitiaomai”*) is a technical legal term used to indicate a person previously indicted for a given offense.



“The Curse of Sin” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

“Are all under sin.” - In the Greek text **“all”** is placed at the beginning of the phrase for particular emphasis since the apostle's basic point is the universal scope of the indictment. In the verses which follow, Paul makes the same point by using the negative contrast **“none”** six times in referring to man's absolute lack of righteousness before God. The preposition **“under”** (Greek - *“hupo”*) does not simply mean to be beneath but to be totally under the power, authority, or control of someone or something. It is often used in Greek to describe the absolute power of King over his subjects or a master over his slaves. Paul's use of the term here is intended to convey the concept that man is completely subservient and in bondage to the dominion of sin. The noun **“sin”** (Greek - *“hamartian”*) is singular. The individual transgressions of the law, the sins, which men commit are not the root of man's moral dilemma. **“Sin”** is not merely unfortunate habits or bad behavior. It is a malignant, evil, power which holds humanity in its deadly grasp. **“Sin”** is what we are by nature. The particular sins that we commit are only the symptoms of the moral disease which infects us, not the disease itself.

“As it is written...” - Paul now introduces a series of Scriptural proofs to demonstrate the total depravity of man. Dr. James Dunn comments on the effectiveness of Paul's use of the Hebrew Old Testament to demolish Jewish pretentiousness:

*“The final nail in the coffin for any special pleading or defense is provided by a powerful string of quotations from the Jewish Scriptures - entirely appropriate, since the only defense in view is the Jewish claim to special status and consideration before God...No defense remains. As soon as these Scriptures are read without the blinkers of Jewish presumption of privilege, they become a devastating indictment of all peoples, Jews as well as Gentiles...When such Scriptures assert that no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks God, no one does good, no one fears God, the mean **no one!**”* (Dunn, p. 151)

Six Old Testament texts are cited; Psalm 14:1-3; 5:9; 140:3; 10:7; Isaiah 59:7-8; and, Psalm 36:1. The quotations are freely cited with some adaptation from the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament. This grim catena of condemnation can be subdivided into three basic segments: 1. the sinful condition (vs.10-12); 2. the sinful life (vs.13-15); and, 3. the sinful source (vs.17-18). The verb **“it is written”** is the standard formula for the introduction of Old Testament Scripture, not only in the Book of Romans, but throughout the New Testament (cf. Romans 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 15:3,21). It translates the Greek perfect tense which indicates action completed in the past with ongoing significance for the present

and the future. The revelation of God's Word in Old Testament Scripture is an accomplished fact. That which has been written is permanently valid and binding for every believer. This is the same powerful word which our Lord used three times during His temptation to banish the trickery of the Evil One (cf. Matthew 4:1-11).

“There is none righteous..” - The indictment begins with a paraphrase of Psalm 14:

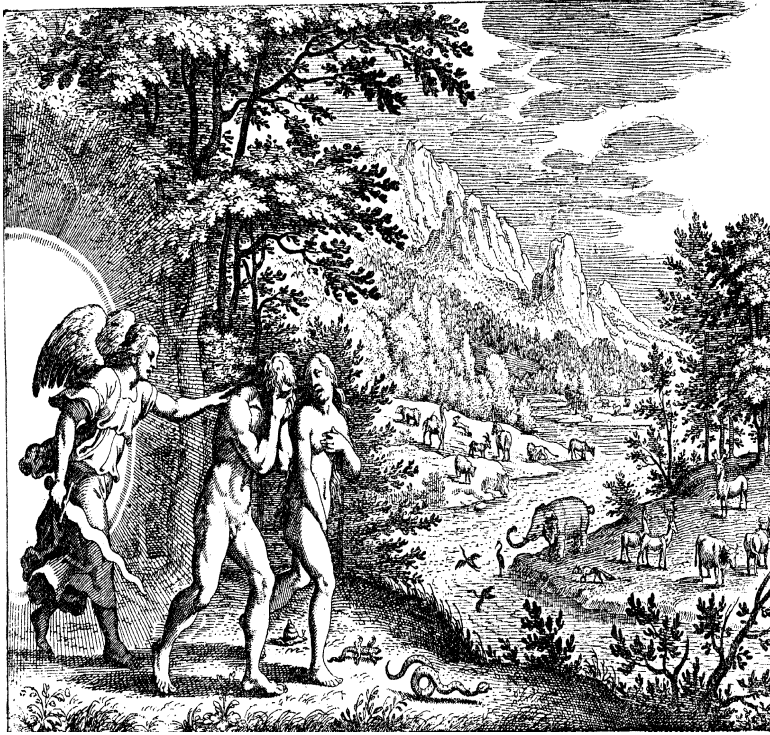
“The fool says in his heart, 'There is not God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Psalm 14:1-3; cf. Psalm 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20)

We have previously noted that righteousness is a major concern in the Letter to the Romans (cf. p.26f.). It is to that great theme that the apostle now returns as he begins his grim description of the natural condition of every human being apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the term ***“righteous”*** in its ordinary forensic sense - to be declared not guilty before the bar of divine justice. To assert that ***“There is none righteous”*** is not to say that no one ever does anything that is morally right. The subject of the text is not specific actions or even general patterns of behavior. The apostle's concern is the righteousness which enables a man to stand before God justified. That perfect righteousness is found only in Christ.

The negative assertion is repeated three times for unmistakable emphasis: ***“no one righteous, not even one...no one who understands, no one who seeks God...no one who does good, not even one.”*** James Boice observes:

“If God says something once we should listen to what He says very carefully. If He says the same thing twice, we should give Him our most intense and rapt attention. What if He repeats Himself a third time? Then surely we should stop all else, focus our minds, seize upon each individual word, memorize what is said, and ponder the meaning of the saying intensely, attempting to apply the truth of God's revelation to our entire lives.” (Boice, I, p.306)

There is absolutely no possibility of righteousness other than the declarative act of God in Christ. Nor can there be degrees or levels of righteousness. One is either completely righteous in Christ, or completely sinful without Him. There can be no



*“Adam and Eve Driven from Paradise”
Bible Illustration by Matthias Merian - 1630*

in between. That righteousness which is not perfect must be judged to be unrighteousness by the holy God.

The unrighteousness of man is revealed in humanity's inability to understand the things of God. Perfect knowledge and understanding of God were at the heart of the divine image in which our first parents were created. With the fall into sin, the divine image was lost. Our understanding has been tragically twisted and distorted by sin. Paul warns the Corinthians:

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

The apostle goes on to make his assertion even more emphatic in the following chapter. The dilemma is not merely that men do not understand - they are completely incapable of understanding. The *cannot* understand. ***“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*** (1 Corinthians 2:14)

No one seeks God... As Adam and Eve fled from their Creator in the cool of the evening, so their descendants have consistently sought to evade and avoid God. All of man's desperate attempts to devise his own religion and all of the ridiculous idols which he has fashioned for himself are indications of our obstinate determination to spurn the love of the Creator and replace Him with false gods more to our liking.

Every one of these efforts is doomed to failure, as pathetic as our first parents fig leaves.

