



"Abram's Entrance Into Canaan"
 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

Romans Chapter 4

Verses 1-3

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness."

"What then shall we say" - This rhetorical question connects the extended illustration which follows with the classic presentation of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ in the preceding verses. This linking phrase occurs regularly in the Letter to the Romans (cf. 3:5; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30)

"That Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?" - Paul had earlier declared that *"the Law and the Prophets testify"* to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith (3:21). This truth is not a novelty or an innovation. It has been

the essence of the plan of salvation from the beginning. Abraham, the father and founder of the Hebrew nation, is now cited as the prime illustration of justification by faith. John MacArthur comments on the perfect appropriateness of Paul's selected illustration:

“By using Abraham as the supreme Scriptural example of justification, or salvation, by faith alone, Paul was storming the very citadel of traditional Judaism. By demonstrating that Abraham was not justified by works, the apostle demolished the foundation of rabbinical teaching - that man is made right with God by keeping the Law, that is, on the basis of his own religious efforts and works. If Abraham was not and could not have been justified by keeping the Law, then no one could be. Conversely, if Abraham was justified solely on the basis of his faith in God, then everyone else must be justified in the same way, since Abraham is the Biblical standard of a righteous man.” (MacArthur, p. 233)

Jewish tradition has elevated Abraham to lofty heights. Unlike the Book of Genesis, which realistically portrays Abraham as a man afflicted with the same weaknesses and flaws of other men, the writings of the Jewish Apocrypha had exalted Abraham to the level of sinless perfection.

“For Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the Lord and was pleasing through righteousness all the days of his life.” (The Book of Jubilees 23:10)

“Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the laws of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh and when he was tested, he was found faithful.” (Sirach 44:19-20)

“Therefore, thou, O Lord, God of the righteous, hast not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who did not sin against thee, but thou hast appointed repentance for me who am a sinner.” (The Prayer of Manasseh, vs.8)

Those who proudly claimed the distinction of descent from Father Abraham believed they had no need for the salvation which John the Baptist and Christ Himself proclaimed to them. The Baptist warned them: ***“Do not think that 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; cf. also John 8:31-41) In contrast to this distortion, Paul's presentation of Abraham as a beneficiary of justification by grace becomes all the more compelling. The patriarch is described

as ***“Abraham our forefather.”*** With these words Paul identifies with the Israel of God and affirms his ongoing relationship with the founder of the Hebrew nation and the father of believers. Abraham is ***“our”*** forefather the apostle declares.

In the Greek text, the next phrase literally reads *“according to the flesh”* (Greek - *“kata sarka”*). In the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul, the term *“flesh”* refers to man or human activity apart from God. The NIV chose to translate the phrase *“kata sarka”* as ***“in this matter.”*** While this translation is linguistically



“God’s Promise to Abraham”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

possible, it is unlikely in the context and serves to weaken the thrust of the apostle's argument. The question that Paul is posing could be paraphrased in this way: *“What shall we then say about what Abraham our forefather found to be the case so far as his own human ability was concerned?”*

The specific meaning of the Greek verb *“eurekenai”* (NIV - ***“discovered”***) in this phrase is also significant. The word refers to *“finding grace or mercy.”*

Abraham himself uses the term this way in the Septuagint's

translation of Genesis 18:3 - ***“If I have found favor in Your eyes, My Lord.”*** The concept the word conveys is that of being granted a favored standing before someone who has the power to withhold or bestow the favor as he chooses. Thus the very word that the apostle has selected foreshadows the thrust of the argument to come which insists that Abraham's status before God was an act of divine favor by grace.

“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works” - If any man would ever have had the right to boast about his own good works, that man would have been Abraham, who left his home at God's command and raised the knife to sacrifice his only son (cf. James 2:20-24). ***“But there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (3:22,23). Even Father Abraham falls under that condemnation. The

fact of the matter is that not even Abraham ***“was justified by works”***. Therefore ***“boasting is excluded”*** (3:27), for Abraham and for all. Not even the man whom God Himself called ***“My friend”*** (Isaiah 41:8; 2 Chronicles 20:7) could boast of his own works ***“before God.”***

“What does the Scripture say?” - The possibility of boasting about good works before God is excluded and God Himself is now called upon to testify to that effect. Paul appeals to the Old Testament, the inspired and inerrant Word of God, as the conclusive authority in this matter. The Scriptural citation is Genesis 15:6 - ***“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*** Abraham was the quintessential man of faith. In the roll call of the heroes of faith in the Letter to the Hebrews we read:

“By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
(Hebrews 11:8-10)

In the parallel reference in Galatians Paul asserts: ***“Therefore, be sure that those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham.”*** (Galatians 3:6-7). That faith was gloriously fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. ***“Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.”*** (John 8:56)

Genesis 15:6 is a most significant passage. It figured prominently in Judaic discussion of the role of Abraham. However, among the rabbis, the focus was on faithfulness, not faith, thus perverting the verse into a proof text for work righteousness. 1 Maccabees, in the Jewish Apocrypha, paraphrases the passage to that effect: ***“Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?”*** (1 Maccabees 2:52) Given that abuse, Paul's citation of the passage here becomes all the more compelling. Stoeckhardt calls Genesis 15:6 ***“the classic passage of the Old Testament for the teaching of justification.”*** (Stoeckhardt, p.50) James Montgomery Boice goes so far as to contend that ***“from the viewpoint of the doctrine of salvation this is the single most important verse in the entire Bible.”*** He explains his contention in this way:

“This is because in Genesis 15:6 the doctrine of justification by faith is set forth for the first time. It is the first reference in the Bible to (1) faith, (2) righteousness, and (3) justification...This is the first time that any specific individual is said to have been justified.” (Boice, I, p.433)

“Abraham believed God” - God promised Abraham that despite the fact that in his old age he still had not had a son, his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:4-5) and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Abraham trusted in and relied upon that divine promise all the external evidence to contrary notwithstanding. That was the substance of Abraham's faith. Luther explains: *“Thus the expression “Abraham believed God” is equivalent to saying that he considered God truthful, for to believe God means to believe Him always and everywhere.”* (Luther, 25, p.255).

“And it was credited to him as righteousness.” - The key word in this text is the verb **“credited”** (Greek - *“logizomai”*). The word is actually a bookkeeping term from the world of accounting which Paul figuratively applies to this divine transaction. It might literally be translated *“booked to his credit.”* Lenski quotes this precise definition:

“Something is transferred to the subject person in question and reckoned as his, which he, in his own person, does not have...It is accounted to the person “per substitutionem”; the object present (faith) takes the place of what it counts for (righteousness), it is substituted for it.” (Lenski, p. 289)

The image depicts God as a bookkeeper recording debits and credits in a ledger. Thus, God took the sin of Abraham



*“Abraham and Isaac on the Way to Mount Moriah”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

from the debit side of the ledger book of Abraham's life and transferred it to the ledger book of Christ, who had died for the sins of the world. So also He took the righteousness of Christ from the credit side of the ledger book of Christ's life and transferred it to that of Abraham. Faith is the channel through which this transfer takes place for each believing individual. The great Renaissance scholar Erasmus used the legal term “*impute*” (Latin - “*imputatum est*”) in his Latin translation of this phrase. This word came to have crucial significance in Lutheran formulations of the doctrine of forensic justification. “*Imputed righteousness*” is righteousness that is attributed to man by the declarative act of God based upon the vicarious satisfaction of Christ. This righteousness is not inherent in us. It is not the result of our mode of living or our good deeds. It is a righteousness outside of man in the heart of God. Luther declares:

“All of our good is outside of us, and this good is Christ...The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly. I use the term “inwardly” to show how we are in ourselves, in our own eyes, in our own estimation; and the term “outwardly” to indicate how we are before God and in His reckoning. Therefore we are righteous outwardly when we are righteous solely by the imputation of God and not of ourselves or of our own works. For His imputation is not ours by reason of anything in us or in our own power. Thus our righteousness is not something in us or in our power.” (Luther, AE, 25, p.267, 257)

On this point the reformers were in complete agreement with one another. John Calvin affirmed:

“It is entirely by the intervention of Christ's righteousness that we obtain justification before God. This is equivalent to saying that man is not just in himself, but that the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment.” (Sproul, p.93)

The beauty of Paul's image lies in the clarity with which it presents the unilateral nature of God's action in justification. Listen once again to Lenski's careful definition:

“When Abraham believed he was in his own person no more righteous than before he believed, but God counted his faith as righteousness for him. God's accounting did not make him righteous, it did not change Abraham, it changed his status with God. Although he was not righteous, God counted him as righteous

nevertheless...This is not an arbitrary, not an unjust reckoning. "Perish the thought!" Only our crooked minds could harbor such an evil thought. Faith is not righteousness. It is counted or reckoned as being righteousness. The believer is really never in and of himself righteous, he is righteous only in God's accounting. What is there in his faith that God can account for righteousness in the believer? No virtue or merit of either the believer or of his faith, nothing of this sort to the end of his life; something else entirely, namely the contents of his faith, Christ, His ransom, His merit. The faith that holds these God counts for righteousness and no other faith. The substitution takes place right here. Christ's merit and righteousness is His own; God counts it as though it were the believer's. Faith only lays its hand upon it. God Himself moves it to do so. The by grace and altogether gratuitously God reckons faith with its content as righteousness for him who believes." (Lenski, p.290,291)

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this fundamental concept. A righteousness that is in no way our own, an *"alien righteousness"* to use Luther's terms, is credited to us by grace, through faith, for Christ's sake. R.C. Sproul explains Luther's language in this way:

"Martin Luther and the other reformers insisted that the righteousness by which we are justified is a "iustitia extra nos," a "righteousness outside of or apart from us. When Luther spoke of this righteousness "extra nos" he understood that the extra becomes ours in the sight of God by faith. Again, the focus is on the grounds of our justification. The righteousness by which I am declared righteous is one that was achieved and merited before I was even born. It is the righteousness of another, even Jesus Christ, the Righteous. His righteousness is not my righteousness intrinsically. It becomes mine only by forensic imputation. It is a righteousness that counts for me, and is reckoned to my account, but it was neither achieved nor wrought by me. In like manner, Luther argued that the righteousness providing the ground for our justification is an "iustitia alienum," an "alien righteousness." This is the righteousness of another, one who is a "foreigner" to us. He is foreign to us, not in the sense that he is unknown to us or that he remains a mysterious stranger to us, but in the sense that he is ever and always distinguishable from us, even though, by faith, we are "in" him and he is "in " us." (Sproul, 107)

For the New Testament, and for the Protestant Reformers, this concept is the essence of Christianity. This is literally, as the Lutheran dogmaticians declare, the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls (*"articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae"*). Luther insists:

"If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. And all the people in the world who do not hold to this justification are either Jews

or Turks or papists or heretics; for there is no middle ground between these two righteousnesses; the active one of the law and the passive one which comes from Christ. Therefore, the man who strays from Christian righteousness must relapse into the active one, that is, since he has lost Christ, he must put his confidence in his won works...Without this article the world is utter death and darkness...This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour...This is the heel of the Seed that opposes the old Serpent and crushes its head. That is why Satan, in turn, cannot but persecute it.” (Plass, p. 703,704)

This is precisely the point at which Rome and Wittenberg parted company in the 16th Century. Roman Catholicism taught, and teaches, that the grace of God in Christ is infused into the individual thus enabling him to do good works. On the basis of those good works the individual is then declared by God to be justified. The reformers rejected this view as a clear denial of salvation by grace through faith alone. Each side condemned the other's position on justification as *apostasy*, that is, a falling away from the Christian faith. The Roman Catholic Council of Trent unambiguously declared:

“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema. (Canon 9) If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost (Romans 5:5), and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.” (Canon 11)

John Calvin aptly responded to these decrees by saying: *“It is not us that these Tridentine Fathers anathematize so much as Paul, to whom we owe the definition that the righteousness of man consists in the forgiveness of sins.”* (Sproul, p.115) The classic response of Lutheranism to the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent was written by Martin Chemnitz in his monumental four volume work *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Chemnitz insists that the disagreement on justification is not merely an argument over terminology:

“We are by no means such troublemakers that we are opposed to a true, solid, and salutary concord and so greedy for contentions that even if a true, godly, and salutary agreement were established concerning the matters themselves, we would still look for things to fight about from battles about words...The dissension and strife in the article of justification is not only about words, but chiefly about the matters

themselves.” (Chemnitz, I, p.168)

What is at issue here, Chemnitz argues, is not some peripheral point or obscure theological distinction but the very heart of the Christian gospel of salvation.

“For this is the chief question, this is the issue, the point of contention, namely what that is on account of which God receives sinful man into grace; what must and can be set over against the judgment of God, that we may not be condemned according to the strict sentence of the Law; what faith must apprehend and bring forward, on what it must rely when it wants to deal with God, that it may receive the remission of sins; what intervenes, on account of which God is rendered appeased and propitious to the sinner who has merited wrath and eternal damnation; what the conscience should set up as the thing on account of which the adoption may be bestowed upon us, on what confidence can safely be reposed that we shall be accepted into life eternal; whether it is the satisfaction, obedience, and merit of the Son of God, the Mediator, or, indeed, the renewal which has begun in us, the love, and other virtues in us. Here is the point at issue in the controversy which is so studiously and deceitfully concealed in the Tridentine decrees.” (Chemnitz, I, p. 468)



Dr. Martin Chemnitz

The argument was not over the importance of good works in the Christian life. Lutherans freely acknowledged that believers were to walk in newness of life, expressing and demonstrating their faith in deeds of love. However, Lutherans categorically rejected the Roman insistence that these good works became at least a part of the basis for our justification. Is the ground of our justification to be found in us or in Christ? This is the fundamental question upon which the Reformation occurred and on this question no compromise was possible. Chemnitz clarifies this point with meticulous care.

“On this hinge the controversy between us and the papalists chiefly turns in the article of justification, namely, whether the regenerate are justified before God to life eternal on account of their newness and

works. But I repeat what has already been said a number of times: We acknowledge that renewal is a very great benefit of the Son of God, the Mediator, through the Holy Spirit in us. We teach that new obedience must follow after reconciliation; and we give to it, in its place, that which the Scripture gives to it, as we shall show later when we speak about good works. However, we have learned from Scripture that this dignity and glory, that they are our justification before God to life eternal, must not be given to our renewal and good works. For this dignity and glory belongs to the obedience, or righteousness, of the only-begotten Son of God, our Mediator, imputed to us through faith. So far we have shown how the Scripture denies to us and takes away from us the justification before God to life eternal, so that it demonstrates by a division or enumeration that there is nor inheres neither in nature nor in life nor in qualities, habits, or works of men in this life, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, regenerate or unregenerate, that by which they can so stand in the judgment of God that on account of it they may be justified to life eternal. And this division, whether there is or inheres in any part of man, or in his actions, something by which he can be justified before God, was instituted by Paul...And for the doctrine of justification solely through the grace, or mercy, of God, it is necessary that it be removed and taken away completely from all the things which are, or inhere, in man, whether he be Jew or Gentile, regenerate or unregenerate.” (Chemnitz, I, p.492)

As it was for Father Abraham, so it must be for everyone else - ***“Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”***

Verses 4-5

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

“Now when a man works...” - Having used an accounting term from the business world to describe God's justification of Abraham, the apostle now draws upon an axiom from everyday world of work and wages to demonstrate that the justification of Abraham, and of every believer, is absolutely by grace. The laborer who does his work well earns his wages. They are not ***“credited to him as a gift.”*** He simply gets what he has coming to him as the result of his effort. This can in no way be considered a ***“gift”*** (Greek - *“kata charin”* - *“as a favor, out of goodwill”*). It is instead an ***“obligation.”*** The workman may rightly demand that which he has earned. Works and grace cannot be combined. Either one has earned that which he receives, or he has not. If he earned it, it's not a gift. If it is a gift, then he did not earn it.

“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God...” - Great care must be taken not to view faith itself as a good work which merits the favor of God. Faith is not our work but God's. It is not the basis for our salvation, but only the God-given

means through which we receive that which God has done for us in Christ. *“Likewise it be comes clear again that faith for Paul is something qualitatively distinct from any human-originated endeavor. We believe, but we can take no credit for it.”* (Moo, p.264) The **“righteousness”** which was **“credited”** to Abraham was not a matter of wages paid for work performed. Paul insists that the man who **“trusts God”** is a man **“who does not work.”** Working and trusting are placed in contrast to one another with the adversative conjunction **“but.”** In this way the apostle clearly indicates that faith is not to be viewed as a good work performed by man which in any way contributes to or merits his salvation. *“The believer has given up working because he knows that all hope by way of works is vacuous, that all claims which men make upon God for pay in accord with obligation are deadly fiction; he simply believes and trusts.”* (Lenski, p.292) It should be noted that Paul's strong contrast between faith and works does not suggest that it is unnecessary for the believer to actively put his faith into practice. The point here is not that the Christian need not do good works, but that we may never depend upon those good works for our standing before God.

The object of the believer's trust is **“God who justifies the wicked.”** This startling paradox is advanced in language that was, no doubt, deliberately provocative. The **“wicked”** (Greek *“asebe”* - literally the *“ungodly,”* *“one who refuses to worship”*) in traditional Jewish thinking were those whose actions put them outside of the covenant, Gentiles and religiously non-observant Jews. Paul uses this terminology to re-emphasize the gracious nature of God's justification. The phrase boldly highlights the nature of God, loving, freely giving, incapable of being put under obligation to any human being. Above all else, our God is a God of full and free grace. It is that grace which is the object of faith. *“Faith looks to God, the gracious Reckoner, for that which is “legally” impossible; it looks to Him for righteousness “apart from the law.”* (Franzmann, p. 78) To such a man, the believer who trusts in the undeserved grace of God, **“his faith is credited as righteousness.”** The great Puritan preacher-theologian Jonathan Edwards observes that the point of this verse is:

“that God, in the act of justification, has no regard to anything in the person justified, as godliness or any goodness in him; but that immediately before this act, God beholds him only as an ungodly creature; so that godliness in the person to be justified is no so antecedent to his justification as to be the ground for it.” (Moo, p. 265)

This incredible point becomes all the more important because it is made in reference to Father Abraham himself. As St. John Chrysostom remarks: *“For a person who*

had no works to be justified by faith was nothing unlikely. The necessity of grace there is plain to see. But for a person richly adorned with good deeds, not to be made just from these, but from faith, this is the thing to cause wonder and to see the power of faith in a strong light.” (Moo, p.265)

Verses 6-8

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

“David says the same thing...” - It was customary among the teaching of the rabbis to offer primary proof for a theological point from the “*Torah*,” the Five Books of Moses, and then to add a secondary witness from the “*Writings*” or the “*Prophets*.” It would seem that Paul is following that traditional rabbinic pattern in this instance. Having cited the example of the founder of the Jewish nation from the Book of Genesis, the apostle proceeds to demonstrate that the greatest of the Hebrew kings also clearly understood and affirmed justification by grace through faith from the Book of Psalms. The quotation is from Psalm 32: 1-2. The language of the Psalm closely parallels the Genesis text previously cited. Both passages utilize the key verb “*to credit*” or “*to count*.” Paul rightly contends that in this verse David proclaims ***“the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.”*** “***Blessedness***” (Greek - “*makarismos*”) means happiness or good fortunate. The word usually carries the connotation of being the privileged recipient of divine favor. This is also the word used in the beloved “*Beatitudes*” of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:1-12).

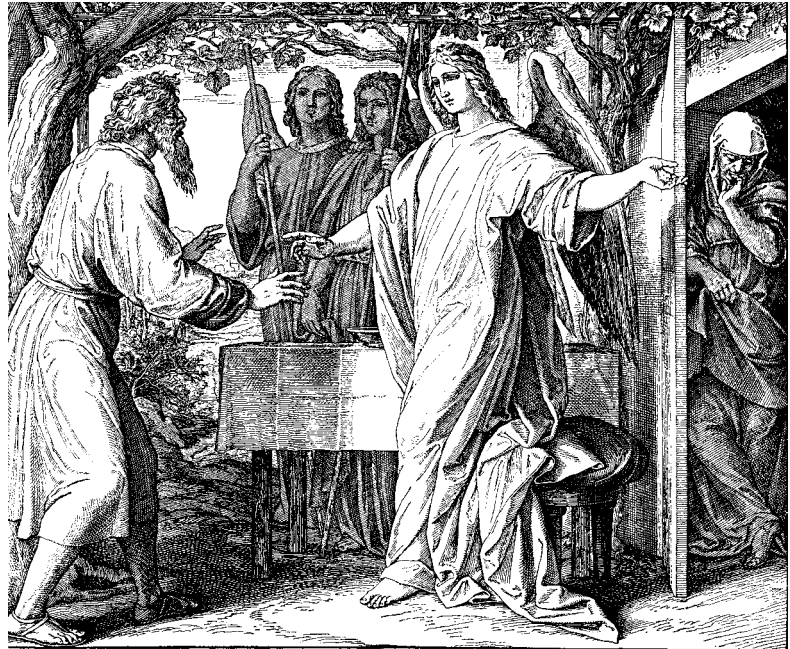
Paul's citation of this passage reveals that the forgiveness of sins is a basic component in justification. Joachim Jeremias asserts “*Justification is forgiveness, nothing but forgiveness!*” (Dunn, p.206) David employs three terms for sin and correspondingly, three terms for its removal. First, “***transgressions***” (Greek - “*anomia*”) which means lawlessness, drawn from a root meaning revolt or rebellion against a government. Second, “***sins***” (Greek - “*hamartia*”) which means “*to miss the mark*.” Lenski amplifies the meaning of the word in this context:

“This "missing the mark" does not have a connotation of one earnestly trying to hit the mark and missing it only because of weakness and ignorance. The contrary is

true...This is criminal refusal to come up to the divinely set mark, the mark set by God's Law. It is the godless, rebellious action of abolishing such a mark, of setting up that pleases the sinner better, setting it up, not merely by word of mouth, but by deed.” (Lenski, p.297)

In the Greek text, “*hamartia*” is repeated in the third line, but in the original Hebrew a different, third term is used. The Hebrew word is “*havon*” which means to deliberately turn aside or turn away. The prophet Isaiah uses the same word to describe Israel's obstinate rejection of her divine Messiah: “***We have turned everyone to his own way.***” (Isaiah 53:6) The cumulative effect of these three powerful words is devastating in its presentation of the total depravity of fallen sinful, rebellious man.

But just as these three words convey the darkness and despair of sin with grim realism, the three terms used to describe the removal of guilt and blame convey the light and hope of the Gospel with equal power. Together, they reveal the wonder of justification in all of its blessedness. First, man's “***transgressions are forgiven.***” The Hebrew verb (“*nasa*”) means “*to dismiss*” or “*to send away.*” E. Koenig explains the word in this way in his Hebrew dictionary:



“God Promises Abraham a Son”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

"Nasa" means to take away or to carry away...to take away all of man's sin and guilt, the whole frightening, stinking, deadly, damnable mess, to remove it from him and carry it away so far that it will never be found; "as far as the East is from the West" (Psalm 103:12), "into the depths of sea (Micah 7:19)...Forgive and forgiveness, the English renderings are too pale.” (Lenski, p.298)

The verb is in the aorist tense indicating a past definite fact with permanent significance: literal translation - “*dismissed once and for all!*”

The second verb is ***“are covered”*** (Greek - *“epikaluphthesan”*). This is the only instance in the New Testament where the term occurs. The thrust of the verb is that man's sins are covered forever and will never be exposed to the sight of God. The allusion is to the blood of the sacrificial offering covering of the Mercy Seat upon the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement. Hence the reference fits the flow of Paul's argument beautifully given his earlier reference to Christ as our Mercy Seat (cf. 3:25).

