

Romans Chapter 9

Nach dem der herr vnd almechtig gott die zehen gebott
alle inn der liebe gottes vnd des nechsten beschloffen hat das sollte das die geseyn lernen vnd propheeten sagen darumb solte die inn deinem hertzen vns
vergeslich tragen Welche die vnden inn zweien taffeln mit ir bedutung sind begrieffen vnd durch zehen wort roter farb bezeichnet.



“Moses with the Tablets of the Law”

Woodcut by Thomas Anshelm, 1505

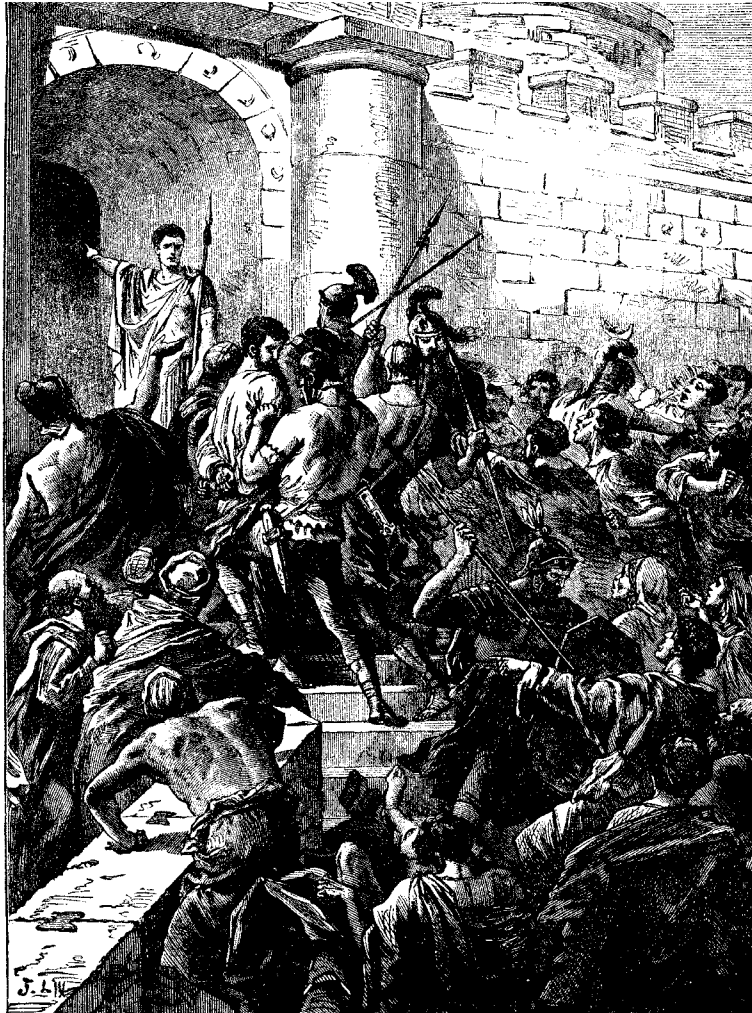
Verses 1-3

I speak the truth in Christ - I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit - I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.

“I speak the truth in Christ...” - The text begins with an impassioned assertion of Paul’s truthfulness in this matter. His affirmation of sincerity is intensely personal.

The three-fold repetition serves to emphasize the significance and solemnity of the topic. ***“I speak the truth”*** (Greek - *“ aletheian lego ”*) - In the Greek text ***“truth”*** precedes the verb for special emphasis; thus literally *“The truth I speak.”* Everything in this sentence is carefully designed the importance of this topic and the fervor of Paul’s conviction in this matter. The truth that is spoken is spoken ***“in***

Christ,” that is to say, in union or in connection with the Savior Himself. John MacArthur notes:



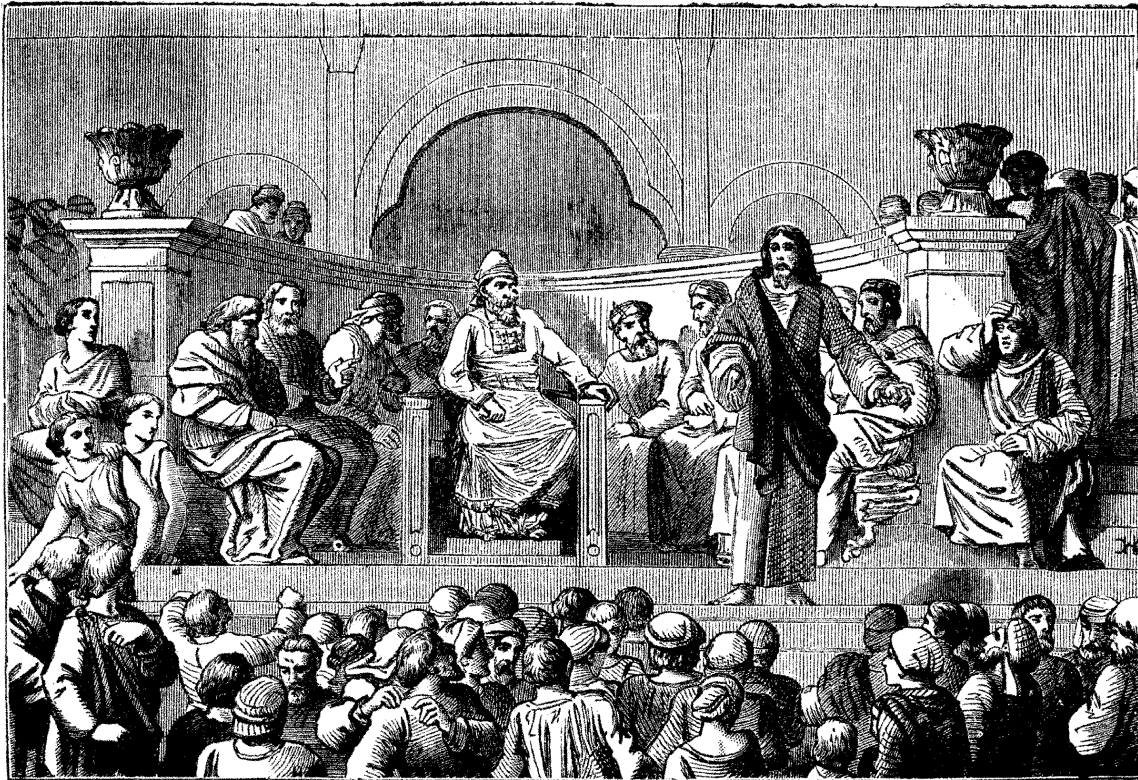
“Paul’s Arrest During the Temple Riot in Jerusalem”

“He called his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as an indisputable witness. He was saying that everything he thought or did or felt was done for and through his Lord. Paul’s union with Christ was the orbit within which his emotions moved and the fountain from which they flowed. In other words, Christ, who was the apostle’s very life and breath, would attest to the truth of what he was about to teach. His omniscient, sovereign, and gracious Lord, who perfectly knew Paul’s heart and motives, would affirm the truthfulness of the apostle’s limitless love for his fellow Jews. In the words of the 19th century Swiss commentator and theologian Frederic Godet, “In the eyes of Paul there is something so holy in Christ, that in the pure and luminous atmosphere of His felt presence no lie, not even an exaggeration, is possible.”

(MacArthur,II,p.9)

The positive affirmation (***“I am telling the truth in Christ.”***) is immediately followed and reinforced by the negative assertion ***“I am not lying.”*** Paul frequently makes this assertion in contexts where he expects his words to be contested (i.e. 2 Corinthians 11:31; Galatians 1:20; 1 Timothy 2:7). A lie (Greek - *“pseudomai”*) is a deliberate falsehood or inaccuracy told with the intent to deceive. Scripture asserts that truthfulness is a fundamental characteristic of God while lying is of the devil who

was the original liar and the father of lies (Numbers 23:19: John 8:44).



“Paul’s Defense Before the Jews in Jerusalem” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit.” - Next, conscience is called upon to witness the apostle’s veracity. Conscience, in and of itself, is not an extremely reliable or convincing witness. Our consciences can and do err. Elsewhere, Paul warns that a man’s conscience can be ***“seared as with a hot iron”*** (1 Timothy 4:2), that is hardened to the point where it fails to identify and warn against sin. Paul explains the pattern in his letter to Titus: ***“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.”*** (Titus 1:15; cf. also 1 Corinthians 8:7,10,12) Hence, it is not merely his own conscience which Paul cites, but confirmation by conscience ***“in the Holy Spirit.”*** The preposition ***“in”*** (Greek - *“en”*) is instrumental in this context and might more precisely be translated *“by means of”* or *“through.”* His conscience is not acting independently in this matter but is under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, at the critical moment during the Diet of Worms, Martin Luther did not simply appeal to his own conscience, which his opponents could just as well have done. Instead he appealed to conscience as bound by the Word of God - ***“My conscience is captive to the Word of God!”*** He further

indicated that if he could be

shown from Scripture that he was wrong, his conscience would defer to the authority of the written Word. This, his opponents could not do.



“Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem” by J. James Tissot

“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...” - We now arrive at the truth which Paul is so anxious to affirm, namely the intensity of his personal remorse over Israel’s rejection of her long awaited Messiah. Paul is well known as the apostle to the Gentiles. Some might have expected, given his outreach into the Gentile world, and the bitter opposition which he consistently encountered in those efforts from the Jews, that he would have given up on his own people and had in fact become “anti-Jewish.” Nothing could have been further from the truth. He is not a renegade, and apostate who has turned his back on his own. Instead, he is profoundly troubled by Israel’s rejection of the Gospel. The language of the text continues to be most emphatic. He is afflicted with *“great sorrow and unceasing anguish”* in the very core of his being. This is not a momentary affliction but an ongoing, continuous crushing burden of grief. The apostle’s words are reminiscent of the laments of the Old Testament prophets over the unfaithfulness and sin of God’s chosen (cf. Jeremiah 4:19-21; 14:17-22; Daniel 9:1-19)

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off...” - The intensity of the

apostle's feelings in this matter are further indicated by his willingness to give up his own salvation, if such a thing were possible (which, of course, it is not - cf. Psalm 49:7), for the salvation of his kinsmen. Like Moses on Mt. Sinai in the aftermath of the golden calf (Exodus 32:32), Paul offers his own life for that of the people. But more than his physical life, he offers to give up his eternal life, his very salvation itself for the sake of his people. **“Accursed”** is the fearful Greek word *“anathema”* which has come into the English language to describe someone who is formally cut off from the church and excommunicated. The term is drawn from the Old Testament where it is used that which is set apart for destruction as an offering to God (cf. Joshua 6:17,18; 7:1,11-13; 22:20; 1 Chronicles 2:7). *“Anathema”* is used by St. Paul in three other New Testament passages (1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22; Galatians 1:8,9) in each instance in reference to the most serious curse or pronouncement of damnation. The word designates eschatological judgement, one who is damned eternally and separated from the presence of Christ. That point is further stressed by the phrase **“and cut off from Christ.”** Those for whom Paul grieves are tenderly identified as **“My brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.”** Although he is indeed the Apostle to the Gentiles, yet in terms of nationality and ethnic heritage, he remains a Jew, deeply concerned about the welfare of his people. Note the use of the covenant title for the nation. Instead of the ordinary ethnic or political title *“Jews.”* They are **“the people of Israel,”** - the descendants of Jacob whose name was changed after he wrestled with God and obtained the promise. The Hebrew name **“Israel”** means “Contender with God.” (Genesis 32:22-32)

Verses 4-5

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Paul now enumerates a list of seven divine privileges and prerogatives accorded to Israel by God in the course of the Old Testament era. A similar listing was begun in 3:2 but never completed. His approach signals that the concern here is not merely human sympathy for the majority of his own people who seemed doomed to hell because of their rejection of the Messiah. The more basic issue here is a vindication of God and the integrity of His promises. God has not failed Israel. The promises of God to His people have not been broken. (cf. Romans 3:1-8)

“Theirs is the adoption as sons...” - The first blessing is the gift of sonship. The Old

Testament teaches that God adopted the Israelite nation as His son (cf. Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 14:1-2; Isaiah 46:3-4; 63:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 1:6; 2:10). God lavished the love of a father upon His chosen people. He protected, guided, and guarded them. He delivered them from bondage, struck down their enemies, and chastened them with fatherly discipline when necessary. He expected filial devotion and obedience from those whom He had adopted, although most often that filial response was not forthcoming. The nation received the blessing of sonship so that through them all the nations of the earth might be blessed.

“Theirs the divine glory...” - The second blessing is that of the splendor of the divine presence. God chose to dwell in the midst of His chosen people. During the years of the wilderness wandering the pillars of cloud and fire led the nation toward the land of promise. First in the tabernacle and later in the temple the glory of the Lord, the *“shekinah,”* rested over the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant. (cf. Exodus 16:7,10; 24:16; 40:34-35; Leviticus 9:6,23; Numbers 14:10,21; 16:19,42; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezekiel 1:28)



“The Shekinah” by Rudolf Schäfer

“The covenants,” - A *“covenant”* (Greek - *“diathekai”*) is an arrangement between two or more parties involving mutual obligations. The Hebrew idiom for the establishment of a covenant relationship is literally *“to cut a covenant”* (*“kerit berith”*) referring to the ritual of animal sacrifice which often accompanied a covenant agreement (cf. Genesis 15:9f.; Jeremiah 34:18). In the Old Testament the term is used with particular reference to the relationship which God established with His chosen people; first through

Abraham and the patriarchs, then renewed through Moses at Sinai, and later through the royal house of David and Solomon. The establishment of this covenant arrangement is cited as the third blessing which God has bestowed upon His chosen nation.

“The receiving of the law,” - Given the negative comments Paul has already made about the inadequacy of the law as a means of achieving salvation, the inclusion of ***“the receiving of the law”*** as the fourth in this list of divine blessings upon Israel may come as something of a surprise. But Paul has always been careful to point out that the problem of legalism is not caused by the law itself, but by a misuse and misunderstanding of the law’s purpose. In and of itself the law is indeed a great blessing as the revelation of God’s holy will for His people. At Mount Sinai, God gave His law, the *“Torah,”* to the children of Israel. Later, Moses reminded the people:

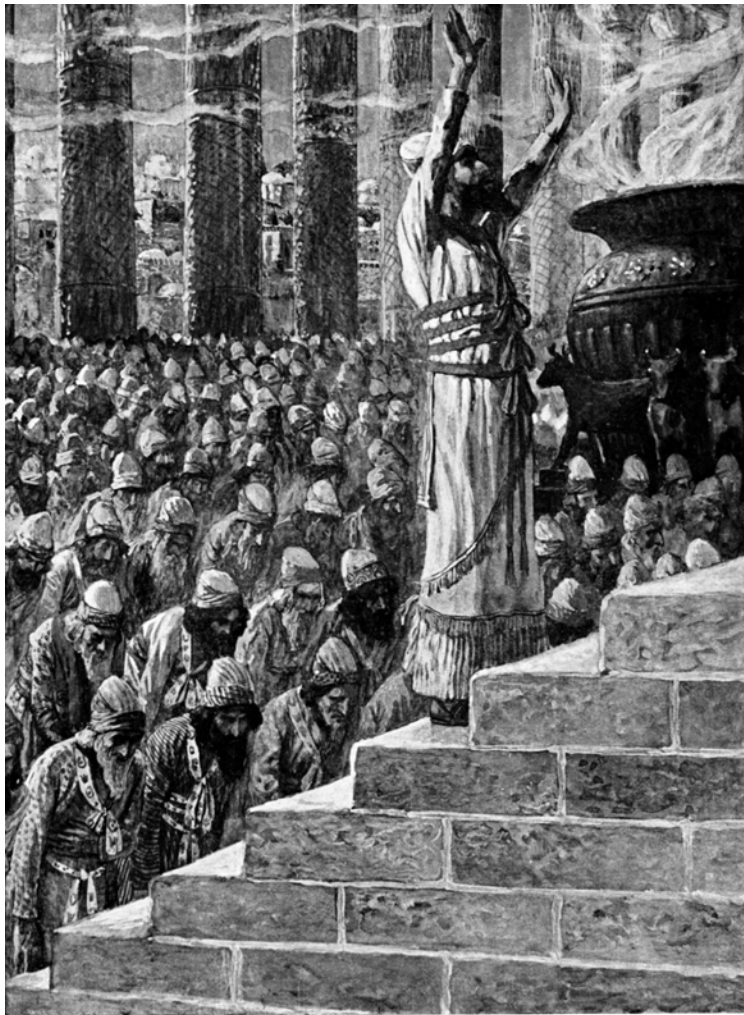
“See, I have taught you the statutes and judgments just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say; ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation has a god so near to it as the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

“The temple worship and the promises.” - The ***“temple worship”*** (Greek - *“latría”*) refers to the entire ceremonial system that God revealed through Moses - the sacrifices, offerings, festivals, cleansings, and other means of worship administered by the levitical priesthood. This entire impressive and elaborate structure was designed to point forward to the coming Messiah and His redemptive sacrifice of Himself for the sins of humanity. It foreshadowed that which was to come in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). In this divine service God promised His gracious presence:

“I will meet there (at the Tent of Meeting) with the sons of Israel, and it shall be consecrated by My glory. And I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister to me as priests. And I will dwell among the sons of Israel

and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God.” (Exodus 29:43-46)

“Promises” are the great promises of the coming Messiah which permeate and pervade the entire Old Testament. As Paul had earlier declared to the Jews in Galatia: ***“We preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers; that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus.”*** (Acts 2:39). The children of Israel were blessed to serve as the custodians of the Messianic hope; to keep alive the promise of salvation by preserving and passing down the inspired



“The Dedication of the Temple” by J. James Tissot

prophecies which God proclaimed to them through His spokesmen.

“Theirs are the patriarchs” - The honor of physical descent from the founding fathers of the nation - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the seventh and final blessing cited in Paul enumeration. Through these remarkable men the nation came into being and to them the promises of God first were made (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:17-18; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12).

“And from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” - The list is crowned and concluded. This final and greatest blessing, in addition to the seven already mentioned, is introduced by a different grammatical construction.

Rather than belonging to the Israelites, like all of the other blessings, the Christ, the Messiah is ***“from them.”*** He does not belong to them. That saving relationship may

not be established by blood, but only by faith. And yet, the crowning glory of the Israelite nation is the historical fact that the Savior of humanity was born among them as one of them. The Greek phrase is “*kata sarka*,” literally, “*according to the flesh*.” But there is, of course, more to the Savior than mere humanity. His human nature is only part of the picture. He is both true God and true man at the same time. Thus the apostle immediately continues: “***Who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.***” The most magnificent of the great host of blessings that God bestowed upon this richly blessed nation is that the eternal God caused His own Son to come from Israel according to His human nature. Note that this passage emphatically and unequivocally expresses the divinity of Jesus Christ. He is without qualification “***God over all!***” This brief, but powerful doxology does not interrupt but intensifies the natural progression of the text. Paul concludes his thought with a forceful “***Amen.***”

Verses 6-7

It is not as though God’s word has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Not because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring shall be reckoned.”

“It is not as though God’s promise has failed.” - The dilemma posed by ethnic Israel’s rejection of her Messiah is now confronted directly. Paul begins with an unequivocal affirmation of the faithfulness of God and the reliability of His Word. “***God’s promise***” (Greek - “*ho logos tou theou*” - literally “*the word of God*”) has not and can never fail (Isaiah 55:11). The verb used here is “*ekpiptein*” which is used in reference to the blossom of a flower falling to the ground (James 1:11; 1 Peter 1:24), chains falling off the hands of a prisoner (Acts 12:7), and the drifting away of a boat that has been cut loose or cast off (Acts 27:32). Thus the term means to fail, to wither, or to come to nothing. Have the promises God made to Israel failed to achieve their purpose? Does Israel’s rejection mean that the Word of God failed? Absolutely not! The problem here is not the reliability of God’s promise but a willful misunderstanding of that promise. The apostle demonstrates this to be the case by carefully defining the nature of the Old Testament covenant and the identity of the Israel of God. The Fourth century commentator Constantius describes the balance which the apostle maintains between deep personal concern and theological integrity in this way:

“Although the apostle grieves that the Jews have failed to obtain the grace of the promise, he nevertheless shows that the Word of God was not in vain and that the things that were promised were owed not to them who were born of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel according to the flesh but to those who keep the faith of the patriarchs and are therefore reckoned to be of their seed.” (Bray, p. 248)

“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.” - Membership in the Israel of God has never been a matter of ethnic identity or blood descent. This is the consistent teaching of both Old and New Testaments. John the Baptist sternly warned the self-righteous Jews of his day: ***“And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*** (Matthew 3:9) In the same way, Jesus denounced the complacency of those who depended on their national heritage as a guarantee of God’s favor: ***“If you were Abraham’s children, said Jesus, you would do the things Abraham did.”*** (John 8:39) The language of this text is equally forthright and unambiguous: ***For not all those who are descended from Israel are Israel.*** The Greek text literally says: *“Not all those from Israel are Israel.”* The term ***“Israel”*** is used in two different ways within the phrase. In the first instance, ***“all who are descended from Israel”*** refers to an ethnic group, the physical nation which is genetically linked to a single individual - Israel (Jacob). However, in the second instance, a decisive shift occurs and ***“Israel”*** now refers to the Israel of God (cf. Galatians 6:16), which is constituted by faith and not by blood, and includes all believers, both Jew and Gentile. The promises of God were never addressed to ethnic or national Israel,



“John the Baptist” by Rudolf Schäfer

those of a particular bloodline or racial category, but to the Israel of faith. If that had been the case, then the nation's apostasy would indicate the failure of the promise. But that is not the case. Phillip Melancthon points out:

"This is the chief proposition in which he answers the objection concerning which is the true people of God. The Jews contended that they were the people of God and that the promises belonged to them alone. Paul responds that the elect are the people of God, and he distinguishes the true people from those who have the title...Paul states the proposition clearly: the sons of God are not made by fleshly propagation, not by natural gifts or merits, but by the election of God."
(Melancthon, p. 189)

"Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children." - The Jewish nation originates with Abraham, the first Jew and father of the Hebrew people. To Abraham God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 15:5; 22:17). Throughout their long history, the Jews' proudest boast was that they were descended from Father Abraham. (cf. Romans 4:1-25) The importance of that claim is demonstrated in a confrontation between Jesus and His opponents recorded in John 8. The Lord infuriated his enemies, provoking them to the point of attempted murder, by challenging their link to the great patriarch. At the same time, Jesus insisted, as does St. Paul in this text, that descent from Abraham is a matter of faith, not bloodline.