“All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” - Fallen mankind ***“All have turned away.”*** The Greek verb in this phrase in *“ekklino”* which means *“to deviate,” “to wander,”* or *“to depart from the right way.”* In a military context the word refers to soldiers who have turned to run away from the enemy and desert the field of battle. The phrase recalls the words of the prophet Isaiah: ***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*** (Isaiah 53:6). Instead of believing in and following Jesus who is ***“the Way, the Truth and the Life”*** (John 14:6), humanity chooses to walk ***“in the way which seems right to a man but whose end is the way of death”*** (Proverbs 14:12). The adjective ***“worthless”*** (Greek - *“echreothesan”*) carries a strongly negative connotation. It is used to describe that which is completely useless and without value. It's Hebrew equivalent was often used in reference to milk that had turned sour and rancid. The Greek word sometimes refers to the senseless laughter of a moron. Paul uses the term in the same way in Titus 1:16 in reference to corrupt and deceitful men: ***“They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.”*** Jesus combines the two closely related meanings of this word (spoiled and useless) when in the Sermon on the Mount He speaks of Christians as the ***“salt of the earth”*** and warns: ***“But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled upon by men.”*** (Matthew 5:13) The emphasis in the original text is on ***“all”*** and ***“together.”*** This malignant pattern is universal. It applies to every segment of humankind. ***“As respects well-doing there is not one; as respects evil-doing there is no exception.”*** (Murray, p.104) The closing phrase of the series is perhaps the most devastating of them all - ***“There is no one that does good, not even one.”*** The Greek verb *“chrestotes”* (***“does good”***) refers to that which is upright, specifically to that which is morally correct. No human being can measure up to God's absolute standard of right and wrong.

Karl Barth, the leader of modern neo-orthodoxy, forcefully argued that the Biblical doctrine of man's total depravity is not only foundational to Christianity but is also demonstrated by the entire course of human history. Barth viewed this text as the decisive expression of the doctrine of man's total depravity in Scripture. He argued that without this crucial insight, neither man nor his history could be properly understood.

*“If all the great outstanding figures in history, whose judgements are worthy of serious consideration, if all the prophets, psalmists, philosophers, fathers of the church, reformers, poets, artists, were asked their opinion, would one of them assert that men are good or even capable of good? Is the doctrine of original sin merely one doctrine among many? Is it not, rather, according to its fundamental meaning **the doctrine that emerges from all honest study of history?** Is it not the doctrine which, in the last resort, underlies the whole teaching of history? Is it possible for us to adopt a different point of view from that of the Bible, Augustine, and the reformers? What then does history teach about the things that men do or do not do? Does it teach that some men at least are like God? No, but that - **There is none righteous, no not one.** Does it teach that men possess a deep perception of the nature of things or that they have experienced the essence of life? No, but that - **There is none that understandeth.** Does it provide a moving picture of quiet piety or of fiery search after God? Do the great witnesses of truth furnish a splendid picture, for example of prayer? No - **There is none that seeketh after God.** Can it describe this or that individual and his actions as natural, healthy, original, right minded, ideal, full of character, affectionate, attractive, intelligent, forceful, ingenuous, of sterling worth? No - **They have all turned aside. they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not so much as one.**” (Boice, I, p.308)*

"Their throats are open graves, their tongues practice deceit." - Having decisively described the sinful condition of all men, the apostle now proceeds to document the manifestation of that condition in the sinful life of all men. The first of the three quotations in this verse comes from Psalm 5:9. ***“Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.”*** A person's character is invariably revealed in his conversation. Thus the apostle uses a striking series of references to the organs of speech - ***throats, tongues, lips, and mouths.*** Jesus declared: ***The mouth speaks of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.*** (Matthew 12:34-35; cf. also 15:18). The Psalmist laments:

“Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies. Their venom is like that of a snake, like that of a cobra that has stopped its ears and will not heed the tune of the charmer however skillful the enchanter may be.” (Psalm 58: 3-5)

The throat is to the heart as ***“an open grave”*** is to the decaying corpse within. As the



*"The Wicked Are Like A Cobra That Will Not Heed the Charmer's Tune"
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

stench of death pours out of the open grave so the foulness of spiritual death is constantly revealed by the speech of unregenerate man. The hallmark of sinful man's communication is deceit. The Greek term "*doulíoo*" ("**speak deceit**") has the basic meaning of luring someone into a trap. It is the tempting bait which conceals the deadly hook. The tense of the verb in the original is imperfect which denotes continuously ongoing action. Deceit is the native language of sinful man, a habitual and normal part of his life.

"The poison of vipers is on their lips." - The next quotation comes from Psalm 140:3 - ***"They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips."*** The text literally says that the poison of vipers is "*under*" their lips, thus rendering a vividly accurate picture of these deadly snakes. The fangs of a viper normally lie folded back into the snake's upper jaw. When the creature thrusts his head forward to strike the hollow fangs drop down and the venom is injected through them into the hapless victim. Luther remarks that this is a most fitting description of the lies and deceptions fostered by false teachers. *"But the poor wretches do not even recognize this poison as the death of their souls. Therefore he uses the expression "under the lips" as if to say, death lies subtly hidden while outwardly it appears as life and truth in the very words of their doctrine."* (Luther, AE 25, p.230) .

The deadly lie is carefully concealed beneath the semblance of truth, as they tell people what they want to hear and thus lead them to death and destruction.

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." - The quotation is from Psalm 10:7 - ***"His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue."*** ***"Cursing"*** (Greek - "*ara*") is a word for the most intense malediction, that is desiring the worst for a person and expressing that desire through open condemnation and defamation. Luther comments:

"This 'cursing' is a matter of openly attacking a person with insults, denunciations and blasphemies, and of wishing him evil...They do not do this slothfully, but as I have said, with great zeal. For he uses the expression 'their mouth is full,' that is, abounding in curses." Luther, AE 25, p.231)

"Bitterness" (Greek - "*pikria*") does not refer to physical taste but to strong hostility and anger against an enemy. The root of this bitterness is jealousy, for as Luther aptly observes *"jealousy is the bitterness of the heart just as love, on the other hand is the sweetness of the heart."* (Luther, AE 25, p.231) David describes such people in Psalm 64:3-4: ***"Those who have sharpened their tongue like a sword...aimed bitter speech as their arrow, to shoot from concealment at the blameless; suddenly they shoot him and do not fear."***

"Their feet are swift to shed blood, ruin and misery marks their ways, and the way of peace they do not know." - Wicked words now escalate to violent and destructive deeds. The excerpt is from Isaiah 59:7-8:

"Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace."