Finally, the third verb is the crucial word ***“will never count against”*** (Greek - *“logisetai”*) which repeats the previous use of the verb by Moses in Genesis 15:6 (cf. vs.3). In verse 3 the term was used in a positive sense as righteousness was ***“credited”*** to believing Abraham. David used the word negatively to make exactly the same point when he promised that a man's ***“sin...will never count against him.”***

Paul, Moses, and David all teach the same thing on the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake. The apostolic witness is reinforced by that of the prophet and the psalmist. God has done it all! An early 20th century hymn by James Procter, based upon Christ's dying words from the cross, express this foundational truth in a most touching way.

"IT IS FINISHED"

by James Procter, 1922

1. Nothing, either great or small - nothing, sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all, long, long ago.
2. When He, from His lofty throne, stooped to do and die,
Everything was fully done, hearken to His cry!
3. Weary, working, burdened one, Wherefore toil you so?
Cease your doing, all was done long, long ago.
4. Till to Jesus' work you cling by a simple faith,
"Doing" is a deadly thing - "Doing" ends in death.
5. Cast your deadly "Doing" down, down as Jesus' feet;
Stand in Him, in Him alone, gloriously complete.
6. "It is finished!" Yes, indeed, finished every jot;
Sinner, this is all you need, tell me, is it not?
(Sacred Songs and Solos # 142)

Paul's quotation of David's inspired words from Psalm 32 serve to emphasize, once again, the apostle's strongly forensic understanding of justification.

“He uses this quotation to compare justification to the non-accrediting, or not “imputing” of sins to a person. That is an act that has nothing to do with moral transformation, but “changes” people only in the sense that their relationship to God is changed - they are acquitted rather than condemned.” (Moo, p. 266)



“Abraham Called on the Name of the Lord” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 9-12

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised...” - St. Paul now returns to the topic of circumcision (cf. 2:25-29) to demonstrate beyond any shadow of a doubt that Abraham's salvation was completely by grace and in no way the result of his own efforts. Since it is Abraham whom Paul is using as his model of justification it is not unreasonable to anticipate the suggestion that the great patriarch's righteousness before God is at least partially the result of his own faithfulness. His participation in the rite of circumcision is a prime example of that faithful obedience. Many among the Jews had come to believe that God's love and His plan of salvation was reserved only for the circumcised descendants of Abraham. The Jewish Intertestamental Book of Jubilees declares that circumcision is the indispensable and indelible mark of God's favor:

“The law is for all generations forever, and there is no circumcision of the time, and no passing over one day of the eight days; for it is an eternal ordinance, ordained and written on the heavenly tables. And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction; nor is there, moreover, any sign upon him that he is the Lord's, but he is destined to be destroyed and slain from the earth.” (Jubilees 15:25-28)

The author of the Book of Jubilees goes on to directly connect the Jews loss of the Promised Land with their failure to consistently follow the practice of circumcision.

“And now I will announce unto thee that the children of Israel will not keep true to this ordinance, and they will not circumcise their sons according to all this law; for in the flesh of their circumcision they will omit this circumcision of their sons, and all of them, sons of Belial, will have their sons uncircumcised as they were born. And there shall be great wrath from the Lord against the children of Israel, because they have forsaken His covenant and turned away from His Word, and have provoked and blasphemed as they have not observed the ordinance of this law; for they treat their members like the Gentiles, so that they may be removed and rooted out of the land. And there will be no pardon or forgiveness for them” (Jubilees 15: 29-31)

The role of circumcision as a mark of God's favor was so absolute among the Jews that the rabbis taught that a Jew who practiced idolatry would have his circumcision undone before he was consigned to Hell. Dr. David Scaer describes *“the Judaistic perversion”* of the rite of circumcision in this way:

“The Jews, who had lost control of the Promised Land, had turned circumcision into a racial, nationalistic badge. It had become a magical ritual and even worse, a

prideful, human-centered expression of the law through which they thought they could merit God's favor "ex opere operato." The Jews had lapsed into a formalism in which race, not grace, was the criterion for salvation. The prophets of long ago had warned Israel of this kind of formalism, urging them not to throw away the worship forms but to carry them out in the right spirit. In any event, the New Testament speaks out against circumcision as it had been abused. Having rejected the Spirit given in true circumcision, the Jews were uncircumcised in heart and ears (Acts 7:51)." (Scaer, p.24)

Continuing to use Abraham as his model the apostle clearly proves that ***"This blessedness,"*** the gift of having been declared righteous by grace through faith alone, is not limited to or contingent upon the rite or circumcision. It is not ***"only for the circumcised"*** but ***"also for the uncircumcised."***

"We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."
- To make his point, Paul cites the text of Genesis 15:6 once again, in this instance introducing it with the emphatic verb *"legomen"* (literally - *"we maintain"*). Paul proposes that the circumstances of that *"crediting"* be examined in greater detail, specifically with reference to its timing in regard to Abraham's circumcision. ***"Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?"*** The time sequence is of crucial significance if we are to properly understand the relationship between Abraham's justification and his circumcision. Which came first, justification or circumcision? The sequence of events in Genesis is clear. The declaration of Abraham's justification takes place in chapter fifteen in connection with the renewal of God's promise of a son. At that time Abraham is uncircumcised. The rite of circumcision is not instituted until Genesis seventeen. In the rabbinical traditions of the Jews, twenty-nine years separated those two events. These facts are so well known that they need not be proven. Therefore the apostle is content to simply assert them as common knowledge. ***"It was not after but before!"*** Abraham's justification before God could not have been the result of his circumcision because he had not yet been circumcised.

Circumcision is not rejected but its proper role within God's plan of salvation is carefully explained, using the unique example of Father Abraham's experience. To emphasize that circumcision was a gift of God, not a meritorious good work performed by Abraham himself, Paul reminds his readers that ***"he received the sign of circumcision."*** The verb indicates that Abraham is a passive recipient, not an active initiator. In Genesis 17:11, circumcision is called ***"the sign of the covenant."***

Paul builds upon that language here as he describes the rite as *“the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness which he had by faith.”* The *“sign”* (Greek - *“semeion”*) and *“seal”* (Greek - *“sphragis”*) terminology is very important and frequently misunderstood.



“Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah” by S. Solomon

A *“sign”* is that which represents, reveals, or signifies something else. It is not the thing itself, but an emblem of it. However, we must recognize that signs in Scripture are not merely empty external symbols which are able to accomplish nothing. This is the sense in which classic Calvinism and Arminianism use the term to rob the New Testament's sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, of their unique ability to offer and convey, faith, the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Understood in this false sense, the sign is once again perverted into a human work, something that we do in response to

God's ordinance and command. No, it is the God from Whom we have *“received”* the sign Who is at work in that which He has established. There is real power here, the power of God's grace at work in the Word of His promise.

“The word “sign,” suffice it to say, participates in the reality which it makes visible, the “signum” (Latin - “sign”) is not to be divorced from the “res signata” (Latin - “that which is signified”). The covenant sign is not merely an outward sign of inward grace. Nor does the sign point only to an external act which demands to be

taken figuratively. The sign is wrapped up in concrete acts. In both Testaments, "signs and wonders" are the real acts of God in history, not mere pictorial illustrations which point toward real acts. As real actions themselves, signs can also simultaneously set future actions into motion, and thus they are normally connected with the Word of God." (Scaer, p.13)

That becomes even more clear as St. Paul uses the term **“seal”** to explain the **“sign of circumcision.”** Circumcision did not merely signify something, it was God's own **“seal”** of attestation and approval. In this divinely ordained action, God Himself was at work. The apostle's use of the term in this context is most appropriate. The prayer pronounced during Judaism's circumcision ceremony says: *“Blessed be He Who sanctified His beloved from the womb, and put His ordinance upon his flesh, and sealed His offspring with the sign of a holy covenant.”* At the conclusion of the ceremony, the rabbi declared: *“The seal of circumcision is in your flesh as it was sealed in the flesh of Abraham.”* On a royal decree, the seal of the king was the certification of authenticity and the guarantee that all of the monarch's power and authority lay behind a decree which bore the royal seal. In the same way, circumcision carries with it the full power and authority of God, His seal of attestation upon the flesh of Abraham and all his house.

Luther points out that a distinction must be maintained between the significance of circumcision for Abraham, through whom God originally instituted the practice, and the significance of circumcision for all of Abraham's descendants. In a sense, Luther suggests, this distinction parallels the difference between the baptism of Jesus, through which the sacrament was instituted, and the subsequent baptisms of all of the followers of Christ: *“Christ is baptized not in order to be made righteous...but as an example, so to speak, for us in order that He may precede us and we may follow His example and also be baptized.”* So also Abraham, already justified on the basis of his faith in God's promise, is circumcised in order that his descendants may come to faith and be made righteous through circumcision. Luther writes:

“Circumcision was given to Abraham in order that through him this sign of the covenant might be transmitted to his entire posterity. Therefore there was one reason for circumcision in the case of Abraham and another reason in the case of Abraham's descendants. God was the God of Abraham before this time, as Moses clearly testifies. Accordingly it was not through circumcision that Abraham began to be a son of God. Nevertheless, because God commanded that he be circumcised, he was in duty bound not to offer an resistance whatever to the will of God. But for the descendants of Abraham circumcision was a symbol that they were heirs of the

promise which had been given to Abraham before he was circumcised...Thus circumcision was enjoined upon Abraham in order that for his descendants it might be a sacrament through which they would be made righteous if they would believe the promise which the Lord had attached to it. In the case of Abraham, who had already been made righteous, there was a different reason for this work, although for him it was also a seal of righteousness.” (Luther, AE, 3, p.86-87)

Paul's point here, in regard to Abraham, is completely valid. The patriarch was justified by grace through faith long before the institution of circumcision. This truth, however, should not lead us to underestimate the importance of circumcision as a genuine means of grace for Abraham's posterity. Listen again to Luther's careful words:

“Paul is an excellent definer and an expert dialectician; for he defines circumcision as a sign or a seal of the righteousness which Abraham had before he was circumcised, in fact, as a sign imprinted on the very flesh of Abraham and of all males who descended from him (Romans 4:11). But if someone calls circumcision a ceremony, he will concede in spite of this that it differs from the rest of the ceremonies in that it, like Baptism, is a passive ceremony. Furthermore, when it is determined that circumcision is a sign which did not make Abraham righteous, but indicates the righteousness that Abraham already has, the question arises whether this seal was an empty sign or something that was implemented with the seal. My answer to this question is that in Abraham's case circumcision is a mere sign without implementing anything; that is, it is a sign in such a way that it does not implement what it signifies, but merely signifies. For the argument with which Paul proves that Abraham was righteous before he was circumcised is irrefutable. Hence, circumcision is a sign which merely signifies righteousness but does not confer it, for it finds Abraham already righteous. It does not make him righteous. But the situation with Abraham's descendants was different. Circumcision does not find them righteous, like Abraham. Therefore it is a seal of righteousness in such a way that righteousness was implemented by it.” (Luther, AE, 3, p.101-102)

Dr. David Scaer asserts the classic Lutheran understanding of circumcision as a means of conveying and offering the grace of God:

“For the Old Testament people of God circumcision was a means of grace in the fullest sense of the term. Circumcision was the "locus," the effector, the causative instrument, of God's gracious covenant. Circumcision was an Old Testament sacrament, that is, an action commanded by God, involving visible means (a permanent mark at that!) and bestowing the blessing of God. For the Old Testament individual there was only one covenant God knew, the covenant of circumcision (cf. Acts 7:6).” (Scaer, p. 15)

Accordingly, Scaer contends, circumcision as a sacrament of the Old Testament closely parallels its New Testament counterpart, baptism. This parallel is so close that circumcision may properly be called ***“the circumcision done by Christ.”*** (Colossians 2:11).

“Both circumcision and baptism are means of grace...Circumcision is also an efficacious “sacrament.” Both are commanded by God and employ visible means. Both are tied to the unilateral prevenient promises of God. Both bring to bear on individual people the saving acts of God in history...Both of them bundle up into one package the Word of God and the visible means...Both circumcision and baptism are the locus and vehicle of God’s redemptive work...Both baptism and circumcision have to be performed only once. When God is the actor and is granting everything that pertains to salvation, it dare not be repeated...Both circumcision and baptism stress human passivity. In both God Himself is the one who is “doing the doing.” Both acts involve receiving a new identity as the passive subject is received into the Name of God and all that it means...Both acts effect one’s incorporation into the Church. Of course, God is the one doing the incorporating; neither circumcision nor baptism are merely the avenue by which a man “joins” the Church...Both circumcision and baptism confer the forgiveness of sins, forgiveness through Jesus Christ which is the only forgiveness there is...Circumcision and baptism stand in the same relationship to faith. Regarding baptism, Luther speaks of “faith which trusts such Word of God in the water;” accordingly, an unbelieving rejection of the blessings of circumcision deems the act as only a “circumcision of the flesh.” (Scaer, p.16ff.)

In this way, the sacraments of the New Testament are both prefigured and reflected in the sacraments of the Old Testament: Holy Baptism in the rite of Circumcision, and Holy Communion in the great Feast of the Passover.

“So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised...”- In an ironic way, Abraham was a Gentile when he was justified by grace through faith. He could not claim a racial heritage before God, nor had he yet participated in the rite of circumcision, for neither the Jewish nation nor circumcision had yet come to be. Thus, to the consternation of the proud, self-righteous Jew, Abraham is declared to be the spiritual father of all uncircumcised believers! As Paul contends in Galatians 3:7 - ***“Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.”*** Lenski concludes: *“Here is our charter of full spiritual relationship with Abraham; all of us Gentile believers today are his children in the fullest sense of the word, the same righteousness being reckoned to us as to him, foreskin notwithstanding.”* (Lenski, p.304, 305)

“And he is also the father of the circumcised, who not only are circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of the faith...”

Circumcision is not decisive. It is faith that is decisive. Abraham is not the father of all those Jews who are circumcised, for this is not a matter of ethnic descent or ritual observance. He is only the father of circumcised Jews who ***“walk in the footsteps of faith.”*** This interesting phrase does not simply mean *“to walk.”* Instead it means *“to stand in line in position”* like soldiers in ranks in a military formation. The language implies that faith can be empirically observed in the life of a believer, it leaves its tracks, so to speak. The paragraph concludes with a reminder of the basic fact



“God Visits Abraham” by S. Solomon

that Abraham's faith preceded his circumcision - ***“the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”***

Verse 13

For it was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

“For it was not through the law...” - The new paragraph begins with the word

“For” (Greek - “gar”) which indicates that what follows serves to explain that which came before. Paul has clearly demonstrated that Abraham's status of justification before God did not depend upon his compliance with circumcision. He now broadens the argument to demonstrate that Abraham's status of justification before God did not depend upon his observance of the law in any way. The noun **“law”** lacks the definite article in this verse, indicating that Paul does not have the specific Law of Moses, the Law, in mind, but rather law in general, any kind of law by which man might seek to justify himself before God. Hence this rejection of legalism applies not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. The core component in this argument is the assertion of the complete incomparability of faith and works in the matter of justification - **“not through the law...but through the righteousness that comes by faith.”**

“The reason that faith has no value if one is living by the law principle is that faith and law are opposites, and if a person is choosing one, he or she is inevitably rejecting the other. It is as impossible to be saved by both faith and works as it is to be setting out from Kansas in the direction of California and New York simultaneously...To put it another way: Law is man-directed (it points to human abilities), while faith is God-directed (it points to God's accomplishments). So if you are approaching salvation by trusting man, you cannot be trusting God - and vice versa.” (Boice, I, p.472)

Abraham's fidelity to the law was axiomatic among the Jews. Without denying that faithfulness, Paul contends that law had nothing whatsoever to do with the patriarch's justification.

“Abraham and his offspring received the promise...” - “Promise” (Greek - “*epaggelia*”) is a key word in this passage. In classical Greek this word simply meant “*announcement*.” But in Biblical literature the word takes on the connotation of a “*promise*” or a “*pledge*.” This was a time of intense messianic expectation among the Jews and this is the word that is used in reference to the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus uses this word to refer to the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4), and it is used regularly by the apostles about the prophetic promises that were fulfilled in Christ (i.e. Acts 13:32). The content of the “*promise*” is **“that he would be heir of the world.”** There is no Old Testament prophecy with this specific wording but Paul's language is aptly reminiscent of Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount: **“Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.”** (Matthew 5:5) God's promise to Abraham included three key provisions: that he would be the father of many nations, that he would possess the

land of Palestine, and that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:1-2). The promise is not only to Abraham as an individual but to ***“his offspring”*** (Greek - *“spermati”*). In Galatians 3:16-18, Paul emphasizes the Christological significance of this term, but here the reference is more general, to all those who are sons and daughters of Abraham by faith.

Verses 14-15

For if those who live by the law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

“For if those who live by the law...” - The concept of *inheritance* was a basic part of the Jewish understanding of their covenant relationship with God. Legalistic Jews (***“those who live by the law”***) make the proud claim that they are the children, the ***“heirs”*** of Abraham. But that cannot be. For is this a matter of living ***“by the law”*** then ***“faith has no value”*** (literally - *“believing has been emptied of its meaning”*) and ***“the promise is worthless”*** (literally - *“the promise has been nullified”*). It cannot possibly be both/and. It must be either/or. ***“Faith”*** and the ***“promise”*** cannot be combined with ***“law”*** and works. They cancel out one another. *“One can hardly apply the word “promise” to something that a person has a right to; not is faith, in the Pauline sense of absolute trust in God, an appropriate word to use for one’s birthright or wage.”* (Moo, p.275) Paul’s colorful description ***“those who live by the law”*** (literally - *“the dependents of the law, the vassals of the legal system”*) says it well.

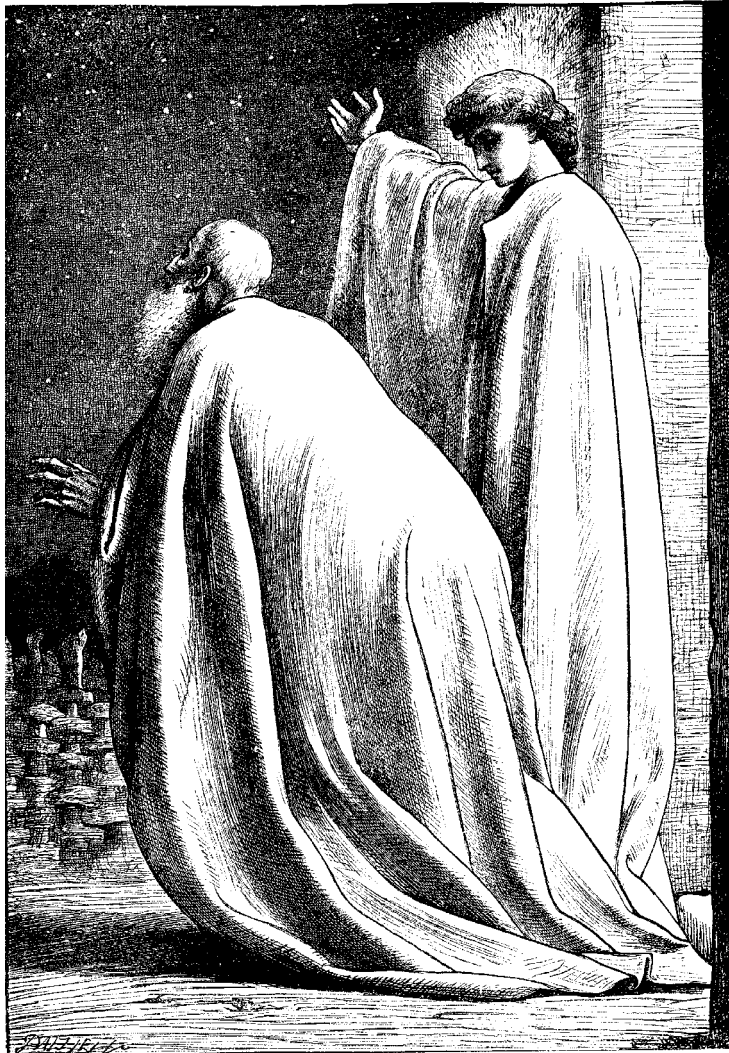
As the preceding chapters have indicated, ***“law brings wrath.”*** The verb is in the imperfect tense indicating continuously ongoing action - *“the law keeps on producing wrath.”* The righteous anger of God is being poured out from heaven upon a world full of sinners who have failed to measure up to the perfect obedience which the law demands. The law is not connected to the promise. It is connected only to the wrath and judgment of God. The law does not save. It can only condemn.

“And where there is no law there is no transgression.” - The word ***“transgression”*** (Greek - *“parabasis”*) means the direct violation of a written code, to deliberately step across a clearly defined line. When a man sins without the law, his wrongdoing is still sin. Paul has already shown that no one has any excuse before the judgment

of God. However, when sinful man is confronted with the specific demands of the written law, and he still chooses to defiantly disobey, his sin escalates into transgression. Thus while all transgression is sin, not all sin is transgression. The rebellion inherent in deliberate disobedience compounds the spiritual damage of the action itself. John Calvin writes: *"He who is not instructed by the written law, when he sins, is not guilty of so great a transgression as he who knowingly breaks and*

transgresses the law of God."

The law renders people even more accountable to God than they were without it.



"Your Offspring Shall Be As the Stars in the Sky"
by Sir Frederic Leighton

Verses 16-17

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

"Therefore the promise comes by faith..." - Because the law's nature is such that it is only capable of producing wrath and judgement *"the promise comes by faith."*

Once again, the intimate connection between **"faith"** and **"grace"** is emphasized. From man's point of view the promise is a matter of faith, the trust which is solely the gift and work of God. From God's point of view the promise is a matter of grace, love that is absolutely unconditioned and unearned. Each necessitates the other. *"God's*

plan was made to rest upon faith on man's side in order that on God's side it might be a matter of grace.” (Barrett) Because justification is by grace through faith it is **“guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring.”** The benefit here is twofold. First of all, the promise is **“guaranteed”** (Greek - *“bebaios”*). The word is used in a technical sense to denote a legally guaranteed security. It means *“reliable,” “dependable,”* and *“certain.”* The promise is not dependant upon man or his works, but upon God and therefore the fulfillment of that promise is certain. Secondly, it is **“guaranteed to all,”** without restriction, limitation or exclusion.

“Not only to those who are of the law...” - The **“offspring”** of Abraham are to be determined by faith alone. Both Jewish believers (**“those who are of the law”**) and Gentile believers (**“those who are of the faith of Abraham”**) are included. It is faith, not ethnic origin or possession of law, which is decisive here. Therefore no discrimination is permissible. The Gentiles enjoy full equality with the Jews for Abraham **“is the father of us all.”** He is the spiritual forefather of every believer. Stöckhardt notes:

“There is a great, holy family upon earth, at whose head stands Abraham, the father of faith. This is the congregation of all believers from the Jews and Gentiles, all sinners justified by faith. The patriarchs before Abraham also belonged to this congregation. The first believer was Adam. Nevertheless, since Scripture especially extols the faith and justification of Abraham, he is esteemed the father of believers. By natural descent, also according to circumcision, Abraham was the father of Israel, God's Old Testament people. However, God's true people, to whom also the believing Israelites belong, are all believers gathered from all people of the earth. It is a comforting and uplifting thought for every individual believer that he, through justification by faith, belongs to the great family of Abraham's children, of God's children on earth.” (Stöckhardt, p.55)

“As it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations.’” - The quotation comes from Genesis 17:5. It is used to substantiate the preceding assertion that Abraham is the father of all believers. Scripture itself had prophesied that this would be the case. This is also clear from Genesis 12:3. As Paul declares in Galatians: **“Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify Gentiles through faith, preached the Gospel aforetime to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all nations be blessed.’”** (Galatians 3:8).