"They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can You say that we shall be set free?' Jesus replied...'I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill Me because you have no room for My Word. I am telling you what I have seen in My Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.' 'Abraham is our father,' they answered. 'If you were Abraham's children,' said Jesus, 'then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is you are determined to kill a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does...You belong to your father the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is not truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.'"
(John 8:33-44)

The text distinguishes between the “*descendants*” (Greek - “*sperma*”) and the “*children*” (Greek - “*tekna*”) of Abraham. Unfortunately the NIV (along with most other English translations) jumbles the text, making “*children*” refer to the Israel of God and “*descendants*” refer to ethnic Israel. Given the language of the phrases which follow (where “*sperma*” consistently refers to Abraham’s spiritual descendants rather than his physical offspring) it would appear to be preferable to reverse the sequence and translating this phrase: “*nor as if all his children are Abraham’s seed.*” In either case, the central point remains the same - ethnic Israel and the Israel of God cannot simply be equated with one another. “*To be a child of Abraham in a physical sense, Paul is saying, is not necessarily to be his descendant in a spiritual sense. Salvation is not a Jewish birthright.*” (Moo, p.575)



*“The Banishing of Hagar and Ishmael”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

“On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” - Paul reinforces his argument with an appeal to historical precedent. The line of the covenant promise was never merely the line of physical descent. Genesis 21:12 is quoted as a reminder that even in the first generation after Abraham the firstborn son was not the child of the promise (cf. Hebrews 11:18). God originally spoke these words to Abraham as Hagar and her son Ishmael are about to be banished from the encampment. Isaac, not Ishmael, was designated by God as the son to and thru whom the blessings of the covenant would be conveyed. Ishmael too would be the father of many nations, but he was not to be the child of the promise. The Greek text uses a verb with particular theological significance - “*klethesetai*” from “*kaleo*” which means “*to call.*” Thus the phrase should literally be translated: “*in Isaac your seed shall*

be called.” In Romans 4:17 the same word is used to describe God’s creative act in the birth of Isaac, the miracle child of Sarah and Abraham’s old age - **“The God who...calls things that are not as though they were.”** The calling of God is the powerful, effective summons of the sovereign Creator to spiritual blessing (cf. 8:28,29; 9:12,24-26). Thus, when Abraham’s **“offspring”** (Greek - *“sperma”*) are *“called”* thru Isaac, it is God Himself who is at work accomplishing His plan of salvation. Martin Franzmann summarizes the theological significance of all this as follows:

“If physical descent from Abraham makes man a true son of Abraham and an inheritor of the promise given to Abraham, then Ishmael, the child of the flesh, was Abraham’s son and heir, and the future of God’s people hung on him. But the Word of God fixed on Isaac and made him son and heir. In fact, the Word of God, God’s promise, called Isaac into being. The Word of God, then, creates the people of God and defines the people of God.” (Franzmann, p. 171-172)

Verses 8-9

In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

“In other words...” - Paul now explains and expands his quotation from Genesis and applies it to the point at issue. This is a characteristic Pauline formula to introduce a brief explanatory note (cf. 7:18; 10:6,8; Philemon 12) The theme is restated once again. Those who are Abraham’s **“natural children”** (Greek - *“kata sarka,”* - literally, *“according to the flesh”*) are not his genuine **“offspring”** (Greek - *“sperma”* - literally, *“seed”*). Once again, the text utilizes a theologically loaded verb, in this case the Greek *“logizetai”* (*“to be reckoned”* or *“regarded”*). In chapter 4, Paul quotes this term from Genesis 15:6 as the crucial indicator of Abraham’s justification by grace through faith (cf. 4:1-24). Now it occurs again to describe the *“reckoning”* of the **“children of the promise”** as **“God’s children,”** the true **“offspring of Abraham.”** In both instances the word describes God’s gracious initiative for the salvation of His own. This is the work of God, not man. The Apocryphal Book of Jubilees affirms the unique role of Isaac among the numerous sons of Abraham using virtually the same language:

“All his other sons would be gentiles and would be reckoned with gentiles, although one of Isaac’s sons would become a holy offspring, not to be reckoned with Gentiles; he would become the portion of the Most High, and all his descendants would be settled in that land which belongs to God, so as to be the Lord’s special acquisition.”
(16:17)

The contrast is clearly drawn. On one side are Abraham’s physical descendants, his *“children according to the flesh.”* On the other are Abraham’s true offspring, *“the children of the promise,” “God’s children.”*



“Abraham Greets His Visitors” by S. Solomon

“For this is how the promise was stated...” - The promise is now defined with an reference to Genesis 18:10,14. Isaac was not born under natural circumstances, but long after both of his parents were past the normal age of childbearing. God visited the camp of Abraham, accompanied by two angels. In the course of their visit the Lord promised to return in one year (18:10) by which time the aged Sarah would have given birth to a son (18:14). The promise of God, as always, was completely fulfilled. Before twelve months had passed, the child Isaac was born. St. John Chrysostom notes the parallel between the miraculous birth of Isaac and the miraculous birth of every believer in the water of holy baptism:

“It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but rather even in nature regeneration through baptism from above was sketched out beforehand...For Sarah’s womb was colder than any water owing to barrenness and old age...And just as in her case it happened when her age was past hope, so in this case also it was when



"Jacob" by J. James Tissot

the old age of sins had come upon us that Isaac suddenly sprang up in youth, and we all became the children of God and the seed of Abraham." (Bray, p. 249)

Verses 10-13

Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who calls - she was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

"Not only that..." - The distinction between an ethnic and a spiritual Israel is even more clearly revealed in the next patriarchal generation. Ishmael was firstborn, but only from an Egyptian chambermaid. Hence it might be argued that even by human standards Isaac was the more appropriate choice. Paul moves to close that potential loophole. In the next generation the choice is made between two twin sons from the same parents, namely Isaac and Rebecca. Esau, the firstborn, was in fact his

father's favorite, a man's man. Nonetheless, God chooses whom He will and Jacob, the younger twin, becomes the child through whom the promise will be continued. The point is emphasized by a series of three subordinate clauses.

"Yet before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad..." - God's action in choosing Jacob was absolutely by grace. It was not the result of any moral or ethical superiority on his part. In regard to sinfulness the twins were identical. Luther asserts: *"Both of them were evil because of the disease of original sin...but by*

their own merit they were the same and equal and belonged to the same mass of perdition.” (Luther, AE 25, p. 386) Neither of the boys deserved the favor of God in any way. The wording of the text underscores the truth that God’s promise to bless Jacob preceded and was not based upon any good works that he may have performed and in the same way Esau’s exclusion was not based upon his evil works or inferior character. God chooses whom He will. He uses us despite all of our imperfections to accomplish His purpose.

“In order that God’s purpose in election might stand:” - The promise was spoken before the twins were born so that it would be unmistakably clear that nothing within the persons of Jacob or Esau, neither in their character nor their behavior, could have been the basis for God’s choice of one of them over the other. Paul may have deliberately intended to contradict the self-gratifying tendency in Judaism to attribute God’s selection of Jacob to the patriarch’s moral superiority over his brother. Inherent in this tendency is the reassuring assumption that the Jews, as God’s chosen people, must also be morally superior to the Gentiles who were not chosen. This tendency is clearly expressed in the Book of Jubilees where Isaac is quoted saying: *“Now I love Jacob more than Esau because he has increasingly made his deeds evil. And he has no righteousness because all of his ways are injustice and violence.”* (35:13) This view is in strong contrast to the Book of Genesis itself which seems to go out of its way to emphasize Jacob’s imperfections and character flaws. The selection of Jacob was completely by grace, just as that of Isaac, and Abraham before him had been. It what may be a specific attempt to undercut Paul’s argument here, the Fourth Century AD rabbinical Commentary *“Genesis Raba,”* the Hebrew sages go so far as to try to read that struggle between good and evil back into Rebecca’s womb:

“When Rebecca passed by houses of idol worship, Esau would squirm about, trying to get out, as it says, “The wicked turn astray from the womb.” (Psalm 58:4); when she would pass synagogues or study houses, Jacob would squirm to get out, as it says, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” (Jeremiah 1:5).” (Genesis Raba 63:6)

The pattern is consistent throughout - ***“in order that God’s purpose in election might stand.”*** Two important theological terms are presented in this phrase. The first is ***“purpose”*** (Greek - *“prothesis”*). In Romans 8:28 it denotes the plan or design according to which God calls His people unto Him, the eternal predestination of the elect to salvation. The term is used in a slightly different manner in this verse to denote the predetermined plan within human history through which God planned and designed

to bring covenant blessing to the whole world through the patriarchs and their descendants. *“From the God of knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before they existed, He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change.”* (Moo, p. 581) The second theological term is **“election”** (Greek - *“eklogen”*). The word means *“to select”* or *“to choose.”* In this context, the term does not refer to an election to salvation, but to the historical selection of Jacob and his descendants over Esau and his. Martin Franzmann explains:



“Jacob’s Deception of Isaac” 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Paul speaks of God’s “purpose of election” here, but he is speaking of that purpose as it works in the history of men. He is not speaking here, as he spoke in 8:28-30, of the eternal predestination of God’s elect to righteousness and glory; he is not now uttering the doxology of the redeemed. Rather, he is showing how God freely chose Isaac and Jacob for the furthering of His purpose, to bless all the families of the earth, in order to make clear that all depends on Him and on His Word alone. His choice of Isaac does not, of itself, doom Ishmael to perdition; Ishmael too received a blessing from God (Genesis 17:20; 21:13), and Ishmael too comes under the blessing

promised to all the families of the earth in Abraham’s seed. God’s purpose of election does not mean that all Ishmaelites and Edomites were to be damned, no more than it means that all descendants of Isaac and Jacob should be saved.” (Franzmann, pp.172,173)

The accomplishment of the plan is certain precisely because it rests not upon man but upon God. The verb **“stand”** (Greek - *“mena”*) is the opposite of the verb in Verse 6 **“failed.”** (*“It is not as though God’s Word has failed.”*) If the purpose of God rested upon sinful human beings it would surely have failed and fallen. But it does not. God’s plan and purpose is fulfilled because it is **“not by works but by Him who**

calls.” He Himself graciously carries out that purpose.

“Not by works but by Him who calls -“ - The point is repeated for the third and final time. In this phrase, the contrast is between **“works”** (Greek - *“ek ergon”*) and **“Him who calls”** (Greek - *“ek tou kalountos”*) as the basis for the selection of Jacob over Esau. Nothing in man or done by man provides the basis for this selection. It is God Himself, **“Him who calls,”** upon whom the selection of one over the other depends. Lenski properly notes:

“It was utterly hopeless to try to fill any of these three patriarchal places “ek ergon,” to award them as dues for works. In a competition of this sort all competitors had to fail for even if one of them had a few more works than all the rest, these could not possibly suffice as a merit that would deserve the position. The only way open was “ek tou kalountos”...the positions had to be awarded solely by a call or an appointment that came from God. In making it He would have to disregard all works and depend only on Himself, He in grace making an “ekloge,” a choice.”
(Lenski, p. 602)

“She was told, “The older will serve the younger.” - The reference is to Genesis 25:23, God’s response to Rebekah’s inquiry as to the alarming struggle taking place within her womb: **“The Lord said to her: “Two nations are in your womb and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”** It is significant to note once again that the focus of God’s revelation to Rebekah is not the eternal destiny of her children, but their temporal role in relation to one another. Despite the fact that Jacob is the younger and the weaker of the two, he is God’s choice to be the patriarch through whom the promise shall be conveyed to mankind. The distinction between the historical selection of one of the patriarch’s children over another and the divine determination of eternal destiny must be carefully maintained lest this text be abused to teach a double divine predestination to either salvation or damnation. This point is of crucial theological significance. George Stöckhardt is exactly right when he asserts: *“There is not the slightest hint of a predestination to damnation in this text.”* Dr. Stöckhardt offers these helpful observations:

“The historical calling of Jacob and his seed was the content of God’s Word to Rebekah, the aim and object of Jacob’s election and call, and does not deal with the final lot of Rebekah’s two sons and their descendants, not with salvation and damnation. We believe, as did Luther, that Ishmael and Esau were both finally saved. Both had taken from their father’s homes the right knowledge of God and

also knew the promise, which Isaac and Jacob received. The story of Esau's reconciliation with Jacob gives the impression that Esau finally took the right attitude toward God and bowed to His will, which gave to Jacob the blessing of the firstborn. We also believe that very many descendants of Ishmael and Esau were saved by God's grace. The apostle wishes to refer this second Biblical example, as the first, to the question under discussion. That Esau was excluded from the lineage of promise points to the fact that not all Israelites, descended from Abraham according to the flesh, are true Israelites. Jacob, as Isaac, is a type of the true children of Abraham and God. This is the lesson from the example of Jacob: all those of the true Israel, who are now chosen and called to adoption and salvation in Christ, are chosen and called in exactly the same way as Jacob was according to God's free purpose, regardless of birth and origin, of works and conduct. They are the real seed of Abraham; they are God's children who finally receive eternal salvation." (Stöckhardt, p.124)



***“Esau Trades his Birthright for Jacob’s Porridge” 19th Century Bible Illustration
by J. James Tissot***

“Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” - The apostle confirms and explains his point with one final citation brought forward with the standard introductory formula, ***“Just as it is written.”*** In this instance, the text cited is Malachi 1:2-3.

“An oracle: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. “I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, “How have you loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” the Lord says. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackels.”

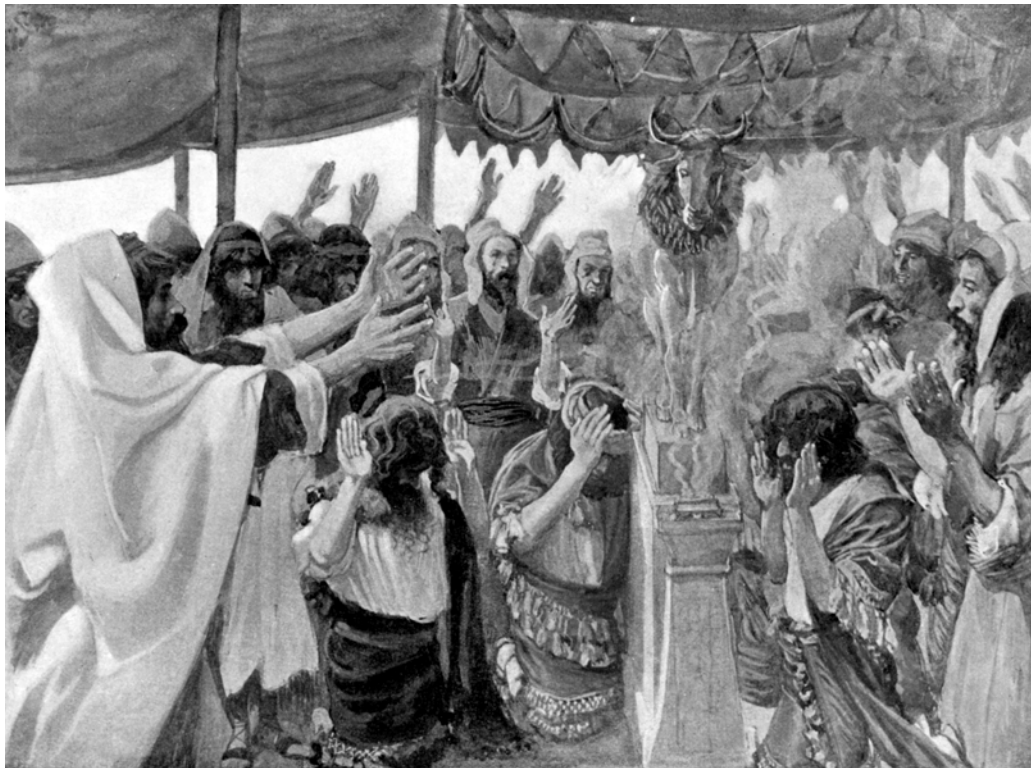
It is evident in the Malachi text that the primary reference is not to Jacob and Esau as specific individuals, but as the personification of the respective nations, Israel and Edom, which come from them. Nor is the thrust of the passage eternity, but history. *“Malachi is speaking of the fate of Jacob and Esau as nations, not of their eternal weal or woe.”* (Franzmann, p. 173) In Biblical usage, however, this does not exclude consideration of the individuals, and that is apparently the apostle’s intent in the quotation as a specific phrase from Malachi is brought forward to corroborate the quotation from Genesis. In the Old Testament passage these words form a part of God’s response to Israel’s challenge ***“How have you loved us?”*** God’s gracious selection of Jacob over his own brother Esau is presented as the proof of the Lord’s undeserved love for His people.

The love - hate contrast in this text, ***“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”*** is a Hebraism, that is a specific linguistic usage of the Hebrew language. In this context, hate does not carry its ordinary English connotation of strong dislike for or antipathy toward someone. It simply means to love less, the opposite of to prefer or to choose. Thus when the Hebrew text of Genesis 29:31 literally says, ***“Leah was hated...”*** it is simply restated the thought of the preceding verse ***“He loved Rachel more than Leah.”*** (29:30; cf. also Deuteronomy 21:15) Our Lord uses similar language in Luke 14:26 when he says: ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple.”*** (Cf. also Matthew 6:24; 10:37,38; John 12:25) This comparative usage of the word hate is common in the Semitic languages of the ancient Near East. Understood in this way, the phrase simply restates that point already made, namely that God graciously chose Jacob over Esau, thus demonstrating that blood descent is not the criterion for membership in the Israel of God.

Verses 14-16

What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For He says to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

“What then shall we say?” - If there is no basis for God’s election in man is God’s action then merely arbitrary and unfair? Paul anticipates the human tendency to challenge the justice of God. As John Calvin pointed out long ago: *“The flesh cannot hear the wisdom of God without being at once disturbed by perplexing questions, and it struggles by some means to call God to account.”* (Boice, p. 1067) At the outset, the apostle rejects even the possibility of divine injustice as an impossible blasphemy. The Greek text is most emphatic! It literally reads: *“There is no unrighteousness with God, is there? Perish the thought!* To accuse God of “unrighteousness” (Greek - “*adikia*”) is the height of presumption and human arrogance. Righteousness is the essence of God’s nature. If God does it, it is righteous by definition, whether I understand or recognize its righteousness or not.



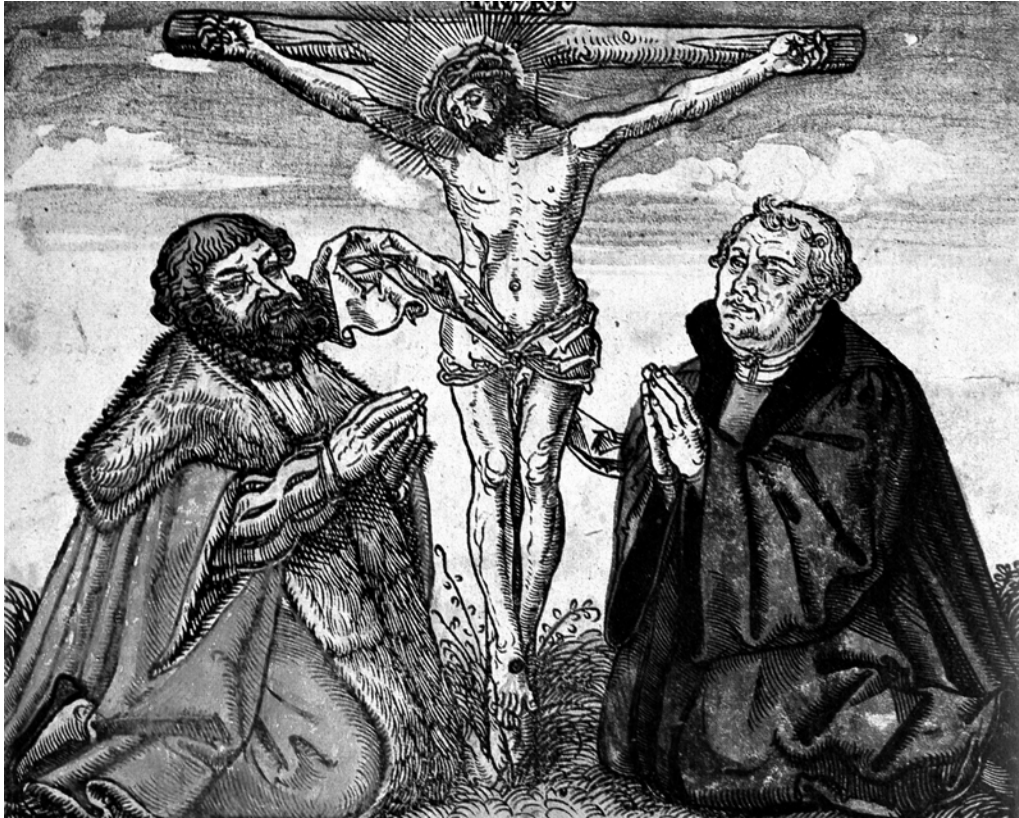
“Israel Worships the Golden Calf” by J. James Tissot

“For He says to Moses: ‘I will have mercy...’ - The words of Exodus 33:19 are now cited as the first of three demonstrations of the consistent righteousness of God. In the aftermath of Israel’s apostasy with the golden calf, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and prays that he may be allowed to glimpse the glory of God as the assurance that God will not withdraw His presence from the nation that has failed Him so miserably. In the words that precede Paul’s quotation, God answers Moses’ request: ***“I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my Name, the Lord, in your presence.”*** As you read these words, keep in mind the profound significance of names in the Bible. When God declares ***“I will proclaim My Name, the Lord,”*** He promises the disclosure of that which determines His being. That disclosure now follows in the words cited by St. Paul: ***“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”*** By declaring His goodness and affirming His sovereign freedom to show mercy as He chooses, the Lord proclaims His Name - that is to say, He uncovers His essential nature, the essence of that which He is as God. James Dunn is correct when he describes this as *“an exceptional unveiling of God, of His glory and His Name.”* Dunn goes so far as to assert that the Exodus 33 text is *“God in His fullest self-disclosure prior to Christ, God in the fullest extent to which He could be known by man, His glory and His name is God as merciful and compassionate.”* (Dunn, p.552) The Lord is not bound by human expectations or standards. If He were, He could not be God. The actions of God cannot be contingent upon the actions of men. If they were He could not be God. No human being has any claim upon Him because He alone is God. No human being deserves or may dare to demand His mercy. By the bestowal of His mercy upon the unworthy nation of Israel, or upon unworthy Isaac, or upon unworthy Jacob, God reveals Himself as free, gracious love.