Like a moth inexorably drawn to the flame, sinful man is obsessed by death. The children of Cain have reaped a bloody harvest throughout human history. We have come view death as a panacea, the solution to our problems, the means to the achievement of our goals and desires. 19th Century Scottish Evangelist Robert Haldane wrote: *"The most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger as man destroys of his fellows to satiate his ambition,*

his revenge, or his greed.” (MacArthur, p. 190). We are *“swift to shed blood.”* There is an irresistible eagerness to the killer instinct in man that seems to be increasing as time progresses. One in every three children conceived in the United States is slaughtered before birth in the bloody holocaust of abortion. A baby born in any one of America's fifty largest cities today faces a greater risk of being murdered than the risk faced by an American soldier in WW II of being killed in combat. Human life is cheap in this world as sin leaves *“ruin and misery”* in its wake. Lenski agrees:

“Where those feet have trodden this is what they leave in their trail. How true the graphic picture is thousands of cases under our own observation show; ruthless, devastating feet crushing and shattering, leaving wails of misery to tell where they have been; a history full of broad bloody trails, and the countless little cruelties as miniature copies.” (Lenski, p. 235)

The prophet Jeremiah had denounced the self-serving leaders of Israel who offered



“Ruin and Destruction Mark Their Ways” 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

their people false reassurance and cried: "***Peace! Peace!***" ***where there is no peace.***" (Jeremiah 6:14) The root cause of humanity's relentless violence is sin. As long as men are in bondage to sin there will never be lasting peace for as Paul observes; "***the way of peace they do not know.***" Our failure to recognize sin as the source of our personal problems and the difficulties of society makes it impossible for us to deal with those problems in a substantive way. John MacArthur quotes the following gripping description of sin:

"It is a debt, a burden, a thief, a sickness, a leprosy, a plague, poison, a serpent, a sting; everything that man hates, it is; a load of curses and calamities beneath whose crushing most intolerable pressure, the whole creation groaneth...Who is the aged grave-digger that shovels away the dirt for a grave? Who is the painted temptress that steals his virtue? Who is the murderess that destroys his life? Who is the sorceress that first deceives and then damns his soul? - SIN. Who with icy breath blights the fair blossoms of youth? Who breaks the hearts of parents? Who brings old men's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? SIN. Who, by a more hideous metamorphosis that Ovid ever fancied, changes gentle children into vipers, tender mothers into monsters and their fathers into worse than Herods, the murderers of their own innocents? SIN. Who casts the apple of discord on household hearts? Who lights the torch of war, and bears it blazing over trembling lands. Who by divisions in the Church, rends Christ's seamless robe? SIN. Who is this Delilah that sings the Nazirite asleep and delivers up the strength of God into the hands of the uncircumcised? Who with winning smiles on her face, honey flattery on her tongue, stands in the door to offer the sacred rites of hospitality and when suspicion sleeps, treacherously pierces our temples with a nail? What fair siren is this who seated on a rock by the deadly pool smiles to deceive, sings to lure, kisses to betray, and flings her arm around our neck to leap with us into perdition? SIN. Who turns the soft and gentlest heart to stone? Who hurls reason from her lofty throne, and impels sinners, mad a Gadarene swine, down the precipice into a lake of fire? SIN."
(MacArthur, p.191,192)

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." - The apostle's grim documentary of depravity concludes with a quotation from Psalm 36:1 - ***"An oracle from my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: there is no fear of God before his eyes."*** The ***"fear of God"*** is one of the great concepts of the Bible. Solomon rightly declares that ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."*** (Proverbs 9:10). Luther indicated his recognition of the central importance of this idea in his *Small Catechism* in that he began each of his explanations to the Ten Commandments with the words *"We should fear and love God that..."* In this positive sense, for the believer, the ***"fear of God"*** is not *"fright"* or *"terror."* It is, instead, the reverential awe of the

creature in the presence of the holy and almighty Creator. It is the realistic and right frame of mind for man before God. It is closely linked in Scripture to worshipping God, obeying Him, and departing from evil. To fear God above all things enables us to conquer all of our other fears. William Dahlmann writes:

"And if we so fear Him, we shall rise superior to all other fears, we shall then have nothing else to fear, and be entirely free of all the fear, worry, and bitterness that otherwise galls our life...The fear of God makes fearless men; docile children to God, but unconquerable heroes to the world. The fear of God made little David the victor over giant Goliath; the fear of God made Daniel look into the jaws of the lions rather than close his windows toward Jerusalem; the fear of God made three Israelites walk into the fiery furnace rather than bend the knee to the image of Nebuchadnezzar; the fear of God made Joseph walk into prison rather than sleep with Potiphar's wife; the fear of God made John the Baptist rebuke wicked King Herod though it cost him his head; the fear of God made Peter and John stand up before the court and say: "We must obey God rather than men!" though it would cost them dearly. The fear of God made Luther, the solitary poor monk, face the spiritual and temporal powers of the world and say: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me. Amen!"...Luther rightly calls this fear of God a virtuous heroine that will not be frightened by man's fuming, storming, and threatening, but when she must offend either God or man will say: "We must obey God rather than men." (Dahlmann, p.36,37)



"Here I Stand" - 19th Century Engraving by Gustav König

For the unregenerate sinner, who neither loves nor honors God, fear in its ordinary sense of dread and terror, is an entirely appropriate reaction to the frightening reality of God's wrath. Rebellious man would do well to be afraid of the Lord's judgment and restrain his conduct accordingly. But man's sinful nature is such, that even this reasonable restraint is absent from his character. Blind to the fatal consequences of his actions, he obstinately

persists down the decline to destruction for ***“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”***

Verses 19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

“Now we know...” - This pair of verses brings the first major portion of the Epistle to the Romans to a decisive conclusion. ***“Know”*** (Greek - *“oida”*) refers to knowledge that is certain, self-evident, and complete. It is the verb typically used to introduce an obvious or inescapable conclusion. The noun ***“law”*** refers to the entire Old Testament and the message of law and gospel which it clearly conveys. ***“Those who are under the law”*** include every human being, both Jews and Gentiles. Paul has already demonstrated that all of mankind is subject to God's law: the Gentiles through God's revelation of Himself in nature and conscience, and the Jews through God's revelation of Himself in sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. Therefore all are without excuse ***“so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.”*** The phrase ***“so that every mouth may be silenced”*** indicates the absence of objection or argument in the face of overwhelming evidence. Like Job in the presence of his Creator, no man will be able to speak in his own defense before the almighty Judge: ***“I am unworthy. How can I reply to You? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once but I have no answer - twice, but I will say no more.”*** (Job 40:4-5) The language here is thoroughly forensic. The accused stands in the dock before the bar in the court of divine justice without one shred of evidence to offer in his own defense. The NIV's translation of the phrase ***“the whole world held accountable”*** muddles the courtroom flavor of the language. The Greek word which this phrase translates is a *“hapaxlegomenon”* (a word which only occurs once in the Bible). It literally means *“subject to judicial action”* or *“liable to punishment from the court.”*

“Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in His sight...” - Verse 20 begins with the Greek conjunction *“dioti”* (***“Therefore”***). This is the strongest word in the Greek language to express the logical linkage between the preceding reasoning and the conclusion which now follows. The argument which began in Romans 1:18 now comes to its decisive conclusion - ***“No one will be declared righteous in His sight”***

by observing the law.” This conclusion is absolutely categorical. The negative is all-embracing, allowing for no exceptions whatsoever. Not one human being can ever be justified before God as the result of his own good works or obedience of the law. The “*works of the law*” can never secure God's favorable verdict - neither for the Jews with their moralistic, self-righteous use of the written law of the Old Testament, nor for the Gentile moralists who strive to conform to the natural law written in their hearts. James Dunn stresses the pivotal importance of this text:

*“This verse delivers the **coup de grace**, the final and fundamental reason which actually serves as the basic theological underpinning of the whole argument. All this must be so (the whole world answerable to God for its unrighteousness) because “by works of the law shall no flesh be justified before Him.” Its importance for Paul is confirmed by his use of the very same assertion in Galatians 2:16, where it clearly fills the same role of expressing a fundamental axiom of Christian thought.”*
(Dunn, p.158)



“The Law and the Gospel” - Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder - 1529

“Rather, through the law...” - The law is intended by God to accomplish exactly the opposite of justification namely the realization or conviction of sin.