“He is our Father in the sight of God...” - The family of faith is not a kinship which may empirically observed. In the eyes of men believers are separated from one

another by countless barriers of race, gender, language, etc. But in the sight of God we are all one family of believers together and Abraham is our father.

“The God who gives life to the dead...” - Nothing is impossible for the God in whom we believe. There are no constraints upon His power. In the following verse Paul will explain this reference to the miracle of Isaac's conception and birth in greater detail. The mighty God alone is capable of creation, that is to make something from nothing (*“creatio ex nihilo”*). The NIV's translation of the second part of this phrase (***“who calls those things that are not as though they were”***) understates the wonder that is being described. The text literally reads *“and calls into being things that exist not.”* The allusion is to Genesis 1 and the creation of the universe by the power of God's almighty Word. This understanding of the text is completely consistent with the linguistic usage of the period. The 2 Apocrypha of Baruch, written during the Intertestamental Period asserts: *“From the beginning of the world, You have called into being things that did not previously exist...With a word, You call to life what was not, and with mighty power you hold back what has not yet come to be.”* This is the God, the Lord of Life and Death, the Almighty Creator, in whom Abraham placed his trust.

Verses 18-21

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about a hundred years old - and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief concerning the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed...” - The paradox is powerful indeed! The phrase literally reads; *“Against hope, on the basis of hope, Abraham believed.”* As St. John Chrysostom observes: *“It was against man's hope in the hope which is of God.”* Contrary to all human expectation, a one hundred year old man believed God's promise that he would yet father a son. He trusted in the divine promise when every circumstance denied that promise. His hope flew in the face of all the evidence of reason and common sense, but still he hoped. His faith was not an existential *leap into the dark*, some sort of personal irrationality without foundation. It was instead

“a leap from the evidence of his senses into the security of God's Word and promise” (Moo, p.283). Paul's point is simply this: instead of relying upon himself, Abraham relied upon God by faith and that faith was not disappointed. *“When one believes, there is no room for self-reliance.”* (Fitzmyer, p. 387)

The promise was fulfilled, just as God had said, *“So shall your offspring be.”* The citation is from Genesis 15:5 where God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens.

“Without weakening in his faith....” - As the years passed, and Abraham grew older one might expect that his confidence would have been shaken. But that was not the case. As his biological clock continued to tick away and he aged passed the point of sexual



“The Sacrifice of Isaac”

19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

potency, *“He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead.”* Sarah, his wife, was also well beyond her childbearing years, *“Sarah's womb was also dead.”* But the promise upon which he relied had come from the God *“who gives life to the dead”* (vs. 17). Genesis reports that not only Isaac was born to Abraham in his old age, but after Isaac's birth, he was further blessed with six other sons. (cf. Genesis 25:1-2) The writer to the Hebrews reports:

“By faith, Abraham, even though he was past age - and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered Him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and countless as the sand on the seashore.” (Heb.11:11-12)

“Yet he did not waver...” - Some commentators object that Paul's assertion of

steadfast faith on the part of Abraham is contradicted by Genesis 17:17 - ***“Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?”*** Stöckhardt replies:

“The words of Abraham's reply to the Lord's promise are not those of one who doubts but of one who is astonished and leaps for joy. His laughter shows the boundless joy in his heart...And afterwards from this laughter and unspeakable spiritual joy he derived the name of Isaac, as an everlasting remembrance and sign of such a beautiful, steadfast, and certain faith.” (Stöckhardt, p.58)

The Intertestamental Book of Jubilees supports this view, indicating that after the Lord's visit and promise of Isaac's birth ***“Both of them rejoiced very greatly.”*** (16:19) John Calvin notes the similarity of Abraham's situation to ours:

“Let us also remember that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham. All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God: He promises us immortality, we are surrounded with death and corruption. He declares that He counts us just, we are covered with sins. He testifies that He is propitious and kind to us, and yet outward judgments threaten His wrath. What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all thing connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.” (Moo, p.284)

Faith is not the absence of all doubt and fear. It is, instead, the ultimate willingness to trust in God and believe even in the face of those doubts. Paul's choice of words in this phrase is helpful: literally - ***“he did not doubt in the attitude of unbelief.”*** The word ***“unbelief”*** (Greek - *“apistia”*) is more than the opposite of faith. It denotes the deliberate refusal to believe. In this specific instance it would mean the renunciation of the promise of God that had been given. Paul is not suggesting that Abraham was free of the momentary hesitations and fears that prey upon every believer, but that he avoided a deep seated and permanent attitude of distrust and denial toward the Word and promises of God.

“But was strengthened in his faith...” - This was true because Abraham did not trust in his own power, but in the power of God which ***“strengthened him in his faith”*** and enabled him to persevere through the long years of waiting. That reliance upon a strength greater than his own sustained him through many dark and difficult days. In grateful recognition of his dependance upon God's power, the patriarch ***“gave glory to God.”*** Abraham gave credit where credit was due; ***“soli deo gloria!”*** The

base line for Abraham's faith is the confidence that His Word is sure. He has the power and ability to do all that He has said - ***“being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised.”***

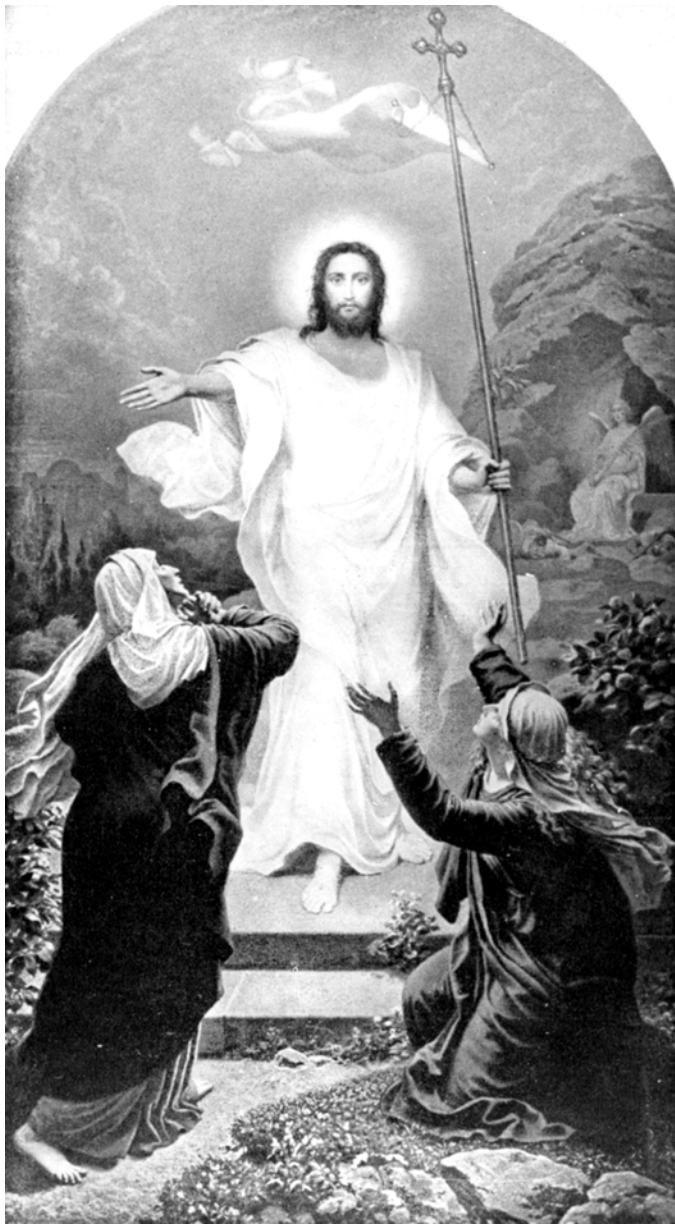
Verses 22-25

This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us to whom God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

“This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.” - Paul returns to the crucial words of Genesis 15:6 for the third time in this chapter to assert once more that a man can be justified before God only through faith. This verse is identified as the conclusion of that which precedes it with the Greek conjunction “dio,” ***“That is why.”*** Having summarized and concluded his discussion of Abraham's justification by faith, Paul is now ready to proceed to directly apply this truth to his Christian readers.

“The words "it was credited to him" were not written for him alone” - That which has been implicit in the text from the beginning of this discussion is now explicitly presented. It is Paul's consistent conviction that the Old Testament is profoundly relevant for Christians. Later, in 15:4 he writes: ***“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”*** The examples and experiences of the saints of the Old Testament were recorded with us in mind. ***“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:11) Those who would consign the Old Testament to oblivion and irrelevance do so at their own peril. They are guilty of spurning an important spiritual resource which God has graciously provided.

Our justification is no different than that of Father Abraham. When Abraham's faith was booked to his credit he became the prototype, so to speak, of all those who would be justified by faith. His faith ***“was credited to him as righteousness”*** apart from circumcision, apart from the law, apart from sight. This reckoning was totally by



"Resurrection Morn" by Adolphe Bouguereau

grace! These carefully chosen words "*were not written for him alone.*" They also apply to "*us,*" for like Abraham we are also people "*to whom God will credit righteousness.*" Paul uses the first person plural pronoun in order to include himself along with the Roman Christians among those who have been justified.

Our faith and that of Abraham are the same. Abraham's faith rested in a God "*who give life to the dead*" (vs.17). So does ours in that we believe in Him "*who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.*" The faith of Abraham and the Old Testament was one of anticipation, eagerly looking forward to an event that had not yet taken place in time. Ours is a faith of affirmation, rejoicing in that which God has done for all believers in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." - Paul has already plainly declared the doctrine of the *vicarious atonement* of Christ in 3:25.

The lifeblood of Jesus, shed for us upon the cross, is the ransom price of our redemption. Christ's death and resurrection are here joined together in beautiful literary parallelism. The dual use of the Greek preposition "*dia*" ("*for,*" "*because of,*" or "*for the sake of*") makes this clear. The atonement was accomplished upon the cross. Forgiveness for the sins of mankind had been won, once for all. In the resurrection of Jesus, God declared that His death had fulfilled its purpose, that sin was atoned, and that the sacrifice of His own Son had been accepted. The resurrection is God's stamp of approval upon the crucifixion.



"The Justification of Adam and Eve" - Woodcut by Jacob Lucius - 1556. This masterful presentation of the Biblical concept of forensic justification was designed and printed by Jacob Lucius shortly after his arrival in Wittenberg from his native Transylvania in 1556. Lucius presents the three members of the Holy Trinity as magistrates seated behind the Judge's Table in an open-air courtroom. God the Father is depicted in the lavish robes and ornate crown of the sovereign with the historic emblems of royal power, the golden orb and scepter, in His hands. God the Son, the incarnate Christ, is seated at His right hand, on the left side of the image. Christ also bears the golden scepter of royal power to signify that in His exaltation the Son rules and reigns with the Father in heaven. God the Holy Ghost hovers above His counterparts in the form of a somewhat anthropomorphized dove. The Trinity is surrounded by the traditional aureole of divine glory, the blazing light and cloud of the Old Testament "Shekinah." The Glory/Cloud is populated with a crowd of cherubim, the cherubs depicted in the customary artistic convention as "putti," that is, little children with diminutive wings. The four living beings that surround the throne of God in heaven are positioned as cherubs on the four corners of the Judge's Table. Adam and Eve, representing fallen mankind, stand before the bar of divine justice. They cower in shame and fear - averting their eyes, hiding their faces, and blushing. Their naked bodies are covered with the pathetic fig leaves of Eden's Fall. The accused are manacled together by a twisting serpent held by the devil. Satan is depicted as a grotesque chimera, a humanoid, reptilian bird of prey, bearing a fiery sword and surrounded by the flames of hell. His clawed talon upraised, he appears before the divine Judge as an indignant prosecutor demanding conviction and damnation. The caption from his beak reads: "O Lord Judge, I accuse Adam and Eve!" Lucius structures the scene around the dialectic of Law and Gospel, the two great themes of Lutheran theology. The right side of the image (at the left hand of God the Father since judgment and condemnation are God's "opus alienum") presents the message of the Law. A sword is placed alongside the Trinity on the Law side of the image as the traditional symbol of God's Word of judgement. Before God the Father on the left side of the Judge's Table are

the Ten Commandments. Their two tablets rest upon a leering skull as a reminder that the Law brings death. Standing before the bar on the Law side are the personifications of "Iusticia" ("Justice") and "Veritas" ("Truth"). Each bears her emblem and makes a demand. Justice holds the scales which are out of balance indicating man's guilt. Her caption reads - "Whoever sins must also suffer punishment." Truth carries the square and reminds the tribunal of the warning of Genesis - "You shall die on the day that eat from the Tree." The angelic putti in the Glory/Cloud are weeping and wailing over the judgment which mankind has brought upon itself. In the background to our right, Lucius pictures Eden's Fall into sin as Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit in the upper corner, and mankind plunging into the gaping jaws of Hell in the lower corner. The Gospel side of the image, to God's right and our left, presents an entirely different message. Here, the counterpart of the sword of judgment on the law side, is the lily of purity and pity. Another pertinent flower is found at the center of the Judge's Table, the messianic rose, representing all of the Old Testament promises of the coming Savior. The caption proceeding from God the Father reads - "Yea, as I live, I do not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that man turn from his way and live." Jesus holds a placard which proclaims the message of the Gospel - "The righteous must die for the unrighteous." and "The Seed of the woman shall crush the head of the serpent." Kneeling in humble petition beside the bar of justice - in contrast to the standing, demanding figures of Justice and Truth - are the personifications of "Misericordia" ("Mercy") and "Pax" ("Peace"). Mercy pleads - "O Lord, when You return, remember your mercy" while Peace beseeches the Judge to recall that which the Lord Christ has done. The angelic putti in the Glory/Cloud on this side of the image are smiling and applauding in joyful affirmation of God's plan of salvation. The background scenes on the Gospel side are Christ's death on the cross as the Redeemer of the world, and the risen Christ triumphantly leading the people of God (with Luther and Duke Frederick the Wise prominently in their midst) through the open gates of heaven.

Romans Chapter 5

Verses 1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

"Therefore, since we have been..." - Beginning with the Greek particle "*oun*" ("***Therefore***"), the apostle proceeds to describe the blessed consequences of justification in the life of the believer. The segment breathes an air of joyful confidence. Luther notes: "*The apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy.*" First, the foundational fact is restated: "***we have been justified through faith.***" The passive verb "***we have been justified***" is in the aorist tense indicating an action in the past, once for all, that is now complete.

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" - First and foremost in this list of blessings is "***peace with God.***" Here, as is regularly the case in the New Testament, the Greek word "*eirene*" ("***peace***") is the equivalent of the Hebrew term "*shalom*." The peace in question is not the mere absence of conflict but the security and serenity of the believer who know full well that his salvation has been fully accomplished in Christ. It is not primarily an inner sense or feeling but the outward situation of being in a relationship of peace with God through Christ, thus the NIV's translation "***peace with God.***" Fitzmyer writes:

“When human beings enjoy a correct relationship with God, their condition may be one of inner calm and quiet composure, of undisturbed conscience, but the essential thing is the experience of God-given salvation and the hope of glory. Those who are now at peace with God are no longer objects of wrath, for them Christ has removed all wrath. Reconciliation has been provided by God.” (Fitzmeyer, p.395)

Christ is the Mediator, the Reconciler, in the Father's plan of salvation. Through His sacrificial death in our place the redemption price has been paid in blood, and the righteous anger of God against sin has been propitiated. God the Creator, and man, the fallen creature are reunited in Christ. St. Augustine said it well when he noted: *“You made us for Yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You.”* (Boice, p. 504)

“Through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace...” - “We have gained access” carries the connotation of being escorted into the royal audience chamber of the king. In this instance, Christ, the divine Son, ushers us into the presence of His Father. We stand before the royal throne and enjoy the favor of the King for Christ's sake. Having been declared *“Not Guilty!”* through the undeserved love of God in Christ we now ***“stand”*** in ***“this grace.”*** This is use of the term ***“grace”*** as a sphere or state of being into which one enters is somewhat unusual in the New Testament but is fully consistent with the Pauline concept of God's undeserved love at work in the lives of sinful men. Thus to depart from this status would be to ***“fall from grace”*** (Galatians 5:4).

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” - The first blessed consequence of justification is ***“peace.”*** Next comes ***“hope.”*** The verb which NIV translates here as ***“rejoice”*** (Greek - *“kairometha”*) literally means *“to boast.”* The word suggests confidence, joy, and jubilation. Previously, St. Paul had excluded the boasting who depended on their own identity or merit (cf. 2:17,23; 3:27-31; 4:2). But now boasting is presented in a positive light and commended, for it is not based upon human achievement but divine grace. A Christian need not fear the future because Jesus Christ is our ***“hope”*** (1 Timothy 1:1). We can celebrate because in Christ our destiny is to share in ***“the glory of God.”*** This ***“hope”*** is every bit as gratuitous as ***“faith”*** itself. It does not rest in us or upon anything that we do but relies solely upon God and what He has done for us in Christ. Thus when we celebrate our share in the glory to revealed we are not bragging about ourselves but rather celebrating that which God has done.

Verses 3-5

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.

“Not only so....” - This confident boasting in the Lord does not merely focus on the glory that will be revealed in the future. This **“hope”** is a blessing and a resource that

is applicable to our present circumstances, no matter how difficult or unpleasant they may be. We need not flee in terror or despair from the troubles of this world. The undeserved love of God which is the firm foundation of our hope is much stronger than all the troubles of this life. **“Sufferings”** (Greek - *“thlipsis”*) is a general term which means hardship, trouble, and affliction of every sort and description. The term comes from a root which means *“to press down,”* or *“to crush.”* It is often used, as in this case, to refer to the ordinary distress brought on by outward circumstances in everyday life. To the unbeliever, the troubles of life are nothing more than a penalty and a punishment for sin. But for the believer that bane is turned into a blessing. It is possible for us to **“rejoice in our sufferings”** because by God's grace they can serve to draw us closer to him. *“Suffering and affliction become precisely the*



“Rejoicing in Suffering” by Rudolf Schäfer

point at which hope is encountered and proves itself. The function of hope in the Christian life is to motivate and develop conduct, endurance, and character.” (Fitzmyer, p. 397)

“Because we know that suffering produces perseverance...” - The apostle leads us through a careful step by step process which takes us from the present reality of our lives and ultimately arrives at **“hope”** fulfilled. Sequences of this kind, in which **“suffering”** begins a chain of linked virtues are also found in 1 Peter 1:6-7 and James 1:2-4. Paul's goal is to lead believers to view **“suffering”** from a proper perspective rather than trying to avoid or escape it. In the end, the believer who learns to view affliction in this way will find that it strengthens **“hope”** rather than threatening or weakening it. **“Suffering produces perseverance.”** **“Hypomone”** (**“perseverance”**) literally means *“a remaining or living under something,”* that is persistent patience in time of trial. Trench calls it *“a noble word that always suggests manliness and bravery.”* It is the courage and confidence to remain under the load of affliction without faltering or complaint, continuing on no matter how overwhelming the load may become. The pattern of strengthening must begin with a willing to endure the suffering. In the parlance of modern physical conditioning, Paul's basic message is *“No pain - No Gain.”*

“Perseverance, character;” - **“Character”** (Greek - *“dokime”*) literally means *“the quality of being approved.”* The word is uniquely Pauline in the New Testament. In classical Greek it is regularly used to describe the testing process which determined the gold or silver content in a coin. In this context it refers to personal character that has been tested and tried, as metal is tested in the fire and purged of its impurities. **“Suffering”** is the fire that burns away the weakness and proves and matures the individual who is able to endure.

“And character, hope.” - The climax and culmination of this process is **“hope.”** Godet is quite correct when he observes that *“Hope is the hinge upon which the entire paragraph turns.”* The English noun **“hope”** lacks the power of its Greek counterpart *“elpis.”* The English word suggests the desire that things will turn out in a certain way while the Greek word expresses the certainty that that which we do not yet possess will one day be ours. We can't see it now, but we are sure that it's coming. (cf. Hebrews 6:9-20)

“And hope does not disappoint us...” - The result of false hope, believing in that

which does not come to pass is shame and disgrace. The prophets of the Old Testament affirm repeatedly that those whose hope is in the Lord need not fear such an outcome (Cf. Psalm 22:6; 25:3,20; 31:1,17; 71:1; Isaiah 28:16; 50:7; 54:4; Joel 2:26-27). Those who hope in the Lord will be vindicated for this is the **“hope”** that **“does not disappoint us.”** The focus of this hope is the final vindication, complete salvation, and a favorable verdict in the Last Judgment. *“Christians need not fear that the judgement will “put them to shame,” in the sense that the foundation on which they have built their lives and hope for eternal blessing should prove inadequate.”* (Moo, p. 304). The final clause in Verse 5 is causal, that is, it explains the basis for the confident hope which has been expressed. The phrase is linked with the Greek particle *“hoti”* (**“because”**) which indicates the causal connection. Our **“hope”** is confident and secure **“because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.”** Every believer has received the **“love”** (Greek - *“agape,” “undeserved, unconditional, gracious love”*) personally and individually (**“poured out...into our hearts”**) by the work of the **“Holy Spirit whom He has given us.”** The picturesque verb **“poured out”** (Greek - *“ekkexutai”*) is used to refer to an abundant, extravagant effusion. This is not a barely adequate trickle, but an overflowing flood tide of love. The same word is used in Acts 2:17,18 to describe the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Thus our hope for the future does not rest upon us or our love for God. It stands, instead upon the firm rock of the faithful God's love for us and therefore it is certain for time and for eternity. The presence of the **“Holy Spirit”** is not only the proof but also the medium of the outpouring of God's love (cf. 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6). In 2 Corinthians 1:22, Paul says that God **“has put His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”** The word literally means *“a down payment”* or *“first installment payment”* of the heavenly glory that will one day be revealed. That is exactly the role which St. Paul assigns to the Holy Spirit in this text.