“It does not, therefore, depend on man desire or effort...” - This is the summary principle to be drawn from the examples and texts cited. The connection is indicated by the Greek conjunction *“ara oun,” “therefore, then.”* The Greek literally reads, *“It is not a matter of the person who wills or the person who runs but of the God who shows mercy.”* The two verbs ***“wills”*** and ***“runs”*** sum up the totality of man’s capacity, both that which we propose or desire to do and that which is actually done. Human participation as a basis for divine mercy is categorically and completely eliminated by this powerful phrase.

Luther warns that these verses express *“the most excellent theology”* which may prove to be too profound for the spiritually immature. This is *“very strong wine, and*

the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect.” He urges the prudent pastoral counsel that anyone who find himself troubled by the Biblical assertion of predestination “purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Christ Jesus.”



***“Martin Luther and Elector John Frederick Under the Cross”
From the Cover Page of the 1546 Edition of the German New Testament***

“Yet here I am issuing the warning that no man whose mind has not yet been purged, should rush into these speculations, lest he fall into the abyss of horror and hopelessness; but first let him purge the eyes of his heart in his meditations on the wounds of Jesus Christ. For I myself would not even read these things if the order of the lection and necessity did not compel me to do so. For this is very strong wine and the most complete meal, solid food for those who are perfect, that is, the most excellent theology, of which the apostle says: “Among the mature, we do impart wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:6). But I am a baby who needs milk, not solid food (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Let him who is a child like me do the same. The wounds of Jesus Christ, “the clefts of the rock,” are sufficiently safe for us.” (Luther, AE 25, pp. 389- 390)

The decisive factor in these matters rests not with man but with God. Human works and attitudes are completely excluded and all that remains as the basis for salvation is “**God’s mercy.**” Nor is this a debate about justice. Mercy and justice have nothing whatsoever to do with one another. They are mutually exclusive categories. Justice presupposes rightful claims. Mercy can only operate where there are no claims. No natural descendant of Adam could ever be in a position to make such claims upon God. God is merciful solely because it is His nature to show mercy.

It must be kept in mind that this phrase (“***I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.***”) is not designed to justify the damnation of the majority, although it is often misunderstood in that way. In fact, the opposite is true. Rather, these words are an assertion of God’s prerogative to extend His mercy as He chooses, unrestricted by the expectations or standards of men.

This is clear in the Exodus context of the quotation as previously discussed. It was neither fair nor just for God to show mercy to apostate Israel after their flagrant disobedience with the golden calf. They deserved nothing but death and damnation. Their incredible ingratitude and faithlessness cried out for that judgment. God chose to have mercy upon them nonetheless. This is the setting from which Paul’s quotation is taken. Those who use this text in support of a theory of double predestination have it backwards. The text is not asserting God’s right to condemn the damned, but His right to justify the saved. The theory of double predestination is the unfortunate result of an over emphasis on God’s sovereignty at the expense of His mercy. The result is a tragic caricature of divine sovereignty which, in fact, denies His mercy. As Lenski points out, those who indulge in such nonsense fail to take into account the reality that mercy and compassion are the essence of God’s nature.

“All that is listed in verses 4-5 was pure mercy to the Israelites; all that the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile, now have is the same pure mercy. “Pity” makes all of this still stronger. How could pity ever demand works? Mercy, and still more, pity are called out by the wretched condition of those who have lost everything and are plunged into woe. In God both qualities are perfect. This is another important point. Calvinism disregards this. It has God extend mercy and pity only to a few of the wretched and lost. For the great mass of the wretched God has no mercy, no pity, but only judgment and damnation. Mercilessly, pitilessly, He lets them perish in their wretchedness, yea, decrees that they shall so perish. In the mercy and the pity a peculiar sovereignty is substituted for the blessed quality that makes each what it really is in God, the response of His nature to man’s wretchedness and not at all an answer

to man's works. This is done by laying a peculiar limiting stress on the relative clauses: "on whomever I will have mercy - whomever I will pity." These clauses mean that God will not allow anyone to restrict Him in exercising His mercy and His pity, restrict Him to men and their works which they suppose they have, or their claims and rights (such as physical birth) which they imagine are theirs. They are taken to mean that God intended to show mercy and pity only to a few who were chosen by Him in an absolute way. The fact that such a sovereignty in God would be the very embodiment of unrighteousness and injustice is brushed away by simple Calvinistic denial and by such pleas as that God owes nothing to the non-elect. The true sovereignty in connection with God's mercy and pity is that He extends it to whomever He will, unhampered, unrestricted by limits that men may set up, undisturbed by charges of injustice that men's foolish reasoning may prefer. In this blessed sovereignty, He shapes what He will do so that the sweet purpose of mercy and pity will be attained to the utmost among men...There is no sovereignty that restricts mercy and pity in God, no sovereignty that places mercilessness and pitilessness for all the rest beside mercy and pity for a few. There is only the sovereignty that overthrows restrictions such as men think should be set up by works, etc., of theirs or by secret eternal decrees of God." (Lenski, pp. 608-609)

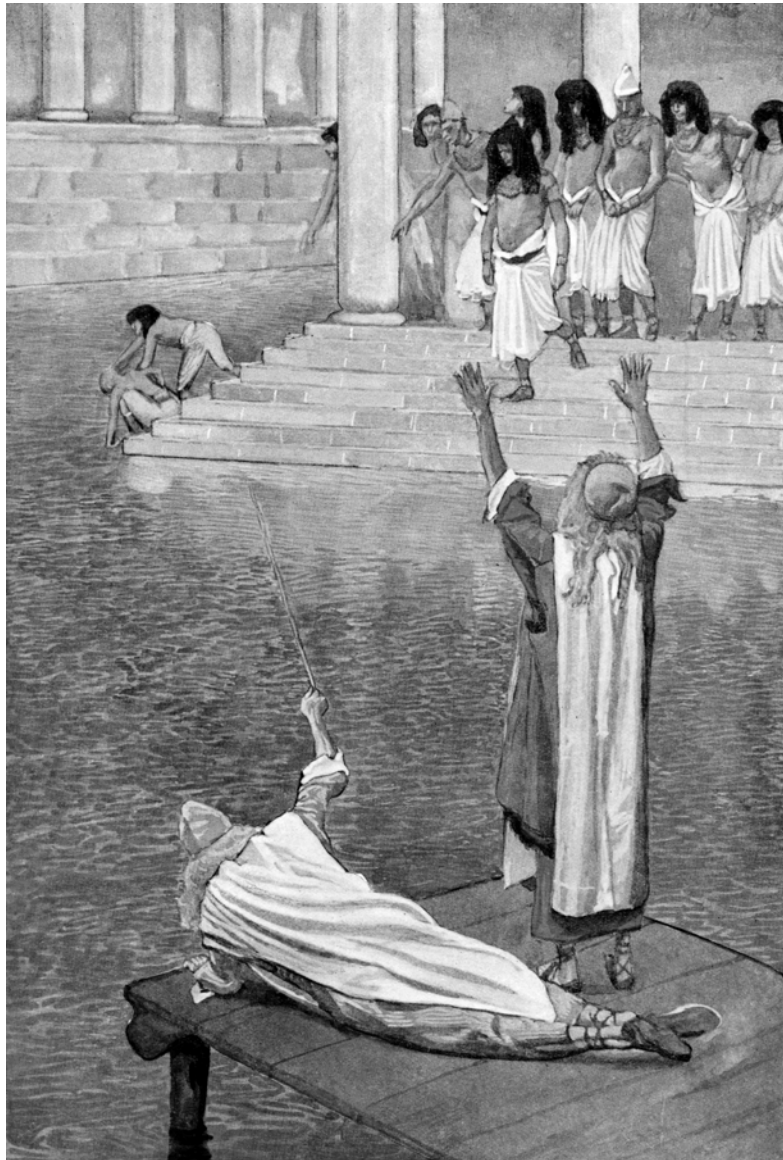
Verses 17-18

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My Name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Therefore, God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.

"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh:..." - The introduction formula for this Old Testament citation parallels that of Verse 14 - ***"For He says to Moses."*** For the apostle, "God says" and "Scripture says" are interchangeable phrases. In both cases, it is God who speaks. This usage is a strong affirmation of the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible. The great Presbyterian defender of the faith Benjamin Warfield writes:

"It was not the not yet existent Scripture that made this announcement to Pharaoh, but God Himself through the mouth of His prophet Moses. These acts could be attributed to Scripture only as the result of such a habitual identification, in the mind of the writer, of the text of Scripture with God as speaking, that it became natural to use the term "Scripture says" when what was really intended was "God, as recorded in Scripture, said." ...These passages thus show an absolute identification, in the minds of these writers of Scripture with the speaking God." (Warfield, p.299)

God's word of grace and mercy to Moses is now balanced by a word of judgement spoken to Pharaoh, Moses' great opponent. The quotation comes from Exodus 9:16. God addressed the Egyptian king through Moses in the aftermath of the sixth plague, the plague of boils. In the words that precede the quotation, God reminds the defiant



"The First Plague - the Nile Turned to Blood"
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot

monarch that He could have destroyed him and his kingdom at any point in this process. ***"For by now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth."*** (Verse 15) But God has chosen not to do so for His own reasons. The ten plagues which God brought upon the land of Egypt were designed to demonstrate the impotence of the idols of that ancient nation before the power of the true God. (Cf. *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* by John J. Davis) The plagues began with the Nile River as the water was turned to blood. The Egyptians worshiped the Nile in the form of the god Hapi. The plagues proceeded through the pantheon of ancient Egypt until the tenth and final plague culminates with an assault upon Egypt's living god, the personification of the god Horus, in the

person of pharaoh himself with the death of the first born. The practical result of this demonstration was to humble pharaoh and force him to allow the release of the Israelite slaves. But as the quotation reveals there is more at stake here than a mere

Israelite exit strategy. ***“I raised you up for this very purpose that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”*** The verb that Paul uses, ***“I raised you up,”*** is used in the Greek Old Testament in the sense of raising up a person on the scene of history for a particular purpose in the plan of salvation (cf. Numbers 24:19; 2 Samuel 12:11; Job 5:11; Habakkuk 1:6; Zechariah 11:16). Within the providence of God this particular man was chosen to be the king of mighty Egypt at this moment in her long history so that he might play the role that God intended in Israel’s redemption from bondage. His stubborn opposition in the face of ten devastating plagues became the occasion for God to display His power and to glorify His name throughout the earth. *“Pharaoh’s obduracy served as the foil to set off God’s redemptive power, the darker melody in a minor key which played counterpoint to the major key of God’s powerful call of Israel.”* (Dunn, p. 563) Martin Franzmann offers the following helpful paraphrase of God’s word to the proud Egyptian king:

“In your rebellion you did not once escape the hand of God; your history of obdurate refusal was the free disposing of the will of the Lord and had to serve the revelation of His power and grace; you made His name to be proclaimed in all the earth. God held you fast in your resistance and locked you up in the sin that was your will.”
(Franzmann, pp. 176-177)

Pharaoh himself - (***“that I might demonstrate through you my power”***) - becomes the means through which God’s power is to be shown and God’s ***“name proclaimed in all the earth.”*** This could not have occurred had the king yielded after the first plague. But he did not. He opposed and resisted. He delayed and denied. And finally, even after giving in, he changed his mind again and led his army to destruction in the Red Sea. Thus, according to God’s purpose and plan all the world came to know of His power and the glory of His mighty Name (cf. Exodus 15:13-16; Joshua 2:9-10; 9:9; Psalm 78:12-13; 105:26-38; 106:9-11; 136:10-15).

“Therefore God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, and He hardens whom He wants to harden.” - This summary statement follows the Old Testament citation in the same way that Verse 16 (***“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”***) applied and explained the previous citation from Exodus 33. Both phrases begin with the same Greek conjunction *“ara oun”* - *“therefore then.”* Once again, it is not Paul’s intent to prove the righteousness of God in these matters by measuring them against some human standard. As Stöckhardt ironically notes: *“That would be a curious theodicy indeed, if one were*

to attempt to justify God before the bar of human justice.” (Stöckhardt, p. 434) Rather, the apostle is simply illustrating the righteousness of God by his actions in the past and asserting His absolute freedom both in granting and withholding mercy. Luther argues that any attempt to measure the justice of God by any outside standard in effect causes God to cease to be God:



“Pharaoh and his Dead Son” by J. James Tissot

“He is God, and for His will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God. For it is not because He is or is obliged so to will that what His will is right, but on the contrary, because He Himself so wills, therefore what happens must be right. Cause and reason can be assigned for a creature’s will, but not for the will of the Creator, unless you set up over Him another creator.” (Luther, AE 33, p. 181)

The reformer is unconcerned about prideful man’s reaction to all this. God’s people must be willing to allow God to be God:

“It is not our business to ask these questions but to adore these mysteries. And if flesh and blood is offended here and murmurs, by all means let it murmur; but it will achieve nothing; God will not change on that account. And if the ungodly are scandalized and depart in great numbers, yet the elect will remain.” (Luther, AE 33, p.180)

In the case of Pharaoh, we see the manner in which God uses even His most determined and powerful enemies to accomplish His purposes. He chooses and uses whom He will. Fitzmyer explains the point in this way:

“When human beings react against God, they think that they are acting on their own and believe that they are thus limiting God’s power or thwarting His plans; but actually He is in that reaction, making them obdurate against Him, as He did the Pharaoh. God’s freedom and sovereignty in the choice of instruments to achieve His ends are made manifest. Thus Pharaoh became an instrument whereby God’s power was revealed and His name proclaimed.” (Fitzmyer, p. 568)

The term **“harden”** (Greek - “*skleryno*”) is typically used in a medical context in secular Greek, as is its English derivative “*sclerosis*.” In Scripture, the term takes on the spiritual connotation of insensitivity to God and His Word as the first step in a process which can ultimately lead to final wrath and condemnation. The hardening of the heart by God in Scripture is always a judicial act carried out by God the judge in response to the stubborn opposition of the sinner who has first hardened himself. (Cf. Notes on 1:24-25, pp.47-48) Stöckhardt emphasizes this truth over against the Calvinist assertion of predestination to damnation. The great Lutheran Bible scholar delineates three stages in God’s action: 1. Permission; 2. Abandonment; and, 3. Being Given Over. He goes on to present a careful definition of the role of the sinner himself in this process:

“Hardening of the heart on God’s part appears as the divine reaction against human conduct, as the adequate punishment for self-obduracy. It is contrary to Scripture and blasphemous to deduce obduracy from an absolute decree of reprobation, which already previously excludes the rejected from the love of God, the redemption of Christ, and the grace of the Holy Ghost...With regard to those who finally harden themselves and as punishment are hardened by God, God left nothing undone in order to convert them...Herein the self-obduracy of the sinner consists: He despises God’s earnestness and goodness, stifles all impressions of the divine Word, and opposes the Holy Ghost, who testifies in his heart and conscience and earnestly desires to convert him. In the long run, however, the great God, who is absolutely earnest in His commands as in His saving grace, will not put up with man’s

opposition to His Word and to His good and gracious will. With the perverse, He is perverse, and He hardens those who have hardened themselves. This does not mean that He effects and nourishes the perverse disposition in them. God never does evil. God's hardening of the incorrigible sinner is first of all permissive. He gives them room and freedom, so that their malice operates fully and unhindered unto the last bitter fruit. Along with this are included together a second and third dimension. God's hardening is abandonment ("egkataleiptikos") and being given over ("paradotikos"). God ceases to work in man, withdraws His Spirit (Luther), and thus the possibility of conversion, and gives man over to his perverse, obdurate disposition and will and into the power of the devil, so that the latter can effect his work in him undisturbed. "God abandons the impious to the devil" (Luther)" (Stöckhardt, p. 439)

Lutheran theologians insist that a careful distinction must be maintained between the responsibility for salvation and for damnation. Stöckhardt articulates the Scriptural view in this way:

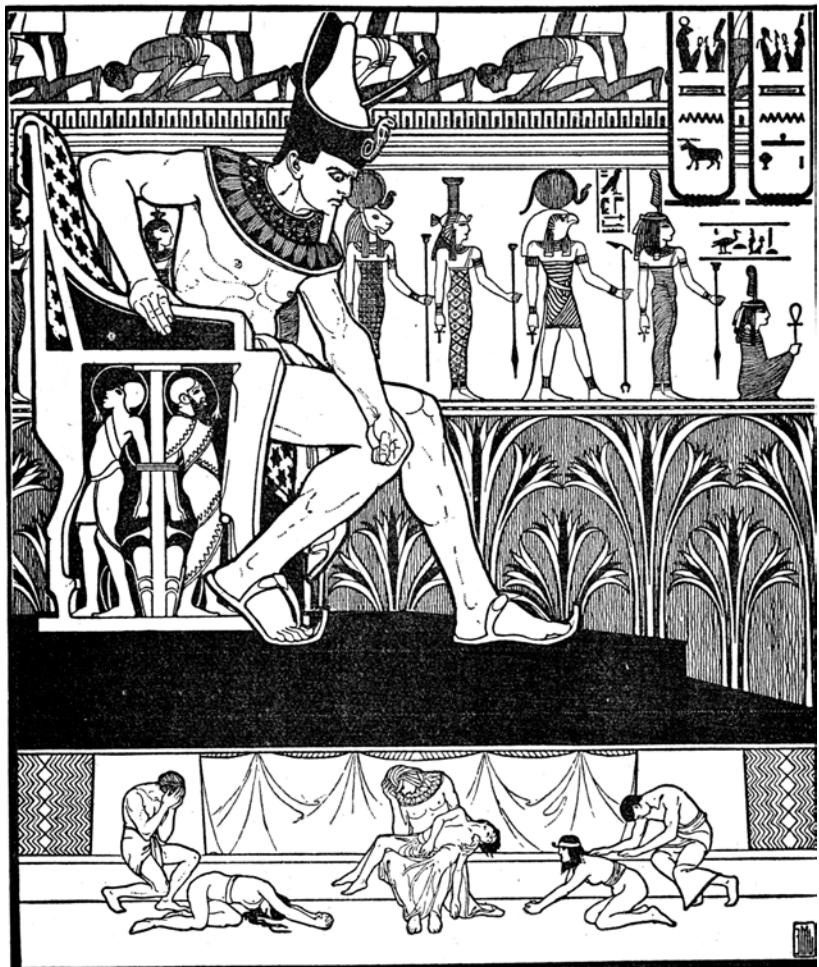
"Therefore, with regard to the motive there is a difference between divine mercy and obduracy that God inflicts. If God has mercy on someone, calls and converts a sinner and in this way saves him, that in no way depends upon man's effort, desire, and conduct, but rests alone in God, in His grace and mercy, already in His eternal grace. That Scriptures declare. God is gracious because He is gracious. And God is just in His doings, though they do not correspond to the weak human conception of righteousness. If God, on the other hand, hardens and finally damns someone, the cause lies alone in man, in his conduct and self-obduracy. Obduracy, which results in eternal destruction, is well deserved, righteous, judgement of God, whose righteousness is also evident to the godless. This twofold matter we must maintain according to Scriptures." (Stöckhardt, p. 440)

The example of Pharaoh is the classic Biblical illustration of the hardening of the heart. The term is used fourteen times in the narrative of Exodus 7-14 which describes Moses confrontation with the king of Egypt. at times in reference to Pharaoh's own actions (7:13,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,34,35), and at times in reference to God's action upon Pharaoh (9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8). It is significant to note that the text refers to Pharaoh hardening his own heart five times before the first reference comes to God hardening Pharaoh's heart. Thus the hardening that God inflicted upon him was the result of his own sin. Joseph Fitzmyer correctly observes that the hardening of the heart by God is the "*divine reaction to persistent human obstinacy against Him, the sealing of a situation arising not from God but from a creature that rejects divine invitation.*" (Fitzmyer, p. 568) Thus the earlier emphasis of Romans 1 is maintained

as God responds to the defiant sinfulness of man by giving him over to that which he has already chosen for himself (cf. Romans 1:18-25) It is important to keep in mind that

“God’s hardening is an act directed against human beings who are already in rebellion against God’s righteous rule. God’s hardening does not then cause spiritual insensitivity to the things of God; it maintains people in the state of sin that already characterizes them.” (Moo, p. 599)

The Lutheran Confessions declare that God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart *“was a punishment of his antecedent sin and horrible tyranny, which in many and manifold ways he practiced inhumanly and against the accusations of his heart towards the children of Israel.”* (FCSD, XI,85) Nonetheless, one might well argue that everything which has been said of Pharaoh could be said of every sinful human being, all of whom by nature stubbornly deny and defy God. Those who are saved are no less sinful than those who are damned. Stöckhardt frankly admits:



“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart” by E.M. Lilien

“If we compare the objects of mercy and the objects of hardening, we cannot understand why of the two who are both by nature sinful and corrupt, God has mercy on one and hardens the other; why He gives the one into hardening, brought about by his own fault, and converts the other, who is no better; why God lets the one continue in his opposition to the very extreme and takes it away from the other before he comes to self- hardening and then to hardening.” (Stöckhardt, p.442)

The apostle does not attempt to resolve this difficulty, for to do so would be to place God before the bar of human justice. Paul's purpose here is clearly to affirm the absolute freedom of God to act according to His divine will in both granting and withholding mercy. ***“God has mercy on whom He wants to have mercy and He hardens whom He wants to harden.”*** Lurking behind the figure of heart hardened Pharaoh in this quotation is the parallel with contemporary Israel. Later, in Chapter 11, Paul will argue that unbelieving Israel has likewise been hardened so that the Name of God may be glorified throughout the world. (Cf. 11:5-7, 25)

The contrast between God's action in the election of the saints to salvation and His reaction in the hardening of the condemned is essentially an expression of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. The subordination of the Law to the Gospel and a meticulously careful emphasis on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel are the defining characteristics of Lutheran theology. In the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, based on Scripture, the Gospel, the message of the sinner's justification, the promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, must always come first. The Reformed theologian, Karl Barth, in criticizing the *“onesidedness”* of that theology, accurately described the Lutheran view when he said: *“The Law has a place before and after the Gospel - before it in order to terrify the unbelieving sinner, after it in order to guide the believing sinner - but hence it is only for the sake of understanding the Gospel that the Law has any place at all in revelation.”* (Barth, I, p. 326) To place the Law on the same footing as the Gospel in the manner of the Reformed is to subtly but fundamentally transform the nature of the Gospel itself. That transformation effects every doctrine but nowhere is it more clearly revealed than in the doctrine of predestination.