“This Word abolishes forever all moralistic delusion that after all we sinners might be justified because of works of law that are in some way wrought by ourselves...The moralistic teaching and following are prominent today, entire denominations are swept away by them, to say nothing of the pale moralism of the secret orders and of worldly ethical preachments...It is obvious what application this finds today while the voice of the modernist, the rationalist, and the ethical reformer finds so many ears.” (Lenski, p.245, 242)

The law functions as a mirror which reveals the spiritual condition of man in hideous reality. Thus *“lex semper accusat,”* the law always accuses. It cannot comfort or save, it can only condemn. Yet, even this negative purpose serves the cause of salvation in a profoundly important way for only the man who is fully convinced of the totality of his own sinfulness can fully understand his absolute need for a Savior. In this sense, the law prepares the way for the gospel. Martin Franzmann writes:

*“It is no mere chance that the “clearest gospel” of the Letter to the Romans is prefaced by the fullest, the most profound, and the most incisive proclamation of wrath and judgment that the New Testament contains. The Gospel is the power of God for **salvation** to everyone who has **faith**. Neither “salvation” nor “faith” can be understood aright unless they are seen against the dark background of the wrath of God on all ungodliness and wickedness of men, as 1:18-3:20 proclaims it. This proclamation makes it clear that all men, Gentile and Jew, are in desperate need of deliverance, of the absolute miracle of salvation, and that they can only **receive** it passively, in faith. The old status of man under sin and under wrath is, for man, irrevocable and fixed. If he is to have a new status, he can obtain it only if God, his Judge, creates it.”* (Franzmann, p. 63)

Verse 21

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

“But now...” - D.M. Lloyd-Jones calls these two little words *“the great turning point”* in God's dealings with the human race. For two and a half chapters Paul has painted the grim portrait of God's wrath over against the unrighteousness of mankind with relentless realism. The darkness gathered and grew deeper with every word. **“But now”** comes the great turning point. Everything that the apostle has stated up

to this point is completely and absolutely true. But, thanks be to God, that's not the whole story! A stunning beam of glorious gospel light pierces sin's darkness as Paul announces God's "*great nevertheless in the face of man's failure*" (Stedman). Those who have failed to understand the darkness in which it appeared will never fully appreciate the brightness of that light. Our hopeless cry of despair now becomes a joyful shout of victory. What man could never have done for himself, God has done Himself on our behalf. In the breathless silence that follows the pronouncement of our doom, the Lord declares: "*You deserve to die but I will give you life! You have earned an eternity of damnation but I will give you everlasting salvation!*" Biblical Christianity is unique among all the religions of man in that it is a religion of divine accomplishment rather than human achievement. Every other religious system, based in one way or another on what men can do or merit for themselves, stands on the other side of this great turning point. Thus, in the end, there are only two kinds of religion - grace religion and works religion. Sadly, the faith of a good many of those who consider themselves to be Christians falls into the latter category.

"A righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known..." - The apostle returns once again to the concept of the ***"righteousness of God"*** (This translation of the phrase as a subjective genitive - ***"righteousness of God"*** - is preferable to the NIV's translation as an objective genitive - ***"righteousness from God."***) which is the basic theme of the entire Letter to the Romans. This term occurs thirty-six times in the Epistle and when related verbs and adjectives are considered, the total number of references exceeds sixty. Dr. Stöckhardt's carefully worded definition is most helpful.

*"Righteousness of God points to man's position or relation to God, designates the relation of being righteous in which man is placed by God's act of declaring righteous. Therefore the **righteousness of God** is the imputed righteousness, the righteousness which avails before God. This righteousness of God, that counteracts sin, guilt, and wrath, is truly not our own righteousness, not something good in us, but a righteousness that rests outside of us in God. It rests in God's judgment and so it is as firm and immovable as God Himself. What God says, judges, and decrees, is valid in time and in eternity. He who God declares righteous is righteous, even though all the world and all devils condemn him, even though his own conscience pronounces him guilty and judges him."* (Stöckhardt, p.39)

The phrase ***"apart from the law"*** precedes the subject in the original for particular emphasis. This ***"righteousness of God"*** has nothing whatsoever to do with anything

and everything in the nature of law and its works (vs.20). Man contributes nothing. All that the law can do is cause the realization of sin and convince man of his own inability to contribute to his own salvation in any way (***“through the law we become conscious of sin”*** - vs.20). John Murray rightly declares:

*“When Paul says **without the law** the absoluteness of this negation must not be toned down. He means this without any reservation or equivocation in reference to the justifying righteousness which is the theme of this part of the epistle. This implies that in justification there is no contribution, preparatory, accessory, or subsidiary, that is given by works of law. This fact is set forth both by the expression itself and by its emphatic position in the sentence.”* (Murray, p. 109)

This ***“righteousness of God has been made known.”*** In 1:17, Paul declared that ***“in the gospel a righteousness from God has been revealed.”*** He now adds that this revelation is not novel or recent but that the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures, ***“the Law and the Prophets,”*** bear witness and testify to it. The apostle's use of courtroom jargon remains consistent. The verb ***“testify”*** (Greek - *“marutroumene”*) literally means to offer testimony in the law court as a witness. The perfect tense of the main verb (***“has been made revealed”***) indicates action that began long ago and continues in the present. This is an important affirmation of the unity of the two Biblical Testaments and of the ongoing validity and importance of the Old Testament for the Christian. This is not a new gospel dispensation which has arrived to replace an outgoing law dispensation. Salvation has always been by grace through faith. Adam, Abraham, and all the believers of the Old Testament were recipients of the same grace by which we are being saved today. *“Paul does not contrast the Christian era to the pre-Christian era, nor is the contrast merely that of the revelation of the Gospel to that of the Law, but rather the condition of the Christian to that of the non-Christian.”* (Stöckhardt, p.30).