Verses 6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

“You see, at just the right time...” - In the verses which follow Paul presents the incredible nature of the gracious love of God for fallen mankind. That love was not

contingent upon anything in us. It is spontaneous and absolutely gratuitous in nature. God loves us simply because God is love. Indeed, the gleaming brilliance of His amazing grace is presented here against the black background of human sinfulness. At the moment of our greatest need, at the point at which we were totally incapable of helping or saving ourselves, precisely then, **“at just the right time,”** God acted on our behalf. In Christ, He did for us that which we could never have done for ourselves. In the sacred person of His only begotten Son, God Himself became our substitute. Paul uses a series of highly negative words to describe the natural condition of every human being. First, we were **“powerless”** (Greek - *“asthenes”*). The English versions translate the word as **“helpless,” “without strength,” “feeble,” “sluggish in doing right,”** etc. Boice is correct in noting: *“Only the strongest terms will do in this context, since the idea is that, left to ourselves, none of us is able to do even one small thing to please God or achieve salvation.”* (Boice, p.536) This adjective is commonly used to refer to the debilitation of physical illness (Philippians 2:26-27; Galatians 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 Corinthians 11:30). For St. Paul, the word is typically used to characterize the complete inability of natural man in matters spiritual (i.e. 1 Corinthians 5:43). This lack of strength persists even in the redeemed life on this earth (2 Corinthians 11:21-13:9). It is altered only by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

But our spiritual dilemma is infinitely more profound than the mere absence of strength. We are actively opposed to God and His will. Paul characterizes those for whom Christ died as **“the ungodly”** (Greek - *“asebeis”* - literally *“without reverence for God”*). This is a strong pejorative term reminiscent of the rebellion described in chapter one (cf. 1:18). The state of rebellion here described applies without exception to all of humanity. The apostle explicitly includes himself in this blanket condemnation when he says **“While we were still sinners.”** Mankind is by nature in a state of fierce opposition to the Creator God.

“God is sovereign, but they oppose Him in His sovereignty. They do not want Him to rule over them; they want to be free to do as they please. God is holy and they oppose Him in His holiness. This means that they do not accept His righteousness and proper moral standards; they do not want their sinful acts and desires to be called into question. . . God is omniscient and they oppose Him for His omniscience. They are angry that he knows them perfectly, that nothing they think or do is hidden from His sight. They also oppose Him for His immutability, since immutability means that God does not change in these or any of His other attributes.” (Boice, p. 537)

In Romans 3:23 Paul had declared, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** He now reminds us that those from whom Christ died were not ***“good”*** or ***“righteous”*** men but those who have fallen far short of the righteous demands of God's holy law. The incredible love of God can only be fully understood in contrast to the helplessness, godlessness, and sinfulness of man. We do not, and could never have deserved that which God has done for us in Christ.

“Christ died for us” - The redemption price has been paid in full on the cross. The tense of the verb is aorist indicating the once for all nature of the historic fact of Christ's substitutionary death. ***“Christ died for us”*** - this is the incredible, incomprehensible good news which Paul proclaims. The fact of Christ's death for the sins of mankind is asserted both at the beginning (***“Christ died for the ungodly.”*** - vs.6) and the end (***“Christ died for us.”*** - vs. 8) of the sentence for particular emphasis. The result of this emphasis is, once again, to highlight the absolutely gratuitous nature of God's love for humankind. The classic hymn by F.M. Lehman says it well:

*“The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell.*

*The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His only Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled and rescued from his deadly sin.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade;*

*To write the love of God above would drain the mighty ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, tho stretched above from sky to sky.*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless, how wide and strong!
It shall forevermore endure - proclaimed in saints and angels song.”*

(HHH, #301)

“But God demonstrates His own love for us...” - The death of Christ for sinful humanity is the decisive demonstration of God's unconditional love. ***“There is no quid pro quo in the love manifested; divine love is spontaneously demonstrated toward sinners without a hint that it is repaying a love already shown. The death of Christ is for us, sinners, precisely the proof of God's love for us.”*** (Fitzmyer, p. 400) There is a beautiful Trinitarian symmetry in this paragraph. The love of God the

Father is shown forth in the death of God the Son and that love is ***“poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit”***(vs. 5). All three Persons of the Godhead operating together as one for us and for our salvation.

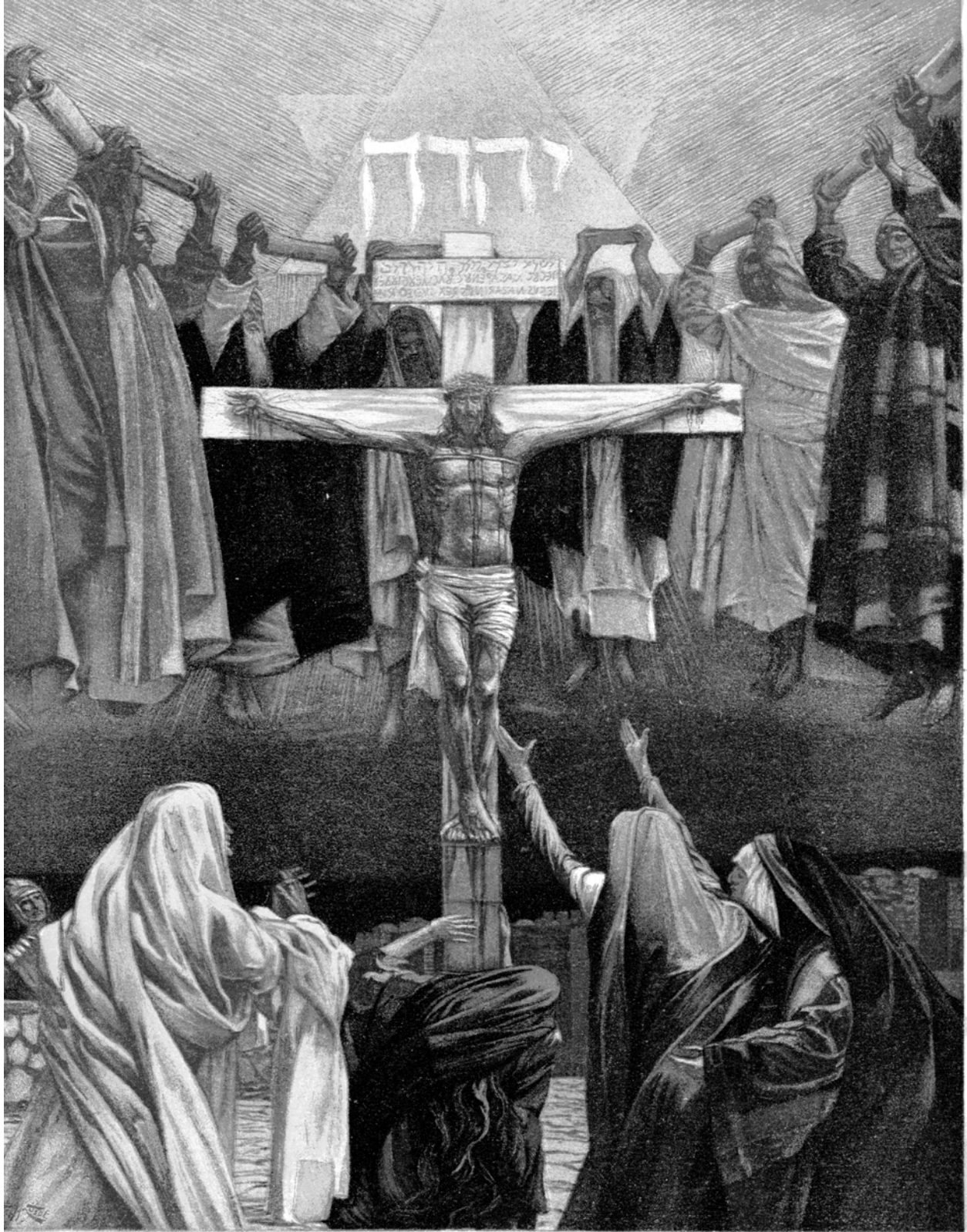
Verses 9-10

Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!

“Since we have now been justified by His blood...” The form of argument in each of these two verses is a reversal of the typical rabbinic teaching device known in Hebrew as *“qal way'yomer”* (English - *“From light to heavy”*). (cf. Matthew 7:11) In Western tradition the logical sequence is known as *“a minori ad maius”* (English - *“From the lesser to the greater”*). In both phrases Paul contends that since God has already accomplished the greater or more difficult task (***“we have now been justified by His blood”*** - vs. 9; ***“when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son”*** vs. 10), there can be no doubt that He will also accomplish the lesser or easier task (***“shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him”*** - vs. 9; ***“shall we be saved through His life”*** - vs. 10).

The cause which merits (*“causa meritoria”*) our justification is the blood of Christ shed for us upon the cross. Lenski correctly argues that *“Blood is specifically used to denote a sacrificial death, and Christ died by shedding His blood, he could not have died another kind of death.”* (Lenski, p. 350) We who have been ***“justified in His blood”*** can confidently await the great day of Christ's return. We need not fear the awesome ***“wrath”*** of God which will be revealed on the Day of Judgement for we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. In the sacrificial death of Christ our righteousness has already been established. Our deliverance from wrath on the Last Day is the result of that which Christ has already accomplished for us. Accordingly, it is possible for us to ***“wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead - Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath”*** (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

“For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him...” - Sinners are not merely ***“ungodly”*** and ***“powerless,”*** but have actually become the ***“enemies”*** of



"It Is Finished" - 19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

God. James Dunn writes:

“The picture is clearly of a sharp hostility between God and humanity; the human condition independent of God is not simply a state of human weakness, disregard for God, and responsiveness to sin; it is also a state of actual rebellion against the creaturely role of complete dependence on the creator. Man needs to be weaned away from that delusion about “standing on his own feet,” which is really nothing more mature than a childish tantrum.” (Dunn, p. 268)

The concept of “*reconciliation*” (Greek - “*katallassein*”) is one of Scriptures' most important descriptions of that which God has done for us and for our salvation in Christ. Reconciliation refers to the restoration of friendly relationships and of peace where before there had been alienation and hostility. It implies the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. In Scripture it refers to God's action in removing the barrier of sin which separated Him from fallen mankind by the substitutionary death of His Son.. The innocent Christ takes the place of the guilty mankind and offers His death as our substitute (“*Vicarious Atonement*”). The other two great reconciliation texts of the New Testament are 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and Ephesians 2:13-16.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation...We implore you on Christ's behalf; be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)

“But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13-16)

The close parallel between the justification language of verse 9 (“*Since we have now*

been justified by His blood”) and the reconciliation language of verse 10 (“*We were reconciled in Him through the death of His Son*”) demonstrates the close similarity between these two verbal images of that which God has done for the salvation of fallen mankind. Reconciliation and Justification are indeed “*theological equivalents*.” James Dunn is quite correct when he states: “*The temptation to press for a clear distinction between "justification" and "reconciliation" should be avoided...Paul regards the one as the equivalent of the other.*” (Dunn, p.259) In this regard, Professor Kurt Marquart hails what he describes as “*Luther's grand equations*” as characteristic of the evangelical emphasis of Lutheran theology.

“Grace equals forgiveness equals justification equals redemption equals reconciliation equals propitiation. These are theological not philological equivalents. Of course the words "propitiation," "redemption," and the rest, mean different things - but they refer to the same theological reality, though from different angles or aspects of it. This is not scholarly carelessness on Luther's part, but pastoral meat and potatoes orientation. Impatient with everything frilly and pedantic, Luther concentrates massively on the Gospel essentials -- and with him, the Lutheran Church.” (Marquart, p.42)

This act of reconciliation is objective, in the sense that it takes place not within man or as the result of anything man has done, but within the heart of God Himself. The great Lutheran dogmatician Franz Pieper writes:

*“Scripture teaches the objective reconciliation. Nineteen hundred years ago Christ effected the reconciliation of all men with God. God does not wait for men to reconcile Him with themselves by means of any efforts of their own. He is already reconciled. The reconciliation is an accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world. Romans 5:10: "We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." When Christ died, God became reconciled. As Christ's death lies in the past, so also our reconciliation is an accomplished fact. 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling" (namely, when Christ lived and died on earth) "the world unto Himself. The **katallassein** of Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 does not refer - let this fact be noted - to any change that occurs in men, but describes an occurrence in the heart of God. It was God who laid His anger by on account of the ransom brought by Christ. It was God who had at that time already in His heart forgiven the sins of the whole world, for the statement: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" means - and that is not our, but the apostle's own interpretation - that God did not "impute their trespasses unto them." And "not imputing their trespasses" is, according to Scripture (Romans 4:6-8) synonymous with "forgiving sins," "justifying" the sinner. The resurrection of Christ is, as Holy Writ teaches, the actual*

absolution of the whole world of sinners. Romans 4:25: "Who was raised again for our justification." At that time we were objectively declared free from sin." (Pieper, II, p.348)

"Through the death of His Son." - Justification in Verse 9 is accomplished ***"by His blood"*** (Greek - "en"), and now reconciliation is accomplished ***"through"*** (Greek - "dia") ***"the death of His Son."*** The atonement price was paid in full on the cross and the innocent death of God's own Son becomes the means through which reconciliation is accomplished. It is God who is at work here, not man. The verb ***"we were reconciled"*** is passive. We are reconciled to God by God. R.C.H. Lenski asserts:

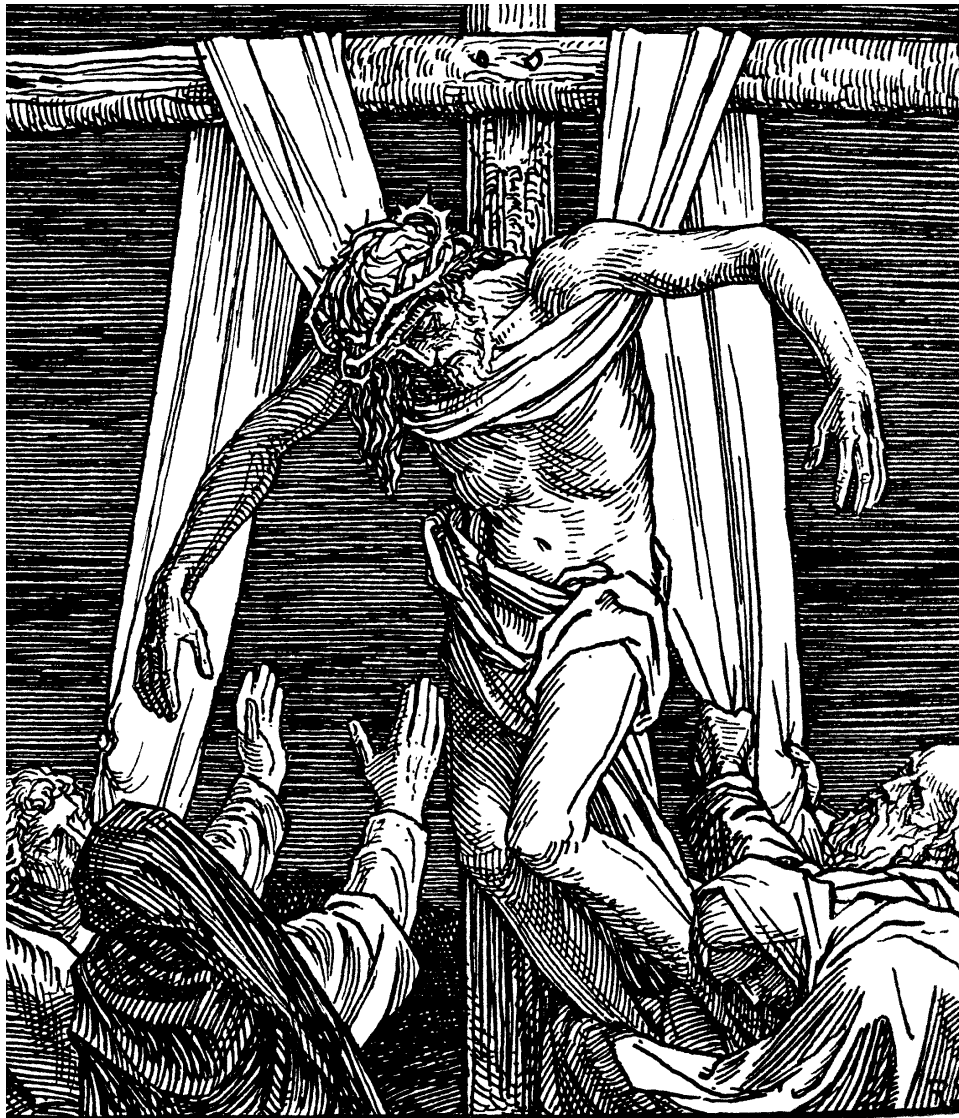
"God always loved the world (John 3:16). It was this love which dated from all eternity that caused Him to give His Son into death for the ungodly world. God needed no reconciliation, nothing to change Him - why should He change? The whole trouble was with us, with what we had made ourselves (enemies), with the state into which we had placed ourselves (sin, godlessness)...We were wrong, we alone; a change had to take place in our case, and we could not make it ourselves, God had to make it. It took the sacrificial death of His Son to do it...This is an objective act. It wrought a change with or upon these enemies, not within them. It, as yet, did not turn their enmity into friendship, nor did it make the world the kingdom. It changed the unredeemed into the redeemed world. The instant Christ died the whole world of sinners was changed completely. It was now a world for whose sin atonement had been made and no longer a world with unatoned sins...Even all the damned in hell were thus reconciled to God. Not as men who were never reconciled are they damned but as men who spurned God's reconciliation through Christ." (Lenski, p.352,353)

"How much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!" - Once again the argument flows from the greater to the lesser (*"a maiori ad minor"*). If God in Christ has indeed accomplished the reconciliation of the holy God with sinful mankind, then there can be no doubt that the triumphant Lord who lives and reigns at the right hand of God in heaven will restore His people to the life for which they were created in the beginning. In Verse 9, salvation referred to deliverance from the wrath of God's judgment on the Last Day That is also the point of reference here. Our salvation will be consummated when Christ returns in glory to lead His people into the joy of life eternal. He who was dead is alive and his life is our promise of immortality. He is the ***"firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"*** (1 Corinthians 15:20) and because He lives we know that we too shall live.

Verse 11

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through who we have now received reconciliation.

“Not only is this so...” - For the third time in the chapter the apostle expresses his confident joy in the Lord - *“We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God”* (vs. 2) and *“we also rejoice in our sufferings”* (vs. 3). But there is still more! The Christian can exult not only in the hope of glory, and in temporal afflictions that have become in Christ a source of blessing, but also in God Himself who has accomplished this great



*“Surely He Has Borne Our Griefs and Carried Our Sorrows”
by Rudolf Schäfer, 1932*

reconciliation on our behalf. St. John Chrysostom writes: “*And so the fact of His saving us, and saving us too when we were in such a plight, and doing it not merely by His Only-begotten, but by His blood, weaves for us endless crowns to glory in.*” (Moo, p.314)

Verses 12-14

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned - for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world...” - Lenski marvels at the scope and power of the paragraph which now begins:

“Starting with himself and the Romans, Paul sweeps through the world age, from Adam to the last day, from one border of eternity to the other, Christ being in the center. This is theology indeed! With a sure hand fact is placed beside fact, and the one paragraph is enough. Where save in Holy Writ is there a paragraph to compare with this? The detailed discussion on various points must not be allowed to confuse the student, must not dim his vision of the immensity which Paul here causes to tower before him.” (Lenski, p. 357)

Dr. Douglas Moo asserts that these verses are among the most theologically significant in the entire Epistle to the Romans. “*Paul paints with broad brush strokes a "bird's eye" picture of the history of redemption. His canvas is human history, and the scope is universal.*” (Moo, p.314)

The paragraph begins with the linking word “***Therefore***” (Greek - “*dia touto*” - literally, “*for this reason*”). In the preceding verses Paul had demonstrated the gratuitous nature of God's action in the justification and reconciliation of sinners. He now demonstrates why all men were sinners and thus in absolute need of that divine action on their behalf.

Most commentators agree that this sentence is grammatically incomplete. (Grammarians call this an “*anacoluthon*.”) Paul introduces a comparison with the words “***just as***” (Greek - “*hosper*”). However, he then digresses into an extended

explanation of the first part of that comparison and never grammatically returns to complete his thought. The expected conclusion finally comes in Verse 14, but without the grammatical structure which would normally introduce it and connect it to that which had come before. The apostle's point is clear nonetheless: Adam and Christ are the pivotal figures upon whom the eternal fate of humanity turns.



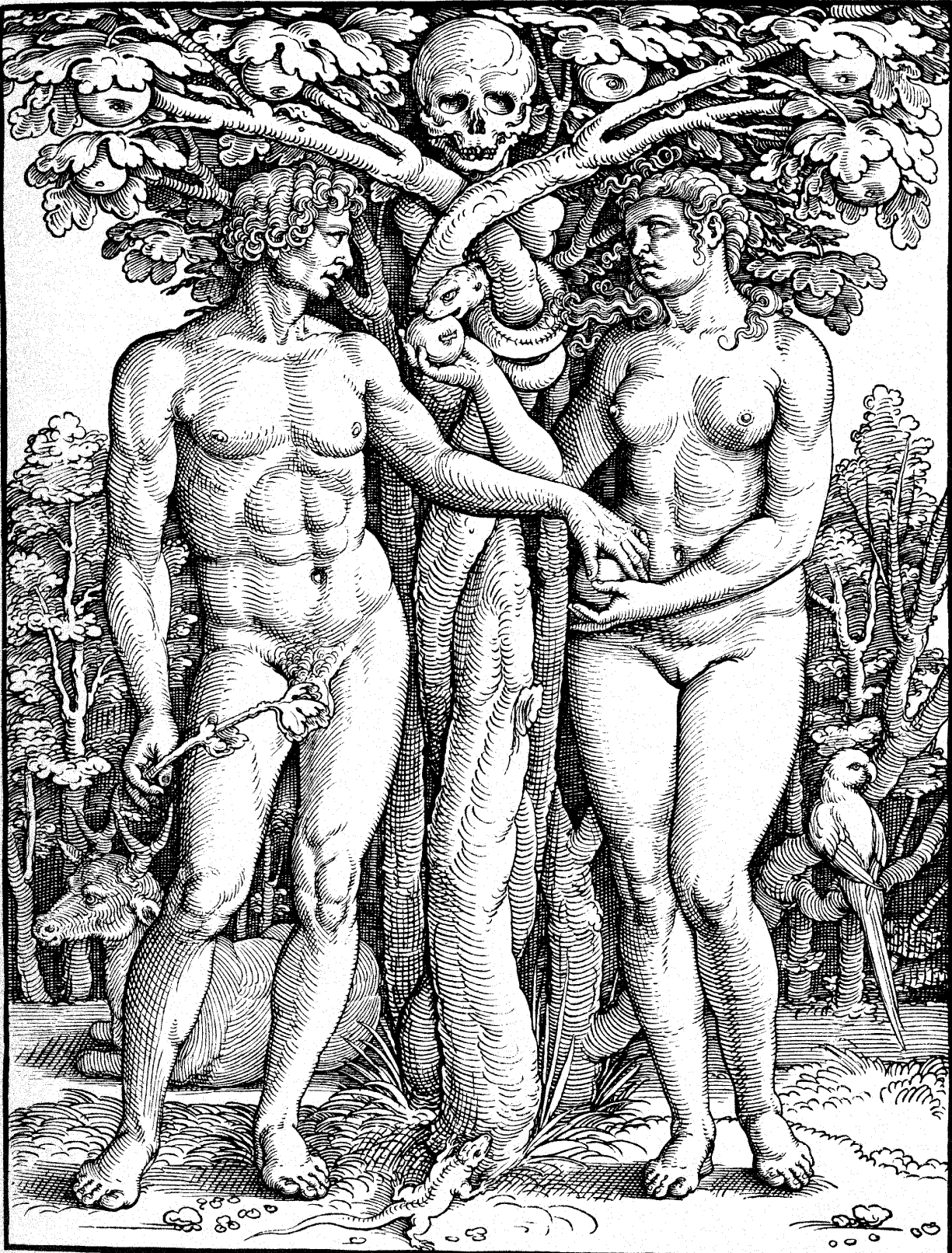
"The Fall Into Sin" - Woodcut from the "Lübecker Bibel" - 1494