In a 1912 article entitled *“The Teaching of Scripture Regarding Hardening,”* Lutheran theologian John Phillip Koehler applies the Law/Gospel dialectic in the context of Romans Chapter 9:

*“The doctrine of hardening is the exponent of the law as the doctrine of election is the exponent of the gospel, that is, both doctrines deeply drive home a chief thought of the law or of the gospel; in these doctrines the thought is expressed most strongly. Through the law God reveals Himself as the almighty Lord and Judge of the world, who is accountable to no one. God is sovereign in His judgment. That is what is meant by the words, **“He hardens whom He wants to.”** In the same way God reveals Himself sovereign in His grace. That is expressed by the doctrine of election. That much the doctrines have in common, that they are exponents of the area of*

doctrine they represent. To the extent that both areas of doctrine are different, these doctrines are also fundamentally different. To the extent that God is sovereign in the law, the expression means that He is accountable to no one, as Paul explains in Romans 9:21. That is a matter of right and of authority. The words about hardening, as the words of the law in general, have this characteristic. It is authoritative speech. It is meant that way and its effect is the same. It knocks man down. The sovereignty of the gospel of grace is completely different. It is not defined by right and authority, but by the freedom of love, that is, in God's activity of love, that He has already guaranteed the salvation of individual man who is saved through his eternal election. God is not defined by anything at all outside of Himself, not by something in the man, but only by what is in God, namely by His love in Christ Jesus. Because these two actions are so different, one may not draw conclusions from one to the other. One may not conclude from the sovereign hardening of the one that from that action results the election of the another; one may not conclude from the free choosing of some that thereby others have been predestined to damnation. Our reason, according to its experience, would gladly do that. But Scripture prevents that by its careful distinction between the two statements. Whoever does that anyway, mixes law and gospel." (Koehler, pp.224-225)

Calvinist confusion in this area is the inevitable result and expression of their more fundamental confusion about the relationship between Law and Gospel. In Calvin's theology, double predestination, as the decisive expression of God's absolute sovereignty, becomes the light in which all other doctrines, including the doctrine of justification, are to be viewed. The corollary concepts of limited atonement, irresistible grace, and inamissable faith, are then spun from that basic governing idea and Scripture is compelled to yield to perceived logic. The essential difference between Calvin and Luther in this most basic perspective affects virtually every area of Christian doctrine and practice.

Verses 19-21

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?

"One of you will say to me..." - Paul immediately anticipates the objection that will arise from the unresolved logical difficulty. How can man be held responsible if God

is in control? The apostle's unequivocal assertion of divine sovereignty would appear



“Where Were You When I Laid the Earth’s Foundation?”

Bible Illustration by Rudolf Schäfer

to have logically absolved man from blame for his own actions. How can God condemn human beings for doing what He causes them to do? After all, who can resist the will of the almighty God. These questions are as old as mankind and to the man whose conscience is not captive to the Word of God they remain every bit as troubling today as they were 2,000 years ago. But the question itself is fallacious, based upon a misrepresentation of the Biblical evidence. The Scriptures clearly and emphatically teach that every human being is indeed responsible for his own unbelief and sin. At the same time, with equal clarity and emphasis, the Bible asserts the determinate control of God over every facet of His creation. How these apparently contradictory assertions are to be reconciled is beyond the capacity of human reason.

Here we approach a boundary line which dare not be crossed lest we become guilty of infringing upon the sovereign majesty of God. Stöckhardt warns that there is a

profoundly important lesson to be learned here for every believing Christian and particularly for every Biblical theologian:

“This is also a solemn warning for theologians who would step beyond the boundary line and cast light upon and clarify every mystery in heaven and on earth with the dim little lights of their own reason and then impudently and insolently deny away everything that does not fit within their tight little categories. But at the same time, the Truth which Paul affirms in Verses 14-21, also includes a direction for the believing Christian and particularly for the Bible believing theologian. They too ought to carefully take note of this boundary line, the point at which divine revelation ends and the mysteries of God begin. It is clearly and definitely revealed in Scripture that the only source of conversion and salvation is the grace and mercy of God and that the only source of hardening and damnation is the evil will of man. This twofold Truth one must extol and inculcate with all diligence. This serves the cause of salvation and the piety of souls. Scripture goes on to say, as in our present text, Romans 9:14-21, and also in the parallel passage in Romans 11:33-36 that there is an unsearchable will of God and that there are inscrutable mysteries of God, which God has reserved in His own wisdom, and that the “discretio personarum” (differentiation between people), the “causa discriminis” (reason for discrimination) is one such mystery. At this point Christian doctrine and theology has arrived at its limit. At this point it must halt. These questions will also arise again and again within the hearts and flesh of believing Christians and theologians. Why? Why does God will and do this or that? Why not the opposite? But we must nip these questions in the bud, for the answers are not found in God’s Word and revelation and they do not serve the salvation of souls which is the only goal of Christian doctrine and theology. He who seeks to solve the insoluble inevitably falls into disputation and wrangling the mighty and majestic God. It is enough for us to know, as Luther noted in the citation quoted above, that there is an unsearchable will in God. That is as far as revelation goes. But it is not fitting for us to inquire and to want to know why and how far His will reaches because God has hidden that from us. The fact, the Truth which at the same time forms the keystone of revealed Truth, that there are unsolved and insoluble questions and secrets, which go far beyond our horizon and which God in His wisdom has kept hidden from us should keep us in the fear of God and in humility, and guard us against idle and dangerous speculation. It should also preserve us in that which is our duty, that we contemplate and proclaim the revealed counsel of God, particularly the entire counsel of God in regard to our salvation, nothing more and nothing less.” (Stöckhardt, pp.455-456)

For Luther, this was the dividing line between the “hidden God” (*Deus absconditus*) and the “revealed God” (*Deus revelatus*). We, as creatures, dare not presume to fully comprehend the mystery and majesty of the eternal Creator. God is revealed in hiddenness and hidden in revelation. It ought to be expected that for us His majesty

is incomprehensible and unfathomable. It should come as no surprise that to the extent that the Creator deigns to disclose Himself and His sovereign will in Scripture, that disclosure would appear to us to be contradictory or paradoxical. How could it have been otherwise? In his classic work *“The Structure of Lutheranism,”* Werner Elert provides a grim description fallen man’s predicament before the terrible reality of the *“hidden God.”*

“He is standing before an inscrutable mystery. He feels the guilt that was bound up with his human nature from the very beginning because of the ‘Thou shalt!’ But he does not know why. As he asks these questions, the darkness becomes impenetrable. There is no answer. This God, who holds us responsible for demands which we cannot fulfill, who asks us questions we cannot answer, who created us for that which is good, and in spite of this leaves us no choice but to do that which is evil - this is the ‘hidden God’ (Deus absconditus). It is the God of absolute predestination. It is the God who hardens the heart of Pharaoh and hates Esau before Esau was born, the potter who forms vessels that fill one with loathing - and in spite of all this, thunders in pitiless sovereignty at these unhappy creatures, ‘Thine is the guilt!’ (‘Tua Culpa!’). Here morals and reason really come to an end.” (Elert, p. 22)

In the depths of his despair, Luther fled in absolute terror from all consuming wrath of God. He felt himself *“sinking into the depths of hell.”* He understood only too well *“the utter unfathomableness of divine majesty and the sovereign will of God.”* (Sasse, p. 139) Lutheran theology is fully aware of the of the deep chasm which separates the finite from the infinite and the sinful creature from the holy Creator. It does not seek to minimize or rationalize the mystery of the divine will and predestination. But for Martin Luther and the Church which bears his name there is an even more awesome and incredible reality than the majestic paradox of the hidden God. Herman Sasse writes:

“They know something even more tremendous, something which grips the human heart even more profoundly, something which goes even further in surpassing human thought. This is the fact that this hidden God has revealed Himself. He has stepped out of the profound darkness behind which, to our eyes, the brightness was concealed so that no one could draw near. He has come to us across the boundless distance which separates the Creator from His fallen creature, and has told us His Name. ‘Ask ye, who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, and there’s none other God.’ And He comes to us not as a Stranger but as a Brother. This is the miracle of the incarnation of the eternal Son of God which Luther celebrates in the greatest of Christendom’s Christmas hymns:

*"The eternal Father's only Son,
For a manger leaves His throne;
Disguised in our poor flesh and blood,
Is now the everlasting Good.
Lord, have mercy!"*

*He whom the world could not enclose
Doth in Mary's lap repose,
He is become an infant small
Who by His might upholdeth all.
Lord, have mercy!"*



"The Word Became Flesh" by Rudolf Schäfer

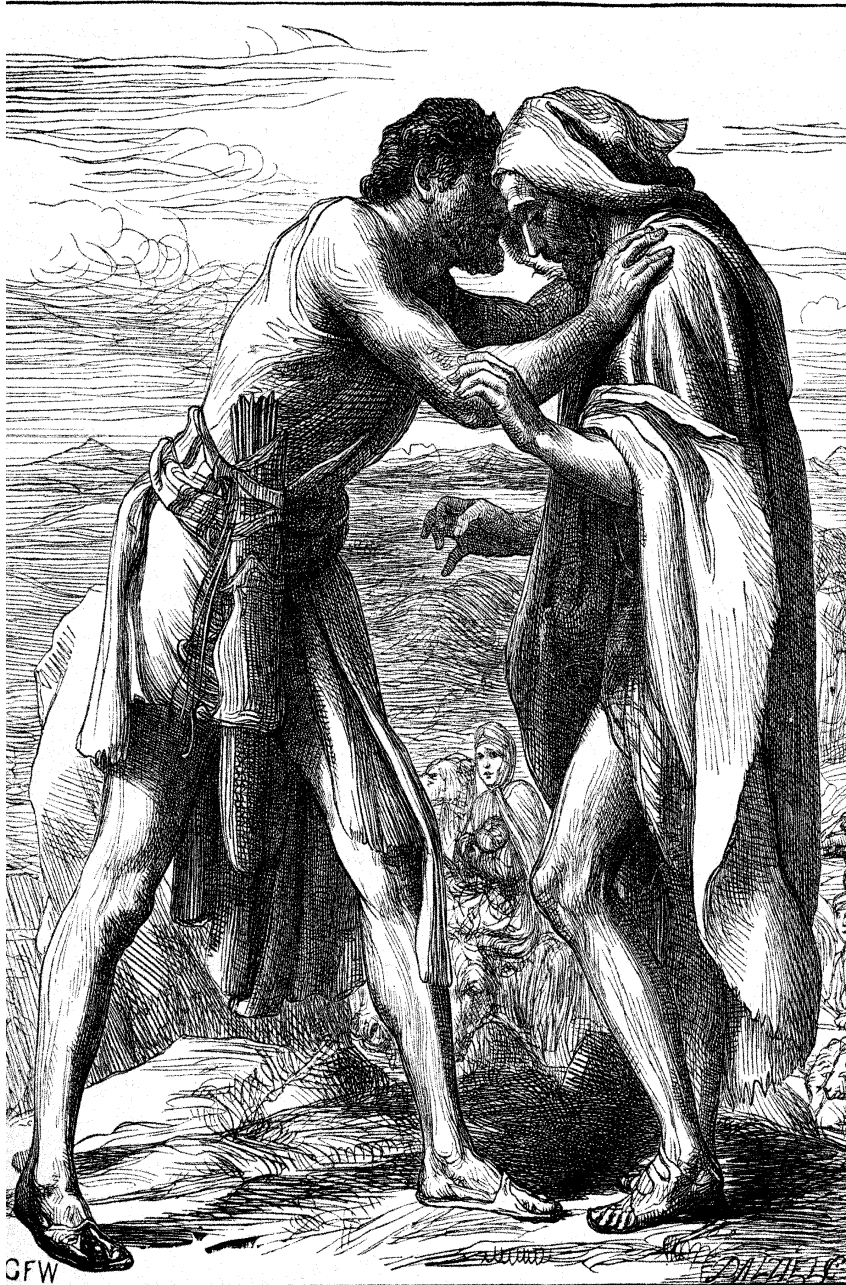
It is from the standpoint of this miracle that the Lutheran faith must be comprehended...We should say, in reply to Calvin, that it is not our task to reconcile these Scripture passages in such a way as to resolve the contradiction between the God of wrath and the God of mercy, between the Judge and the Savior of the world, into a logical and consistent idea of God. We must, rather, acknowledge that the reality of God has two sides. We dare not gloss over the words of judgment and wrath, nor may we take the greatness and the glory away from the words of grace and mercy. Moreover, as the Formula of Concord notes, "with special care the distinction must be observed between that which has been revealed concerning this in God's Word and what is not revealed. For in addition to that hitherto mentioned which has been revealed in Christ concerning this, God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it alone for His wisdom and knowledge. Concerning this we should not investigate, nor indulge our thoughts, nor reach our conclusions, not inquire curiously, but should adhere to the revealed Word of God." (Sasse, pp.138-141)

"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God?..." - Paul does not deign to answer the presumptuous questions of foolish men. He offers neither excuse nor explanation. To pose such questions is to accuse God. To dare to raise such questions is to exalt one's self to the level of God. *"A Christian would be frightened by the very thought of doing such a thing. Suppose we did not see through God's counsels, shall we, with our poor, erring creature minds take the infinite mind and perfect will of God to task?"* (Lenski, p. 619) The horrified exclamation of Verse 14, ***"Perish the thought!"*** is the only appropriate response. John Murray rightly describes Paul's words as *"the appeal to the reverential silence which the majesty of God demands of us."* (Murray, II, p. 31) The dramatic language of the text summons the creature to recall his identity (***"Who are you, O man"***) in the presence of the eternal Creator.

"Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it..." - The inherently subordinate position of the creature over against his Creator is asserted with a quotation from Isaiah 29:16. ***"You turning things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"?"*** (Cf. also Isaiah 45:9; 64:8) The image of God as the potter who forms the clay according to his own artistry and will is a common one in the ancient Near East. It is ultimately drawn from the language of Genesis 2:7 - ***"And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."*** The same image serves the prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 18:3-6).

For the creature to demand an account from God is as foolish and nonsensical as to imagine that a lump of clay might challenge the will of the potter who forms it. The Old Testament references come in the context of Israel's grumbling and complaints.

The prophets use the imagery of the potter and the clay to reveal the ridiculous presumption of such complaints. That is also the apostle's message.



"Jacob and Esau" by G. F. Watts

"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay..." -

While no longer quoting in this Verse, the apostle's language closely parallels that of the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 15:7 -

"For when the potter kneads the soft clay and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, he fashions out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses and those for contrary uses, making all in like manner; but which shall be the use of each one of these the worker in clay decides."

The irony of the allusion would not have been lost on Paul's original audience. In the Wisdom of Solomon text the Jews are the worthy vessels while Gentile idol worshipers are described as unworthy. Now the point of the imagery has been reversed and unbelieving Israel is the unworthy vessel in contrast to true children of

Abraham by faith. In both instances, the point of comparison in this image is the sovereign right of God the Creator to do as He chooses with that which He has created.

“Paul’s imagery is clear; one bowl may be highly decorated and grace a king’s palace; another, made from the same clay, may serve as a chamber pot in a lowly household...The only sensible course for each one, whether menial pot or treasured bowl, is to submit in creaturely humility before the divine potter.” (Dunn, p. 565)

Verses 22-24

What if God, choosing to show His wrath and make His power known, bore with great patience the objects of His wrath - prepared for destruction? What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory - even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

“What if God, choosing to show His wrath...” - The NIV translates the participle ***“choosing”*** (Greek - *“thelon”*) as causal, so that God’s desire to demonstrate His wrath and power becomes the reason for His great patience with the objects of His wrath. While this translation is linguistically possible it tends to obscure the sense of the text. The participle ***“choosing”*** would be better translated as concessive, expressing what God wanted to do, based on His holiness and justice, but did not actually do because of His great love and mercy.

“So immense is the mercy of God, so intense His purpose to make known its riches to men by living examples in order to draw them to His mercy, that He puts off His wrath and His power and the destruction which these must visit on the obdurate...When men are ripe for judgment, God has the will to strike them down in judgment: yet He delays this in the interests of His grace. Foolish men may think that His threats of judgment are not serious; God is willing to run that risk. Displaying His grace is supreme to Him.” (Lenski, p. 622)

Using the participle in this way, the text would then read: *“But what if God, although His will was to manifest His wrath and make known His power....”*. Even the ***“wrath”*** and the ***“power”*** of God ultimately serve the cause of His love. The very judgment that falls upon the stubborn sinner may be seen by other sinners as a warning that will turn them from the path of destruction (cf. v.17). God demonstrates

His judgment so that all may know that it is truly ***“a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*** (Hebrews 10:31) God is astonishingly patient with sinners. The Greek text uses the powerful word *“makrothumia”* which literally means *“great suffering.”* *“God should have destroyed them long ago but delayed and delayed. Although they are intolerable to Him, He tolerated them, and this required great longsuffering indeed! God exercised this longsuffering because of His immense purpose of mercy.”* (Lenski, p. 623) The purpose of God’s longsuffering is always the repentance and forgiveness of the sinner. As the apostle Peter explains: ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient (“longsuffering”) with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*** (2 Peter 3:9)

Stubborn impenitent sinners are designated as the ***“objects of God’s wrath.”*** The text literally says *“vessels”* or *“vases of God’s wrath”* (Greek - *“skeue orges”*) carrying out the potter imagery from the preceding verses. These vessels are said to have been ***“prepared for destruction.”*** This is a perfect passive participle without a designated subject, thus removing God as the active agent in this matter. This is in sharp contrast to the next verse where, in speaking of the vessels of His mercy, an active participle is used and God is designated as the subject. In addition, the Greek prefix *“pro”* (***“in advance”***) is added to verb in the second phrase, indicating God’s independent action long before the promised glory was actually received. Careful attention to these distinctions within the language of the text is of crucial theological significance. The Lutheran Confessions devote a significant amount of time to a careful exegesis of the language of these verses in order that we might clearly understand what the Bible says about the distinction between the basis for salvation and the basis for damnation.

“But the reason why not all who hear it (the Word of God) believe, and some are therefore condemned the more deeply is not because God has begrudged them their salvation; but it is their own fault, as they have heard the Word in such a manner as not to learn, but only to despise, blaspheme, and disgrace it, and have resisted the Holy Ghost, who through the Word wished to work in them, as was the case in the time of Christ with the Pharisees and their adherents. Hence the apostle distinguishes the work of God with special care, who alone makes vessels of honor, and the work of the devil and of man, who by the instigation of the devil and not of God has made himself a vessel of dishonor. For thus it is written (Romans 9:22-23 is cited). Hence the apostle clearly says that God endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, but does not say that He made them vessels of wrath; for if this had been His will, He would not have required any great longsuffering for it. The

*fault, however, that they are fitted for destruction belongs to the devil and to men themselves and not to God. For all preparation for condemnation is by the devil and man, through sin, and in no respect by God, who does not wish that any man be damned. How then should He Himself prepare any man for condemnation? For as God is not a cause of sins, so, too, He is no cause of punishment, of damnation; but the only cause of damnation is sin; for **the wages of sin is death.**" (Romans 6:23). And as God does not will sin, and has no pleasure in sin, so He does not wish the death of the sinner, either. (Ezekiel 33:11), nor has He pleasure in his condemnation. For He is not willing **that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance** (2 Peter 3:9). So too, it is written in Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11 - "**As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.**" And St. Paul testifies in clear words that from the vessels of dishonor, vessels of honor may be made by God's power and working when he writes thus, 2 Timothy 2:21; "**If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.**" For he who is to purge himself must first have been unclean, and hence a vessel of dishonor. But concerning the vessels of mercy, He says clearly that the Lord Himself has prepared them for glory, which He does not say concerning the damned, who themselves, and not God, have prepared themselves as vessels of damnation." (FCSD, XI, 79-83)*

The dreadful Calvinist doctrine of reprobation, that God predestined the overwhelming majority of his creatures to fall and be damned is based upon a misunderstanding of this text. Dr. Stöckhardt concludes: "*It is well to note that the apostle neither here nor elsewhere mentions anything concerning a preparation or predestination of the vessels of wrath to damnation. If there were such a thing, it would surely be mentioned in this connection.*" (Stöckhardt, p. 459)

"What if He did this to make the riches of His glory known to the objects of His mercy...." - The final purpose of God's patient forbearance in the face of egregious sin is here presented. Gracious love, mercy,



"John Calvin"

is God's defining attribute (cf. 1 John 4:8), and all that God does ultimately serves the cause of His love. So also His willingness to defer punishment for sin and to allow the process of hardening to run its full course, not only serves to provide the greatest possible opportunity for repentance on the part of the sinner, but also enables believers to observe the full impact of God's righteous wrath upon the sinner.

"Who would have known about God's mercy toward Israel if God had struck down Pharaoh on that first day when Moses demanded Israel's release? Who would have known about God's mercy toward the church that was made up of Jews and Gentiles if God had destroyed the Jewish nation when Herod killed the Baptist or when the Sanhedrin first plotted Jesus' death?" (Lenski, p. 624)

Only in the context of that grim message of the Law can the amazing sweetness of the message of the Gospel be fully appreciated.

"When the vessels of mercy perceive the fearsome wrath of God upon the disobedient and reflect on the fact that they deserve the same, then they appreciate in a deeper way the riches of God's glory and the grace lavished upon them. The mercy of God is set forth in clarity against the backdrop of His wrath...The mercy of God would not be impressed on the consciousness of human beings apart from the exercise of God's wrath, just as one delights more richly in the warmth, beauty, and tenderness of spring after one has experienced the cold blast of winter." (Schreiner, p. 523)

The description of the redeemed in this Verse parallels the description of the damned in the preceding Verse - **"objects of His wrath"** in contrast to **"objects of His mercy."** However, in this case, as previously noted, the participle is active, and the subject is clearly identified - **"whom He prepared in advance for glory."** Those for whom glory has been prepared are the handiwork of God, and Him alone.

A final relative clause is added to remove any possible ambiguity as to the identity of the vessels of His mercy - **"even us whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles."** With these words the apostle re-emphasizes the basic thrust of his argument. Membership in the household of God is a matter of faith, not blood. The true children of Abraham are not his blood descendants, but those who like Father Abraham trust and believe in the promises of God. Blood Israel's stubborn rejection of Jesus as the Messiah does not mean that the promise of God has failed. On the contrary, Israel's rejection of her Savior serves that which was God's plan from the beginning, namely the salvation of mankind, and the creation of a church made up not of one nation, but of every nation.

Excursus: The Calvinist Doctrine of Reprobation

The doctrine of “reprobation” is one of the distinctive features of Calvinist theology. In his *“Institutes of the Christian Religion”* John Calvin insists that *“those whom God passes over, He condemns; and this He does for no other reason than that He wills to exclude them from the inheritance which He predestines for His own children.”* (Calvin, p. 497) Calvin goes on to assert that reprobation is the



“The Opening of the Synod of Dort - 1618”

inescapable counterpart to the Scriptural doctrine of predestination to salvation and that “election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation.” The Geneva reformer scorns Lutheran theology which resists or rejects this doctrine as ignorant and childish (Calvin, p. 497). The official teaching of Calvinism was formalized and codified by Canons of the Reformed Synod of Dort in 1619 which declared the following:

Article VI

“That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree. “For known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts 15:18; Ephesians 1:11) According to which decree He

Article XV

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture, that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in an eternal decree; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have willfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but permitting them in His just judgment to follow in their own way; at last, for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger.”

The Synod describes God’s action as “*passing by*” from the Latin “*praeter*” (by) and “*ire*” (to go) which comes into Reformed theological terminology in the English word “*preterition*.” Dr. Harry Boer, a theologian of the Christian Reformed Church offers this comprehensive definition of the Calvinist position in his 1983 book “*The Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church*.” Boer is most careful to emphasize that reprobation is neither passive nor permissive. It is, rather, a specific deliberate act of God’s sovereign will which determines to condemn the damned for all eternity.

“What is meant by God’s leaving the reprobate to their wickedness, or, as Dort calls it, His “passing by” of the reprobate? In other words, what concretely does “passing by” mean?...This is the core, the heart, the irreducible center and substance of the decree of reprobation. It states clearly what the “passing by” of the non-elect in fact entails. It reveals that non-election is not a side effect, a by-product, or an attendant circumstance of election. Reprobation consists of three distinct decretal actions of God, deliberate, purposeful, and terribly determinative and final. The reprobate are left in a common fate of living death; they are denied the gift of faith and the grace of conversion; and they are condemned and punished forever. This does not happen simply because God elects others and in the process simply has a neutral attitude to those whom He “passes by.” He specifically decreed that the reprobate should be reprobate, in the same sense in which He decreed that the elect should be elect. This is the meaning of the fateful words in Article 6, “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree.” The several parts of the decree of reprobation are therefore not due to a non-action, an omission, a disregard or inadvertence, or inattention on God’s part. Rather, they are the result of an explicit and purposeful decision as deliberate and intended as the decree of election. The not believing and the not

being converted of the reprobate may involve all manner of time-conditioned personal circumstances, attitudes, backgrounds, and influences. The fact is that behind them and prior to them stands an immutable decree of God as unbreakable as that of election itself, determining that these circumstances, attitudes, backgrounds and influences would never be overcome or undone by the sufficiency and power of the gospel. Before birth, from eternity, the reprobate are destined never to come to faith, are destined never to be converted, are destined to remain in the death into which their primal father Adam cast them, and are destined to be punished forever. But this is not all. The irrevocable certainty of the fate of the damned lies in the same place, in the identical might and driving power within God that guarantees the salvation of the elect - that is, God's sovereign good pleasure. This is the cornerstone of God's predestinating decree, whether for election or reprobation. Not only are both achieved by the same two sided decree, but both have their origin in the same mystery shrouded sovereign will of God. To grasp this absolutely essential fact is to hold in hand the key to the Dortian doctrine of predestination." (Boer, p. 9 ff.)

Calvin was well aware that many would regard this doctrine as "horrible" (Reid, p. 937) but he nonetheless maintained that it was not only necessary but should be prominently preached and taught to the people of God. In Calvin's view, Romans 9 was among the preeminent texts which supported the concept of divine reprobation of the damned. Edwin Palmer articulates the classic Calvinist understanding in this way:

"Reprobation as preterition is unconditional, and as condemnation it is conditional. God in passing some by was not conditioned by their unbelief. God did not foresee which ones by their own will would not accept Christ and on that basis reject them. Just as election is unconditional so also preterition is unconditional. The only reason given for the election Jacob and the passing by of Esau is: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13). The reason was in God and not in the foreknowledge of the good or bad that either one would do. ("Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad - in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by Him who called - she was told, "The older will serve the younger.") As Calvin said: "As Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated." The most powerful evidence that preterition is unconditional and that unbelief is ordained by God is found in the hypothetical questions that Paul raises in response to this strong assertion of God's sovereignty both in election and reprobation. He asks hypothetically, as if a doubter were questioning God's wisdom: "What then shall we say? Is God unjust?" The question presupposes that double predestination (election and reprobation) is unconditional, that it is not based on God's foreknowledge of who would believe or not, who would be good or evil. For if predestination were based on what God foresaw man would believe or do, then predestination would seem to be completely

fair. Man would then get what he deserves and there would be no need for Paul to raise these questions. So the very question about God's unfairness ("Is God unjust?") necessarily presupposes that election and reprobation are not based on what man does but on God's decree. As a matter of fact, Paul immediately goes on to say just that. "For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." (Romans 9:15-16) Paul follows up by reasserting that "God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." (Romans 9:18) Again he asks a question: "One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?" Again these very questions can be understood only if preterition and unbelief are grounded in God...Thus Romans 9 is clear in asserting that both election and preterition are unconditional. Their ultimate foundation is in God: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." Reprobation as condemnation is conditional in the sense that once someone is passed by, then he is condemned by God for his sins and unbelief. Although all things, unbelief and sin included, proceed from God's eternal decree, man is still to blame for his sins. He is guilty. It is his fault and not God's. (Palmer, pp. 104-105)



"John Calvin and his Colleagues in Geneva" by Ferdinand Hodler - 1884

Lutherans have rejected Calvin's assertion that reprobation is the unavoidable logical consequence of predestination to salvation as a contradiction of Scripture and a violation of the fundamental principle that the Bible alone, not mere logical deduction, can be the basis for Christian doctrine. Professor Theodore Engelder summarizes the Scriptural foundation for the Lutheran view in his *"Popular Symbolics"*:

"There is no election of wrath, no predestination of men to damnation as Calvinism teaches. Scripture nowhere teaches that God was pleased to pass by and to ordain to dishonor and wrath a part of mankind. On the contrary, it teaches a) that the grace of God is universal, not particular, affirming that God will have all men to be saved, 1 Timothy 2:4, and that He brings His efficacious grace to bear also upon such as are ultimately lost, Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51, and b) that those who are lost perish solely because of their rejection of the saving grace of God, Matthew 23:37; Acts 7:51; 13:46. The argument that the dogma of the election of wrath is the necessary corollary of the doctrine of the election of grace ("since there could be no election without its opposite reprobation" Calvin, Institutes, III, 23,1) could carry weight only if reason were permitted to construct doctrines by means of logical deductions. Besides, Scripture distinctly repudiates this deduction. While it teaches that the Christians owe their salvation to the sovereign grace of God in Christ, it teaches that men are lost, not in consequence of any action or decree of God or any lack of action, but solely on account of their wickedness Acts 13:48,46; Romans 9:23 ("vessels of mercy which He has afore prepared unto glory") and 22 ("endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction"). FCSD, XI, 79,80. As to John 12:40; Romans 9:17f., 11:8-10; 1 Peter 2:8: God hardens and casts men away not because of any eternal decree of reprobation to that effect, but solely because men harden themselves against, and cast away, the Gospel of grace, Romans 11:9 ("recompense"); 1 Peter 2:8 ("stumble at the Word"); John 12:40 is preceded by verses 35-37; Matthew 11:25 by verse 20f." (Engelder, p.)

Verses 25-29

As He says in Hosea: "I will call them 'My people' who are not My people; and I will call her 'My loved one' who is not My loved one," and, "It will happen that in the very place that it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out His sentence on earth with speed and finality." It is just as Isaiah said previously: "Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

“As He says in Hosea...” - The point is now documented and affirmed by the prophetic witness of Old Testament Scripture. If God had promised salvation to every individual Jew and then failed to save all the Jews one might rightly be able to argue that the promise of God had failed. But that was never the case, as this series of four passages from the Old Testament will demonstrate.

We turn first to the 8th Century prophet Hosea. Hosea was God’s inspired spokesman to the northern kingdom of Israel on the eve of that nation’s destruction by the hordes of Assyria in 722 B.C. The prophet was commanded to marry a harlot, a woman who would not be faithful to him, to symbolize the spiritual adultery of the ten northern tribes in their unfaithfulness to God. (Cf. Hosea 1:1-2:9) Hosea married a prostitute named Gomer. Each of the children whom Gomer conceived is given a symbolic name. Their first born was a son named *“Jezreel”*, a Hebrew word which means *“Scattered in the Wind.”* This strange name was a warning that the time was approaching when God would scatter the northern tribes among the Gentile nations as punishment for their sins. The second child was a daughter whom God named *“Lo-Ruhamah”*. The name is a combination of two Hebrew words which mean *“Not Loved”* because once His judgment came upon them and they were scattered among the nations, God would love the ten lost tribes no more. Another son was born and named *“Lo-Ammi,”* which means *“Not My People,”* foretelling a time when Israel would be the people of God no longer.

Paul paraphrases from Hosea 2:23 and Hosea 1:10 which refer to the names of all three of the prophet’s children. The original texts read: ***“I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will show My love to one I called ‘Not My Loved One.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My People’; ‘You are My people’; and they will say, ‘You are my God.’” “In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”*** The prophecy promises that God will act to undo the disruption caused by His people’s unfaithfulness. The call of Israel had never been a matter of race or conduct. Israel was not chosen because God had rejected the nations, but because of God’s plan for the salvation of the whole world. Thus, as is so often the case in the New Testament’s application of Old Testament prophecy, the promises of a renewed Israel find their fulfillment in the church. Hans LaRondelle summarizes the New Testament perspective in this way:

“Israel’s calling by Yahweh is therefore, for Paul, fulfilled in the apostolic church. He joins Peter (1 Peter 2:10) in citing Hosea’s prophecy of Israel’s restoration, in order to affirm its fulfillment in the universal church of Christ (Romans 9:24-26). Thus Peter and Paul stand together in declaring that Israel’s remnant prophecies have found an ecclesiological fulfillment. This universal application to the Church community is not an abstract spiritualization, but denotes the true, literal

fulfillment.” (LaRondelle, p.108)

The prophet foresees a time when those who were not God’s people will become His people by God’s gracious act. The privilege of sonship has been extended to all who respond in faith to God’s call through the gospel of salvation. Theodore Laetsch explains the Hosea text in this way:

“As the three children of Gomer whose name symbolized God’s judgment were reaccepted by the Lord, so the three names are mentioned here in a manner indicating that God’s curse is lifted. God will sow “her,” the Church, God’s Spouse, “in the earth”; not Canaan only, for in the New Testament God’s people are not restricted to Canaan. Throughout the world God will plant the seed of His Church, so that her branches will extend over all lands (Matthew 13:31,32,36-43; Romans 10:18; also Isaiah 6:3b,11). In New Testament times there shall again be a great people of Israel, sown by God, having obtained mercy from Him, acknowledged by Him as His people, while they rejoice in Him who is indeed their God. Peace shall reign on earth again; for God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, magnifying His holy Name, the Lord Jehovah of mercy and truth.” (Laetsch, p. 36)



***“The Prophet Hosea”
19th Century Bible Illustration
by J. James Tissot***

Paul alters and expands the wording to the original text to emphasize his point. He adds the concept of God’s ***“call”*** as the crucial element in the reformation of the people. He also emphasizes that this will occur ***“in the very place”*** of the earlier rejection, that is to say, in the land of exile, the dispersion, from among the Gentiles, God will call out a people for Himself.

“Isaiah cries out concerning Israel...” - The Isaiah prophecies speak directly of the

Israelite nation and warn that only a small remnant of the nation will be saved. The verb “**cries out**” (Greek - “*krazei*”) is a word that connotes intensity and urgency. This is a desperate cry of warning spoken to a complacent and indifferent people. The citation comes from Isaiah 10:22-23: “***Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the Lord Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.***” The remnant theology of the Old Testament, that only a small minority of the total population would remain faithful and thus be preserved by God, clearly demonstrates that a saving relationship with God has never been the result of blood or national origin. This was never God’s intent, but a faulty conclusion based upon human presumption and pride. The prophet recalls the words of God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17; 32:17) but warns that even in the face of the Abrahamic covenant only a remnant will be saved from among the



*“The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Deportation of its Citizens to Babylon”
19th Century Bible Illustration by J. James Tissot*

great mass of the patriarch's descendants. *"For Paul, the remnant doctrine clearly confirms his word of judgment to Israel: it is 'not all who are of Israel who are truly Israel.'"* (Moo, p.615) And yet, despite the apostasy of the majority God will mercifully preserve His faithful remnant. The wondrous mercy of God is all the more clearly revealed by the fact that while ***"the Lord will carry out His sentence on the earth with speed and finality,"*** nonetheless, God will still preserve His own. From amidst the great mass of vessels of wrath and small number of vessels of mercy will be saved.

"It is just as Isaiah said previously: 'Unless the Lord Almighty..." - Paul now develops the Gospel side of remnant theology as he reminds us that despite the widespread disobedience of the nation God will still preserve His own. *"God's promise to preserve a remnant signals His continuing faithfulness to His people, however faithless they may have been."* (Moo, p.616) Israel was no better than Sodom and Gomorrah and deserved the same fate that befell those doomed cities. But God in His mercy ***"left us descendants."*** (Greek - *"enkatelipen sperma"*). Thus the continuity of the text is maintained as the earlier theme of the *"sperma"* as the true descendants of Abraham (9:6-9) is brought forward once more. The preservation of the seed is solely the work of God's mercy. Left to itself and its own just deserts Israel would have completely disappeared within the same hellish firestorm that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, but God intervened to save those whom He had chosen. Lenski summarizes:

"Paul shows from Isaiah's prophecy that 'seed' was left for Israel, that the Word and promise did not fall by the way (vs.6). In His longsuffering God so dealt with the vessels of wrath already long fitted for complete destruction that He did not utterly consume these vessels, that He bore with them and thus managed to secure vessels of mercy (vss. 22-23). If God had made His final reckoning with the Jews in Isaiah's time or even prior to this, no godly remnant would have been obtained from them at any future time, certainly not at Paul's time. Judaism would have become a second Sodom, would have been made like Gomorrah, not a soul would have been left after the cataclysm of punishment...The torrent of wrath swept over the Jews but always abandoned some, and from these God's mercy won the seed, the remnant, the leftover, and made this seed vessels of mercy." (Lenski, p. 632)



“Behold I Lay a Stone in Zion” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 30-33

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.

“What shall we then say?” - This phrase is used repeatedly in Romans (6:1; 7:7; 9:14) to advance the argument to a new level and introduce the implication of his teaching in the preceding segment. Fitzmyer labels it *“a diatribe-like rhetorical question.”* (Fitzmyer, p. 577) Having clearly demonstrated that the failure of Israel to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah does not mean that the Word and promise of God have failed, the apostle will now proceed to demonstrate that the cause for Israel’s failure is not to be found in God, but in Israel itself.

“That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it...” - There is a tragic sense of irony in these words. The Gentiles have unexpectedly stumbled upon that which the Jews had sought all along. The verbs *“pursue”* and *“obtained”*

are matched. We find the same pair combined in Philippians 3:12-14 in the context of a runner straining toward the finish line of the race. The key word **“righteousness”** is used in its proper forensic sense before God rather than mere moral uprightness which was, in fact, the goal of many pagan philosophies and religions. This genuine **“righteousness”** is obtained **“by faith.”** Since faith is itself a gift of God’s pure grace, this is in precise conformity with Paul’s previous assertion in Verse 16 that **“it is not a matter of the person who wills or runs, but of the God who shows mercy.”**



“The Scribes and Pharisees” by J. James Tissot

“But Israel who has pursued a law of righteousness has not obtained it.” - The race imagery continues as Paul delineates the failure of the Jews to achieve their goal. But the language has undergone an important shift. The **“righteousness”** that is obtained by faith in the preceding phrase is here replaced with **“a law of righteousness.”** The law in question is, according to the typical Pauline usage, the law of Moses, in this instance, abused as a means of attaining righteousness. But law demands and never gives. The law as a means to righteousness demands perfect obedience which cannot be achieved. Thus the law’s demands exceed our ability to meet them. Accordingly, Israel’s attempt to obtain righteousness through the law ended in inevitable failure. Douglas Moo offers this helpful paraphrase:

“Israel, pursuing a law that promised righteousness, did not attain that law. For what reason did Israel not attain the law that promises righteousness? Because Israel pursued that law that promises righteousness not on the

basis of faith but as if it could have been attained on the basis of works.” (Moo, p. 626)

The failure was not the result of the law itself. Rather the failure resulted from the abuse of the law as a means to earn or work righteousness. Lenski defines the essential incompatibility of faith and works:

“The fearful difference between faith and works is that “faith,” being trust, relies in complete dependence on another, on God, on Christ, on the promise and the mercy, while “works” repudiate such dependence and rely on man’s own ability and attainment. Faith permits God to put it wholly and completely under obligation to Himself; works not only repudiate this obligation to God but insist on putting God under obligation to the man who does the works, and the Jews tried to obligate God by means of even false works.” (Lenski, p. 637)

“They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” - Paul uses the language of the Old Testament to clarify his thought. The Greek text is considerably stronger than its English counterpart. This is not a reference to a mere pebble in the road that causes one to trip and then recover himself. The Greek text literally says *‘they smashed against the stone of smashing against.’* The serious intent of the image is reinforced by Paul’s use of the ominous term *“skandalon”* in Verse 33. This word originally referred to the trigger that springs the trap and carries a definite connotation of deadliness. The trap that springs shut is a death trap. It kills its victim. This is an image of total destruction, not momentary imbalance. This imagery comes from two passages in Isaiah which the apostle now conflates together in a single quotation. Peter quotes the same two texts together in 1 Peter 2:6-8 which has led some scholars to conclude that the combined use of the texts was common in the early Christian community, perhaps as part of proof text collection of Old Testament prophecies which find their fulfillment in Christ. The two passages read as follows.

“So this is what the sovereign Lord says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts in Him will never be dismayed.’ (Isaiah 28:16)

“And He will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel He will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem He will be a trap and a snare.” (Isaiah 8:14)

The prophet's words were written in a time of national crisis as the nation of Judah was threatened by the might of Assyria. Isaiah urges the people to have faith in God and not in their own diplomatic and political maneuvers. In the second text, he warns that because they have failed to do so, God will bring about the downfall of the nation. James Dunn summarizes the application of the prophecy to Paul's argument in this way:

"Israel's failure to heed Isaiah foreshadows Israel's failure to heed the gospel; the trust which Isaiah called for is the same confidence in that which God has done which Paul calls for. Most of Israel had found Isaiah's call for faith to be an offense; it is the same reliance on human contrivance that causes his own kinsmen to stumble at Paul's gospel. Just as Isaiah had to think in terms of only a remnant who would believe, so Paul finds some comfort for his sorrow that so few of his own people have come to faith in their Messiah, and as the remnant of Isaiah's could be assured that their trust would not be disappointed, so too, the Jews who had come to faith in Christ could be confident, that even though they were a minority, God would not fail them. If only Israel would heed the promises and warnings of their own Scriptures!" (Dunn, p. 594)



*"The Destruction of the Host of Assyria Before Jerusalem"
by Rudolf Schäfer*

Romans Chapter 10



*“The Young Jesus in the Temple with the Scribes and Teachers of the Law”
by William Holman Hunt*

Verses 1-2

Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer...” - The chapter opens with the characteristic fraternal address **“Brothers”** through which Paul identifies with his audience and signals a new turn of thought (cf. 1:13; 7:1, 4; 8:12; 11:25; 12:1; 15:14, 30; 16:17) Implicit in this renewed emphasis is the warning that the predominantly Gentile congregation in Rome dare take no pleasure in the condemnation of Israel. The apostle reasserts his profound personal desire for the salvation of the Israelite people (cf. 9:1-3). There is no joy or personal satisfaction in the judgment here pronounced. Instead, Paul *“once more speaks his compassion for the people whose unbelief it is his duty to expose.”* (Franzmann, p. 186) The depth and intensity of his

individual feeling in this matter is indicated by the terms ***“my heart’s desire and prayer.”*** Paul’s commitment rests in the desire or will of his innermost being, the heart. That desire is expressed in his ***“prayer to God.”*** The Greek word *“deesis”* conveys the idea of persistent pleading and entreaty. This is not an isolated, casual prayer, but an ongoing, urgent plea. The object of his petition is ***“that they may be saved.”***

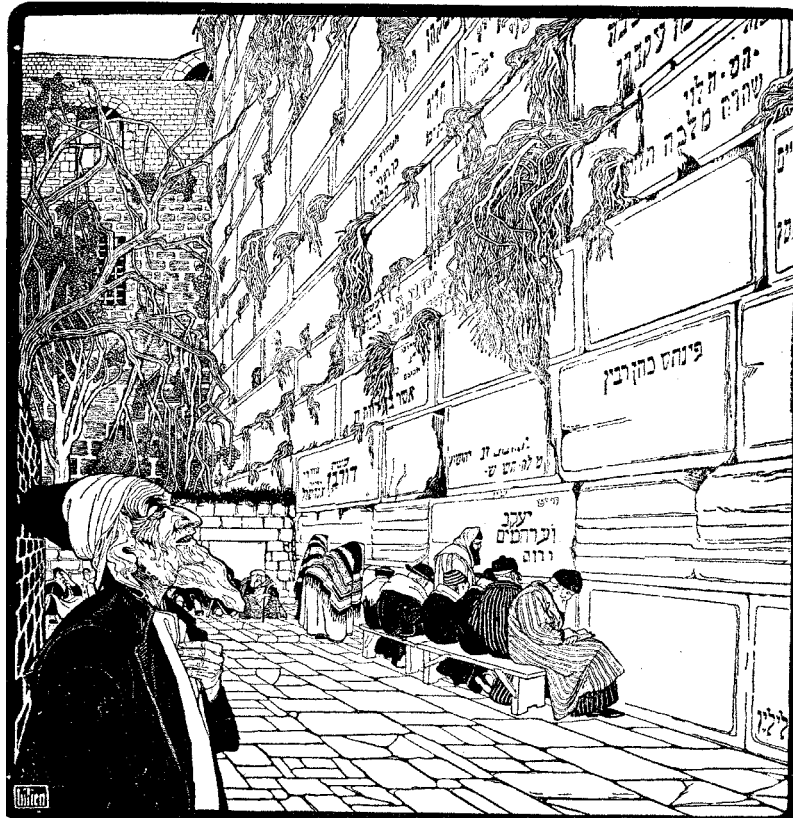


“Jesus Teaching in the Temple Treasury” by J. James Tissot

“For I can testify about them that they are zealous...” - Paul knew well from personal experience of the Israelite zeal for God. He had himself excelled in that zeal. He testified to the Galatians:

“For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” (Galatians 1:13-14; cf. also Philippians 3:5-6; Acts 22:3)

The word “*zealous*” (Greek - “*zelon*”) in itself is neither good nor bad. It can be used negatively to denote fanaticism or positively to indicate overwhelming concern or consuming desire. Zeal for God, demonstrated in a compelling desire to carefully observe and obey His Law was considered the characteristic of the faithful Jew at this time. This was a highly commendable attitude among the Hebrews and Paul appears to use the concept in that positive light. During the intertestamental revolt of the Maccabees, Mattathias triggered Jewish resistance with the cry: “*Let everyone who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me.*” (1 Maccabees 2:27) In the New Testament era, those who advocated armed rebellion against the Romans styled themselves the “*Zealots.*”

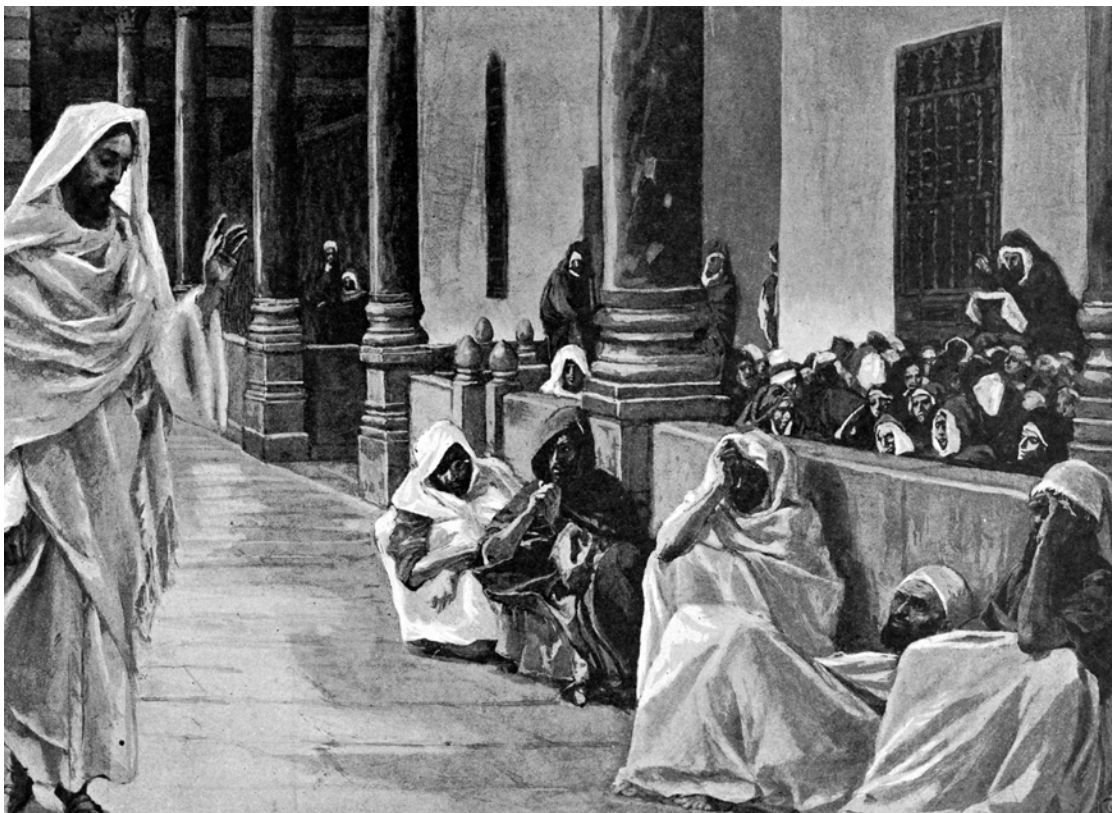


“*Modern Jews Praying at the Wailing Wall*” by E.M.Lilien

But this Jewish zeal was misguided and destructive because it is not “*based on knowledge.*” The text does not use the ordinary term for intellectual information, “*gnosis,*” but a more intense, powerful word, “*epignosis,*” that is, the profound spiritual insight that comes from a saving relationship with God. The Jews possessed a certain degree of information; they had an intellectual awareness of the outward demands of God’s law. But their’s was the sort of superficial religious knowledge

which leads to pride and arrogance (1 Corinthians 8:1) but not the godly knowledge that produces faith and humility. They flawed knowledge was focused on human obedience to the Torah and failed to recognize that genuine righteousness comes only from God through Christ. Hence the very intensity of their religious ardor and zeal became the means of their downfall. Sincerity never replaces truth. Lenski notes:

“Here we have the answer to the statement that everything depends on a man’s religious sincerity, and nothing on the substance that his sincerity includes. Take poison ardently; the ardor will as little effect the deadly effect of the poison as the lack of ardor would. “It is better to limp in the road than to run eagerly away from it.” (Augustine) The greater the intensity of zeal devoid of true knowledge, the more damage it does to itself and to others. And this is true in all departments of life. Error, too, also tends to produce fanatical zeal, which we would not admire or offer as an example. No matter how great the zeal produced by truth and its true knowledge becomes, it always has the sanity and the balance that distinguish it from the morbidity of fanatical zeal.” (Lenski, p. 643)



“He that is of God Heareth God’s Words” by J. James Tissot

It is not the text’s intent to excuse Israel’s rejection of Christ as the Messiah on the

basis of ignorance. The use of the loaded term “*epignosis*” in the phrase “***their zeal is not based on knowledge,***” indicates that there is a moral, willful dimension to their not knowing. The problem here is not mere ignorance, the absence of information. This is an invincible, deliberate ignorance. They do not know because they choose not to know; they do not want to know; they have willfully determined to reject the truth which God has set before them in the person of His only Son. This is the tragedy described by St. John the Evangelist: “***He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, and His own did not receive Him.***” (John 1:10-11) Sinful man “***did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God*** (Romans 1:28) and therefore spurned the unmistakable evidence of God’s invisible qualities revealed in creation (Romans 1:19-20) in a deliberate act of his perverted will. In the same way, Israel had chosen not to know that which she could have known, because God had graciously revealed it to her. Lenski is correct in asserting: “*The Jews were ignorant of divine essentials not because of any failure on God’s part to make them truly known, but because of guilty obduracy on their own part.*” (Lenski, p. 643) This stubborn resistance to the truth about God is in its essence a violation of the First Commandment as prideful sinners insist on knowing God on their own terms. Stöckhardt explains:

“The Jews do not comprehend because they do not want to comprehend...God had revealed to Israel in His Word who and how He is, and the manner in which He desired to be honored. But they did not believe. They did not want that kind of God - God as He is and as He reveals Himself. Instead, they chose to think of God in a manner consistent with their own desires. Therefore their zeal for God was not a God pleasing zeal. True zeal for God, true worship of God remains within the parameters of God’s revelation and is not determined by our own thoughts and desires.”
(Stöckhardt, p.477)

Verses 3-4

Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

“Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God...” - The “*righteousness of God*” is the basic theme of the Epistle to the Romans and the heart of the Gospel of Salvation. The “***righteousness that comes from God***” is the forensic



"The Twelve Year Old Jesus in the Temple"
by Max Liebermann

act of the righteous God in declaring the sinner to be justified, that is, pronouncing a verdict of "*Not Guilty!*" on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. The "*righteousness of God*" is presented 35 times in Romans (cf. notes on 1:17, p.27f.) It is precisely at this most crucial point that the "*not knowing*" of Israel is focused. The concept of a deliberate refusal to acknowledge that which could have been known continues in this verse. "*Since they did not know*" does not refer to the absence of information or knowledge, but to the

repudiation of that which has been revealed and the refusal to know or accept that which has been disclosed by God. The contrast between two mutually exclusive categories of righteousness is reinforced and explained by the phrase "*they did not submit to God's righteousness.*" The verb "*hupostasso*" means to submit or be subject to the authority of another. The pride of sinful man rebels against submission. The descendants of fallen Adam would prefer to "*like God,*" (Genesis 3:5) independent, and answerable to no one. Instead of "*submitting*" to the righteousness of God, they chose to substitute another righteousness, a righteousness of "*their own,*" that is to say, a righteousness of their own making, based upon their own works. Such self-righteousness does not come from God. Man must attempt to "*establish*" it for himself. The futility of this effort is suggested by the verb "*sought*" (Greek - "*sateo*") which means to search for or to pursue. The verb is in the present tense, indicating continuous, ongoing action. Lenski aptly summarizes the difference

between these two kinds of righteousness and the implications of that difference:

“The one “righteousness” is God’s, wrought and bestowed by Him, availing before Him, all the glory being His, we being wholly dependent upon Him; it is justification by faith alone. The other, “their own,” which they are “seeking,” pursuing, not catching up with (9:31), is one that, if it were attained, would emanate solely from themselves, count only in their sight, they being the ones who justify themselves (Luke 16:15), all the glory would be their own, they would be entirely independent of God, He would merely tell them what works they should do to establish this righteousness; this is the righteousness of works, “even that which is of the law” (Philippians 3:9).”
(Lenski, p.644)

Verse 4

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

“Christ is the end of the law...” - The Greek text includes the conjunction “*gar*” (“*for*”) indicating that this verse is the summary explanation of that which has preceded. The verse constitutes one of the most famous of all of Paul’s theological affirmations.

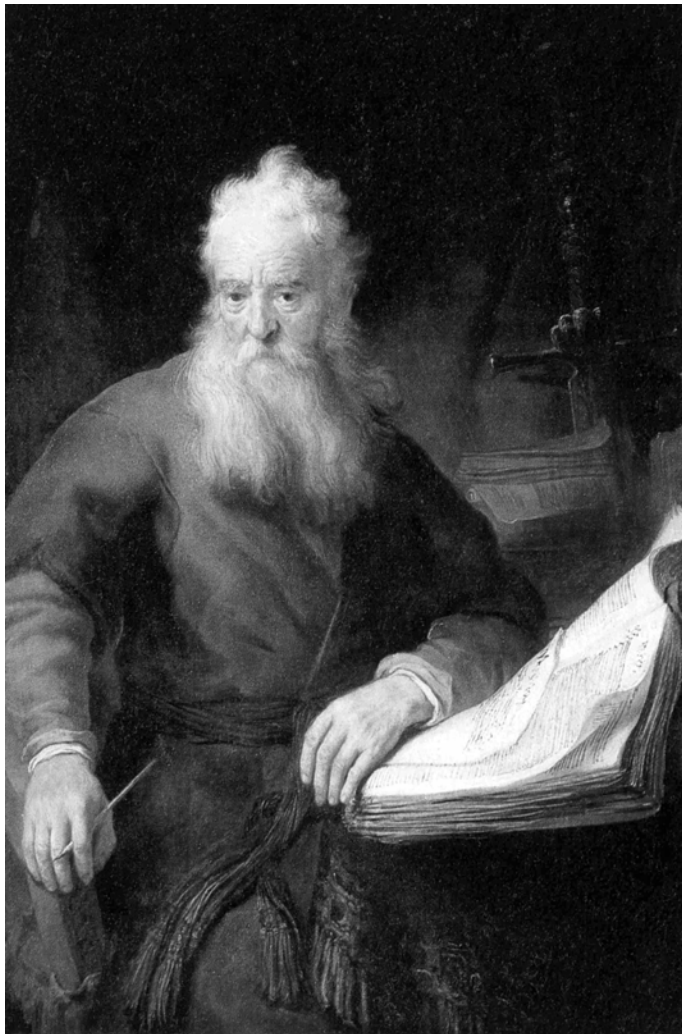
In the original, the noun “***end***” (Greek - “*telos*”) comes first for special emphasis; thus literally “*for an end of law is Christ.*” In either language the term may refer to the termination of something or to its goal. That ambiguity has provoked considerable debate among the commentators. Given typical New Testament usage, the emphasis on termination probably should be maintained, although not in a temporal sense. That is to say, since mankind’s fall into sin, the law has never been a means of attaining righteousness. It is not as though at a specific date in history Christ put an end to the law righteousness which had prevailed prior to that date. There has never been any genuine possibility of law righteousness for sinful mankind, human pretensions to the contrary notwithstanding. The Old Testament was not a “*law covenant*” in contrast to the “*gospel covenant*” of the New Testament. The plan of salvation has been the same throughout history. Christ was “***the end of the law***” for Adam and for Abraham (cf. Romans 4) in exactly the same way that He is the end of the law for us.

The “***law***” (Greek - “*nomos*”) in question here is generic, law in any and every form, including, but not limited to, the law of Moses. This is the whole principle of law, law as a method of obtaining righteousness. Paul understands the difference between law

righteousness and Christ righteousness from profound personal experience. Like so many other great champions of the Gospel, Paul is a man who has himself lived under the terrible tyranny of law righteousness and religion. He uses the same terminology in Philippians 3:5-9 as he describes the course of his own spiritual journey -

“Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for the righteousness that is in the law, faultless. But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my

Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”



“The Apostle Paul in Rome” by Rembrandt

“Law” is linked to “righteousness” in this phrase with the Greek preposition “eis.” The preposition expresses the means by which something is accomplished or achieved and should thus be translated “for Christ is an end to law as a means to righteousness.” The NIV’s translation links the preposition to the phrase as whole in the sense of purpose, thus, “so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” This translation tends to obscure the sense of the passage.

God's plan of salvation, personified in Jesus Christ, is the repudiation and contradiction of any and every human attempt at self-justification. Dr. Stöckhardt hails this verse as "*a clear summary of the Gospel of God*" and "*the unmistakable shibboleth of the true religion.*" He goes on to summarize the overall application of this powerful passage:

"That which Paul writes here about the Jews applies generally to all unbelievers. This is a clear summary of the Gospel of God, the unmistakable shibboleth of the true religion. Christ is the end of the law. Whoever believes in Him is justified. Thus it is inexcusable ignorance for anyone not to know where to look for righteousness, salvation, and life. It is inexcusable ignorance for anyone to distort or deny the righteousness accomplished by God, or to establish in place of that righteousness one of his own." (Stöckhardt, p.481)

Verses 5-9

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (That is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

"Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law:..." - The contrast between law righteousness and Christ righteousness is amplified and explained in these verses using a series of quotations from the Old Testament. In this way, Paul is able to demonstrate that the Law/Gospel dialectic is not an innovation but that it has been part and parcel of God's revelation throughout history. Judaic rejection of the message of the Gospel is not a matter of adherence to the old covenant in preference to the new. Rather it is a fatal distortion of the plan of salvation as it had existed since the beginning.

The initial quotation comes from Leviticus 18:5. In contrast to much of modern scholarship which considers the Pentateuch to be a composite from four divergent sources (JEDP) compiled over many centuries, St. Paul unequivocally identifies Moses as the author of the passage. It is most appropriate that Moses, the great

lawgiver of Israel, who received the Ten Commandments from God's own hand on Mt. Sinai, is presented as the first authority on the nature of law righteousness. Note also that the verb which introduces the citation is in the present tense, "**Moses describes,**" thus indicating the ongoing contemporary relevance of a word written many centuries in the past. Because the text is the inspired Word of God it remains permanently pertinent and applicable.

The subject of the quoted text is "**the righteousness based on law.**" Theoretically, the law is a valid means of attaining righteousness. It is as Moses said: "**I am the Lord your God. Keep My decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord, your God.**" (Leviticus 18:5) The prophet Ezekiel reiterates the point three times in the twentieth chapter of his book of prophecy.

"I gave them My decrees and made known to them My laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them...Yet the people of Israel rebelled against Me in the desert. They did not follow My decrees, but rejected My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them... "But the children rebelled against Me: they did not follow My decrees, they were not careful to keep My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them." (Ezekiel 20:11,13, 21)

Our Lord Himself, in response to the legal experts accurate summary of the law's content, declares: "**You have answered correctly,**" **Jesus replied, "Do this and you will live."** (Luke 10:28) The problem with law righteousness, as indicated in all of these passages, is that it requires perfection. In order to be saved on the basis of the law, one must obey the law absolutely, without the slightest infraction. As St. James declares: "**Whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**" (James 2:10) Thus while the law is a theoretically valid means of attaining righteousness, in reality no naturally born descendant of Adam can be saved on the basis of the law because the perfect obedience the law demands is an impossibility. Accordingly, Paul concludes in Galatians 3:10,11 - "**All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written; 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything that is written in the book of the law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law.**" Lenski sums it up this way:

"Yes, law is one way to righteousness, to securing God's favorable verdict...The trouble with the law as a means for attaining righteousness is that it requires complete doing on our part;...A single break in the doing, or a single omission in the

many things to be done is fatal. Man is in a sinful condition from the start and thus could not hope to achieve righteousness by doing the law. Only a man trained in pharisaic blindness (John 9:40-41) could dream of saying what the rich young ruler said in Matthew 19:20. The entire Jewish legal system with all its sacrifices for sin proclaimed that no man could do the law and thus gain righteousness and life. What Paul quotes from Moses is an old doctrine; every Jew should know it, and certainly every Christian.” (Lenski, p. 647)

“But the righteousness that is by faith says...” - The comforting promise of faith righteousness is in stark contrast to the unattainable demands of law righteousness. Whereas **“the righteousness that is by the law”** was introduced with a quotation from the inspired writings of the prophet Moses, **“the righteousness that is by faith”** is dramatically personified to speak for itself. Having demonstrated the futility of law righteousness, Paul now presents the divinely given means for conveying the righteousness of God to us, namely the Word. The apostle makes his point by paraphrasing and expanding upon the text of Deuteronomy 30:11-14. The original reads as follows:

“Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may obey it.”



“The Prophet Moses” by Rudolf Schäfer

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy marks the end of the ministry of the great prophet Moses. This is his valedictory message to the nation. The people are apprehensive and uncertain. What will they do when Moses is gone? How will they find God or know His will in the absence of the great lawgiver? The words cited above were written to calm their fears and assure them of the adequacy and efficacy of the Word of God. Even after Moses was gone that Word would remain and it would provide all that was needed to know God and understand His will. Paul uses an amplified reformulation of the text to make the same point about the righteousness of faith. Douglas Moo summarizes the parallel in this way:

“As God brought His Word near to Israel so that they might know and obey Him, so God now brings His Word near to both Jews and Gentiles, that they might know Him through His Son, Jesus Christ and respond in faith and obedience...The grace of God that underlies the Mosaic covenant is operative now in the new covenant; and, just as Israel could not plead the excuse that she did not know God’s will, so now, Paul says, neither Jew nor Gentile can plead ignorance of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. As Paul, therefore uses Leviticus 18:5 to summarize the essence of the law, so he quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-14 to encapsulate the Gospel. Throughout salvation history, these two words from the Lord have operated side by side; God making His demand on His people on the one hand and providing in His grace for their deliverance on the other...righteousness before the Lord can never come from the law, involving as it does human effort, but from the gospel of God’s grace.” (Moo, p. 353, 354)

The Word is the means through which that righteousness is offered and conveyed. It is not the result of human effort (***“Who will ascend to heaven...to bring Christ down? Who will descend...to bring Christ up from the dead?”***) but the self-disclosure of God and His plan of salvation in the Word. The allusion here to the incarnation (***“Who will ascend to heaven, that is, to bring Christ down?”***) and to the resurrection ***Who will descend into the deep, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead?”***) is intentional and unmistakable. God came down to us in the person of His Son, the Word made flesh, because we were incapable of going up to Him. Christ’s victory over death proclaimed in the resurrection declares Jesus to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. God comes to us now in the written Word which conveys to us the Gospel of Jesus. The medieval acrostic carol “In Dulci Jubilo” catches the sense of this concept very well:



“Christmas Night” by Ludwig Richter

message proclaimed by **“the righteousness that is by faith”** is pure sweet Gospel. Martin Franzmann points out:

“The voice of righteousness by faith bids man cease his willing and his running after righteousness. Man need not scale the heavens to bring Christ down; Christ has come down, and that, too, in the likeness of our own sinful flesh and as a sacrifice for sin (8:3) Man need not go into the dark abyss of death, to bring Christ up from the dead; He has been raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, raised for our justification. (6:4; 4:25)...The voice of righteousness by faith says not “Do!” but “It is done!” (Franzmann, p. 188)

“But what does it say? “The word is near you...” - Verses 6 and 7 tell us that the word of the **“righteousness that is by faith”** categorically excludes any human effort. Now, the rhetorical question, **“But what does it say?”** serves to draw special

*“Now sing we now rejoice, now
raise to heaven our voice;
He from whom joy streameth poor
in a manger lies;
Not so brightly beameth the sun in
yonder skies.
Thou my Savior art! Thou my
Savior art!*

*Come from on high to me; I cannot
rise to Thee.
Cheer my wearied spirit, O pure
and holy Child;
Thro’ Thy grace and merit, blest
Jesus, Lord most mild,
Draw me unto Thee! Draw me unto
Thee!*

This language about ascending to the heavens and descending into the abyss seem to have been proverbial expressions for attempting the impossible. Christ has accomplished the impossible for us. He has done that which we could never have done for ourselves. The

attention to the positive part of the word proclaimed by the “***righteousness that is by faith.***” This is not an esoteric, cryptic message, hidden from most while being revealed only to an inner circle of initiates who have undergone mystical journeys to heaven and hell (“***The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.***”). The message of the Gospel is both accessible and understandable because God has made it so. Thus, in terms of Paul’s basic argument in this segment, the unbelief of Israel cannot be attributed to any failure on the part of God. The state of modern man is much the same. We in western culture are surrounded with readily available information about the Gospel, but the vast majority of men choose to ignore or deny that Gospel nonetheless. They choose instead, work righteousness in one of its endless variety of forms. As Geoffrey Wilson observes: “*The sheer perversity of unbelief is shown by the many who prefer to undertake an impossible odyssey rather than put their trust in an accessible Christ.*” (MacArthur, p. 71)

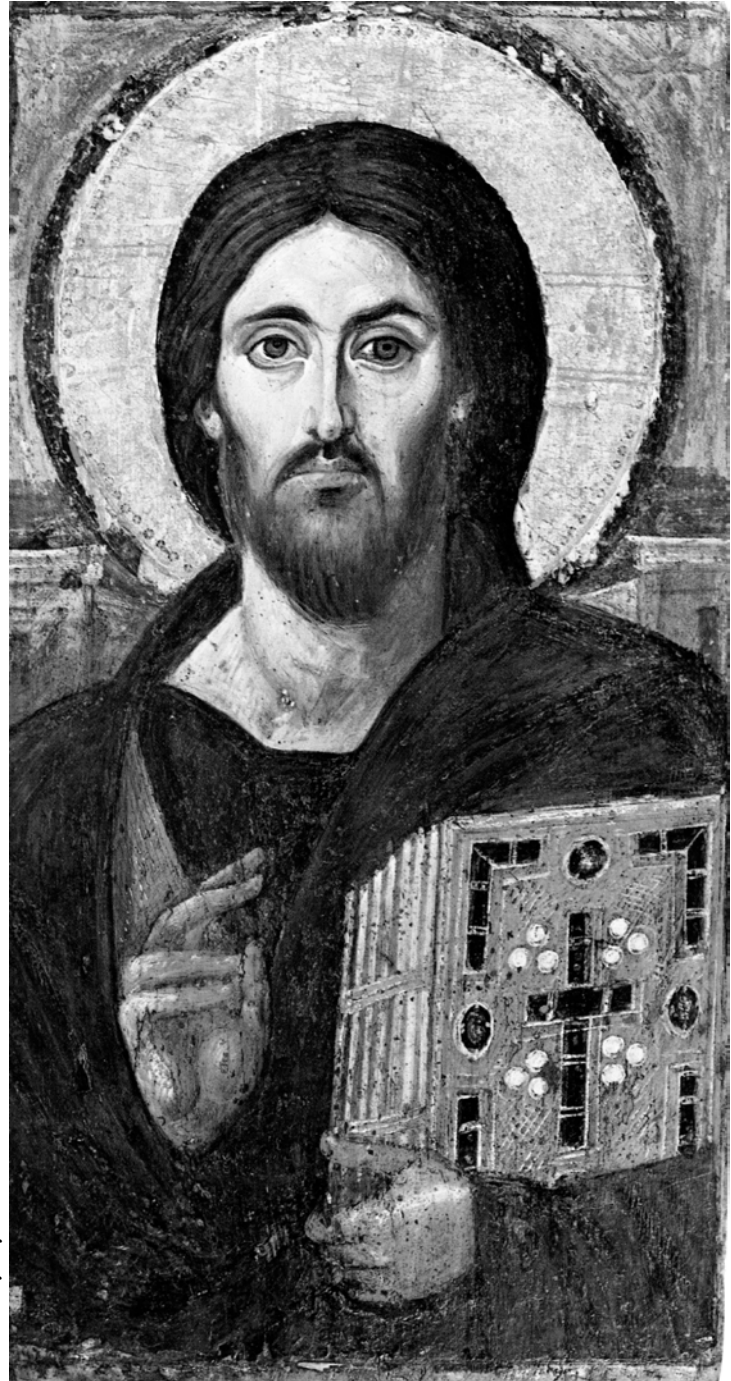
“That is, the Word of faith we are proclaiming.” - How can it be that this mighty word of salvation is available and accessible to men? It is because “***the word of faith,***” that is, the word which is preached, is a means through which personal justifying faith (Objective Genitive) is created. That faith creating message is conveyed in the apostolic preaching of the cross - “***we are proclaiming.***” Note the use of the first person plural verb which Paul utilizes to refer not only to his own preaching but also to that of all the other apostles.

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart...” -

The “***mouth***” - “***heart***” language is clearly drawn from the Deuteronomy text. Here, the order of Paul’s presentation follows that of the Old Testament passage with the “***mouth***” preceding the “***heart.***” In the sentence which follows, however, he will revert to the more logical chronological sequence - “***For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.***” (Verse 10) The Word first penetrates the heart, the innermost core of being, as God the Holy Spirit bestows the gift of faith, establishing a relationship of trust with the individual who is then enabled to confidently believe that Jesus is our Savior and our Substitute who was sacrificed upon the cross to pay in His blood the redemption price for our sin and whom God raised from the dead to proclaim our justification before all the world. The inevitable result of that faith is confession. The Greek verb is “*homologeo.*” The use of this term is somewhat unusual in the writings of St. Paul. The word has judicial overtones, referring originally to solemn testimony offered before a court of law. In this context “*confession*” is a public attestation of one’s faith,

an acknowledgment of one's identification with the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. also 1 Timothy 6:12-13; Titus 1:16; 2 Corinthians 9:13). In the Old Testament, the basic confession of Israel's faith was the famous "*Shema*" of Deuteronomy 6:4 - "**Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.**" Most commentators agree that the affirmation "**Jesus is Lord**" served a similar function in the New Testament and that these words were a fundamental confession of the Christian Church from the earliest days. The phrase appears in the New Testament repeatedly in a variety of forms (cf. Philippians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 12:3) and its antiquity is conclusively indicated by the Aramaic transliteration "*Maranatha*" ("*Our Lord, Come!*") in 1 Corinthians 16:22. James Montgomery Boice notes:

"'Jesus is Lord.' What a tremendous statement! It is impossible to overestimate the significance of these three words (only two in Greek), for this was not only the first essential element of the Gospel proclamation, as well as of the first Christian confession. It was also a confession of their faith for which believers of the first century were willing to die." (Boice, p. 1191)



*"Christ the Almighty Lord" 6th Century Icon
from the Monastery of St Catherine at Mt. Sinai*

The phrase is pregnant with theological meaning. John Murray summarizes its theological content in this way: "*The confession 'Jesus is Lord' refers to the lordship which Jesus exercises in virtue of His exaltation. This lordship presupposes*

the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ and consists in His investiture with universal dominion.” (Murray, p. 55)

The Greek word “Kyrios” (Lord) is the equivalent of the Hebrew divine Name “Jahweh.” In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, “Kyrios” is used over 6,000 times as the translation of sacred Tetragrammaton. Accordingly, to declare that Jesus is Lord is to acknowledge Him as true God, the divine Son of the Father. Paul uses the term forty-four times in Romans. In thirty of those instances it is used in reference to Jesus Christ. In eight cases it is used of God the Father. In the remaining cases it is unclear whether the reference is to Jesus or to the Father.

This interchangeable usage clearly indicates Paul’s unqualified belief in the deity of Jesus Christ.



Bishop Polycarp

The profound significance of these words for the believers of the First Century is illustrated by the account of the martyrdom of a man named Polycarp, bishop of the church in Symrna. Polycarp died for the faith in February of 156 A.D. On the way to his trial, two of the soldiers guarding him took pity on him because of his advanced age. They urged him to go through the required ceremony and thus avoid condemnation. “What harm is there,” they asked, “in saying that Caesar is Lord” and offering the customary sacrifice if it could save your life? The old saint steadfastly refused. Before the stake he was again urged to hail the emperor as Lord and

renounce the Lord Christ. Again he refused in these courageous words: *“Eighty and six years I have served Him and He never did me any injury; how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior.”* (ANE, 1, p.41) For old Polycarp, and for every true Christian there is one Lord and one Lord alone, Jesus Christ. To acknowledge or to bow down before another is to blaspheme the true God and betray the one Lord.

“That God raised Him from the dead...” - The resurrection is specifically cited as the decisive demonstration of the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. John Calvin is quite correct when he asserts: *“The resurrection alone is often set before us as the assurance of our salvation, not to draw away our attention from His death, but because it bears witness to the efficacy and the fruit of His death.”* (Moo, p. 658)

It is most important to recognize that the act of confession is not cited here as a meritorious work which takes its place alongside faith as a second requirement for salvation. Confession is the result and the demonstration of faith. Phillip Melancthon explains:

“I grant that a beginning of obedience is necessary, but it does not merit eternal life. Neither is it the purchase price of eternal life, nor is it pleasing except we believe in Christ. Since obedience is pleasing because of faith, it is a contradiction to imagine that works either justify or that they merit eternal life. By faith we declare that remission of sins and eternal life are given us gratis, because of Christ. There is nothing troublesome about this interpretation. It grants that obedience is necessary. It takes away the opinion about merit. It teaches how one pleases in order that Christ may be accorded His honor, and that faith may remain certain. For it would become uncertain if one had to think that we pleased God when we had sufficient merits. This is profitable to know in general about all statements of this kind. Now let us return to the text. It is certain that Paul does not approve of confession unless faith is present; he does not grant to confession that it is the purchase price or merit of eternal life. As has been said, that would be a contradiction. Yet he demands confession because, as has been said, obedience is necessary, and Paul wanted to show that he is speaking not of a hypocritical faith, that is, of idle thinking, about a true impulse of the heart that lays hold of the mercy promised because of Christ. Therefore, patience and every kind of good work shines forth in confession.”
(Melancthon, p. 200)

A careful balance must be maintained here. The act of confession may not be construed as a meritorious work that contributes in any way to personal salvation. To do so, would be to deny that salvation is by grace and to confuse justification with sanctification. But at the same time, we may not tone down the importance of confession in this text. Our Lord and the New Testament in general clearly indicate the vital role of confessing the faith as the most reliable demonstration of the presence of a genuine, saving relationship with the Lord. At the same time, the Bible warns that those who allow the intimidation and opposition of men to silence their confession will find themselves disowned on the great day of judgement.

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32)

“I tell you whoever acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns Me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8-9)

“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That is why his parents said, He is of age, ask him.” (John 9:22-23)

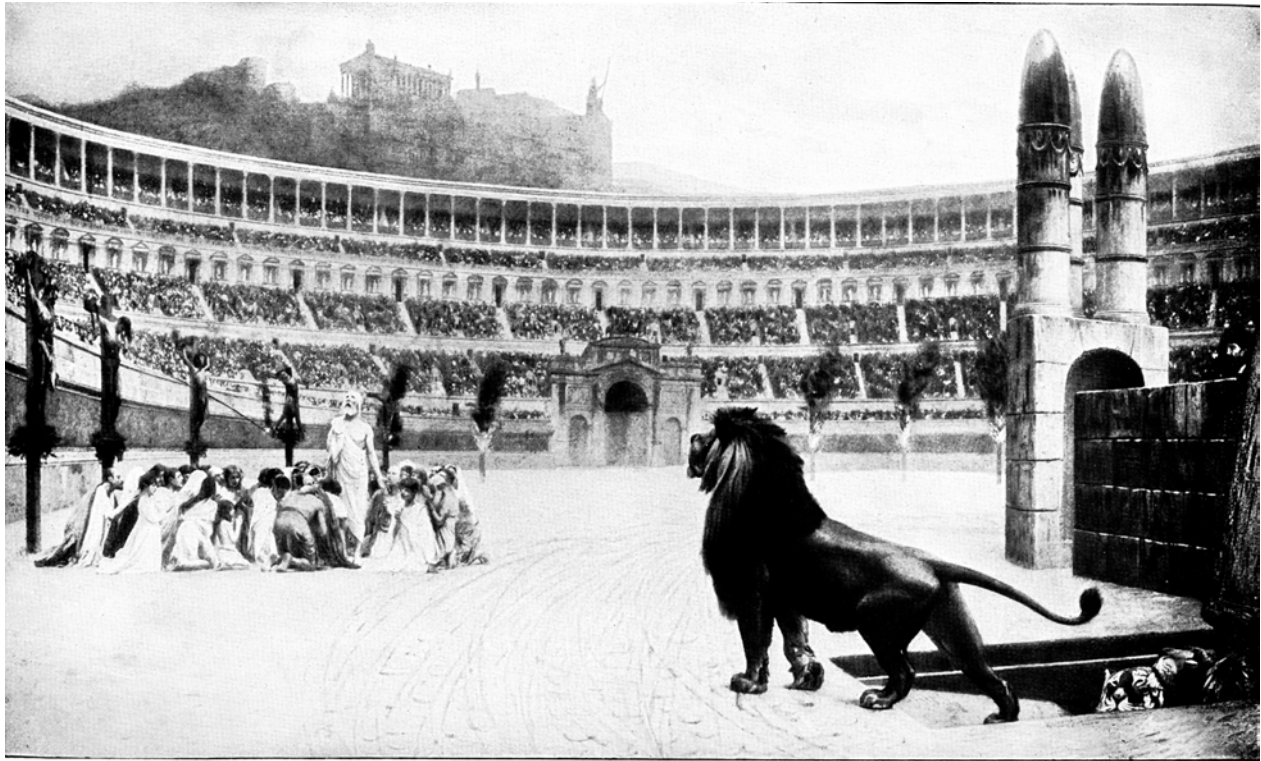
“Yet, at the same time, many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.” (John 12:42-43)

“Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus who, while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this commandment.” (1 Timothy 6:12-14)

“No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.” (1 John 2:23)

“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” (1 John 4:15)

“Many deceivers who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world.” (2 John 7)



“The Martyrs’ Final Prayer” - 19th Century Lithograph

Hence it can be seen that Robert Haldane, the great Scottish Bible teacher of the last century, was in no way guilty of exaggeration when he bluntly asserted:

“Confession of Christ is as necessary as faith in Him, but necessary for a different purpose. Faith is necessary to obtain the gift of righteousness. Confession is necessary to prove that this gift is received. If a man does not confess Christ at the hazard of life, character, property, liberty, and everything dear to him, he has not the faith of Christ.” (Boice, p. 1206-1207)

Secret discipleship, that is, a faith relationship with Christ that is deliberately concealed to avoid the persecution and opposition of men is an impossibility. Every believer has the opportunity, in a unique way determined by the circumstances of each individual situation, to confess the Lord Jesus Christ. To fail to do so, is to be subject to the tragic condemnation which the Evangelist St. John levels against the Jewish leaders who believed in Jesus but would not publically acknowledge Him: ***“they loved praise from men more than praise from God.”*** (John 12:43)

Offering the good confession is not simply a matter of verbal expression, the formulation of words. That is of critical importance, to be sure, and cannot be

omitted, but Christ must be confessed in Word and deed. We confess the Lord Jesus as we gather with fellow believers around the means of grace and we deny Him when we fail to do so. We confess the Lord Jesus when we teach His Word in all of its truth and purity and we deny Him when we compromise the doctrines of Holy Scripture in order to accommodate inclinations and opinions of men. We confess the Lord Jesus in the values and priorities by which we live or we deny Him by allowing our actions to be determined by the worldly standards of the culture in which we live. We confess the Lord Jesus by cheerful submission in the face of the most severe trials and tribulations and even death itself and we deny Him when our response to suffering is fear, bitterness and complaint.

Of course confession without faith, the mere mouthing of the words, simple intellectual knowledge without personal trust, is of no value whatsoever. As Jesus declares: ***“Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your Name, and in Your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from Me you evildoers.”*** (Matthew 7:22-23) The good confession can only be the result of a real personal faith relationship with Jesus Christ. ***“No one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”*** (1 Corinthians 12:3) John Murray says it well: *“Confession without faith would be vain. But likewise faith without confession would be shown to be spurious... Confession with the mouth is the evidence of the genuineness of faith.”* (Murray, p. 56) St. John Chrysostom summarizes the relationship between heart conviction and genuine confession in this way: *“The understanding must be strongly fixed in pious faith, and the tongue must herald forth by its confession the solid resolution of the mind.”* (Bray, p. 276)

The result of that true faith which is demonstrated by the good confession is that ***“you will be saved.”*** The future tense of the verb points forward to the great day of judgement when believers in Christ will be delivered from the righteous wrath of God to be poured out upon sinful mankind.

Verses 10-11

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with you mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”

“For it is with your heart that you believe...” - As Paul now restates the point the natural chronological sequence is restored - first heart conviction, then oral

confession. The apostle distinguishes here between justification (Greek - “*dikaio syne*”), associated with believing in your heart, and salvation (Greek - “*soteria*”), associated with confessing with your mouth. The former, (justification) describes the present reality that the instant the sinner believes by divine verdict he is accounted righteous for Christ’s sake. The latter, (salvation) emphasizes the eschatological reality of eternal life with God in heaven. Of course there is a considerable amount of overlap here, these are not mutually exclusive concepts.

“We may say that in the same instant salvation likewise results, for to be justified is to be saved...One who believes and is thereby justified confesses and shows that his faith is genuine, and the result is salvation, he is saved already now, and when the moment arrives and death calls him away, heaven is his.” (Lenski, p. 657)

“As the Scripture says....” - The thought is supported by a quotation from Isaiah



*“Christ Jesus Himself as the Chief Cornerstone”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

28:16 - *“So this is what the sovereign Lord says: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.”* This text had been previously cited in Romans 9:33. The only difference here is the addition of the word *“Everyone”* which serves to emphasize the universal nature of the gospel, a crucial concept for that which now follows. The verb *“will never be put to shame”* refers to the vindication of the saints on the day of judgement.

“Shame, confusion, fleeing in terror from the face of the great Judge shall not be the lot of him who rests his trust on Christ.” (Lenski, p. 658) The early church father Origen, sees in this phrase

an allusion to the shame of Adam in Eve in the Garden after the fall into sin: *“If no one who believes in Him will be put to shame, it is clear that those who sin will be just as Adam who sinned and was ashamed and hid himself. So whoever incurs the shame of sin obviously does not believe.”* (Bray, p. 276) Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf effectively expresses the same concept in his classic hymn *“Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness”* (*“Christi Blut und Gerechtigkeit”*):

*Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
‘Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

*Bold shall I stand in that great day;
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.
(ELH # 432)*

Verses 12-13

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile” - The Verse is introduced with the explanatory conjunction ***“For”*** (Greek - *“gar”*) which links this sentence to the preceding thought. In effect, Paul is now explaining the ***“everyone”*** which he had inserted into the Isaiah passage in Verse 11. In Romans Chapter 3, Paul had argued that there is no difference among men before God’s judgement ***“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:23). God justifies all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, by grace through faith. This must be so, the apostle insisted, because there is only one true God: ***“Is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.”*** (3:29-30) Here in Chapter 10, Paul once again argues for the elimination of the distinction between Jew and Gentile, but in this instance the argument is based upon the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As there is only one God, so there is also only one Lord - ***“the same Lord is Lord of all.”*** The lordship of Jesus Christ is not limited by the petty dividing lines that men uses to distinguish themselves from one another. Jesus is the ***“Lord of all.”*** Just as He demands allegiance from all men so also He

graciously showers the riches of His blessings upon all those ***“who call on Him.”*** This phrase is a characteristic Old Testament expression for worship that is addressed to God with specific reference to the worship of prayer and supplication (cf. Genesis 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 5:11; Isaiah 64:7). John MacArthur defines the term in this way:

*“In the Old Testament the phrase ***“call upon the name of the Lord”*** was especially associated with the right worship of the true God. It carried the connotations of worship, adoration, and praise and extolled God’s majesty, power, and holiness. Emphasizing the negative side of that phrase, the imprecatory Psalmist cried to God, ***“How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? Will Thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations which do not know Thee, and upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Thy name.”*** (Psalm 79:5-6) Again, the psalmist exulted: ***“O give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples.”*** (Psalm 105:1) Still another time in the Psalms we read that he ***“called upon the name of the Lord,”*** praying, ***“O Lord, I beseech Thee, save my life! Gracious is the Lord, and righteous: yes, our God is compassionate”*** (Psalm 116:4-5).” (MacArthur, p. 82)*

The point is reinforced by a quotation from Joel 2:32 - ***“And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.”*** Joel had prophesied salvation for everyone who called upon the name of the Lord, no matter who they were or what nation they came from. Once again, the explanatory conjunction ***“for”*** serves to link the quotation to the previous assertion. All that Paul is saying is what the prophet had said before. Note also the equivalence in Paul’s thought between the ***“Lord”*** (Hebrew - *“Jahweh”*) in the Old Testament passage with the ***“Lord”*** (Greek - *“Kyrios”*) Jesus Christ. They are one and the same. The phrase ***“the name of the Lord”*** is also theologically significant. Lenski defines it in this way:

“It always means His revelation by which He draws nigh to us, makes Himself known, by which we may, indeed, know Him so as to trust Him and be saved by Him. His Name is the door to Him and at the same time the power that draws us through the door...It is the means by which He comes to us, by which we have Him, without which we cannot reach Him. The Word is His Name, and this whole chapter treats of the Word. Those who rejected it in unbelief doomed themselves. The Name is intended for faith and confession, for justification and salvation. There is salvation in no other name.” (Lenski, p. 660)



“O Give Thanks to the Lord; Call Upon His Name” by Rudolf Schäfer

Verses 14-15

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?” - There now follows a connected series of four rhetorical questions, each linked to its predecessor. Lenski notes: *“Now comes Paul’s famous chain...The Word as the means of grace for producing faith must touch all the links in the chain. Paul lets them form that chain and then fastens a golden Scriptural pendant to the last link in Verse 15.”* (Lenski, p. 660) The point of these verses is that faith is not created spontaneously, but through the Word, the means which God Himself has established. John Murray says is very well: *“The main point is that the saving relation with Christ involved in calling upon His Name is not something that can occur in a vacuum; it occurs only in the context created by the proclamation of the gospel on the part of those commissioned to proclaim it.”* (Murray, p. 58)

The series begins with the key phrase in the quotation from Joel 2:32 - ***“everyone who calls on the name of the Lord.”*** To call upon the Lord is an act of faith, thus the first question in the chain is self-evident - ***“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?”***



***“Martin Luther Preaching at Torgau” by Lucas Cranach the Elder
From the Altar Predella of the City Church in Wittenberg***

It is obviously impossible to have faith, in order to call upon the Lord, if one has never heard the Lord, hence, the next question in the series - ***“And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”*** Each of these questions is posed in a broad general way. The logic of this extended syllogism would apply in any situation. The NIV’s translation of the second question, ***“one of whom they have not heard”*** diminishes the force of the original text. The Greek literally says - *“one whom they have not heard.”* This is not simply a matter of the casual gathering of second hand information. To hear of someone or about him is only an inferior substitute for hearing that person himself. It is that kind of direct contact that the text clearly has in mind, and that insight will become most significant in the question which follows.

“And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” The key word in this question is the verb ***“preaching”*** (Greek - *“kerussein”*). This word refers specifically to the proclamation of herald. By using it in this context Paul emphasizes the fact the apostles and those who come after them as spokesmen for Christ do not proclaim their own word, but that of the Lord. Jesus emphatically states exactly this in Luke 10:16 as he sends out the seventy-two disciples: ***“He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent me.”*** Lenski offers this helpful definition:

“Kerussein, which we translate “to preach,” means “to herald,” act as a herald for publically announcing some message of a king or commander. The point is that the herald announces no word more or less than he is bidden to announce and alters and changes nothing. He merely lends his voice to his master who is often present in person. This the apostles were to do, and they did it, and their message still rings through the world; this the prophets did before them, often with the direct preamble “Thus saith the Lord!” Applied to us who preach today, this means that we are Christ’s heralds through whom men hear Christ Himself only when we transmit His Word exactly as He has commanded it to us.” (Lenski, p. 662)

Having identified preachers as the heralds of the Word, the apostle now forges the final link in his magnificent chain with one last question - ***“And how can they preach unless they are sent?”*** There is no such thing as a self-appointed herald. That would be an oxymoron. A herald is by definition one who is duly sent and commissioned to speak on behalf of another. God is the Sender. His commission of faithful messengers to proclaim His Word is the implementation of His desire for the salvation of all men. Dr. Stöckhardt emphasizes the fact that this concept of a divine calling extends from the apostles down to the present day:



“How Beautiful Are the Feet of Those Who Bring Good News”
by Rudolf Schäfer

“The final expression obviously refers, first of all, to those proclaimers, those preachers, the apostles, who were immediately called and sent by Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:17. Yet the axiom “no preaching without sending” applies to the official preaching of salvation of all New Testament preachers. No preacher can rightly administer the preaching office in the New Testament unless he has been sent and equipped with the Spirit and gifts by the Lord. “No one can rightly preach unless he has been sent” (Körner) And the mediate call, through the church, is also a divine sending and call. Finally even the personal witness of all believing Christians, which is powerful enough to awaken saving faith, rests upon the

command of the Lord: “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you.” “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” “Preach the gospel to every creature.” The apostle’s entire preceding comment forms a chain of logically connected thoughts the result of which is that the prerequisites of saving faith and calling upon the Lord are hearing, preaching, and sending.” (Stöckhardt, p 493)

In the historic theology of the Lutheran Church, the centrality of the Word of God and the importance of the office of the public ministry as the office of the Word of God have always been strongly emphasized. The great Lutheran theologian Phillip Melancthon asserts a close connection between that emphasis and this passage. He describes this text as “*the foremost passage about the necessity and the dignity of the ministry*” in all of Holy Scripture. He contends that the people of God ought to study these inspired words of St. Paul diligently and carefully in order to guard against sinful man’s inherent tendency to supplant the Word with his own opinions and imaginations.

“In order that we may know in what way God works in us, and may not seek other illuminations outside of the Word, nor grant entrance to imaginations and opinions about God without a sure Word of God. This precept about the Word of God is wide open, for it is difficult for a man to stand fast by the Word of God and to say for certain that what he sets forth in the Word is the will of God, and so he easily slips into other imaginations. Thus Eve, thinking lightly of the Word, adds the imagination: “Perhaps God does not think so harshly.”...And we must know that God does not want His will about sin and grace to be known and apprehended in any other way except in the Word, and that the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Let us hold this rule fast, and for this great reason show all honor to and defend the public ministry of the Word.” (Melancthon, p. 201-202)

The “*golden Scripture pendant*” attached to the last link of the chain is a quotation from Isaiah 52:7. The original text anticipates the joyful celebration of God’s victory in the context of deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. The messengers sent to announce that victory speed their way over the hills surrounding Jerusalem. The people, anxiously awaiting their message, strain their eyes toward the horizon, eager for the first glimpse of those who carry the good news. The moment when they finally appear is a time of profound joy and intense jubilation. ***“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”*** The dusty, dirty feet of the messengers, bruised and bloody from their long journey, appear to be most beautiful indeed to those who rejoice in the announcement of their deliverance by God.

The message of salvation has been proclaimed. The heralds, God's prophets and apostles, have been sent forth and have faithfully discharged the responsibility of their office to proclaim the Word which God has graciously entrusted to them. God has charged that Word with the power to create saving faith in the hearts of those who hear



"The Call of Isaiah" by Rudolf Schäfer

it that they may call upon the Name of the Lord and be saved. But at this point in the text, the note of triumphant gladness which has characterized the description of the power and possibility of the Word turns to sadness. The response of most of mankind has been denial, defiance, and disbelief. Even among Israel, the chosen people of God, the vast majority has failed to heed the divine Word and believe. Has the Word of God failed? Has God reneged of His promise? Most definitely not! The problem lies not with God but with men. Paul now returns to the problem which permeates this segment of the epistle, the unbelief of Israel.

Verses 16-17

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.



“The Stoning of Stephan” by Matthäus Merian - 1630

“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.” - The shift from triumph to tragedy is signaled by the adversative conjunction **“But.”** (Greek - *“Alla”*) The text uses a literary device called *“litotes,”* that is, ironic understatement to underscore the tragedy of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah. Not only have **“not all of the Israelites”** failed to accept the good news personified and proclaimed by Jesus, the overwhelming majority of the nation has rejected Him. The original text does not include the word **“Israelites,”** although that is probably what the apostle had in mind given the Isaiah quotation which follows. The term is an interpretive addition in the NIV translation. The verb **“accepted”** (Greek - *“hypakouein”*) literally means to listen and to submit to. It is the correlative of the *“herald”* terminology in the preceding paragraph.

“For Isaiah says “Lord who had believed...” - This is not a novel situation, a new and unprecedented problem. It is as Stephan noted, moments before his martyrdom:

“You stiff necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears. You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51) Eight centuries earlier, the great prophet Isaiah had lamented Israel’s failure to heed the divine Word which he had proclaimed among them. The quotation comes from Isaiah 53, the great *“Suffering Servant”* chapter, the most powerful description in the Old Testament of the Savior’s humiliation, suffering, and death. This is particularly pertinent here . The Jews rejected Jesus precisely because He was the Suffering Servant and did not meet their grandiose expectations of national deliverance and glory. Isaiah complains: ***“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”*** (Isaiah 53:1) St. John the Evangelist had used the same verse to characterize the stubborn opposition of the Jews to Christ and His Gospel:

“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who had believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed.” For this reason they could not believe, because as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn - and I would heal them.” Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him.” (John 12:37-41)

Israel’s rejection of her Messiah was the culmination of a pattern of disobedience and defiance that had continued for centuries. Men had obstinately hardened their hearts and were in turn hardened by of God. The cup of God’s righteous wrath was now about to overflow for ***“the measure of the sin of your forefathers”*** had finally been filled up (Matthew 23:32).

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” - This summary statement is introduced with the conjunction ***“Consequently”*** (Greek - *“ara”*). The Isaiah quotation indicated the breakdown in the faith/salvation chain of cause and effect which had occurred in the case of Israel. The apostle now briefly restates that process and affirms that it is not the failure of that process that has result in the unbelief of Israel.

“But the unbelief of man does not make void the Word of God. If men have “not all heeded the Gospel,” some have heeded it; and for them the arm of the Lord, the power of God, has been revealed through it. The golden chain which binds men to the Lord

in faith has been fully forged; every link is there, from “sending” to “believing” and to “calling on His Name.” Christ has preached, in word and deed, His messengers have gone forth and have borne abroad His name, and men have come to faith and called upon His name for their salvation.” (Franzmann, p. 192)

Note carefully the connection reemphasized here between hearing the Word of Christ and faith. *“Faith is not the result of intuition, mystical experience, meditation, speculation, philosophizing, or consensus but by hearing the Word of Christ.”* (MacArthur, p. 87)

Verses 18-21

But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” But concerning Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”



“Luther Preaching in Wittenberg” by Gustav König

“But I ask: Did they not hear?” - The willful and deliberate nature of Israel’s disobedience is now emphasized with a series of quotations from the Old Testament. Paul dramatically presents the evidence with two rhetorical questions: *“Did they not hear?...Did Israel not understand?”* In the Greek text, each of these questions is posed in the form of a double negative, thus indicating that a “no” answer is

anticipated. Literally - *“It is not that they did not hear, is it?”* And *“It is not that they did not understand, is it?”* Both potential excuses are emphatically rejected - *“Of course they did!”*

“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” - The first reference comes from Psalm 19:4 which extols the creation’s universal witness to the glory of God:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4)

Those who accuse St. Paul of appropriating this text to prove a point never intended by the Psalmist misunderstand the apostle’s intent in this instance. Psalm 19:4 is certainly not a proof text to demonstrate that Israel has heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Nor is St. Paul attempting to use the text in that way. The typical formulas used to introduce a quotation (cf. i.e. vss. 19,20,21) are absent in this instance. Paul is merely using the language of the Old Testament, *“clothing his thoughts with Old Testament words which fittingly express what he wants to say.”* (Stöckhardt, p. 147) Lenski describes the process in this way:

“Paul quotes just as we do, but in a better way, for he knew his Old Testament better than we do. Take the present instance. Here a word taken from a psalm is simply adopted to express Paul’s own thought, he glides over into telling Biblical language without a formula of quotation. We do the same, but not always so pertinently when we quote the language of others in order to express our own thought.” (Lenski, p. 670)

Paul’s intention is not to present the original meaning of the verse of the Psalm, but to use its language about hearing the revelation of God to assert the universal preaching of the Gospel. *“As God’s word of general revelation has been proclaimed all over the earth, so God’s word of special revelation, in the gospel, has been spread all over the earth.”* (Moo, p. 667) Given the messianic content of the Old Testament, and the apostolic preaching of the cross throughout the Roman world and beyond, this is a fair and accurate assertion. The text specifically uses the Greek word *“oikoumene”* which refers not the entire world and every individual human

being on the face of the globe, but to the civilized world, most notably, the Roman Empire. Paul's point is well taken - Israel may not rightly contend that they have not been given the opportunity to hear the message of salvation.

"The Jews cannot excuse their unbelief by advancing that they did not hear of the Gospel. The voices of Gospel preachers resounded in all the lands and in all the cities of the known world. There wasn't a synagogue where the gospel was not heard; there wasn't a Jew in the world, who could justly plead ignorance of the gospel." (Stöckhardt, p.147)

"Again I ask: Did Israel not understand?" - If it was not a lack of opportunity to hear that prevented the Jews from being saved, then what was it? Could the problem have been a lack of understanding? As noted above, the question in the Greek text is posed in the form of a double negative, literally *"It is not that Israel did not understand, is it?"* Not only is the anticipated answer is a definite "no," but the form of the question serves to express the apostle's shock and amazement that such a thing could even have been suggested.

"It is unthinkable, unbelievable that Israel, the chosen people, to whom God from ages past had entrusted His Word and promises, should ignore and leave unnoticed the message of the promises' fulfillment, or despise and reject it. The apostle is astonished, surprised, and indignant over the undeniably clear fact that Israel did not understand and believe the Gospel." (Stöckhardt, p. 147)



"The Golden Calf" Illuminated Woodcut from the Lübeck Bible -1493

In this case the conclusion is supported by two quotations from the Old Testament, the first from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21 - ***“They made Me jealous by what is no god and angered Me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding.”*** In the Song of Moses, the prophet recounts the history of God’s gracious dealings with Israel in stark contrast to the faithlessness and rebellion of the people. This verse describes God’s “equivalent” response to Israel’s idolatry. That which they have done to Him, He will do to them. The punishment fits the crime. As Israel had spurned the true God and turned to the worship of idols (***“what is no god”***), thus arousing His jealousy and wrath, so God would turn from Israel to chose as His own the Gentile world (***“those who are not a people”*** - ***“a nation that has no understanding”***) so that Israel might thus be stirred to envy and return to the Lord. This theme will be specifically developed in Chapter 11:11-16. The designation of the Gentiles as ***“those who are not a people”*** and ***“a nation that has no understanding,”*** is intended to highlight the blessings that God has bestowed upon Israel. As the chosen people of God, His own holy nation, the Jews tended to look down on the rest of humanity second class citizens - ***“those who are not a people.”*** God had chosen to reveal Himself directly to Israel, He had written the law with His own hand and presented it to them at Mt. Sinai. How could those who had been so uniquely blessed now claim that they did not understand? ***“Their unbelief cannot be excused on the grounds that they have not heard the gospel. They have. And their knowledge of their own Scriptures ought to have informed their hearing. They should have known what to expect and so they are doubly without excuse.”*** (Dunn, p. 631)

Not only did Israel know the gospel of salvation, but they were warned in advance that because of their unfaithfulness the kingdom of God would be taken from them. Their angry resentment against the inclusion of the Gentiles within the church is in itself the fulfillment of the prophecy of Moses.

“And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me...” - In the classic manner of a rabbinical teacher, a quotation from the prophets now follows one from the law. Paul returns to Isaiah, whom many commentators consider to be his favorite Old Testament prophet, to cite two more pertinent passages. The first is Isaiah 65:1. In this text the prophet minces no words. He speaks bluntly and emphatically - ***“Isaiah boldly says.”*** In the Isaiah passage, God warns of the rejection of apostate Israel and describes the manner in which His grace operates: ***“I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. To a nation that did not call on My name I said, “Here am I, here am I.”***

August Pieper, whose classic commentary on Isaiah remains the standard among Lutheran exegetes, describes this concept as “*a truth of revelation that is fundamental to the whole Gospel.*” Pieper writes:

*“The Lord is uttering the truth that He reveals Himself and lets Himself be found by people who do not search after Him, or have not sought Him, a truth of revelation that is fundamental to the whole Gospel. This is the doctrine of the **free** grace of the Lord, a doctrine that was not discovered by Paul, but which is found everywhere in the Old Testament (Cf. Exodus 33:19. Isaiah especially emphasizes it. Cf. 43:22ff. As an example) It is God’s way to reveal Himself to such as have never sought Him out. Had He waited until He had been sought after, there would never have been a revelation of God’s grace. It is of this way of the Lord that He is speaking in this passage. In accordance with Deuteronomy 32:21, Paul is entirely consistent with this truth when he makes the application of it to the acceptance of the gentiles and contrasts Israel as a people that had received grace according to the same divine principle but had treated it with contempt and had in consequence been rejected.”* (Pieper, p. 662)

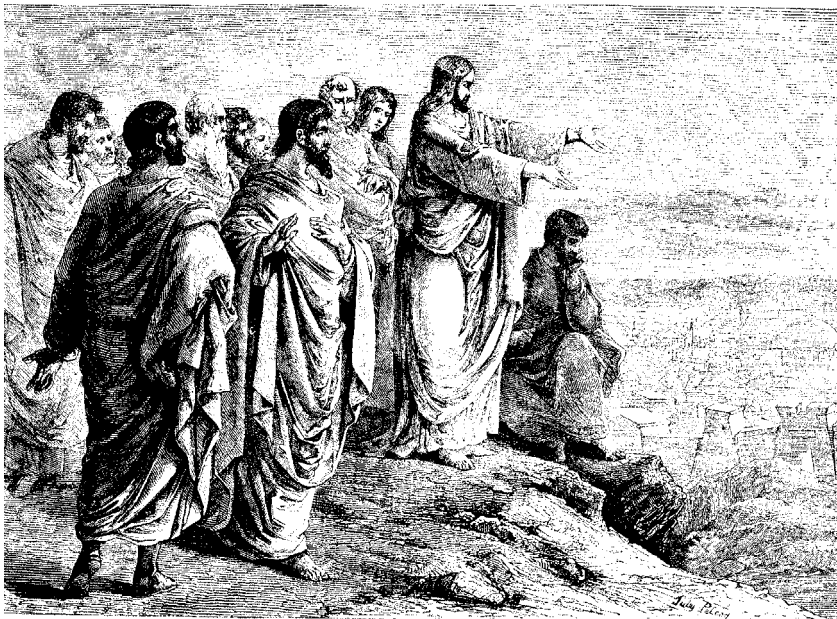


“The Lost Son” by Eugene Burnand

The language of the Isaiah text closely reflects Paul’s words in Romans 9:30 (“***What shall we then say? That the Gentiles, who have not pursued righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.***”) In this way, the text serves well to unify and advance the apostle’s argument.

“But concerning Israel He says, ‘All day long I have held out My hands...’ - The contrast between the undeserved love freely demonstrated to the Gentiles and the stubborn disobedience of Israel could not be more clearly drawn. Paul continues his quotation from Isaiah 65: ‘All day long I have held out My hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations.’ John Murray notes:

“The perversity of Israel, on the one hand, and the constancy and intensity of God’s lovingkindness, on the other, are accentuated by the fact that the one derives its character from the other. It is to a disobedient and contradicting people that the outstretched hands of entreaty are extended. The gravity of the sin springs from the contradiction offered to the overtures of mercy.” (Murray, p. 63)



***“Jesus Weeping Over Jerusalem”
19th Century Bible Illustration***

The outstretched hands of a loving God are a poignant image of the Lord’s compelling and consistent desire for the salvation of His people. In the face of defiance, disobedience, and rejection, He continued to love them, and to reach out to them in love. The text calls to mind the heartbroken lament of Jesus over Jerusalem on the eve of His death: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets***

and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.” (Matthew 23:37-38) The fathers of the early church did not hesitate to see in the image of God’s outstretched hands an allusion to Christ’s crucifixion and the tortured hands of our Lord nailed to the rough wood of the cross. Diodore of Tarsus writes in the Fourth Century: *“It appears from the holding out of His hands that God is calling the people to Himself. It is also a sign pointing toward the form of the cross.”*



“The Destruction of Jerusalem” by Wilhelm von Kaulbach

Jesus sadly prophesied the coming of God’s judgment upon apostate Israel in the “*Little Apocalypse*” of Matthew 24. His predictions utilize the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman legions of Titus in A.D. 70 as an precursor of the destruction of the world in the final judgment. The Lord warned the Christians remaining in the city: ***“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘ the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.”*** (Matthew 24:15) Wilhelm von Kaulbach’s masterful presentation of the scene depicts the moment when the Roman legions break through to the Temple sanctuary and raise their idolatrous eagle standard over the altar of sacrifice. The angels of God’s judgment herald the coming of Titus while Moses and the prophets look on sadly from heaven. In the foreground, the high priest commits suicide rather than allow himself to be captured, while the Christian flee in safety, forewarned by the Lord