Verses 22-24

This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

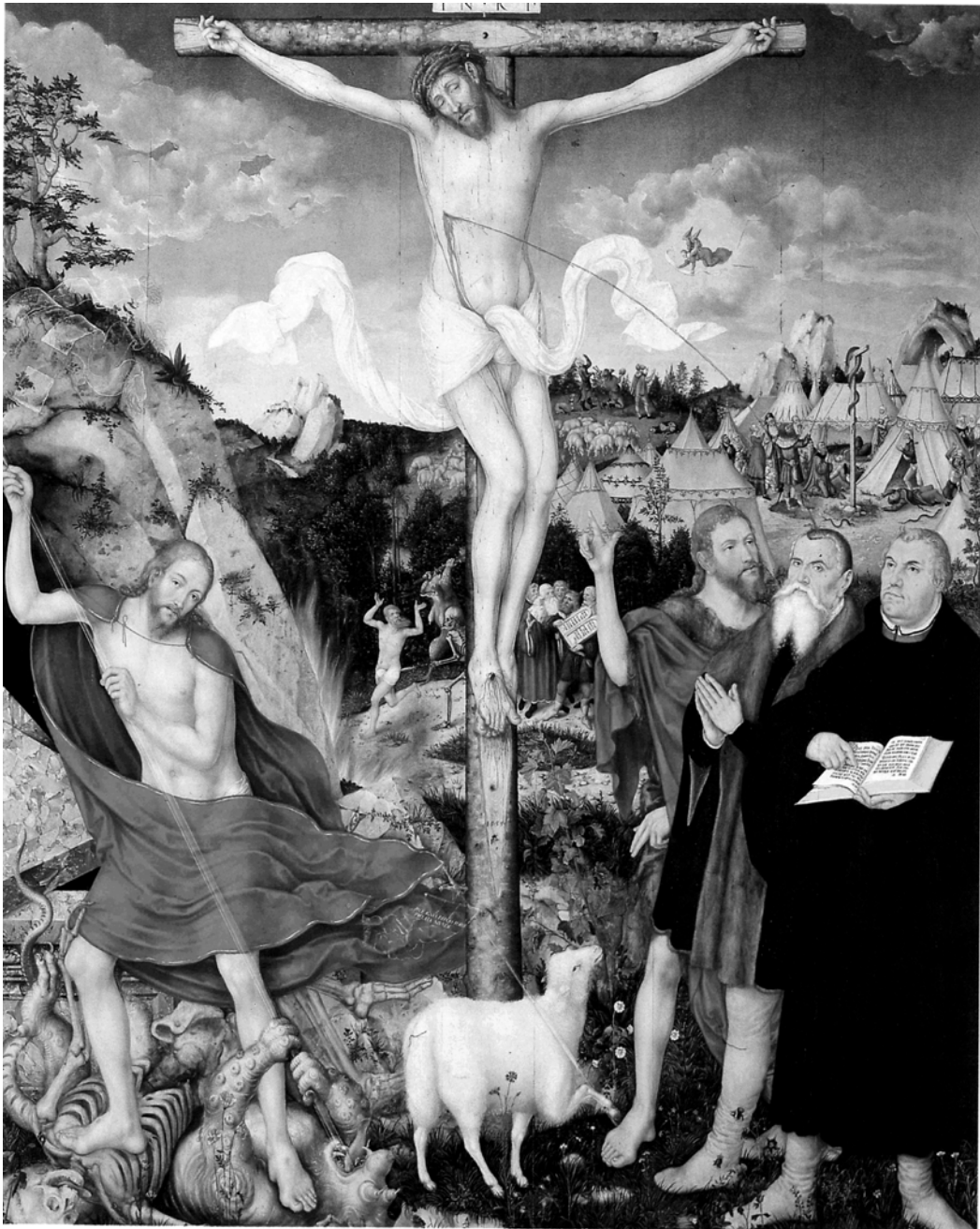
“This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ...” - Once again, the language parallels the wording of 1:17 - ***“a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.”*** This ***“righteousness of God”*** which is absolutely separate from the works of the

law, ***“comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*** Lenski explains:

“Faith and Jesus Christ are ever combined like a cup and its contents. Faith is the heart's trust embracing Christ, and by so embracing Christ it is the subjective means for making ours the status of righteousness created by God's declaration. Or, beginning, with God: His righteousness, the bestowal of the judicial declaration: “I declare thee righteous!” is ours where and when faith is ours, faith in Jesus Christ.”
(Lenski, p.247)

Paul is no advocate of “*fideism*,” generic faith which simply believes in believing. The optimistic conviction that sincerity saves - it doesn't make any difference what you believe in so long as you believe in something - may be comfortably consistent with the arrogant individualism of our age, but it is not consistent with the Bible. Nor is a general, non-controversial faith in God sufficient. Saving faith in Scripture is faith in Jesus Christ and in Him alone. Paul uses both the personal name (“**Jesus**” - Hebrew: “*Savior*”) and the official title (“**Christ**” - Greek: “*the Anointed One, the Messiah*”) to designate the object of faith. “*These titles are redolent of all that Jesus was and is personally, historically, and officially.*” (Murray, p.111) This faith is the only way that the “**righteousness of God**” comes to anyone. It comes “**to all who believe** because ***there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***” The apostle has clearly demonstrated the totality of sin's corruption of the race. No one has escaped this deadly spiritual infection. All are sinners. The text merely repeats that which has already been clearly proven. Every other distinction, no matter how crucial it may seem to be in the eyes of men, is completely irrelevant - Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female (cf. Galatians 3:28). In the eyes of the holy God there are only two categories of humanity - the saved: those who have received the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ and the damned: those who have not.

“And are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” - The apostle now proceeds to discuss the all important doctrine of justification by grace through faith in detail. The verb “**are justified**” (Greek - “*dikaiousmenoi*”) is closely related to the “**righteousness**” (Greek - “*dikaiosis*”) language of the preceding verses. Thus, to justify refers to the judicial action of God in declaring the sinner to be righteous - the pronouncement of a verdict of “*Not Guilty!*” The grace of God is the motive in our justification. The emphasis on the gratuitous nature of justification can be clearly seen in the Greek text of the phrase which literally reads: “*being justified as a gift without payment by His grace.*” The



“Christ the Redeemer of the Word” - Center Panel of the Altarpiece of the City Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Weimar. Painting by Lucas Cranach the Elder, completed after his death by his son, Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1555. The painting depicts Christ crucified to redeem mankind from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The artist himself is portrayed at the foot of the cross between Martin Luther and John the Baptist. Blood from the wound in Christ’s side spurts down upon Cranach’s head. John the Baptist, Christ’s forerunner, directs the artist’s attention toward Jesus upon the cross. The figure of the Lamb at the foot of the cross recalls John’s recognition of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” These words are inscribed in Latin on the banner held by the Lamb. Luther holds an open Bible with his finger pointing to the text of Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 1 :7; and John 3:14-15. To the left of the cross, the victorious Christ has risen from the tomb to crush death and the devil beneath His feet. The center background depicts the power of the Law to accuse and damn., Moses holds the Ten Commandments while death and the devil drive sinful man toward the fires of hell. The scenes behind Luther, Cranach, and the Baptist present the message of the Gospel, prefigured by the brazen serpent in the wilderness encampment of Israel and announced by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem. In this masterful work of art, with its profound message of Law and Gospel, Lucas Cranach offers his own personal confession of faith, acknowledging Jesus Christ as his Redeemer.

term “*dorean*” (a gift without payment) is used to refer to gifts of particular value that are given without thought of repayment or benefit to the giver. The NIV reflects this word with the adjective “*freely*.” The combination of this term with the crucial noun “*grace*” (literally - “*as a free gift by His grace*”) emphasizes the unconditional nature of God's action on our behalf. “*Grace*” (Greek - “*charis*”) is one of the most important theological words in the New Testament. “*Grace*” is undeserved, unconditional love - the favor of God toward sinners because of Christ (“*favor dei propter Christi*”).