"Sin entered the world through one man..." - Reference to *"sin"* in the singular, with the definite article, is typical of the Letter to the Romans. Paul does not view *"sin,"* in the first instance as individual actions or misbehavior. Instead it is a basic reality, a malignant, malevolent force which *"reigns"* (5:20), can be *"obeyed"* (6:16-17), pays wages (6:23), seizes opportunity (7:8,11), *"deceives"* and *"kills"* (7:11,13). *"In a word, he personifies sin, picturing it as a power that holds sway in the world outside Christ, bringing disaster and death on all humanity."* (Moo, p. 319) *"Sin"* was not a part of the world which God created (cf. Genesis 1:31). The perfect world which the Lord God had fashioned for man was destroyed by the willful disobedience of Adam, the first man, the father of the human race. Through Adam's *"breaking a command"* (vs.14), *"trespass"* (vs. 15), and *"disobedience"* (vs. 19), *sin entered the world.* Sin strides onto the stage of human history as Adam takes and eats the forbidden fruit. The verb *"entered"* suggests the intrusion of evil into the goodness of God's creation. The phrase echoes the language of the Apocryphal book *"The Wisdom of Solomon"* which sadly notes: *"Through the devil's envy death entered the world."* (2:24). Adam stands alone in his responsibility for mankind's downfall. The phrase *"through one man"* is repeated twelve times in this paragraph for

unmistakable emphasis. Although Eve sinned first, mankind did not fall until the sin of Adam. Adam was the “*head*.” His was the responsibility/authority. When Eve acted, she did so as an individual, for herself alone. When Adam acted he did so on behalf of humanity. In Adam's action, the nature of mankind was changed forever. Paul's argument is clearly based on the assumption that the text of Genesis Chapter 3 is an accurate account of actual historical events. No other understanding of these verses is possible. Those who would challenge the historicity of the Genesis account must do so in contradiction to Scripture's clear interpretation of itself. Furthermore, the comparison which Paul draws here in Romans 5 reveals the enormous theological implications of the historicity of the Fall account in Genesis 3. A denial of the Fall is not merely an unimportant debate about an obscure and insignificant Old Testament text. Our understanding of the entire plan of salvation is at stake. John MacArthur correctly notes:

“The fact that Adam and Eve were not only actual historical figures but were the original human beings from whom all others have descended is absolutely critical to Paul's argument here and is critical to the efficacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If a historical Adam did not represent all mankind in sinfulness, a historical Christ could not represent all mankind in righteousness. If all men did not fall with the first Adam, all men could not be saved by Christ, the second and last Adam.”
(MacArthur, p.294)

“And death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned.”
- At the time of his creation, God had warned Adam, ***“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*** (Genesis 2:16,17). Death is the inevitable result of sin: the inescapable wage which must be paid (Romans 6:23). Man, who was created for immortality, is doomed to death because of his willful disobedience of the Creator God. At the moment of Adam's sin, death became an inescapable part of the human reality. From that time on, Adam's condition, and that of all his descendants, was terminal. Although he was to live for more than 900 years thereafter, death was his companion every day. It was exactly as God had warned Adam it would be: ***“By the sweat of your brow you will earn your food, until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”***(Genesis 3:19)The sixteenth century Reformation artist Hans Sebald Beham graphically depicts this fatal reality in a 1533 woodcut entitled *“The Fall.”* Beham was an artist in the German city of Nuremberg, a student and protege of



"The Fall Into Sin" - Woodcut by Hans Sebald Beham -1533

the famous Albrecht Dürer. He captures the crucial moment as Eve stands before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Her right hand accepts the apple held in the serpent's gaping jaws while her left hand extends to share another with her husband. Adam passively reaches out to take the forbidden fruit offered by his wife. A leering death's head sprouts from the center of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree's branches become skeletal arms stretching out from the skull to enfold the doomed pair in a fatal embrace. The woodcut presents link between Adam's sin and death's entrance into the world of men with chilling clarity.

In the Greek text the noun “*death*” like its counterpart “*sin*” has the definite article. “*Death*” is thus presented not as an abstract force, but as the personification of a destructive power that would drag all of humanity down into the depths of the grave. The connection between the action of “*the one man*” and the fate of “*all men*” is unequivocally asserted. The classic Lutheran hymn by Lazarus Spengler says it well:

*“All mankind fell in Adam's fall, one common sin infects us all;
From sire to son the bane descends, and over all the curse impends.*

*Thro' all man's powers corruption creeps and him in dreadful bondage keeps;
In guilt he draws his infant breath and reaps its fruit of woe and death.*

*From hearts depraved, to evil prone, flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone;
God's image lost, the darkened soul nor seeks nor finds its heavenly goal.”* (TLH #369)

The link between Adam's sin and its consequences for his posterity was clearly understood among the people of the Old Testament era as the following quotations from the apocryphal books of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra indicate:

“With the Most High no account is taken of much time and of few years. For what did it profit Adam that he lived 930 years and transgressed that which he was commanded? Therefore, the multitude of time that he lived did not profit him, but it brought death and cut off the years of those who were born from him.” (2 Baruch 17:3)

“For when Adam sinned, death was decreed against those who were to be born, the multitude of those who would be born was numbered. And for that number a place was prepared where the living ones might live and where the dead might be preserved.” (2 Baruch 23:4)

“O Adam, what did you do to all who were born after you? And what will be said of the first Eve who obeyed the serpent, so that this whole multitude is going to corruption. And countless are those whom the fire devours.” (2 Baruch 48:43)

“For although Adam sinned first and has brought death on all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment.” (2 Baruch 54:15)



“The Generations of Adam” by Hans Sebald Beham - 1530

“O sovereign Lord, did you not speak when you formed the earth - and that without any help - and commanded the dust and it gave you Adam... And you laid upon him one commandment of yours; but he transgressed it, and immediately you appointed death for him and for his descendants... For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent.” (4 Ezra, 3:4,7,21)

In the language of theology, the legacy of Adam's disobedience is called *“original sin.”* Original Sin is the sinful nature inherited by every naturally born descendant of Adam as the result the first man's transgression. Original sin includes hereditary guilt. The guilt of Adam, the father and head of the human race, would be imputed to all who were to come from him. Hans Beham depicts this truth in a 1530 series of woodcuts entitled *“The Patriarchs of Genesis.”* The first family in the series is that of Adam. The father of the race stands next to his wife with his children at his feet. Behind Adam and Eve stands the grim figure of death in the form of a decaying corpse whose skeletal arms reach out to enfold them all. Through Adam's sin ***“Death came to all men.”*** Lutheran

theologian Adolf Hoenecke correctly defines the relationship between Adam and all of his descendants in this way:

“The sole reason why all men born since Adam are already at their birth in the state of corruption, into which Adam plunged by the Fall, is this, that God regards the deed of Adam as their deed, charges them with its guilt, and sentences them to be born in the miserable state of hereditary corruption as one deserved by themselves.”
(Pieper, I, p.539)



“Death from Eden’s Tree and Life from the Tree of the Cross” - 15th Century Illumination

Adam's sin is not merely that of a private individual. *“He is regarded as the common parent, head, root, stock, source and representative of the whole race”* (Schmid, p. 239). As our source, he stood in our place. Adam was, in that sense, a corporate figure, a personification of the race, both biologically and representatively (cf. Hebrews 7:10). All those who were to come from him, lived in him. When he sinned, we sinned along with him. When he fell, mankind fell too. The guilt of his sin was imputed to all of his progeny. As the modern Lutheran hymnist Martin Franzmann says it: *“In Adam we have all been one, one huge rebellious man. We all have fled the evening voice that sought us as we ran.”* The Hebrew text which expresses this concept

most explicitly is 4 Ezra 7:118 - *“O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants!”*

But original sin is more than mere guilt. When Adam sinned, what it meant to be human mutated into a grotesque caricature of the perfection of God's original creation. The seed of man was impure from that tragic moment on. The divine image was lost, replaced by a profound hereditary corruption which the Lutheran Confessions describe with these grim words:

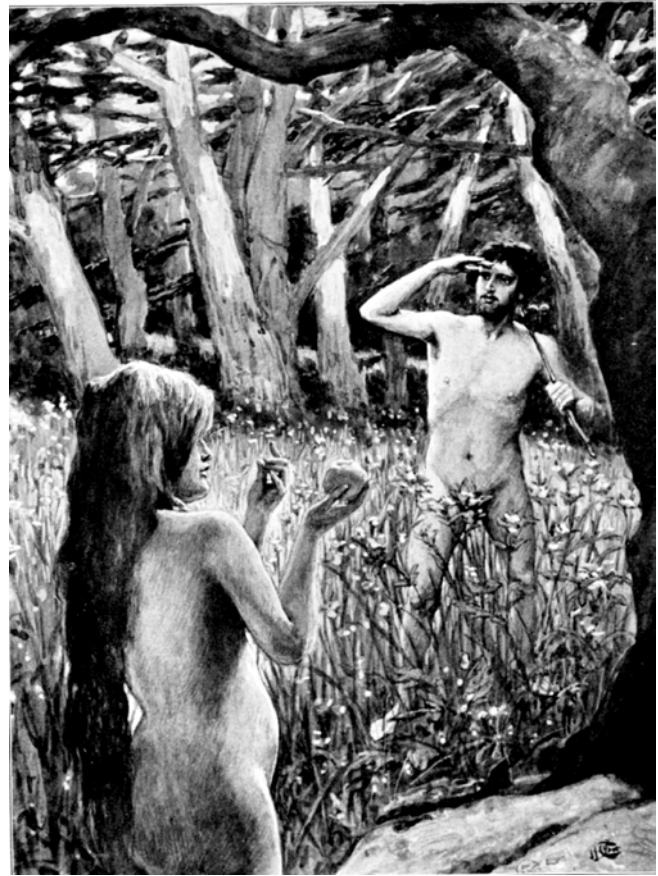
“A deep, wicked, horrible, fathomless, inscrutable, and unspeakable corruption of the entire nature and all its powers, especially of the highest, principle powers of the soul in the understanding, heart and will so that now, since the Fall, man inherits an inborn wicked disposition and inward impurity of heart, evil lust and propensity; that we all, by disposition and nature inherit from Adam such a heart, feeling, and thought as are, according to their highest powers and light of reason, naturally inclined and disposed directly contrary to God and his chief commandments, yea, that they are enmity against God, especially as regards divine and spiritual things.”
(Formula of Concord, SD I, 3)

Scripture does not define the specific manner in which this hereditary corruption perpetuates itself and is passed from generation to generation (Latin - *“propagatio peccati”*). Martin Chemnitz cautions: *“How the soul contracts that sin we need not know, since the Holy Spirit has not been pleased to disclose this in certain and clear Scriptural testimonies.”* However, while refraining from specific definitions, the fathers of the Lutheran Church reject the speculation of those who believe that God creates a new soul at the conception of every human being as contrary to Scripture. John Andrew Quenstedt, one of the great theologians of the age of orthodoxy, carefully summarizes the Lutheran view in this way:

“The soul of the first man was immediately created by God; but the soul of Eve was produced by propagation, and the souls of the rest of men are created, not daily, nor begotten of their parents as the body or souls of brutes, but by virtue of the divine blessing (Genesis 1:28), are propagated, “per traducem,” (Latin from traductio - through trans-mission or transfer) by their parents ... As human reason, not enlightened by Holy Scripture, knows little that is certain concerning the departure of the human soul from the body, and its condition after its departure, so also it can define nothing certain concerning the origin of the human soul in or with the body. We distinguish between traduction, or the propagation itself of the soul, and the mode of traduction or propagation. That the soul is propagated by parents

procreating children, and that souls are not immediately created or infused by God, is sufficiently manifest from the Holy Scriptures; but the mode has not been defined, and therefore, we refrain from its determination and definition.” (Schmid, p.166,167)

The fatal result of Adam's transgression spreads to every single human being - ***“death came to all.”*** The particular violations of the law of God which men commit, the individual sins (***“all sinned”***) are the result of the sinful nature which we inherit from the first sinner and his original sin. The NIV's translation of the conjunction *“eph ho”* as ***“because”*** is inconsistent with Paul's line of thought. The conjunction here is not causative, it is consecutive. It should be translated as *“with the result that.”* We sin because we are sinners. Before Adam's sin man was immortal and righteous. After Adam's sin man was mortal and sinful. ***“Death came to all”*** with the sinfulness that Adam brought upon us. All the individual sins which we commit are the result of that deadly sinfulness.



“Temptation” by J. James Tissot

“For before the law was given, sin was in the world” - ***“The law”*** in this phrase is the written law of Moses. Even without the written law, ***“sin was in the world.”*** The deadly power of sin was immediately in evidence when Cain, Adam's firstborn son murdered his brother Abel. Thus even in the absence of the written law ***“death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses.”*** Once again Paul notes that the basic function of the law is to make us aware of sin (cf. 3:20, 4:15). The final phrase in Verse 13, ***“But sin is not taken into account where there is no law,”*** is a virtual repetition of Romans 4:15. When man sins without the law, his wrongdoing is still sin, but he is not guilty of *“transgression,”* that is, a deliberate act of disobedience in defiance of a specific prohibition.

“When one transgresses a command of law, that law charges this up as a transgression. In other words, law shows the gravity of sin, shows it as transgression, charges it up as such. This is one of its functions. But death reigns through sin just the same whether some code of law or some specific command does this charging up or not.” (Lenski, p.365)

Adam was guilty of breaking a specific command which he had received directly from God. Once the law had been given at Sinai, mankind was again confronted with specific directives from God which served to reveal and define man's godlessness, unrighteousness and rebellion. The law stood as man's accuser (*“lex semper accusat”*). But sin and death still prevailed ***“even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam.”*** Sin and its consequent death are not dependent upon the law.

“Adam who was the pattern of the one to come.” - The apostle now resumes the main thrust of his argument and turns from the first Adam, the death-bringer, to the second Adam, the life-giver. The Greek noun is *“typos”* which means a *“type”* or *“pattern.”* The word *“type”* denotes those Old Testament persons, institutions, or events that have a divinely intended function of prefiguring realities to be revealed in Christ and His New Testament. Adam, the first man, and Christ, the Second Adam, correspond to one another as men whose actions have had universal impact upon humanity. The effect which the Second Adam had upon mankind is exactly the opposite of the effect which the first Adam had. In fact the Second Adam came for the specific purpose of undoing that which had been done by the first Adam. In the verses which follow, the apostle will explain both the parallel and the difference. Lenski insists that this insightful comparison is foundational for all of Christian theology:

“Adam's fatal act typifies Christ's act of deliverance in a certain vital way. The latter had to undo the former, and it is thus that Adam typifies Christ. Paul now presents the entire correspondence. It is so vital because it goes to the bottom of both sin and deliverance from sin. All else that is said in the Scriptures regarding either or both rests on what is here revealed as the absolute bottom. All of our teaching ought to go back to this essential paragraph in Paul's epistle.” (Lenski, p. 366)

Paul draws the same crucial comparison in 1 Corinthians 15 as he discusses the victory of life over death in the resurrection of the body and the glorified bodies of the saints in heaven:



"The Raising of Lazarus" by Rudolf Schäfer

"So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam, a life giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.'" (vss.45-49)

Verses 15-17

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the grace that came by the gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many? Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much

more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.



"Death - the Victor" 1496 Woodcut by Nicholas le Rouge

*"But the gift is not like the trespass." - The paragraph begins with the adversative conjunction "**But**," because Paul is now defining and qualifying the contrast within the parallel between Adam and Christ. They are alike in that the actions of both are determinative for mankind but they are also different in the nature of their actions and their consequences. These three verses present the two basic contrasts between the work of Adam and that of Christ. That contrast is heightened by the language of the text. That which Christ has done is called "**the gift**" (Greek - "*charisma*"). The term is based on the Greek word "*charis*" which means "grace." A "*charisma*" is a gift of God's grace, an embodiment of the undeserved love of God, "*the concrete expression of God's generous and powerful concern for His creation...a medium through which God's graciousness is experienced in**

Christ." (Dunn, p. 30) Adam's act, on the other hand, is labeled as "**the trespass**" (Greek - "*parabasis*"). In this context it carries the connotation of "*transgression*," the crossing of a clearly defined line, a deliberate breach of the law.

"For if the many died by the trespass of the one man..." - Each contrast is presented

with the formula ***“For if...how much more.”*** The first part of the contrast describes the consequence of Adam's action. In the preceding phrase Paul used the Greek noun *“parabasis”* which means *“transgression”* or *“trespass.”* In this phrase, however, and slightly different word, *“paraptoma,”* is used. The word means *“false step,” “slip,”* or *“blunder.”* It is a strong term which brings out the full gravity of Adam's deed. Lenski translates the word as *“fall”* and comments: *“It excludes all excuse, it brings out the full gravity of the act that constitutes the “Fall.” So grave was the inexcusable fall of Adam that it killed all men so that the hope of deliverance seemed to be gone forever.”* (Lenski, p.368) Those impacted by ***“the trespass of the one man”*** are called ***“the many”*** (Greek - *“hoi polloi”*). Paul's use of this phrase is rooted in the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 53, where its Hebrew equivalent is used inclusively as a reference to everyone or to all. That is certainly the intended sense here. The consequence of Adam's action was that all men died.

“How much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many?” - The superlative quality of God's undeserved love is suggested by the double reference to ***“grace”*** in this sentence. That undeserved love comes to us freely through the act of ***“the one man, Jesus Christ.”*** Once again, as in the preceding phrase, the recipients of the one man's action are ***“the many,”*** namely, namely mankind. Lest there be any misunderstanding that Paul merely equates Adam's action with Christ's, the apostle uses a verb that conveys the sense of overabundant surplus (Greek - *“perisseuein”* - ***“overflow”***). *“The fullness of Paul's language matches the content: on the side of Christ there is an “abounding,” an overflowing, an overwhelming and triumphant “much more.”* (Franzmann, p.100). Stöckhardt's summary is helpful:

“There is, however, a difference in the parallel. The offense effected the many, but “much more” the free gift. If one accurately compares the offense with the free gift, there is on the side of the free gift a plus sign, a plus of evidence and certainty. What Paul contrasts to the offense is the grace of God, the gracious disposition which God shows, and the gift which consists in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, in the grace which Jesus Christ has shown. In the grace of that one Man, Jesus Christ, God's grace manifests itself. And the grace of God is an altogether different power, is much greater, stronger, and effectively more powerful than the transgression of the one man. For that reason it is said of the grace of God and Jesus Christ, not only that it came unto the many, but that it “abounded” unto many, was richly poured out upon them. Therefore, since the boundless grace of God in Christ lies in the balance, all who suffer under the evil effect of Adam's sin can and should be all the more certain that they also share in the free gift of Christ.” (Stöckhardt, p.70)



*“Death Rides Forth as a Conqueror from the Jaws of Hell”
1496 Woodcut by Nicholas le Rouge*

“Again, the gift of God is not like the one man's sin...” - The second contrast is now introduced. This time the contrast is between the gift that comes through Christ and the condemnation which was the result of Adam's sin.

“The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” - As in the preceding segment the apostle proceeds to elaborate the contrast. Paul uses the forensic language of the law court on both sides of the contrast. The *“one sin”* of Adam results in *“judgment”* (Greek - *“krima”*), the act of a judge in rendering a verdict. That verdict is *“Guilty!”* and brings *“condemnation”* (Greek - *“katakrima”*) upon all of humanity. In Greek the second term is an intensification of the first (*“krima”* and *“katakrima”*). It denotes

not only the pronouncement of the guilty verdict but the consequent execution of the sentence. Thus, in this one word Paul reminds his readers not only of Adam's sin itself but also of the death which came upon mankind as a result of that sin. On the other hand, the gracious **“gift”** of God becomes all the more magnificent with the recognition that it does not merely follow one sin but all the sins of mankind, the **“many trespasses”** down through the centuries. *“That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment, this is perfectly understandable; that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is the miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension.”* (Cranfield, cited by Moo, p. 338) The result of that which Christ, the Second Adam, has done is **“justification”** (Greek - *“dikaionoma”*). The language is again forensic, courtroom talk. **“Condemnation”** means the pronouncement of a guilty verdict by the judge. **“Justification”** is its positive counterpart, the pronouncement of *“Not Guilty!”*, the judge's declaration of an acquittal.

“For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man...” - The **“For if...How much more”** structure of Verse 15 is here repeated, using many of the same terms from the earlier verse. This verse is the summary and climax of the contrast which has already been presented. **“Death reigned”** over all of humanity because of **“the trespass of the one man.”** Adam's original sin was the instrument through which death has exercised its fatal dominion throughout all of human history. **“death reigned through the one man.”** The use of the aorist tense in the verb **“reigned”** is designed *“to present the whole sweep of Adam's epoch as summed up in the one instant of the death to which all must bow the knee.”* (Dunn, p. 281)

“How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace...” - Now comes the exposition of the other verdict. The apostle's language builds in superfluous repetition in a deliberate effort to reflect the superabundant quality of the grace given and received. God is the active agent here; He alone is the Giver. **“Those who receive God's abundant provision of grace”** are believers, the passive recipients of that which God has done for them in Christ. Dr. Stoeckhardt rightly emphasizes both the crucial role of faith and its passive nature:

“Along with Luther and the majority of other commentators, we translate “hoi lambanontes” as “those who receive,” not as “those who accept.” Thus, life is not dependant upon the act of acceptance but upon the gift of righteousness. The individual, therefore, becomes the recipient of this gift for his own person, and receives it as his own. That takes place through faith. Thus the expression



"Life by the One Man - Jesus Christ" by Rudolf Schäfer

“lambanein” is used whenever a person comprehends as a recipient anything that has to do with the concept of faith. However faith does not come about as something done by the individual who takes the gift for himself. Instead, through faith he comes into personal possession of the gift, which he applies to himself. It is only believers who will “de facto” rule in life in the days to come. To be sure, “dikaioma” (justification) is for the many, that is for all men. And as a result of this, heaven is open to all men. Salvation has been prepared for all men. Nonetheless, only he who appropriates the gift of righteousness by faith, and thereby receives it as his own, will actually obtain life. Those who spurn and despise this “diakaioma” (justification) go out empty and deprive themselves of the benefits and fruits of this eternal salvation. However, it is not merely the gift of righteousness which appears here as the object of “lambanein,” but “ten periseian tes charistos kai tes doreas tes dikaiosunes.” The emphasis lies upon the expanded definition of this object. The grace of God, His gracious disposition was manifested and at work. And it is an abundance of this grace and righteousness which we receive, or which we who are in the faith can now say we have received. Boundless grace and righteousness is our lot.” (Stöckhardt, Römerbrief, p. 255)

The verdict of condemnation was perfect justice. The trespass of the one man, Adam, resulted in the reign of death over all of his posterity. That which sin deserved, it received, *“quid pro quo.”* That which had been earned was decreed, nothing more or less. There is, however, no comparable equivalence in the verdict of justification. Here, instead, is what Lenski describes as *“unrestrained abundance.”* Rather than the minimum legal requirement, the divine response to man's dilemma is ***“God's abundant provision of grace”*** and ***“the gift of righteousness.”***

Just as death reigned through the trespass of one man, so those who receive God's undeserved love and the gift of justification by faith will ***“reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”*** The saved are not merely delivered from death, they are carried over to the triumphant reign of life eternal with God in Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13; 4:8; Revelation 20:4; 22:5). The opposite to the cold and crushing rule of death is boundless enjoyment of life everlasting, the regal life of a king. This is the goal of justification and the purpose for all that which Christ has done. He is ***“the one man”*** who as Adam's counterpart, will undo the fatal damage that was done in the first man's fall. The ***“reign of life”*** comes only ***“through”*** (Greek - *“dia”*) him, the one Mediator between God and man.