“God's justifying act is not constrained to any extent or degree by anything we do which could be esteemed as predisposing God to this act. And not only is it the case that nothing in us or done by us constrains to this act but all that is ours compels to the opposite judgment - the whole world is brought in guilty before God. This action of God's part derives its whole motivation, explanation, and determination from what God Himself is and does in the exercise of free and sovereign grace. Merit of any kind on the part of man, when brought into relation with the doctrine of justification, contradicts the first article of the Pauline doctrine and therefore of his gospel. It is the glory of the Gospel of Christ that it is one of free grace.” (Murray, p. 114)

“Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” - As grace is the motive for our justification so “**the redemption that came by Christ Jesus**” is the means through which that justification is accomplished. The just and holy God could not simply overlook man's sin. The penalty for that sin had to be paid in full. Man could never have paid that penalty for himself so God paid it for him in the innocent blood of His only-begotten Son. “**Redemption**” (Greek - “*apolutrosis*”) refers to the payment of a ransom in order to liberate a captive or set free a slave. Mankind was held in bondage to sin. Dr. Stöckhardt declares:

“Christ redeemed us from all our sin and from God's wrath by paying a price, a ransom...By payment of a ransom, men were wont to free prisoners of war or slaves from captivity or slavery. So Christ, by payment of a high price ransomed sinful men, held in bondage because of their guilt. And what is this price, this ransom? It is He Himself, His own life, His own blood. In Christ we have redemption through His blood. Because of their abominations, men are worthy of death, have forfeited their lives. However, Christ came and in their stead pledged His own life and shed His own blood for them. Thus, sinful men became free from sin, death, and damnation. Christ Jesus is the Son of God. And the life, the blood of the Son of God, yes, God's blood, God's martyrdom, God's death - that is indeed the payment and ransom for the whole world.” (Stöckhardt, p.41)

Verses 25-26

God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished - He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.



*“The High Priest Within the Sanctuary”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement” - It is God who acts to establish the basis for man's justification. The typical word order is reversed in the original to emphasize this fact (literally - *“presented did God”*). That which had always been done secretly within the sacred confines of the *“Holy of Holies”* is now *“presented”* publically for all the world to see. Paul uses the graphic language of the tabernacle and the ritual of *“Yom Kippur,”* the great Day of Atonement to explain that which God has done. A brief review of the sequence of events on *“Yom Kippur”* will help to clarify the meaning of the text.

The Day of Atonement was the highest and most holy of all the sacred festivals of Israel. It occurred on the tenth day of the month of Tishri, the seventh month of

the Hebrew calendar. Seven days before the festival the High Priest left his home and lived in the Temple. Throughout that week he underwent a series of ritual cleansings and carefully rehearsed the services he was to perform. On the eve of the festival he swore an oath before the elders of Israel that he would perform the ritual without omission or alteration. Just before dawn, he underwent the first of the five ritual baths included in the ceremony. After the ordinary morning sacrifice, the High Priest set aside the golden vestments of his office and appeared before the Lord in plain robes of pure white linen. A perfect young bull and two goats were placed before the Lord at the entrance to the Tabernacle (later the Temple). Lots were drawn to designate one of the goats for sacrifice and the other as “*Azazel*,” the scapegoat. A small piece of scarlet cloth was attached to the scapegoat's head and he was positioned facing the people in the courtyard of the temple. A strip of scarlet cloth was tied around the throat of the sacrificial goat. The bull was sacrificed for the sins of the high priest and the sons of Aaron. The High Priest then entered the Holy of Holies with burning coals from the altar and frankincense. Once inside, he placed the incense on the burning coals so that the smoke would fill the Holy of Holies. As the cloud of incense surrounded the ark, the High Priest returned to the courtyard for the blood of the bull. Re-entering the Holy of Holies for the second time, he sprinkled the bull's blood over the ark and on the floor around it. The blood on the ark was for the atonement of the sins of the High Priest and the priesthood. The blood poured out on the ground was for the cleansing of the Holy of Holies. When this ritual was complete he went back to the courtyard and killed the ram selected as the sin offering. Re-entering the Holy of Holies for the third time, he repeated the sprinkling of the blood on the cover of the ark, this time for the sins of the people, and on the floor in front of it, to cleanse the Holy of Holies from those sins. Then the remaining blood of the bull and the ram were mingled together used to cleanse the Holy Place and its furnishings along with the altar of burnt offerings. At the dramatic conclusion of the day's rituals, the people's sins were ceremonially placed upon the scapegoat and it was driven out of the camp into the wilderness. In the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon, the “*Shekinah*” glory of God was visible between the outstretched wings of the golden cherubim over the cover of the ark. This shining glory was the sign of God's presence in the midst of His people. The blood of the sacrifices sprinkled on the ark signified that the sins of the people were covered in the eyes of God. Thus the cover of the ark came to be known as the “*Mercy Seat*” (Hebrew - “*kapporeth*”). Luther translated the word with the German “*Gnadenstuhl*” (Seat of Grace). The sacrificial system of the Old Testament did not forgive sins in and of itself (Hebrews 10:4). Rather it was designed to point forward to the one great sacrifice of the perfect

Son of God upon the cross. Paul draws on the rich ceremonial heritage of the Day of Atonement to explain the redemptive work of Christ as he uses the Greek title for the “*Mercy Seat*” (“*hilasterion*”) to refer to Jesus. The text literally reads: “*God presented Him as the Mercy Seat.*” The golden “*Mercy Seat*” of the Old Testament, covered by the blood of the sacrificial offering, prefigured Christ and His work of redemption. The NIV’s translation of “*hilasterion*” as “*a sacrifice of atonement*”



“*The Scapegoat*” by Rudolf Schäfer

is inconsistent with the other uses of this term in Scripture and obscures the powerful imagery of Day of Atonement. Lenski also emphasizes the appropriateness of the fact that the Ark of the Covenant contained the two tablets of the Law, inscribed with the Ten Commandments.

“Not this or that single Jewish sacrifice is here referred to but “the highest and most perfect expiatory act of the Old Testament” (Keil), the one that was most completely typical of Christ’s expiation, yea, its very type, prophecy, and promise. Once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, the Jewish High Priest, and he alone took blood from the great altar of burnt offering and went into the Holy of Holies, into which none dared enter but he and he only for the purpose of this function and sprinkled that blood on the kapporeth, the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, called the Mercy Seat, in order to cover the sins of the whole people. In the Ark were deposited the tables of the law, that law which condemned these sins. The kapporeth covered those tables; but only when it was thus sprinkled with expiatory blood did it cover the sins of the people from God and from His punishment.” (Lenski, p. 256)

“Through faith in His blood” - The blood of the bull and the ram as a sin offering on the Day of Atonement pointed forward to the ransom which God would pay for mankind in the blood of His Son upon the cross. Peter writes: ***“You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”*** (1 Peter 1:18-19) Continuing the imagery of the Day of Atonement, Christ is simultaneously the eternal High Priest, the Mercy Seat, and the perfect sacrificial offering.