Verses 18-19

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made



"Life for All in Christ" by Rudolf Schäfer

sinner, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

"Consequently...." - The summation, the final deduction of Paul's argument, now arrives introduced by the conjunction *"consequently"* (Greek - *"ara oun"*). *"Examination will show that every element of Verse 18 is already present either implicitly or explicitly in the preceding verses."* (Murray, p. 199) The familiar formula is repeated again *"just as...so also"* to present the correspondence between Adam and Christ as type and antitype.

"The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men," - Dunn describes this phrase as *"a masterly compression of the different*

aspects picked out in the preceding verses" (Dunn, p.283). The Greek text is elliptical, that is, abbreviated, lacking words which must be supplied by the reader. The text literally reads - *"through the mediation of one man's fall - for all men a verdict of condemnation."* Once more, the direct link between the sin of Adam and the inherent sinfulness of all those who come from Adam is clearly asserted. When Adam sinned, all mankind became sinful and fell under the verdict of condemnation.

“So also the result of the one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.” - In contrast to the ***“one trespass”*** of Adam which brought condemnation, Christ's ***“one act of righteousness”*** (Greek - *“dikaionoma”*) results in ***“justification that brings life for all men.”*** The ***“one act of righteousness”*** is the factual basis on the basis of which the divine verdict of righteousness (justification) is rendered. In this instance, the ***“one act of righteousness”*** does not refer to a specific isolated action but to the entirety of our Lord's substitutionary life and death. Stoeckhardt notes:

“Christ was obedient unto death and the cross, and He demonstrated His obedience by dying on the cross. But the content of the “dikaionoma” of Christ goes still further, including all of the obedience which Christ rendered to God in life, suffering and death, the “obedientia activa et passiva.” Christ fulfilled all the righteousness of the law; He fully satisfied the righteousness of God, not only its punishments but also its demands. Christ's entire walk upon this earth, culminating in His death, was a single unified act of righteousness (“recte factum”).” (Stöckhardt, *Römerbrief*, p.260)

The ***“trespass”*** of Adam condemned mankind to death. The ***“act of righteousness”*** carried out by Christ restores man to life again. It is, as Paul correctly describes it, ***“justification that brings life for all men.”*** Life is the whole point and purpose of justification. Man was created for life in the beginning. Instead, the disobedience of the first man brought on the reign of death. The purpose of justification is to restore mankind to the eternal life with God for which we were intended. The parallel between the universal significance of these two diametrically different actions could not be more clearly drawn. James Dunn emphasizes the profound theological importance of the ***“Adam Christology”*** presented in this paragraph:

“At this point the features of Adam Christology are most sharply drawn, with Christ's work described precisely as the antithesis to Adam's - the deed which accords with God's will set against the trespass which marked humankind's wrong turning, the act defined as obedience precisely because it is the reversal of Adam's disobedience. The inaugurating act of the new epoch is thus presented as a counter to and cancellation of the inaugurating act of the old. Christ's right turn undoing Adam's wrong turn. Paul may well intend to suggest the idea of Christ's role as a retracing that of Adam, a recapitulation or rerunning of the divine program for man in which the first Adam's destructive error was both refused and made good by the last Adam, thus opening the way for the fulfillment of God's purpose for man (Hebrews 2:6-15).” (Dunn, p. 297)

“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many...” - This is the climax of the extended comparison between Adam and Christ. Verse 19 restates and elaborates the basic point of this segment using the same structure as Verse 18 (***“just as...so also”***), but with slightly different wording. Paul reverts to the Hebraism of Verse 15 to designate those who are affected by the actions of Adam and Christ. ***“All men”*** (vs. 18) again become ***“the many”*** (vs.15). As previously noted, the Hebrew phrase is an inclusive reference to everyone (cf. Notes, p.192) which in this case is consistent with the purpose of Verse 19 as a reiteration of Verse 18. At the same time, the clear parallelism of the text in Verse 19 requires that both references to ***“the many”*** within the Verse be understood in the same way. The ***“many”*** who were made sinners through the ***“disobedience”*** of the first Adam and the ***“many”*** who are justified through the ***“obedience”*** of the second Adam are identical. In both instances the reference is to all mankind.

Paul's choice of words is crucial. Adam's action had been previously described as ***“breaking a command”*** (vs. 14), the ***“sin”*** (vs.16), and the ***“trespass”*** (vs.15,17,18). Each of these terms carries its own unique connotation. Now Adam's deed is labeled as ***“the disobedience of the one man.”*** (Greek - *“parakones tou enos anthropou”*). The word emphasizes the voluntary nature of Adam's act and naturally recalls the Genesis account of God's instruction to Adam (2:16-17) and the man's deliberate disregard for God's word (3:1-6). Adam chose to disobey. He was not coerced or deceived (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14). The result of ***“the disobedience of the one man”*** is that ***“the many were made sinners.”*** The verb ***“were made”*** (Greek - *“katesthatesan”*) means ***“were constituted,”*** or ***“were caused to be.”*** It refers to the judicial act by which one is placed in a state or condition. Fitzmyer correctly comments: ***“Adam's disobedience placed the mass of humanity in a condition of sin and estrangement from God; the text does not imply that they became sinners merely by imitating Adam's transgression; rather, they were constituted sinners by him and his act of disobedience.”*** (Fitzmyer, p.421)

“So also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous....” - The ***“disobedience”*** of Adam and its grim consequences for his posterity are overwhelmed and undone by the action of Christ, the second Adam. His willing ***“obedience”*** is the exact opposite of its counterpart in the text. As in the preceding phrase, the terminology emphasizes the issue of volition. Adam chose to disobey. Christ chose to obey. The importance of Christ's voluntary submission to the Father's will is presented in Philippians 2:5-11 where the essence of our Lord's

action on behalf of fallen humanity is captured in these powerful words: ***“He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.”*** (vs. 8).

The influence of Christ is overwhelming and knows no bounds. Jesus' obedience to the will of His Father has had an effect on the destiny of all human beings. The result of ***“the obedience of the one man”*** is that ***“the many will be made righteous”***. The use of the future tense here (***“will be made righteous”***) is an expression of the logical



“The Temptation of Jesus” by Rudolf Schäfer

theological implications:

“Genuine Lutheran theology counts the doctrine of general justification among the

sequence of events which Paul describes. The justification of ***“the many”*** is the logical result of, that which follows from and thus happens after ***“the obedience of the one man.”*** Hence the use of the future verb tense in this phrase. All of humanity, ***“the many,”*** are justified by that which Christ has done for humankind. Jesus is truly ***“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29). In the historic language of Lutheran theology the conviction that Christ won forgiveness, reconciliation and justification for every human being upon the cross is called ***“objective, general, or universal justification.”*** Writing in *“Lehre und Wehre”* in 1888, Dr. George Stoeckhardt clearly defined this crucial concept and its

statements and treasures of its faith. Lutherans teach and confess that through Christ's death the entire world of sinners was justified and that through Christ's resurrection, the justification of the sinful world was festively proclaimed. This doctrine of general justification is the guarantee and warranty that the central article of justification by faith is being kept pure. Whoever holds firmly that God was reconciled to the world in Christ, and that to sinners in general their sin was forgiven, to him the justification which comes from faith remains a pure act of the grace of God. Whoever denies general justification is justly under suspicion that he is mixing his own work and merit into the grace of God...We must be well on our guard that we do not lose what we possess. The article of justification remains pure, firm, and unshaken if we keep in mind the statement of doctrine and faith concerning general justification, if we hold firmly that the entire world of sinners has already been justified, through Christ, through that which Christ did and suffered.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” pp. 44-45)

Dr. Stöckhardt contended that without a recognition of objective justification a subtle but decisive shift will occur in our understanding of the significance of faith. Our faith inevitably becomes the basis for our justification. We receive forgiveness because we believe. According to this view, we believe in that which Christ has done and our sins are forgiven as a result of our faith. The central focus shifts from Christ and what He has done to me and what I do by believing. Thus the certainty of salvation is destroyed. Stöckhardt concludes:

“Thus faith is no longer only a means, only a hand which receives the gift of God. Instead an action of man, this very accepting and grasping of the merit of Christ, becomes that which effects something, which brings into being something that was not there before, namely the forgiveness of sins. Faith is then, basically, a successful performance. In accordance with the Biblical concept of merit, it is a meritorious work. And precisely thereby the comfort of this justification is built upon sand. When a sinful man wants to become certain of this - that God counts him as righteous, that He forgives him his sins, then it does not help him if he looks to Christ and to the gospel. For in Christ, that is in the Gospel of Christ, he finds only the possibility of the forgiveness of sins or justification. Man must then look into his own heart to see whether he finds that behavior which transforms possibility into reality. And if he is in anguish, tortured by his sins and experiencing the wrath of God, faith will flee from his feeling and awareness. At that moment he will not find the crucial faith which he is seeking within his own inner consciousness. Then woe, for the lifeline slips away and is torn from his hands. Then he despairs and goes down to destruction in spite of all the possibilities of salvation.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” p. 44)

The reality that the forgiveness of sins, the justification of the world is an accomplished fact is objective in the sense that it is not dependant upon anything within man. God has done it all in the person of His Son. Stöckhardt cites Romans

5:18-19 as the central proof text for this fundamental teaching of Holy Scripture.

“This is a clear, certain doctrine of Holy Scripture. The locus classicus for this doctrine is the second half of the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. What St. Paul has taught from Romans 1:16 on concerning justification, he sums up in chapter 5, verses 12-21, as in a recapitulation. And the sum of this section is again given in the two verses, 18 and 19...Two men, Adam and Christ, are here held in juxtaposition. Of the one man Adam, it is said - we translate literally: “Through the transgression of one man damnation has come about for all men.” Adam has sinned, has transgressed the divine commandment, has been disobedient. And thereby, by this act, the many who descend from Adam have all been set forth as sinners, transgressors before God. The transgression, the disobedience of the one has already been accounted to the many, to all people. All men are now accounted before God as transgressors, as disobedient. They have all sinned, in and with Adam (Verse 12). And in consequence of the disobedience of the one, which is now the disobedience of all, the many - that is all men - are subject to damnation and death. Christ is the counterpart of Adam...As certainly as the first thing is the case, that the many through the deed of the one man (Adam) have been set forth as sinners - it is equally certain that the other thing takes place, that through the deed of the one man (Christ) the many are set forth as righteous...The apostle is explaining what in the case of the one, in the act of the one, has happened to the many. Thus Christ, the one man, has fulfilled all righteousness, has rendered obedience. His entire life, suffering, and death was the fulfillment of righteousness, was one great act of obedience. And precisely through this act the many, those who through Adam's sin had become condemned sinners, have all been presented as righteous before God. The righteousness, the obedience of the one has been accounted to the many, to all people. All men are now accounted before God as righteous, obedient. They all have a share in justification...The Scripture text before us is a clear passage, as clear as sunlight. Paul testifies clearly and plainly here that all men who were condemned through Adam's sin have been justified through Christ and that precisely because Christ fulfilled all righteousness and rendered obedience all men are actually justified, not only potentially.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” pp. 44-47)

The great Lutheran theologian argues that objective justification in no way militates against or denies the central article of the Christian religion, namely justification by faith. But faith, he insists, must be understood Biblically so that *“it retains its special concept and character according to which all merit and work of man is excluded.”* Dr. Stöckhardt summarizes the role of faith in this way:



Dr. Karl Georg Stöckhardt

“Faith receives, accepts. Faith appears throughout as a means, by which we accept and make our own everything which belongs to justification - the fullness of grace, the obedience of Christ, and the justification itself. Faith does not come into consideration from any angle as a work of man, by which something is brought into existence which was not there before. It is not our faith and accepting which determines the judgement of God, which turns the judgement unto damnation into the opposite, which first creates the relation in which God now stands to sinners. No, it is God's abundant grace alone and the obedience of Christ, of this one man, which directs and moves God to declares us free of sin and damnation - indeed, has long ago directed God to justify sinners and the entire sinful world. This judgement of God has been established long ago.

This new relation of God to sinners has been brought about through the obedience of Christ. God's grace, Christ's obedience, the gift of righteousness is prepared before our faith and acceptance, and is offered and presented for acceptance and is offered and presented for acceptance, as St. Paul teaches, in the Word, in the Gospel, to all men who perceive the Gospel. And through faith, when we believe the Gospel, we now appropriate the reconciliation, the justification, the righteousness, which have been promised to all sinners, for our person. Through our faith then, we, for our person, step within this justifying judgement of God, which God has already declared over all sinners in general, into this new relation of grace, founded through Christ, and are thus accounted righteous before God and can declare with joy: Now we have become righteous through faith. Thus through faith the general justification becomes a special justification. We draw and guide the justifying judgement of God upon our head, upon our person. Those who do not believe, reject Christ and the Gospel, though they also have been justified through Christ's obedience. They place themselves outside of that relation of God to sinners which has been established and have validity only in Christ and which is declared to sinful men only in the Gospel. He who believes does not make reality of something that God has only made possible, but recognizes and confirms what, on the side on of God, was long truth and reality. He who does not believe renders impotent and invalid what was already reality.” (Stöckhardt, “Objective Justification,” p. 48)

As is so often the case in Christian theology, this is a matter in which we must rely upon the clear teaching of the Word of God rather than rather than our own reason. Every human being is already justified before God in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. And yet, those who do not believe and thus spurn this forgiveness are condemned. Their sins have been forgiven but they have refused to receive this forgiveness and are thus lost and damned. Despite the fact that their sins have been forgiven it is proper and necessary to regard them as lost and condemned creatures. Accordingly we rejoice when a man is converted and comes to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once I was lost, not in God's grace, but now I am found. Once I was not forgiven, under the wrath and judgement of God, but now I have been forgiven by God's undeserved love in Christ. The apparent logical contradiction between these truths must remain unresolved for both are clearly taught in Scripture. It is an essential part of the dialectic between Law and Gospel.

“Just as it is necessary and Scriptural, according to the Gospel, to speak of God as having declared the whole world to be justified for Christ's sake and by raising Him from the dead, it is also necessary and Scriptural, according to the terms of God's Law, to speak of impenitent sinners as not justified and forgiven, but condemned.”
(CTCR, *Theses on Justification*, p.17)

We would do well to heed Dr. Stöckhardt's wise counsel: *“This matter we cannot solve according to reason. We refrain therefore from systematizing justification. What Scripture says concerning justification, that we accept, that we hold fast and allow not one word of it to be apocapated or distorted.”* (Stoeckhardt, *“Objective Justification,”* p. 48)

Verses 20-21

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just a sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

“The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” - This segment concludes with an additional observation about the role of the Mosaic Law. In legalistic Judaism the Law played an all important, even salvific role. The meticulous observance of the Law had come to be the essence of Judaism and the basis for the chosen people's relationship with God. The essentially negative function of law is a



"Sola Gratia" by Rudolf Schüfer

consistent emphasis in Paul's theology (cf. 3:20; 4:15; 5:14; 7:7-13; Galatians 3:19). Law is not the crucial issue. The Law is not the unique element of Christianity. It is the common property of many man-made religions. Heinrich Bornkamm paraphrases Paul's thought in this way: *"The law has therefore no epoch making significance, but only has the function of actualizing and radicalizing the crisis of Adamic human existence."* (Moo, p. 348) This perspective is emphasized by the verb used in this phrase - *"the law was added"* (Greek - *"pareiserxomai"*). The term carries a definite negative connotation. Its only other use in the New Testament comes in Galatians 2:4 where it describes Judaizers who have

"sneaked in" to deprive Gentile Christians of their freedom. The NIV's translation (*"was added"*) fails to reflect this negative emphasis. In Verse 12 we were told that *"sin"* and *"death"* have *"entered the world."* Now law is placed in the same category, lumped together with them. Like them, the Law *"came in from 'off stage' to reinforce the power of sin and death over Adam's race."* (Dunn, p.299)

Those who focus upon the Law or who emphasize the Law as an equal partner to the Gospel create a theology that is fundamentally distorted. The pronouncement of the Law is God's *"opus alienum,"* His alien work. It does not express the essence of His divine nature. That is revealed only in the Gospel, God's *"opus proprium,"* His

proper work. God in Christ is the Savior of sinners, not a Lawgiver or Teacher of morals. Herman Sasse cogently argues that this insistence upon the primacy of the Gospel and of the subordination of the Law to the Gospel is

“the basic theological idea which dominates the whole teaching of the Lutheran Church and which distinguishes it from the Reformed. It is the basic idea of the Lutheran Reformation that the whole Bible is to be understood from the standpoint of the Gospel, and that the Gospel is the message of the sinners justification by faith alone.” (Sasse, p.142)

“So that the trespass might increase.” - The noun **“trespass”** (Greek - *“paraptoma”*) alludes to Adam's fall in Eden (cf. Verse 15). The effect of that original sin has not been decreased by the law but rather intensified. It is now given a new dimension as rebellion against the revealed, detailed will of God. Because **“law was added,”** sin escalates into transgression (cf. 4:15; 5:14). *“We may say that the law has the function of turning those it addresses into “their own Adam:” as a sinner who transgresses known law.”* (Moo, p.348) Were it not for sin, law would never have been necessary. The law only serves to increase what is already there, namely sin and death.

“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” - The power of sin and death are great indeed. The damning accusations of the Law radicalize the power of sin and condemn all of humanity. But the love of God is infinitely more powerful. The rescuing power not only equals the damning power but towers above it and overwhelms it. The Greek text uses the superlative form to emphasize the total triumph of God's undeserved love. Sin increased but grace super-increased. Julia H. Johnston's classic hymn, based upon this verse, captures the sense of the text.

*“Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sins and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

(Refrain)

Grace, grace, God's grace; Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;

Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin.

*Sin and despair like the sea waves cold, Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold, Points to the refuge, the Mighty Cross.*

(Refrain)

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide, What can avail to wash it away?

*Look! There is flowing a crimson tide; Whiter than snow you may be today.
(Refrain)*

*Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace believe?
(Refrain) (Smith, #416)*

“So that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign...” - The argument now surges to its triumphant crescendo. The **“just as - so also”** structure which has prevailed throughout this segment appears for the last time, restating and concluding basic themes. In Verse 17 we had been told **“By the trespass of the one man death reigned through that one man.”** Paul returns to that theme here and reminds us that the dominion of death over humanity is the result of sin. The posterity of Adam dwells within the realm of death because of the first man's fall into sin. All of mankind now lives and dies in bondage to sin. But through the second Adam, **“Jesus Christ, our Lord,”** the reign of sin and death has been broken. In Christ, a new era has come where **“grace”** not **“sin”** prevails and reigns. In Christ we have received God's declaration of righteousness (cf. 1:17; 3:21,22) the result of which is **“eternal life.”** James Dunn writes:

“The first act of the human drama ends in darkest tragedy - sin reigning with death the final word. The Gospel of Christ for Paul is that that power has been broken; God's grace has more than matched the intensification of sin through the law and so given sure promise of life beyond the cold grasp of death...As sin and death encompass the whole of the old epoch, so grace encompasses the whole of the new...And always through Christ Jesus as Lord; if the agency of Adam's trespass gave free reign to sin and death, it is precisely the force which continues to come through the one man who defeated sin and death, which sustains the believers against their continuing claims upon him and which will prove finally triumphant. The one man who lost his way condemned those like him to fall short of the destiny intended for man; the one man who refused the wrong turning and completed man's intended destiny thereby made it possible for those who come after him to fulfill that destiny too through the grace which was and is preeminently His.” (Dunn, p.300)

As we come to this incredible chapter we cannot but marvel with R.C.H. Lenski, **“Who but an inspired writer could put such a volume of saving truth into twenty-one short verses?”** (Lenski, p.386)



"The Baptism of Jesus" by Rudolf Schäfer

Romans Chapter 6

Verses 1-2

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?

"What shall we say then?" - This formula is a regular feature of Paul's style in the letter (cf. 3:5; 4:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30) . The question serves as a transition and enables Paul both to deal with anticipated objections and follow thru on logical inferences from the preceding material. It is, in a sense, an acknowledgment that what has been said may be controversial and that further clarification is necessary to avoid misunderstanding.

“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” - In 5:20 Paul had asserted - **“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”** The apostle's intent in that verse had been to affirm that even in the era of the law with its radicalization of sin, God did not abandon His people, but poured out His undeserved love upon them all the more in the promise of the Messiah. But a superficial reading of 5:20 does seem to suggest that the increase in grace was the result of the increase in sin. If that is true, isn't it logical to suggest that we ought to sin all the more so that we can increase the manifestation of God's grace. There is a certain twisted logic at work here, as Martin Franzmann notes,

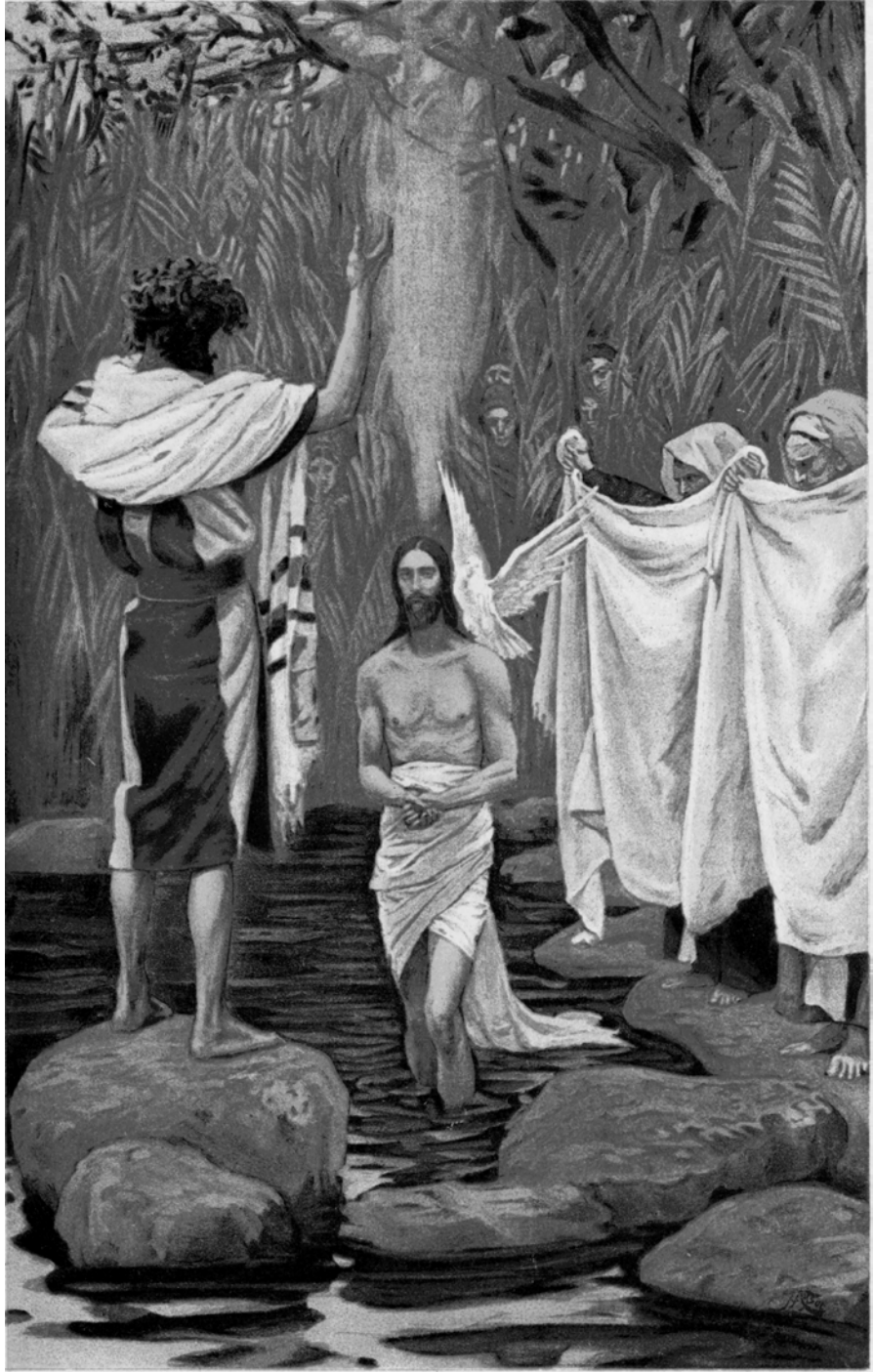
“But it is a cool, Satanic logic; there is in it the Satanic suggestion that we should exploit God, make His grace serve our selfish will, use His gifts to support us in our rebellion against God. It is the logic which the Tempter used on Jesus: “If you are the Son of God and enjoy a Father's favor, then get some good out of it; eat, insure your risks with His providence, compromise and reign - anything but obey!” (cf. Matthew 4:1-11)” (Franzmann, p.108)

Historically, critics of Christianity's grace religion have always objected to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. If you remove the coercive power of the law, they say, you will destroy the basis for all morality and decency. This view, as the apostle will now demonstrate, represents a fundamental misunderstanding of sanctification.

“By no means!” - Paul's denial of the view that the Christian should sin more in order to obtain more grace is most emphatic. The Greek (*me genoito*) carries the connotation of indignation and repugnance. It is often used in the context of religious horror in the face of blasphemy. Lenski comments:

“Perish the thought!” Paul exclaims. There are thoughts and reasonings which in spite of their show of logic are so abominable that the Christian mind instinctively turns from them and refuses even to think them. There are also such thoughts and reasonings outside of Christianity, in all departments of knowledge and of life, that are instinctively rejected by mankind and entertained and acted on only by men who are morbid, slightly unbalanced, badly defective in natural morality, pitifully obsessed by the vicious follies they cannot cast off. Paul's exclamation, “Perish the thought!” is the reaction of a mind that is mentally, spiritually sound, and the apostle utters this exclamation in place of all his readers.” (Lenski, p.388,389)

“We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” - The thought of continuing to live in sin is unthinkable for the Christian because in Christ “We died to sin.” The concept of death in this instance serves to indicate a decisive and final break in one's state of being. In Christ we are outside of the realm of sin and beyond the reach of sin's power. When a man dies he ceases to respond to external stimuli. He is no longer subject to physical sensation. He feels neither pain nor pleasure. He cannot be coaxed, threatened or commanded. A corpse is incapable of response or reaction. The sphere in which he once moved is his sphere no longer. The same is true for the Christian in the spiritual realm. Once, we by nature were all subject to the power and dominion of sin. But then, in Christ, we received grace and new life. And everything changed. Dying to sin is not something we have done. It is something that has been done to us.



“The Baptism of Jesus” by J. James Tissot

“What happened to us makes any further connection with sin impossible. Sin cannot be our life element any longer; it cannot be the compelling impulse of our wills and the controlling bent of our desires as it once was (cf. Colossians 3:7) for dead men have no will and no desires.” (Franzmann, p. 109)

Origin, the early church father, said it well: *“To obey the cravings of sin is to be alive to sin; but not to obey the cravings of sin or succumb to its will, this is to die to*



***“The Baptism of Jesus in the Presence of Luther and Duke Frederick the Wise”
1548 Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Younger***

sin...If then, anyone, chastened by the death of Christ, who died for sinners, repents in all these things...he is truly said to be dead to sin through the death of Christ.” (Fitzmyer, p.433)

The idea of dying to sin is an important element in the apostolic teaching of St. Paul. He uses the concept in four different, closely interrelated ways: (1) the juridical sense: justified Christians have died to sin in the sight of God the judge, when Christ

paid the penalty of the law in our place (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14); (2) the baptismal sense: in the water of Holy Baptism the Christian personally becomes a participant in the death and resurrection of Jesus and receives the sign and seal of God; (3) the moral sense: justified Christians are called to freedom from the coercion of the law and to mortify their sinful bodies; (4) the eschatological sense: for the believer death becomes the gateway to life eternal; on the last day they will be raised to live and reign with Christ forever.

This thought is closely related to the Adam/Christ contrast in the preceding segment. The first man brought sin and death. The second man brings forgiveness and light. Christians are delivered from the dominion of sin and death and restored to righteousness and life. ***“How can we live in it any longer?”*** Living in sin and dying to sin are placed in direct contrast to one another. They are exact opposites. As a corpse has no place in the world of the living, so the Christian has no place in sin's kingdom any longer. Living in sin does not simply refer to committing sins, for every Christian continues to sin throughout his earthly life. Rather, living in sin means to live as though sin still reigned, as if sin continued to dominate and rule in my life. The reference is to a lifestyle or habitual practice, not to individual actions. Sin's power is broken for the believer, this must be evident in life and practice (cf. James 2:14-26; 1 John 3:6,9)

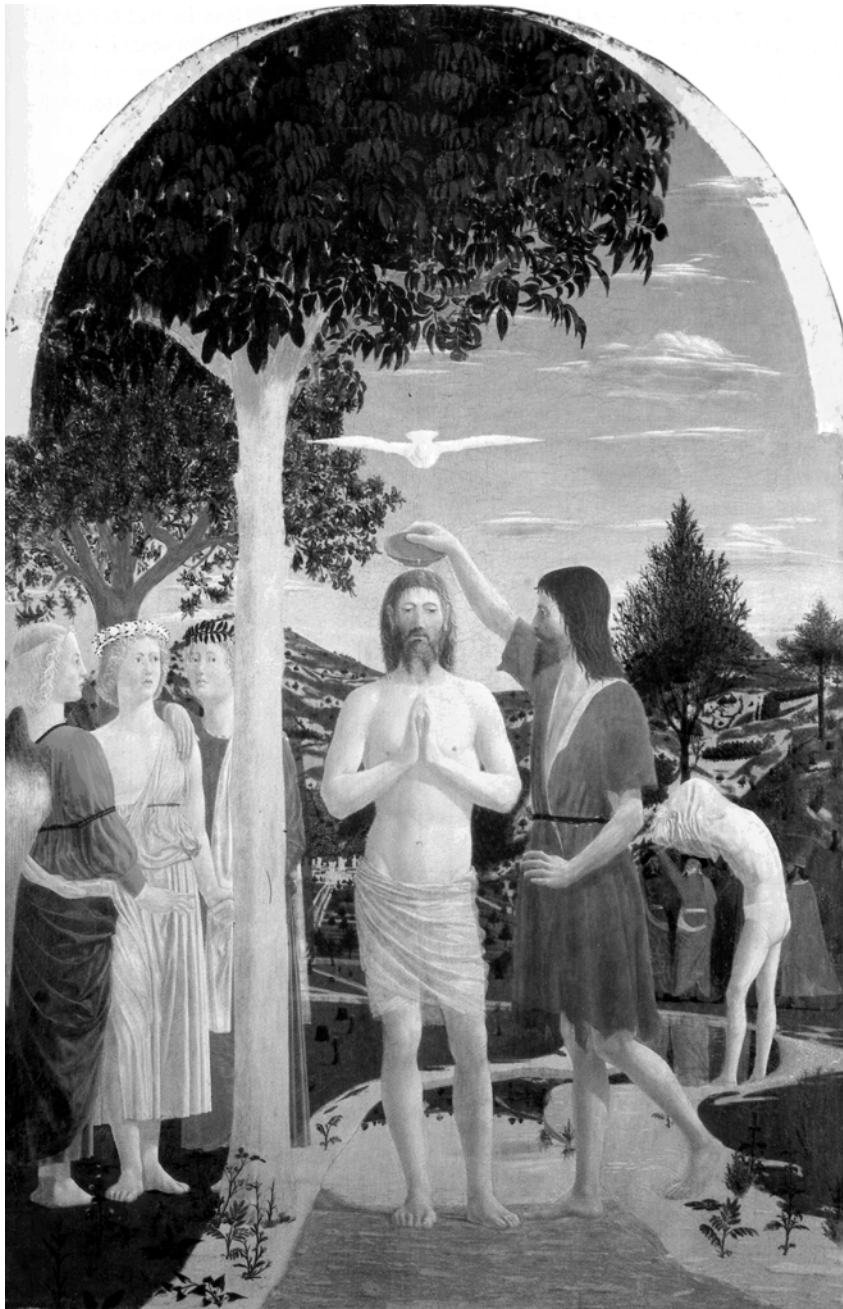
Verses 3-4

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

“Or don't you know?” - The literary device Paul utilizes here is called *“litotes”* (an affirmative expressed by a negative of the contrary). By posing the question Paul is indicating his confidence that the Christians in Rome are already well aware of this information about baptism and the Christian life. The appeal is to a well known and familiar tradition within the Christian community. These believers experienced the death to sin in the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

“All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus...” - Baptism is the crucial event which unites the child of God with Jesus Christ. The passive verb is particularly

significant - *“all of us who were baptized.”* Baptism is not essentially human action. It is divine action on our behalf. We are not the active agents. We are the passive



“The Baptism of Jesus” by Piero della Francesca

recipients of that which God does in the water and Word of the sacrament which He has instituted. Baptism, as the rite of Christian initiation, had been the universal practice of Christianity since our Lord spoke the Great Commission: *“Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:19). Already, at this early date, Paul can address the Christians at Rome with the assurance that they are fully aware of Baptism and its significance. Paul’s own baptism, in Damascus by Ananias in the aftermath of his conversion, is reported in Acts 9:18 - *“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.”*

Paul would later recall the urgent words of Ananias, who served as God’s messenger to blind Saul. Ananias announced: *“And now, what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”* (Acts 22:16) Hence, it

comes as no surprise that the apostle now includes himself among the baptized members of the household of God - ***“all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus.”***

The phrase ***“baptized into Christ Jesus”*** has elicited a great deal of discussion among the commentators. The phrase may be an abbreviation for the more familiar phrase ***“into the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** Fitzmyer suggests that the abbreviation is a deliberate theological statement, *“an image drawn from bookkeeping - to the name, account, of Christ. Baptism would be regarded as establishing Christ's proprietary rights over the baptized person, and the name of the baptized person would be booked in the ledger to the account of Christ.”* (Fitzmyer, p.433) In any case, the preposition ***“into”*** (Greek - *“eis”*) indicates the joining of the believer with Christ Jesus in baptism, the initial movement of introduction or incorporation by which one is born to life in Christ.

“Were baptized into his death” - The sacrament of Holy Baptism causes the believer to become an actual participant in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. When Christ died, we who are baptized died with Him. This is not the language of symbolism but of actual reality. The preposition ***“into”*** (Greek - *“eis”*) carries the connotation of movement into something in order to become involved with or part of it. There is a close parallel to this language in Galatians 3:27 which further explains Paul's thought: ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*** Our involvement in the death of Christ is personal and direct. Martin Franzmann links this thought to the other New Testament passages on the death of Christ and baptism when he writes:

“We know that we were baptized “into Christ.” Our baptism effectually committed us to Him, “clothed us in Him” (Galatians 3:27), incorporated us all in Him (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). One baptism gave us one Lord (Ephesians 4:5). He is the Lord of all in the power of His divine love; that love made His death a “death for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Therefore, baptism “into Him” is a baptism into His death.” (Franzmann, p. 109)

We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death...” - We who have become participants in the death of Christ have also become participants in His burial. The Greek verb in this phrase is *“synthaptein,”* a combination of the noun *“grave”* (Greek - *“taphos”*) and the preposition *“with”* (Greek - *“syn”*). Thus the word literally means *“to be placed in the tomb alongside of.”* Fitzmyer suggests the English compound *“coburied.”* It is clear, once again, that the text is not referring

to merely symbolic action. Lenski describes the language of this verse as “*mystical*.” He explains:

“What occurred in a physical way in the case of Christ is predicated of us in whom it occurred in a spiritual way, in fact, the two are made one: “entombed were we with him” and this “by means of our baptism in connection with his death”...Here we have no figures or symbols, no verbal beauties, but concentrated facts. Here more is said than that Christ died for us, that God reckoned his death as ours, as though we had died, or even that by baptism and faith all the benefits of his sacrificial death were made personally ours. The spiritual effect in ourselves is at once included. By connecting us with Christ’s death baptism so joined us to it that we ourselves died to sin. It was a dying together,, this death of Christ of and of ourselves, a being entombed together as dead. The interval of time vanishes. The difference between Christ’s death as sacrificial and vicarious and ours as escape from sin and its dominion is fully conserved.” (Lenski, p. 392,393)



“The Burial of Christ” by Albrecht Dürer

Those who rob the sacrament of its regenerative power (John 3:5; Titus 3:5) and reduce baptism to empty symbolism also tend to focus on the method of baptism (namely immersion) as critically significant. They perceive the apostle's point in this verse to be nothing more than symbolism - by being lowered into and then being raised up from the water we are symbolically reenacting the burial and resurrection

of Christ. But the language of the text itself does not permit this symbolic view. When Paul asserts that we are ***“buried with Him”*** he is describing the participation of the believer in Christ's own burial, a participation that is mediated by baptism. In the water of baptism, by the power of the divine Word, the believer is actually set alongside Christ Jesus in His tomb (*“synthaptein”*). The crucial role of baptism in this entombment is expressed by the Greek preposition *“dia”* (through) which is used to express the instrument through which something happens or occurs. Baptism is the means through which God has chosen to accomplish this reality. Once again, Lenski's observations are precisely to the point:

“The moment baptism becomes for us what it is, its mode ceases to dominate our thinking. Even in a symbol, we need no picturing, no duplication. A few drops of water symbolize as well as, yea better than, a lake or an ocean. Baptism by immersion and submersion becomes no more symbolic than sprinkling or pouring. But the function of this sacrament is not to picture or to symbolize - whatever of that character we see is minor. Its function is to act as a most effective divine, spiritual means, one that derives its power from connection with Christ and his atoning death, one that effects in us a death to sin and a new life, regeneration (John 3:5; Titus 3:5) or new birth; and thus newness of life forever.”
(Lenski, p.393,394)

The effective link between baptism, being born again, and new life in Christ is the consistent teaching of the New Testament. Martin Franzmann summarizes as follows:

“We know that we were baptized “into Christ.” Our baptism effectually committed us to Him, clothed us in Him (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). One baptism gave us all one Lord (Ephesians 4:5). He is the Lord of all in the power of His divine love; that love made His death a



“Baptism - the Fountain of Life”
by Rudolf Schäfer

death for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Therefore, baptism "into Him" is a baptism into His death. His death was a real human death. His burial makes that plain; all the evangelists are at pains to emphasize the reality of Jesus' death by recording, in considerable detail His burial. Our participation in His death is also full reality; we share His burial through our baptism into His death." (Franzmann, p. 109)



"Christ Was Raised from the Dead"
by Rudolf Schäfer

"In order that just as Christ was raised from the dead..."

- The apostle now defines the purpose of our participation in the death and burial of Christ. The phrase is introduced with the Greek preposition "*hina*" ("***in order that***"). We share in Christ's death and burial so that we might also share in His resurrection. The agent of Christ's resurrection is described as "***the glory of God the Father.***" This is characteristic Old Testament language where the great miracles are typically ascribed to the glory of God (i.e. Exodus 15:7,11; 16:7, 10). The Bible interchangeably asserts that Christ was raised from the dead and that He Himself arose. Both are true and there is no conflict between the two concepts. The Father placed His divine seal of approval

upon the sacrificial death of His Son by raising Him to life again, and in so doing God guaranteed the atoning efficacy and sufficiency of that which Christ has done for humankind.

The comparison between Christ's resurrection and our new way of life is presented with “*hosper*” (“*just as*”) - “*houtos kai*” (“*so also*”) language that was used throughout the Adam/Christ comparison of the preceding chapter. Thus the apostle reminds us that the transformation which takes place within the believer is, in effect, a transition from the old epoch of Adam, under the dominion of sin and death, into the new era of Christ and the reign of righteousness and life. Because of that transition, death could not hold the Lord, and Christ's triumphant resurrection from the grave is the indication that the new age has begun. Baptized believers participate in the resurrection of Christ in the same way that they participate in his death and burial. Paul sounds the same theme elsewhere.

“In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (Colossians 2:11-12)

“But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4-7)

“We too may live a new life.” - The result of our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ is a pattern of life that reflects the values of the new age. The Greek text literally says, “*that we might take up a new way of walking.*” The verb “*walk around*” (Greek - “*peripatein*”) is often used in the Old Testament to describe a lifestyle pattern (cf. Exodus 18:20; 2 Kings 20:3; 22:2; Psalm 86:11; Proverbs 8:20; 28:18).

Verses 5-7

If we have been united with Him in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be rendered powerless, that we should no longer be slaves to sin - because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.



“The Burial of Christ” by Heinrich Hoffmann

the mortification of their flesh, together with the working of His resurrection in the vivification of their spirit.” (Moo, p. 367)

If we have been united with Him in His death... - The colorful language of the text literally says, “*if we have become grown together with Him*” (Greek - “*symphytos*”). The imagery is horticultural, the young branch is grafted into the tree and grows together with it in organic unity, sustained and nourished by its life-giving sap. John Calvin explains the image in this way:

“By these words he not only exhorts us to follow Christ as if we are admonished through baptism to die to our desires by the examples of Christ's death and to be aroused to righteousness by the example of His resurrection, but He also takes hold of something far higher; namely, that through baptism Christ makes us sharers in His death, that we may be engrafted in it. And, just as the twig draws substance and nourishment from the root to which it is grafted, so those who receive baptism with right faith truly feel the effective working of Christ's death in the

Paul has previously asserted that baptism is the means through which we have become participants in the death of Christ (cf. vs. 4) and he reaffirms that reality now as the foundation for what follows. In the washing of baptism we were grafted into Christ and have been ***“united with Him in His death.”*** Because we have become participants in the death of Christ ***“we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection.”*** Dr. Stöckhardt explains the apostle's thought in this way:

“From this fact follows that we also in baptism are planted together in Christ's resurrection. In Christ death and resurrection are closely connected. Christ is the Crucified and the Resurrected. And he who shares in His death shares also in His resurrection. The new life of the Christians not only has a likeness in the resurrection of Christ but springs and flows from it. In baptism we share in Christ's resurrection and in the new life that He entered at His resurrection. In baptism Christ's new life after the resurrection is planted in us. Hence, we are flesh of His

flesh, bone of His bone (Ephesians 5:30). And so, we are born again to a new life. In this manner we Christians received the new life wherein we now live.”
(Stöckhardt, p. 80)

The shift in verb tense (“***we have been united with Him in His death - we will be united with Him in His resurrection***”) indicates the progressive nature of this reality throughout the life of the believer culminating in the resurrection on the last day.

“For we know that our old self was crucified with Him...” - Verses 6 & 7 restate and elaborate the basic argument presented in the preceding verses. The phrase ***“For we know”*** introduces this summary. The subject of the sentence is ***“our old self”*** (Greek - *“o palaios hemon anthropos”* - literally - *“our old man”*). The reference is to that which we once were, the self that belongs to the old age, dominated by sin and subject to wrath. This is our entire being as it existed before regeneration, completely helpless and hopeless. The adjective ***“old”*** is typically used to point back to that former existence. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Colossians 3:9; Ephesians 4:22) In contrast, that which we have become in Christ is called ***“the new man”*** (Ephesians 4:22-24) or the ***“new creature”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:5). Paul here uses the third of the *“syn”* verbs in this segment to describe our participation in the events of Christ's death and resurrection (vs. 4 - buried with; vs. 5 - united with). In this instance we participate in the crucifixion itself - *“synestaurōthe”* (*“crucified with”*). Douglas Moo offers this assessment of Paul's thought:

“The believer who is “crucified with Christ” is as definitely and finally dead as a result of this action as was Christ Himself after His crucifixion. Of course, we must remember what this death means. There is no more a physical, or ontological, death than is our burial with Christ (vs.4) or our “dying to sin” (vs.2). Paul's language throughout is forensic, or positional; by God's act we have been placed in a new position. This position is real, for what exists in God's sight is surely (ultimately) real, and it carries definite consequences for daily living.” (Moo, p. 373)

Note the passive voice of the verb *“was crucified.”* This is not something that we could ever have done by ourselves. God had to do this and has done it for us.

“So that the body of sin might be rendered powerless...” - The purpose of our co-crucifixion is liberation from the domination of sin. The phrase ***“the body of sin”*** parallels the ***“old self”*** in the preceding phrase. The reference is not to the physical body in contrast to the soul, but to the whole person as a part of the fallen world, the

human being as a descendant of Adam in bondage to sin and death. The genitive “*of sin*” expresses the element which dominates the earth-oriented, natural human person. The verb “*rendered powerless*” (Greek - “*katargeo*”) means “*to be released from*” or “*to deprive something of its power, to paralyze.*” The point is that because of our participation in the crucifixion of Christ, we are no longer the helpless tools of sin. Our solidarity with and subservience to the legacy of Adam has been ended. We are no longer “*slaves to sin.*” Sin is a master which rules without challenge over natural man. We, however, have been liberated from our slavery to sin by our participation in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.



“Crucified With Christ” by Rudolf Schäfer

“Once for all the curse of this slavery has been broken since our old man has been crucified. The battle with sin is not completed in baptism but the decisive victory has been won. The sin is dethroned, the new man has taken the place of the old man in us, and now it is our task to prevent the sin from again usurping that throne.” (Lenski, p. 403)

“Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

- The slave who dies can serve his master no longer. By death he has been set free

from his slavery. In the same way, our involvement in the death of Christ through baptism has broken the dominion of sin/death in our lives.

Verses 8-10

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer

has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died once to sin for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God.

“Now if we died with Christ...” - The death to sin which is the result of our involvement in the death of Christ marks the beginning of a new life in Him. That new life has already begun: ***“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, look, the new has come.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17) It will take on final, definitive form only when we live with the Lord in eternity, thus the future tense of the verb (***“we will also live”***) in this sentence. In this way, the whole of this life for the believer is suspended between Christ's death and Christ's resurrection.