“He is at one and the same time the offering and the priest. He gave His life into death; He shed His own blood in the stead of sinful men, who were worthy of death. With His holy precious blood He appeared before God Himself. He is our Mediator at the highest throne. He pleaded His blood before God and once and for all atoned for the sins and the guilt of the whole world. He turned God's wrath into pleasure. Marked and covered with His own blood, He stands as the New Testament Kapporeth between sinful men, the transgressors, and the great, holy God and covers all our sins, guilt, shame, and weakness before God, so that He no longer reckons them to our account. Therefore men are completely and forever free from their sins, rid of all their transgressions and impurities. That is what propitiation in His blood includes.” (Stöckhardt, p.44)

The writer to the ***Hebrews*** notes:

“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary...Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the golden ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's rod that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the place of atonement...He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood having obtained eternal redemption...But the heavenly things themselves are better sacrifices than these for Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again the way the high priest enters the Most holy Place every year with blood that is not his own...But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Hebrew 9:1-5, 12,23-26)

As always, “*faith*” is the means by which that which Christ has done is appropriated by the individual. The classic theologians of Lutheran orthodoxy distinguish between grace as the “*causa interna movens et impulsiva*” (the internal cause which moves and impels) of justification; Christ and His blood as the “*causa externa et meritoria*” (the external cause which merits); and faith as the “*medium apprehendens*” (the means which apprehends).



“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle” by J. James Tissot

In these few short phrases, Paul has presented the entire Scriptural doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. This is the heart of the Letter to the Romans and indeed of all of the Bible. James Montgomery Boice has outlined the foundational truths of these verses in a helpful diagram which he calls “*The*

Salvation Triangle.” At the three points of the triangle are God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Christian. Each of the lines which connect the three represent one of the great salvation doctrines in this section. The line across the base of the triangle represents *Redemption*. The arrow points from Christ to the Christian because it describes what Christ has done for us. He is the subject of the action. We are the objects. Jesus has redeemed us, paying the ransom price which buys us back from sin, death, and the power of the devil with his own lifeblood. The line on the left side of the triangle, linking Jesus with God the Father stands for *Propitiation*. The arrow points from Christ to the Father because it represents what Jesus did for us in relationship to His Father. *Propitiation* means the turning away of anger by the offering of a gift. The wrath of the holy God against man's sin needed to be turned aside. That work was beyond the capability of man. Jesus who is God, turns God's wrath aside by the offering of His innocent life. The final line of the *Salvation Triangle* connects God the Father with the Christian. It represents *Justification*. The arrow points from God to man. God, who declares us righteous is the subject of the action. We who are justified are the object of God's declarative act.

“He did this to demonstrate His justice” - If God were to have overlooked man's sin He would have been guilty of injustice. By the sacrificial death of His Only Begotten Son, God met the demands of justice in full. In Christ's innocent death the demands of the covenant were fulfilled. God kept His Word to His people. Sin has been fairly punished. The justice and righteousness of God has now been demonstrated for all the world to see.

“Because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand go unpunished” - From the moment of the Eden's Fall mankind deserved nothing but death and damnation (***“When you eat of it you will surely die.”*** Genesis 2:17). The fire of judgment could rightly have fallen upon mankind at any time since then. But it has not. The patient ***“forbearance”*** of God through all the long centuries that followed has been misconstrued by many as an indication of weakness or permissiveness. Peter warns:

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say: “Where is this coming He promised? Ever since our fathers died everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

What fools perceive as impotence is actually the patient longsuffering of a merciful heavenly Father: ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** (vs.9) The NIV's translation of the verb in this phrase is literally correct. The Greek word “*paresis*” means “*to withhold punishment*” or “*to delay judgment.*” The psalmist marveled at the patient forbearance of God: ***“Yet He was merciful; He atoned for their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time He restrained His anger and did not stir up His full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.”*** (Psalm 78:38,39)

“He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time” - Paul now restates his assertion of divine justice. The just punishment, so long withheld throughout the centuries of the Old Testament era, was fully inflicted upon the crucified Christ. No longer could anyone question the justice of God. He Himself met the Law's stern demands with the life blood of His only begotten Son. By so doing, ***“at the present time,”*** He demonstrated His righteous justice to all of humanity. By paying that penalty Himself God not only proved that He is just, but that ***“He is the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.”***

Verse 27

Where then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the Law? No, but on that of faith.

“Where then is boasting?” - Before God's magnificent plan of salvation no room is left for self-glorification. God has done it all. Man has done nothing. As St. Paul declares in Galatians 6:14 - ***“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.”*** The great Christian hymnist Isaac Watts said it well when he wrote:

*“When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood.”*

The rejection of human pretension is emphatic and absolute - ***“It is excluded.”*** One commentator offers the paraphrase - ***“It is shut out once and for all.”***

“On what principle? On that of observing the Law? No, but on that of faith.”- The

utter incompatibility of faith and works is one of the fundamental themes of the New Testament. No compromise or combination is possible. Murray explains the difference in this manner:

“We are required to ask how the principle of faith is so rigidly exclusive of and antithetical to the works of law in the matter of justification. The only answer is the specific quality of faith as opposed to that of works. Justification by works always finds its ground in that which the person is and does; it is always oriented to that consideration of virtue attaching to the person justified. The specific quality of faith is trust and commitment to another; it is essentially extraspective and in that respect is the diametric opposite of works. Faith is self-renouncing: works are self-congratulatory. Faith looks to what God does; works have respect to what we are. It is this antithesis of principle that enables the apostle to base the complete exclusion of works upon the principle of faith.” (Murray, p.123)

Yet, at the same time, great care must be taken so that faith itself does not become a good work. Our faith is not the result of our own effort or decision. Faith is a gift of our gracious God. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones provides this very necessary disclaimer on the nature of faith:

“Faith is nothing but the instrument of our salvation. Nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified because of our faith; nowhere in Scripture will you find that we are justified on account of our faith. The Scripture never says that. The Scripture says that we are justified by faith or through faith. Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which this righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect work. It is the death of Christ upon Calvary's cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is His appearing on our behalf in the presence of God that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness to our account that saves us. This is the righteousness that saves; faith is but the channel and the instrument by which His righteousness becomes mine. The righteousness is entirely Christ's. My faith is not my righteousness and I must never define or think of faith as righteousness. Faith is nothing but that which inks us to the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.” (Lloyd-Jones, p.120)

Verse 28

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the observance of the law.

“For we maintain...” - “Here we have the perfect summary of the doctrine of



"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by Rudolf Schäfer

justification put into the form of a confession." (Lenski, p.268) The language of the text is reminiscent of that of the Lutheran Confessions which introduce each of the articles of the evangelical faith with the powerful words: "*We believe, teach, and confess.*" The Greek verb "*logizometha*" is used to express the universal opinion among all the Christian communities. This is an especially powerful word used to describe an important conviction with direct practical consequences. This is not merely an abstract theory but a concept with immediate application that is at the center of Christian life and hope. The core conviction at issue here is the crucial belief that "*a man is*

justified by faith apart from observing the law." The passage closely parallels its counterpart in Galatians 2:16 - "*We know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.*" Without this there is no Christianity and no salvation. This is the magnificent "*Sola Fide*" of the Reformation. Luther's insertion of the Latin word "*sola*" in the text at this point was completely consistent with the meaning of the passage. Stoeckhardt argues that Luther's "*sola*" is not only consistent with the context, but is, in fact "*required by the text itself*" ("*sondern von Text selbst gegeben*"). (*Römerbrief*, p. 165) In agreement with this view, the "*Formula of Concord*" insists:

“We believe, teach, and confess that if we would preserve the pure doctrine concerning the righteousness of faith before God, we must give special attention to the "exclusive terms," that is to those words of the holy apostle Paul which separate the merit of Christ completely from our own works and give all glory to Christ alone. Thus the holy apostle Paul uses such expressions as "by grace," "without merit," "without the law," "without works," "not by works," etc. All these expressions say, in effect, that we become righteous and are saved "alone by faith" in Christ.” (F.C. Ept. III,10)

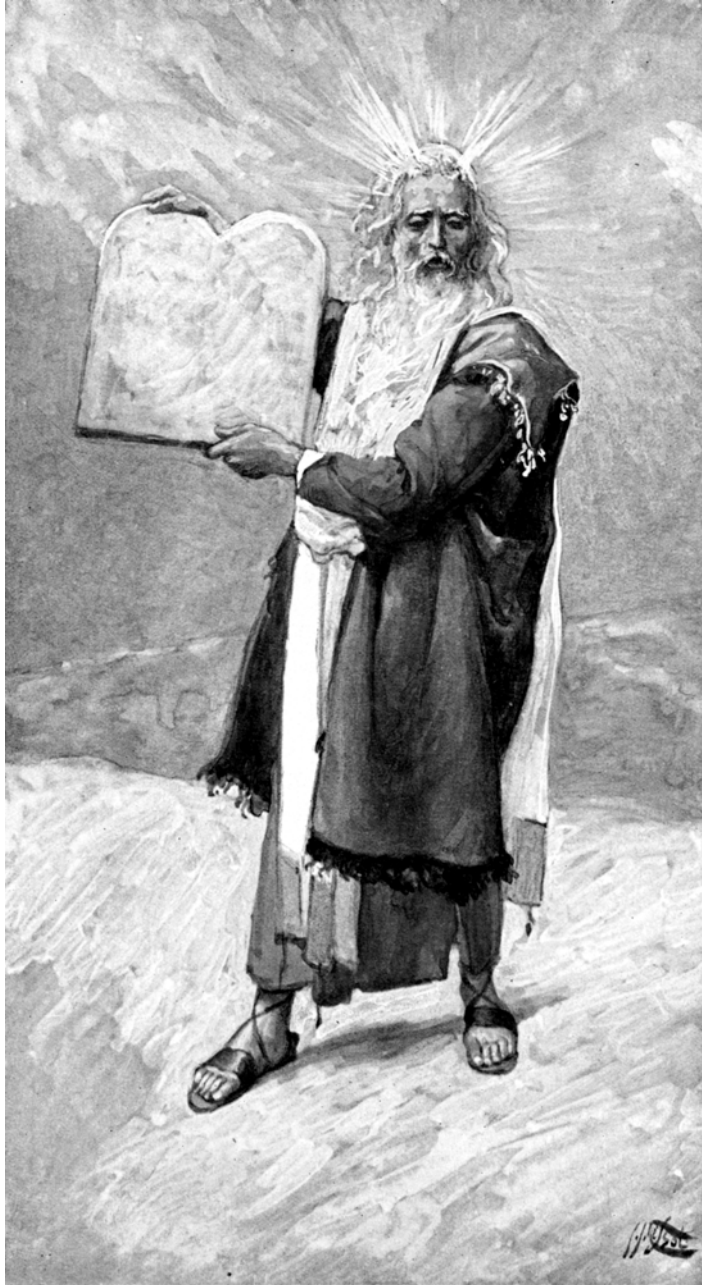
Dr. Stöckhardt's application of the verse is still more explicit:

“In this manner the apostle excludes each and every human deed and conduct from justification. All that man thinks, desires, and does, no matter what it is, is excluded. Even faith itself as the source and driving power of good works. It is a radical distortion of the teaching of justification to hold that God, when He justifies man, already sees in faith, the seed, the full fruit. Not faith as an act of the human will, not the act of apprehending, but the thing which faith apprehends justifies man. What induces God to declare man just is alone what faith accepts, namely the merits of Christ. Therefore if we wish to stand before God in time and in eternity, if we wish to be justified and saved, we must put far from our eyes all works, also the best works, all our own thoughts, feelings, desires, deeds, and efforts, no matter whether they are the best Christian virtues. We are lost if we reflect upon what we have done.” (Stöckhardt, p. 48)

Verses 29-30

Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

“Is God the God of the Jews only?” - The core conviction of Judaism was an absolute commitment to strict monotheism (Deuteronomy 6:4). That commitment had mutated into what has been accurately described as *“a degenerate theocratic exclusiveness.”* Many Jews scorned the Gentiles and believed that the God who had chosen Israel also scorned Gentiles. Paul now uses the very monotheism which was the unique distinctive of Jewish religion as a compelling argument in favor of the universal application of salvation by grace through faith. If there is one God and one God alone He must be the God of all men. Charles Hodge summarizes the thrust of the argument very well:



*"Moses With the Ten Commandments"
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

*"We have here the second result of the gospel method of justification: it presents God as equally a God of the Gentiles and of the Jews. He is such, because **there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by the same faith.** He deals with both classes on precisely the same principles; He pursues, with regard to both, the same plan, and offers salvation to both on exactly the same terms. There is, therefore, in this doctrine, the foundation laid for a universal religion, which may be preached to every creature under heaven, which need not, as was the case with the Jewish system, be confined to any one sect or nation. This is the only doctrine which suits the character of God and his relation to all His intelligent creatures upon earth. God is universal and not a national God, and this is a method of salvation universally applicable." (Hodge, p.101)*

Paul's argument leaves the genuine monotheist no avenue of escape. If there is only one God, who is the God of all, then the one God's plan of salvation must apply equally to all men.

Verse 31

Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the Law.

"Do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith?" - One final objection must be answered before Paul concludes this magnificent presentation of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Does this teaching ***"nullify the Law?"*** The verb ***"nullify"*** (Greek - *"katargeo"*) means *"to abolish," "do away with,"* or *"render ineffective."*

Paul's rejection of this charge is stated in strongest possible language - ***“Not at all!”***

The NASB expresses the sense of the Greek more forcefully as it translates - *“May it never be!”* In fact, exactly the opposite is true. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith restores the Law to the purpose for which it was originally intended by the God who gave it. It ***“upholds the Law”*** by rescuing it from the legalistic abuse to which it had been consigned by the self-righteousness of both Jewish and Gentile moralists. Grace religion upholds the Law in three ways: by the full payment of the Law's righteous demands upon the cross; by restoring the Law to its genuine purpose of leading sinful men to recognize the impossibility of self-justification; and, by creating the possibility of new obedience in those who have been born again to new life in Christ Jesus.



“Put on the Full Armor of God” by Rudolf Schäfer