“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead...” - Our faith is founded on facts. All true faith contains definite and explicit knowledge as in the classic definition faith = knowledge + assent + trust. The historical fact of the resurrection is the keystone of Christianity for as Paul contends in 1 Corinthians 15:17 - ***“If Christ has not been raised your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.”*** Here, as previously, the resurrection is ascribed not to Christ Himself, but to God the Father who has triumphantly restored His beloved Son to life again (cf. 4:24; Philippians 2:9-11). The reality of the Christ's resurrection means that ***“he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.”*** The resurrection of Jesus meant a final and decisive break with death and all of its fatal power - the end of His humiliation and the beginning of His exaltation. Having humbled Himself to the limitations of earthly existence and submitted to a humiliating death on the cross, Christ is exalted by the Father, and restored to glorious life once again. He is ***“the firstfruits of those that rise”*** (1 Corinthians 15:23) and His resurrection signals the beginning of the new era of forgiveness and life. Through sin death became the lord and master of mankind (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54-57). By His resurrection, Jesus proves that death is can no longer exercise lordship (Greek - *“kurieuei”*) over Him. Death is His master no longer. ***“The death He died, He died to sin once for all...”*** - Christ assumed our sin. He took upon Himself the burden that was ours.

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). In His death He bore the penalty for the sins of humankind. Thus His death is ***“to sin”*** in the sense that it has a decisive effect upon sin. His death is a unique, definitive event. It can never be repeated. It need never be repeated. ***“He died to sin once for all”*** (Greek - *“hapax”*). That reality is demonstrated by Christ's return to life after His death.

Hence, as Fitzmyer suggests:
“Christ was raised from the dead not merely to publicize His good news or to confirm His messianic character, but to introduce human beings into freedom, a new mode of life with a new principle of human activity, the Spirit.”
 (Fitzmyer,, p.438)



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

“But the life He lives, He lives to God.” - An irreversible transformation has taken place. We have passed from one era to the next and there is no going back. A reversion to the old condition is no longer possible. The death of Christ is a single event with permanent relevance for all of humanity- (Note the aorist tense of the verbs in the preceding phrase). The life He now lives is a continuous, ongoing, unending reality (The Greek verb tense now shifts to the durative present, indicating indefinitely ongoing action). Having vanquished death, Jesus, the God/Man, now lives forever to the glory of God.

Verses 11-14

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace.

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin...” - These verses apply that which has been said of Christ to Christians. The comparison between the death and life of Christ and the attitude of the believer toward his own life is introduced with the phrase *“In the same way.”*

The powerful verb in this sentence is the Greek “*logizomai*” (to count or to be credited to) which figured so prominently in chapter 4's discussion of the justification of Abraham (cf. 4:3-12). Thus we are clearly reminded that the Christian's reckoning himself dead to sin and alive to God is the result of God's having reckoned him to be righteous. This is a strong word used to describe firm conviction that is to be consistently expressed in daily conduct. The language is not theoretical or abstract; it is real and practical. The verb is a present imperative, urging us to view ourselves in this way constantly, throughout our lives.

In 6:2 we were told that we were told that “***We died to sin.***” Now the argument concludes as the apostle recalls those words. We are to consider ourselves “***dead to sin but alive to God.***” Christ “***died to sin once for all***” (vs.10). We became participants in that death through baptism. The object of the imperative in this verse is that we must now continually take this death into account, take it seriously, in our own self-perception. Like Christ, we have died to sin, and as we become ever more aware of that union with Christ, and consciously oriented to Christ, the possibility of returning to the old way of sin's dominion will become ever more remote. This is much more than mere mimicry.

“It is not just that they (Christians) are to imitate Christ (because He has died to sin so you too); Christians are also to arm themselves with the mentality that they are dead to sin; for that is what has happened to them in the baptismal experience.”
(Fitzmyer, p.438)

To be “***dead to sin***” is only possible in union with Christ. Hence, to be “***dead to sin***” is to be “***alive to God in Christ Jesus.***” This phrase “***in Christ Jesus***” is St. Paul's characteristic way of describing the union of the believer with the Lord (cf. 8:1; 12:5; 16:3,7,9,10; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; Galatians 1:22; 2:4; 3:28; 5:6; 1 Corinthians 1:2,30; 4:10; 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 12:2; Philippians 1:1; 4:7; Philemon 23). Lenski describes it as “*a pregnant phrase which denotes a vital spiritual connection*” (Lenski, p.409). Christians, by faith, are united with the risen and living Lord through the Holy Spirit and thereby share in the vitality of His life in glory.

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies...” - Such an admonition would be worthless and futile were it not for Christ and our participation in His death and resurrection. *“Now it would be useless to tell sinners not to let this powerful king, sin, reign over them, whether in their mortal bodies or in the rest of their being;*

*sinner*s could not prevent sin reigning over them.” (Lenski, p. 411) One might just as well tell a drowning person simply to swim to shore as to tell a person who is under sin's mastery not to let sin reign. St. Augustine's observation is sadly accurate, for the unregenerate man it is “*non posse non peccare*” (“It is Not possible not to sin.”) The Greek text literally says “do not let sin hold sway or rule as a king” (Greek - “*basileueto*”). That is, of course, not to say that Christians are no longer capable of sin and are required to live holy and sinless lives. The rule of the tyrant has been overthrown; his tyranny has been broken; but that does not prevent this overthrown tyrant from harassing those who have escaped his tyranny. The phrase “*in your mortal bodies*” is not merely a reference to the physical body in distinction to the soul. Rather the reference is to the whole person viewed as a part of the world and thus subject to the temptations of sin.



“Christ's Victory Over Satan” by Albrecht Dürer, 1498

“The battle is a spiritual one, but it is fought, it is won and lost, in the daily decisions the believer makes about how to use his body. In characterizing the body as “mortal” Paul is reminding us that the same body that has been severed from its servitude to sin is nevertheless a body that still participates in the weakness, suffering, and dissolution of this age...This “mortal body” is, then, the believer's form of existence in this world which still has a part in this age.” (Moo, p. 383)

“In order to obey its evil desires.” - The noun “*desires*” (Greek - “*epithumias*”) can be used positively (cf. Philippians 1:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:17). However, in this context refers to desires that are in conflict with the will of God. The NIV is correct in supplying the negative adjective “*evil*.” Parallel phrases are: “*desires of the heart*”

(Romans 1:24), and ***“desires of the flesh”*** (Galatians 5:16). The reference is not merely physical or sexual desire but to man's craving for and dependency upon the satisfaction of all of his personal, earthly needs - physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially, etc. The basic issue is mastery. Sin seeks to influence and control the sinner. Sin's goal is to achieve (actually to regain) the submission to its reign that results in obedience.

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin...” - ***“Do not offer”*** (Greek - *“mede parastanete”*) means *“to put at the disposal of.”* It is often used of the authority of a slave owner or of a military officer. The point of the verb is the acknowledgment of a superior power and authority to whom the only proper response is submission and obedience. It thus fits perfectly in this discussion of sin as the controlling power in a person's life. As in the preceding phrase, the verb is a present imperative, indicating a command with ongoing, continuous application. As ***“mortal body”*** in verse 12 does not refer merely to the physical, so ***“the parts of your body”*** here not simply mean limbs or physical body organs but rather man's natural capacities. *“Human faculties”* or *“human capabilities”* are alternate possible translations. ***“Instruments of wickedness”*** (Greek - *“hopla adikias”*) might better be translated as *“weapons of unrighteousness,”* given the conflict context of the phrase. ***“Wickedness”*** is a general term for all that stands in opposition to the righteousness of God. Those natural capacities and abilities that God has given us are weapons that must no longer be put in the service of the evil master from whom we have been set free.

“But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought...” - The verb (*“parastesate”*) is repeated in this contrasting phrase. Christians are to put themselves at God's disposal, to submit to His control and to acknowledge His lordship. As men and women who have a share in Christ's death and resurrection ***“we have been brought from death to life.”*** That reality becomes the basis for an actual transformation of who we are and how we live. We who were once dead in sin are now ***“alive to God in Christ Jesus”*** (vs. 11). The human faculties and capabilities which were not to be offered to sin as weapons of unrighteousness are instead to be dedicated to God as ***“instruments of righteousness.”*** The parallel language in these two phrases clearly emphasizes the contrast.

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” - The issue throughout this section is control - who is the lord of your life. This concluding phrase repeats that emphasis with the verb *“kyrieusei”* (*“to exercise*



"Jesus Christ Is Lord!" By Rudolf Schäfer

lordship or mastery") from the noun "kyrios" which means "lord" or "master". (As in the liturgical "Kyrie Eleyson- Lord have mercy!"). Fitzmyer aptly translates "Sin is not to hold sway over you." Phillip Melancthon calls this bold declaration that the lordship of sin is ended "*dulcissima consolatio*" (Latin - "*the sweetest consolation of all*"). This promise is confirmed by the assurance - "**You are not under law but under grace.**" The reference is to the law as the governing principle in religion, the basis of our relationship with God. Any religious system based completely or in part on human effort is law religion no matter what denominational label it carries.

Legalism of any sort can never be the Lord of the Christian life. The law cannot free us from sin. Its demands and condemnations only intensify sin's dominion. The curse of the law upon man's imperfection brings death. Those who are ***“under law,”*** dependent upon that which they must do for themselves, will find no escape from damnation and doom. Sin is our master no longer only because of God's undeserved love in Christ. We are not ***“under law but under grace.”***

“Grace removes the curse of sin, breaks its dominion, joins us to Christ and God, fills us with spiritual power to trample unrighteousness under foot and to work righteousness...Being subjects to grace is pure blessedness for sinners, for while law comes with threatening demands which we are helpless to fulfill, grace showers upon us not only what we need, but all that it can possibly bestow, even the capacity to receive, and asks no merit or worthiness on our part.” (Lenski, p.418)

Verses 15-16

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

“What then? Shall we sin because...” - The question with which the chapter began is now restated in the context of law and grace. Since there is no legal restraint for conduct are we then free to do whatever we want? If you put grace alone in place of the law have you not removed the only barrier against sin and the only means of dealing with sin thereby opening the floodgates to a deluge of sinning? Absolutely not! The response is again most emphatically negative (cf. vs.1, p. 209f.)

“Don't you know that when you offer yourselves...” - The apostle uses the social institution of slavery to make his point. In the Mediterranean world of Paul's day many people sold themselves into slavery - either permanently or for a specified period of time - as a means of support or to avoid financial disaster. Paul reminds us that no human being is a free agent - either we are slaves to sin and self, or we are slaves to God in Christ. There are no other alternatives. The person who refuses God's lordship in his life does not thereby achieve independence, but becomes instead a slave to sin. That which masquerades as freedom in this world is actually bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Those who live only to gratify their own desires are slaves without recognizing their slavery. Their shackles are forged in the

compulsion and futility of their empty lives. The Satanic Father of the Lie has cleverly managed to convince his slaves that their bondage is freedom. The person who is a slave to God in Christ is truly free. But the freedom of the Christian is not freedom to do whatever you choose, but freedom to obey God - willingly, joyfully, naturally. The essence of slavery is the obligation of consistent obedience - ***“You are slaves to the one you obey.”*** If you consistently obey your sinful desires, then you are, in fact, a slave to sin, whether you recognize it or not.

The consequence of slavery to sin is ***“death”*** in time and in eternity. The consequence of slavery to godly obedience is ***“righteousness”*** - the divine verdict of justification which leads to life eternal.



“The Prodigal’s Return”
by Rudolf Schüfer

Verses 17-18

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

“But thanks be to God...” - As Paul considers all that God has done to set His people free, he injects an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving to God which demonstrates the intensity of the feelings within the apostle's own heart on this subject. He knows from personal experience what it means to once have been lost and then be found. Every human being is by nature a slave to sin. The members of the congregation in Rome could easily recall the time when they lived beneath the brutal tyranny of sin. But, ***“Thanks be to God!”*** that time is past.

“Though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed...” - The bondage of sin,

the cruel taskmaster, is now in the past for the Christians in Rome. It has been replaced with the joyful obedience of those who freely serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

The obedience of the Christian is “*wholehearted*” (Greek - “*ek kardias*” - literally “*from the heart*”). It indicates deeply felt and motivated action from the inmost being in contrast to obedience which is superficial, minimal, or coerced. This is the maximal grace response (How much can I do?) in contrast to the minimal law response (How much do I have to do?). The Christian's wholehearted obedience is attributed to “*the form of teaching to which you were entrusted.*” Most commentators agree that the reference is to a fixed catechetical formulation or creed used in connection with Holy Baptism already so well established and well known that Paul could refer to it without further explanation. The verb “*were entrusted*” (Greek - “*paradidomi*”) is frequently used in this way to describe the action of handing down or passing on traditional teaching. Note that this teaching did not come from the Christians in Rome. They did not devise or invent it. It came from God Himself and was merely entrusted to them as a legacy to preserve and pass along.



“The Baptism of Christ with the Revelation of the Divine Trinity” by Lucas Cranach the Younger (The City of Wittenberg is in the Background with Luther and the Family of the Elector John Frederick of Saxony Looking On)

“*You have been set free from sin and have become slaves...*” - There is no possible neutral ground; either you are a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness - no comfortable, compromising in between. Paul drives this point home with the assertion

that we have been set free so that we may be enslaved. Through Baptism in Christ Christians have been transferred from the dominion of sin to the dominion of righteousness. They are slaves who have changed ownership; slave who have a new master. This is the first reference to the liberation of the sinner from sin in Romans. This becomes an important theme through the balance of the Epistle (cf. 6:20,22; 7:3; 8:2,21). The Christian life is emancipation from the tyranny of sin. But Biblical freedom is not autonomy(Greek - "*self-law*") or self-direction in the modern sense of the term, which views every individual as free to do whatsoever he or she chooses to do. Biblical freedom is deliverance from the enslaving powers which sought to prevent the human being from becoming what the Creator God had intended him to be. Real freedom can only be experienced in harmonious relationship with the God who is our source (cf. John 8:31-36) "*The liberty which Christ has purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a childlike love, and willing mind.*" (Moo, p. 402)

Verse 19

I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to ever increasing righteousness.

"I put this in human terms because you are weak..." - Paul apologizes for using the inadequate analogy of slavery to describe the believer's relationship to the Lord, but he wants to be sure that this crucial point is clearly understood. The use of examples and illustration from everyday life are a common feature of the apostolic teaching of the New Testament (cf. 3:5; Galatians 3:15; 1 Corinthians 3:1; 9:8). Analogy although helpful is never perfect. That is also true in this instance. Douglas Moo observes:

"Paul recognizes that his language could be interpreted to mean that Christian experience bears the same marks of degradation, fear, and confinement that were typical of secular slavery. But, while shorn of these characteristics, life in the new realm of righteousness and life does mean that a person is given over to a master who requires absolute and unquestioned obedience; and to make the point, the image of slavery is quite appropriate." (Moo, p.404)

The use of this analogy is explained by the fact that ***"you are weak in your natural selves."*** The reference is not to a mental or moral weakness unique to the Roman congregation but rather the difficulty common to all sinful human beings in comprehending the truth of God. Sin has produced a weakness of understanding



“The Return of the Prodigal” by J. James Tissot

generally and an inherent resistance to spiritual truth particularly (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16). The NIV appropriately translates the Greek *“sarx”* (literally - *“flesh”*) as *“natural selves.”*

“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body...” - The slavery analogy is used again as Paul urges his readers to serve their new master with the same single-minded dedication that they once served their former master. The language here closely resembles vs.13. Before coming to the faith ***“you used to offer the parts of your body to impurity and ever increasing wickedness.”*** The two powerful nouns ***“impurity”*** (Greek - *“akatharsia”* - moral impurity and uncleanness, particularly sexual immorality) and ***“wickedness”*** (Greek - *“anomia”* - lawlessness and rebellion) combine to provide a comprehensive picture of the grim reality of sin. Lenski writes:

“All sin is filthiness even as all sin is lawlessness. We don not have a division of sin into two sections but two aspects of sin. Sin is abominable; it reeks and stinks as does filth; and at the same time it is rebellion, anarchy, a challenge to law. Imagine giving one's own bodily members as slaves to such a power! Too often we hide this horribleness from ourselves and shudder at it only when it reveals itself stark and naked in some fearful crime. Learn from Paul what this tyrant looks like so that you will not extend even a finger to him.” (Lenski, p. 431)

Note also the emphasis on the cumulative, progressive nature of sin as ***“ever***

increasing wickedness.” The Greek text literally reads: “*you have yielded your members as slaves...to wickedness unto wickedness.*” Sin builds upon itself and reinforces itself. It is a downhill path that leads to destruction.

“So now offer them in slavery to righteousness, leading to holiness.” - The second segment of the contrast closely mirrors the first. Again the slave obediently offers the members of his body to his master without reservation or hesitation. But now instead of “***impurity***” the new master is “***righteousness leading to holiness.***” The “***righteousness***” in question is the right conduct which is demanded by God, the complete opposite of all “***impurity***.” The downhill slide of sin's progression is replaced by “***holiness***” (Greek - “*hagiasmos*” from “*hagios*” which means a saint, one who has been made holy). These words are used in the New Testament to designate one who has been singled out, separated from the world and consecrated to God. While the Christian is already holy, as the result of God's decree of justification, he remains a sinner nonetheless (“***simul justus et peccator***”) and thus “***holiness***” is also a way of life in conformity with the will and character of God toward which the Christian must constantly strive. Serve your new master, Paul urges, with the same single-minded dedication with which you once served your old master. Martin Franzmann summarizes the meaning of what he calls “*the slave imperative*” in the text in this way:

“The man in whom the flesh and the spirit are still at war with each other (cf. Romans 8:12-14; Galatians 5:17), the man who still recognizes in his heart the will of disobedient Adam, the man who still must fight off the claim of sin upon his mortal body - he needs to be told that sonship means obedience for all the sons of God. For this aspect of sonship there is no better or stronger term than “slavery.” And so Paul, after he has qualified his use of the image of the slave speaks of the slave imperative; Be good slaves now to righteousness, as singly and as totally devoted to your master as when you were slaves to sin. You devoted your members, all your powers of action, to that service; render that same full-time, whole man service now to righteousness. That former service was one that defiled you, and it exhausted itself in opposition to God; it was dominated by the Satanic will of sin, which is stupid, monstrous, pure negation of all that is divine.” (Franzmann, p.118)

This characteristic New Testament approach to Christian living is dramatically different than much of the quick fix, easy, multi-step solutions popular in much of the church today. God in Christ has already done it all. He has already provided everything that is necessary for us to live as devoted slaves of our Lord. If we fail to do so it is either because we do not recognize what God has already done or we are

simply too sinful and spiritually lazy to do what God has enabled us to do. The lifestyle of the Christian is the result of what God has caused you to be. James Montgomery Boice summarizes the substance of this New Testament approach to sanctification and the Christian life in these six propositions:



“Jesus and the Rich Young Man” by Eduard Gebhardt

“1. The teaching about sanctification in verse 19-20, like the teaching in verses 11-13, is an exhortation. In fact, it is a command. 2. Being an exhortation, the command to offer our bodies to God for His purposes is something we must do. Indeed, it is something we can do... We are now able to obey God, do good works, and live righteous lives. 3. The command to yield the parts of our bodies as instruments of righteousness is based upon something that has already happened to us. That is, something that has already happened, not something that may happen, or will yet happen to us. 4. The New Testament approach to sanctification is therefore to get us to realize our position and act accordingly. The New Testament does not tell us to be what we will become. Rather, it tells us to be what we are. 5. This demand is utterly reasonable. In fact, anything contrary to it is unreasonable.

Before we were saved, we served sin; that was consistent and reasonable. But now that we are converted, it is equally reasonable that we should serve God. 6. The failures we have in trying to live a holy life are due almost entirely to our failure to realize these truths or to our laziness or sin failing to apply them to our conduct.”
(Boice, pp.)

Verses 20-23

When you were slaves to sin you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“When you were slaves to sin...” - The factual reality which is the basis for the preceding command is here repeated. We can and must serve righteousness because God has freed us from sin and made us slaves to righteousness. If this were not true it would be impossible for us to offer the members of our body in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. Before we came to faith in Christ we were completely ***“free from the control of righteousness.”***

“The sinner merely disregards the righteousness, turns his nose up at it; he feels elated not to be compelled to do this or that but to be free to throw himself into the vile arms of sin just as he pleases. Well, that is freedom, if one wants to call it by so noble a name.” (Lenski, p.432)

As Jesus said, ***“No man can serve two masters.”*** (Matthew 6:24). These are mutually exclusive alternatives. As slaves to sin we recognized no obligation to the will and Word of God. We have defiantly chosen to go our own way instead. As slaves to sin we were deaf to God's righteous demands and incapable of responding to them if even we were to hear and respect them. The power to do right and turn from the wrong is simply not present within those who have become slaves to sin.

“What benefit did you reap at that time...” - Paul demonstrates the negative destructiveness of being ***“free from the control of righteousness”*** by showing the fruits which resulted from that freedom. The NIV translates the Greek *“karpos”* (literally - *“fruit”* often used in the sense of *“result”* or *“product”*) as *“benefit.”* The

translation expresses the sense of the apostle's question well as he urges the Romans to consider whether there were any positive results from their old way of life. The agrarian origin of the word is reflected in the verb "*reap*." From their new perspective as sons and daughters of God in Christ the things which they then did are now cause for shame. The devil has always promised liberation but those who yield to his seduction find only guilt and shame (cf. Genesis 3). The end result, the ultimate destination, the outcome (Greek - "*telos*") of those shameful things is death, and that not merely death in time, but death for all eternity.

"But now that you have been set free from sin..." - The contrast to the fraudulent freedom from righteousness is now set forth. This is not freedom from righteousness but freedom from sin. The fruit of freedom from righteousness was shameful action which leads to death. The fruit of freedom from sin is "***holiness***" the outcome of which is "***eternal life***." This climactic antithesis draws the contrast as clearly as it can be drawn.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." - The chapter ends with this powerful summary statement which is one of the best known verses in the Bible. The verse contains three contrasts: 1. the master that is served - sin versus God; 2. the outcome of that service - death versus eternal life; and, 3. the means by which this outcome is attained - a wage earned versus a gift received. The "***death***" in the opening phrase is ultimately the eternal death and damnation of the impenitent sinner. However, the specific language of the text suggests more than this ultimate outcome. One who lives in bondage to sin need not wait for eternity to experience the deadly destructiveness of evil. The noun "***wages***" (Greek - "*opsonion*") originally referred not to the final mustering out bonus paid at the end of a victorious campaign, but to the ongoing daily food ration (literally - "*fish ration*") provided to a Roman soldier while on active duty. Thus, the "***death***" which is "***the wages of sin***" is not merely a future reality but also one which pertains to the individual's present state. This view is fully consistent Paul's earlier insistence that the wrath of God is now being poured out upon sinful rebellious mankind in the deadly downward spiral of sin's destructiveness. (cf. Romans 1:18-32). In his classic book *Whatever Became of Sin?*, Dr. Karl Menninger argues that sin is always destructive. He uses the historic "*seven deadly sins*" to demonstrate his point: pride destroys relationships; lust destroys one's personality as it weakens loyalty, undercuts trust, and destroys integrity; gluttony destroys the physical body whether it is overindulgence in food, drink or drugs; anger destroys others whether by actual

violence or words alone; sloth destroys opportunity and ambition; envy and greed destroy contentment and happiness in life. Sin pays its wages every day in misery, suffering, sorrow, and pain until the account is finally settled once and for all with eternal death. The other side of the contrast is completely different. God does not pay wages for services rendered. He offers a free gift of His undeserved love (Greek - “*charisma*”). This gift is given solely by grace, unearned and free. It has been bought and paid for “*in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”



“The Seven Deadly Sins” - An Illuminated Woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien