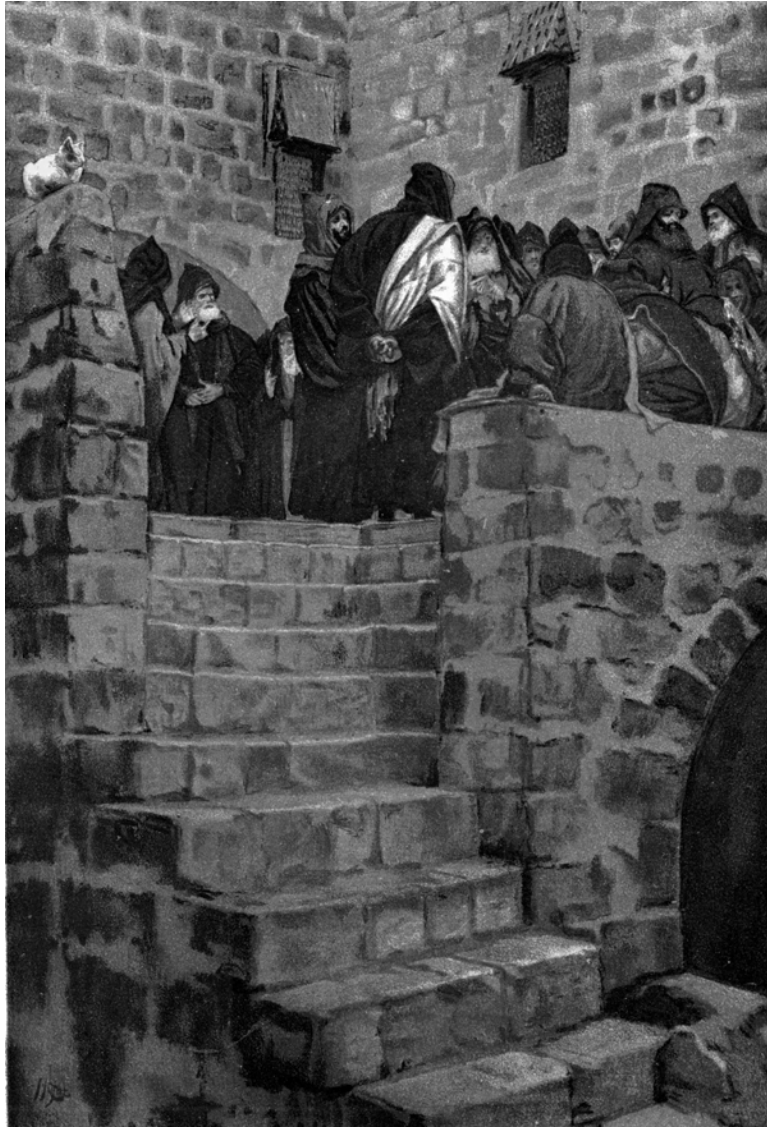


# Romans Chapter 11



*“The Evil Counsel of Caiaphas” by J. James Tissot*

## Introduction

*“God is free and Israel is guilty. This should suffice to justify the ways of God to man. Chapters 9 and 10 would by themselves provide a neat theodicy, a vindication of God. If Paul were a religious philosopher, he might well stop here. But Paul is not a philosopher; he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. Jesus knew of no limits to the creative possibilities of God; He knew that all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26). He saw in the hopeless spectacle of the harassed and helpless lost sheep of Israel the harvest field of God (Matthew 9:36-37). Paul serves Him, for Paul has the mind of Christ. Paul has been set apart for the Gospel of God. He serves the Creator God whose light has never failed (9:6). God’s Word says, “Let light shine out of darkness.” (2 Corinthians 4:6;*

*Genesis 1:3; cf. Isaiah 9:2); His Word can make light shine even out of Israel's darkness. His Word has uses for the dead branches cut from the tree of Israel; for Israel hardened in obdurate resistance to God (11:25). For God almighty's love is in His Word...God's Word has not failed. Therefore, a "disobedient and a contrary people" (10:21) cannot be the end and the goal of all God's ways with Israel. God has not rejected His people. Paul is living proof of that." (Franzmann, p. 194)*

## **Verses 1-2**

***I ask then: did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.***

***"I ask then: did God reject His people? By no means!"*** - Once again, Paul uses a rhetorical question to introduce the next stage of the argument. The rhetorical pattern is introduced with the phrase ***"I ask then:"*** (literally - *"I say therefore"*) indicating that what follows is the result and implication of that which has gone before. In the Greek text, the question begins with the negative particle *"me"* signaling that a negative answer is anticipated. In English we might say - *"God has not rejected His people, has He?"*

At the end of the preceding chapter Paul had concluded that the Israelites were ***"disobedient and contrary people"*** (10:21). It might reasonably be expected, then, that God would have given up on this rebellious nation and consigned them to the judgment that they fully and richly deserved. Such a conclusion, however logical it may be, misunderstands the nature and purpose of God. The crucial issue in this Verse is the specific identity of ***"His people."*** As the apostle has already demonstrated ***"not all who are descended from Israel are Israel."*** (Romans 9:6) To be a child of Abraham is a matter of faith, not of blood. Thus, the ***"people"*** (Greek - *"laos"*) of God in this passage are not the Jewish nation as a whole, but rather believers. Stöckhardt is exactly correct when he argues:

*"Some commentators incorrectly interpret this comment as a reference to the Jewish nation as such and to Israel's historical calling within the history of the plan of salvation. According to this view, the issue is whether Israel's calling would have been forfeited because of the unbelief of some Israelites or the majority of the Israelites. But rejection does not refer to the loss of a calling within the history of the plan of salvation. Rejection means the same thing as condemnation, exclusion from salvation. The expression "ho laos autou," "ho laos tou theou" has its full worth here and designates the people of God in the true, narrow sense of the term. In Chapter 9:6-13, Paul had already previously distinguished between Israel*

*according to the flesh (“kata sarx”) and Israel according to the spirit (“kata pneuma”), that is between Israelites who are merely descendants of Abraham physically and the children of God from Israel, the children of the promise, whom God had elected and called to adoption and to eternal life. That which he has said about the rejection of God is restricted to Israel according to the flesh. He will now develop this distinction further. The people of God, of whom he speaks in 11:1 are the sum total of all the true children of God (“tekna tou theou” - 9:8), “God’s people in Israel” (Luthardt).” (Stöckhardt, pp. 506-507)*

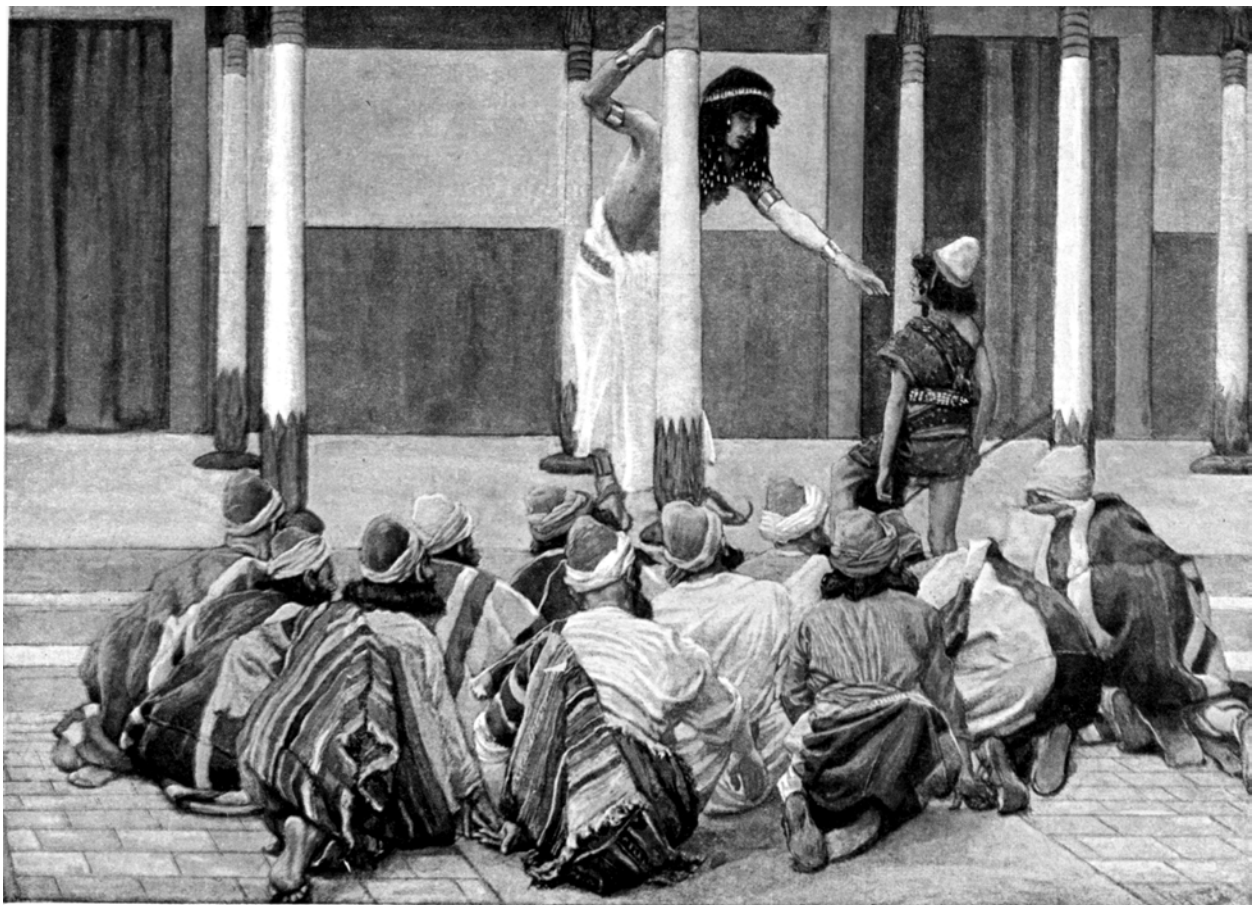
The identification of **“His people”** with believers is further reinforced by the phrase **“His people whom He foreknew”** in the Verse which follows. God’s plan of salvation was never about blood descent or national identity, but about the preservation of a faithful remnant made up of Jew and Gentile alike. That plan had neither failed nor changed.

The verb **“reject”** (Greek - *“apothéo”*) is most emphatic with the literal meaning of thrusting away from one’s self something that is hateful or disgusting. In this context it is the equivalent of condemnation or damnation. The thought that God would condemn those who are His own by faith because of the faithlessness of others is inconceivable, and Paul rejects it with the strongest possible language - **“By no means!”** *“The idea of this verse, then, is that God has not rejected those upon whom He has placed His covenantal love. Such an idea is unthinkable and indeed impossible.”* (Schreiner, p.581)

**“I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.”** As he did at the beginning of his discussion of Israel, Paul now reasserts his own identification with the nation of Israel. The Greek text introduces this phrase with conjunction *“for”* (Greek - *“gar”*) which indicates that Paul sees his own identity as a Jew as a reason to deny that God has rejected His people. The language is that of the Old Testament covenant. **“Israelite”** is the nation’s covenant designation based on the new name which God bestowed upon Jacob after he wrestled with the angel (Genesis 35:10). By identifying himself as **“a descendant of Abraham”** (Greek - *“ek spermata abraam”* - *“from the seed of Abraham”*) the apostle links his testimony with his earlier discussion of the true Israel (cf. Romans 4:13-18; 9:7-8). Some have suggested that the reference to the tribe of Benjamin is the result of Benjamin’s reputation as the most faithful of all the tribes. This view is reflected in the rabbinic tradition that Benjamin was the tribe which led the crossing of the Red Sea, and the fact that Benjamin was the only other tribe to remain loyal to the House of David when the Kingdom was divided. Such suggestions miss the point of the apostle’s

comment and tend to fall back into the same nationalistic mind set that is being repudiated in this section. Paul's emphasis upon his membership in the tribe of Benjamin is simply the furnishing of individual detail which demonstrates the accuracy of his assertion. Paul is a part of the believing remnant within the nation, and the continuing reality of the remnant proves that God's purpose and promise have not failed. *"Paul, himself, as a Jewish Christian, is living evidence that God has not abandoned His people Israel. Jews like Paul, are continuing to be saved and to experience the blessings God promised to His people."* (Moo, p. 675)

***"God did not reject His people whom He foreknew."*** - The impossibility of God's rejected of His own is reinforced by a reference to divine election. From before the time when time began, God has known those who belong to Him, those whom He has claimed and called for eternal salvation. The foreknowledge of God is presented here in the same sense that it has in Romans 8:29 (cf. p. 323ff. for a complete discussion



*"Joseph and Benjamin in Egypt" by J. James Tissot*



of the term's meaning). George Stöckhardt captures the essence of the Biblical concept:

*“When it is said in Scripture that God has known and knows us, this means that God has acknowledged, recognized, accepted us as His own, by such knowing has made us His own, adopted us as His own, has placed us into union, into fellowship with Himself, and so, as though bound to Him in unity and kindred with Himself, He loves us with His whole heart...We will not permit this comfort to be taken from us, the comfort that Scripture has opened up to us in and with the “foreknowledge” of God; that God, already in eternity has said to us, to each and everyone of us individually, You are mine. I have engraved your name upon My hands.” (Stöckhardt, Predestination, pp. 16,25)*

This is the sense in which the term is used in Amos 3:2 - ***“You (the people of Israel) only have I chosen*** (literally - *“have I known”*) ***of all the families of the earth.”*** From before the beginning, God's loving foreknowledge had chosen the lambs of His own flock both from the sheepfold of Israel and the nations (John 10:14-16). The love of God for His own does not change, nor can it fail.

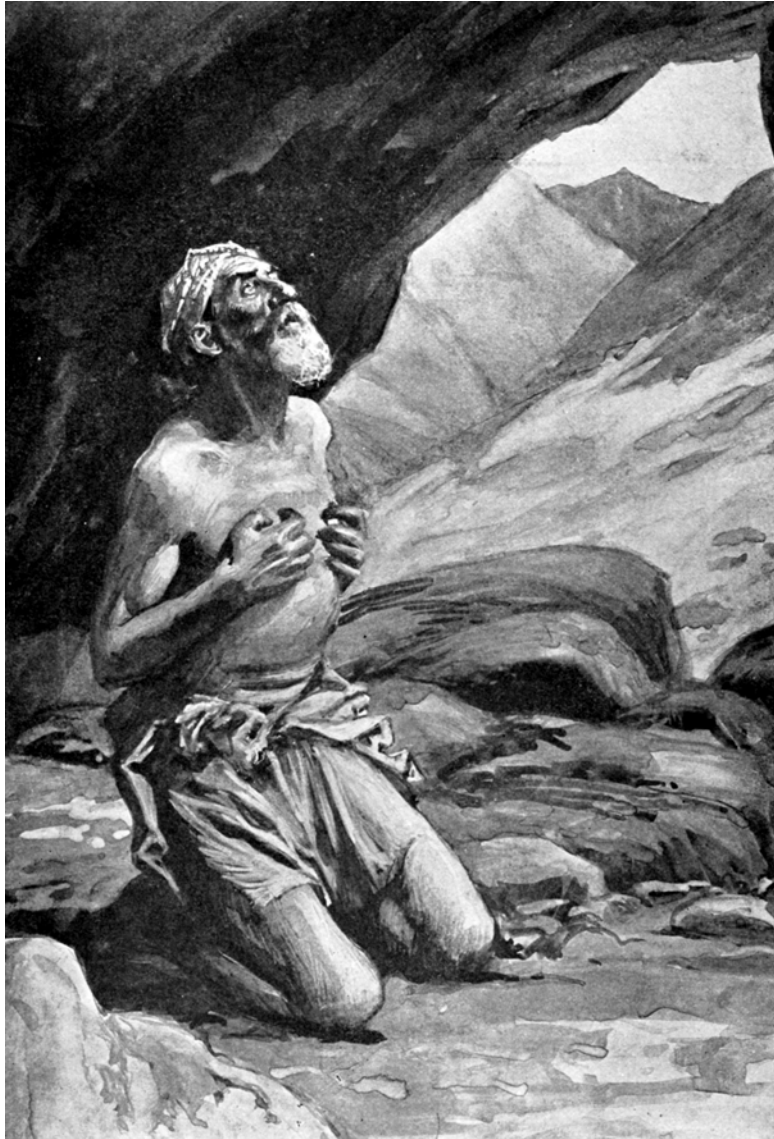
### **Verses 3-6**

***Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah - how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars; I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me?” And what was God's answer to him? “I have reserved for Myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.***

***“Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah?”*** - The apostle appeals to the historical precedent of the prophet Elijah's conversation with God in the dark days following his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on the summit of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 19:10-18) to document the preservation of the righteous remnant. Even amid the worst apostasy the Lord preserves His own. They many constitute only a tiny handful compared to the great multitudes who abandon or compromise the truth of God, but they will always remain, nonetheless. As Jesus promises, the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church (Matthew 16:18). The 1 Kings text serves perfectly to illustrate the apostle's contention that God always preserves His own, and that the unfaithfulness of the majority does not negate the

promises of our faithful God.

***“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace...”*** - The explicit connection between the historical precedent and the present situation is now drawn. In both instances the remnant remains. The apostasy of the overwhelming majority



***“Elijah on Mt. Horeb” by J. James Tissot***

of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel did not undo the gracious promises of God to His own. There still remained 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. So also the rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah by the overwhelming majority of Israel does not signify the failure of God’s plan of salvation for His people. A faithful remnant remains in Israel, exemplified by Paul himself, ***“a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin.”*** (11:1). The preservation of the remnant is the work of God alone. Human effort, the works of man, are not a factor here. The remnant remains, ***“chosen by grace”*** (literally - *“in accordance with the election of grace”*). This is the first time these two profoundly significant theological concepts - *“election”* (Greek - *“eklogen”*) and *“grace”* (Greek -

*“charitos”*) - have been combined in Romans. It is a powerful combination. God’s action in choosing the remnant is not conditioned by anything in them. *“The existence of a remnant of believing Jews is not ultimately ascribed to their greater wisdom or nobility, or to their free will, or to their spiritual perception. The*

*inclusion of the remnant in God's people is due to His electing grace.*" (Schreiner, p.582) It is God and God alone who is at work here. Martin Franzmann summarizes:

*"Elijah found that he was not alone; and Paul, who knows the deadly enmity of Israel as Elijah did, and has looked full upon the tragic wreckage of his people, broken on the Stone of stumbling, Paul, too, knows that he is not alone. He knows that out of Israel God's elective grace has now called forth men who do not disobey and contradict God but call Jesus Lord and believe that God has raised Him from the dead. These men have gone the way that all who go into the new Israel of God must go; they have gone the way of grace and faith, not trying to establish a righteousness of their own but renouncing their own righteousness and submitting freely to the given righteousness of God."* (Franzmann, p. 196)

The combination of "grace" and "election" is of profound theological importance. One cannot be denied or minimized without jeopardizing the other.

*"One should also observe that Paul's teaching on election is indissolubly bound up with his gospel of justification. . Those who deny unconditional election introduce, albeit subtly, the notion that human works play a role in obtaining justification and open the door for human boasting. . For Paul, the purity of grace is bound up with the conviction that God elects apart from any human work. Luther saw this very clearly in his classic "Bondage of the Will." He defended the doctrines of the bondage of the will and unconditional election so vigorously because the denial of either compromised the Pauline gospel that justification is by grace alone through faith alone."* (Schreiner, p. 583)

***"And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace."*** - No combination of grace and works is possible. These two categories are mutually exclusive. The absolute incompatibility of God's grace with human works is the hallmark emphasis of Paul's New Testament writings (Cf. Romans 3:21-31; 4:1-11; 5:2, 20-21; 9:11). Each and every attempt to combine that which a man does or is with the attainment of salvation is scorned and rejected by the St. Paul, the great apostle of grace. As he declares to Timothy: ***"God has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."*** (2 Timothy 1:9) If God's action is based in any way on ***"works,"*** that which is done by a human being, then it cannot be ***"grace."***

*"There is no such thing in God as a diluted grace, a partial grace. If grace is not the free and round and whole and undivided love of God, the same to all, pure gold in*

*every hand that holds it, then it is not grace. Where God's grace works, there is simply no room for the works of men, for human merit, and acquired reward.*" (Franzmann, p. 197)

All those who attempt to bring the two together are guilty of following ***"a different gospel which is really no gospel at all."*** (Galatians 1:6,7). Whenever man's works become a factor, God's grace is necessarily and automatically eliminated. This had become the case in pharisaic Judaism. For Paul, the son of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin, the discovery of this grace was actually a rediscovery, a homecoming to the faith of Abraham, as it had truly always been.

*"For Paul and for many other Jewish Christians, belief in Jesus Christ had been a rediscovery of the experience of the grace of God which had been obscured for them while they remained within the more traditional Judaism. But for Paul conversion was a rediscovery of what he now realized more clearly had always been at the heart of Judaism rightly understood - a rediscovery of God's choice not on the basis of good or evil deeds (9:11) but as an act of sheer generosity. Conversion to Jesus Messiah was not a movement away from the faith of the patriarchs and prophets, but a rediscovery of its pristine power."* (Dunn, pp. 646,647)

#### **Verses 7-10**

***What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."***

***"What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain..."*** - One more rhetorical marks the conclusion of this portion of the argument. Paul has contended that the presence of the remnant, Jews who are Christians, demonstrates that God has not rejected His people. In fact, the current situation in which only a small minority actually believe, is fully consistent with the historical pattern of the past. The language here is reminiscent of 9:30-31 which also serves as a summary of the preceding argument in Chapter 9 - ***"What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel,***



*“The High Priests Conspire with Judas” by H. Prell*

*who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.”* The nation as a whole **“Israel”** has failed to attain what she was seeking, that is, righteousness before God (cf. 9:30-31). This failure is all the more tragic in light of all of Israel’s diligent efforts to achieve the desired goal. The nation is now divided into two categories, the **“elect”** (Greek - *“ekloge”*) and the rest who were **“hardened”** (Greek - *“porousthai”*). The elect are the remnant, those who God in His grace has chosen to be His own (cf. vss. 5-6). The Greek verb *“porousthai”* literally means *“to petrify,” “to be turned into stone.”* This is the judicial hardening of God by which His punishment for the obdurate sinner is confirmation in the sin he has chosen for himself (cf. 1:18-32; 9:16-17). Lenski notes: *“The punitive hardening that follows after self-hardening has fully set in is here described. They that will not shall not!”* (Lenski, p. 687)

**“As it is written: “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.”** - The judgement of hardening upon Israel is documented with a composite of citations from the Old Testament. This verse is a combination of Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 29:10. In the Deuteronomy passage Moses rehearses and foretells the history of Israel warning them of the judgement to come because of their unbelief - **“To this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands, or eyes that see or ears that hear.”** The

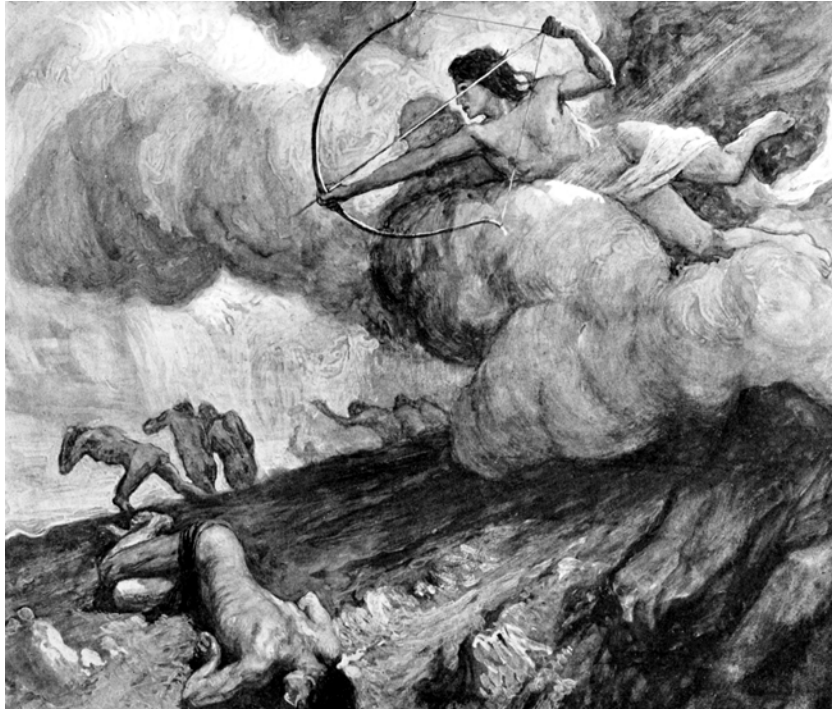
Isaiah text is also a stern word of warning that God will bring upon the people and their prophets ***“a deep sleep”*** and ***“seal their eyes.”*** Both quotations recall the classic Old Testament text on the hardening of Israel, Isaiah 6:9-11 -

***“Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*** (Cf. Matthew 13:10-15; John 12:37-43)

By citing these passages Paul contends that the spiritual blindness of Israel is the culmination of a judgement process that had been at work in Israel for many generations.

*“In both of these prophetic passages, just as in Isaiah 29:9ff., Israel was denied spiritual sight and hearing, the capacity to understand and to grasp God’s Word and work. The blinding and hardening of Israel had already begun in the time of Isaiah, indeed its earliest beginnings reach back to the days of Moses. Yet, because at the time of Christ and the apostles the judgement of obduracy upon Israel was truly consummated and completed, the apostle rightly applies these statements of Moses and Isaiah as prophecies of his own New Testament time.”* (Stöckhardt, p. 513)

***“And David says: May their table become a snare and a trap...”*** - In fine rabbinic style, having quoted from the Torah and the Prophets, Paul now turns to the Writings, the third segment of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanak with a citation from the Book of Psalms. These harsh words come from Psalm 69, the anguished lament of the dying Messiah upon the cross. The Psalm is repeatedly quoted and alluded to in the New Testament in reference to Christ (cf. Matthew 27:34,48; Mark 3:21; 15:23,36; Luke 13:35; 23:36; John 2:17; 15:25; 19:29; Acts 1:20; Romans 15:3; Hebrews 11:26; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 16:1). In the malediction quoted here, the Messiah is calling down the judgement of God upon His enemies. Psalm 69 is one of the so-called *“Imprecatory Psalms”* which call for the punishment and destruction of the enemies of God and His people. Those who are troubled by these often harshly worded passages fail to recognize that when the psalmist, or even the Messiah speaking through the psalmist as in Psalm 69, calls for the destruction or death of the wicked, this is not a matter of personal vengeance or vindictiveness. It is rather a plea for the vindication of the holy God and His divine justice by the exercise of



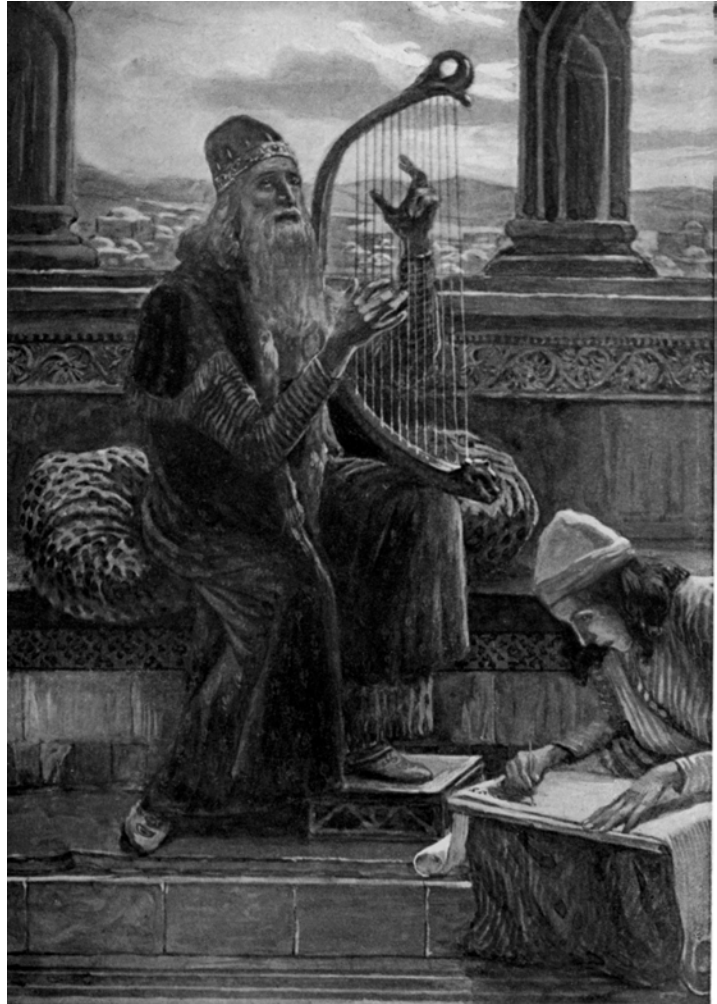
***“The Ungodly Shall Not Stand in the Day of Judgment”  
by J. James Tissot***

judgment upon the those who have stubbornly and impenitently defied His will. The object of these fervent prayers for judgment are those who have hardened their hearts and who obstinately seek to prevent the accomplishment of God’s plan of salvation. The motive of these prayers is never personal vengeance but the vindication of the justice of God. Dr. John Brug offers these helpful observations about the Imprecatory Psalms in general and Psalm 69 in particular:

*“We use the term “imprecatory psalms” to describe those psalms that contain curses or prayers for the punishment of the psalmist’s enemies...Many commentators dismiss these prayers as remnants of a less developed stage of religion, which we have now outgrown. They claim that such prayers are no longer valid in New Testament times, since we are now told to love our enemies and not to take revenge. Such claims, however, are not supported by a careful study of these Psalms or the rest of Scripture. These prayers, harsh though they sound, were proper prayers when they were first uttered, and they are still proper today...Luther once commented that we cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer without cursing. Every time we pray “Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,” we are praying that the plans of Satan and all who serve him will fail and that they receive the judgment which they deserve. We should indeed pray that God will lead our enemies to repentance and forgiveness as Christ and Stephan did, but we must also pray that all who continue to defy God will receive the justice they deserve. God is a God of absolute holiness...When the psalmist uttered such prayers, his concern was for the God’s glory and the success of God’s plans....Similar prayers for God to display His justice occur in the New Testament. Paul prayed for God’s judgment against those who opposed his preaching of the gospel (Galatians 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:14). Even the saints in heaven pray, “**How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?**” (Revelation 6:10)” (Brug, pp.12-13)*



In the inspired words of Psalm 69, the dying Messiah calls down the judgment of God upon His enemies. As noted above, this is not a desire for personal vengeance, but a holy desire for the unhindered accomplishment of the will and purpose of God. The enemies of the Righteous One appear to have triumphed. They rejoice in their victory while they scorn and oppress the Servant of God. The table of the feasting, the symbol of their victorious self-confidence, shall become the instrument of their doom. The eyes of those who have gazed without pity upon Him whom God has smitten, shall be blinded, and the proud backs of the oppressors shall be bent forever beneath the yoke of slavery. By spurning the freedom that God offered, they chose for themselves slavery instead. By refusing to see the truth that God had plainly revealed they cursed themselves to stumble helplessly in the darkness. Thus Israel has brought the judgment of God upon itself by its defiant rejection of the Savior whom God had sent. This is a grim but realistic picture of the righteous judgment of God at work.



*“David - the Psalmist” by J. James Tissot*

John MacArthur notes:

*“One of the saddest commentaries in history is that so many people place their trust in the very thing that damns them. All false religions - pagan, cultic, unbiblical Christianity, and every other kind - present counterfeit means of salvation. The more their adherents feed on the falsehoods, the more immune they become to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, the living bread of life. As she continued to reject God, Israel became progressively more spiritually blind - so blind that she could not recognize her own Messiah and Savior. Just as David had prayed in righteous indignation against the sins of his own people, Israel’s eyes were darkened to see not. Because Israel refused to see the things of God, God judicially ratified her willing blindness.”*

*“Bend their backs” may suggest the hunched over posture in which blind people sometimes walk as they grope their way on a path they cannot see that leads to a destination they do not seek.” (MacArthur, p. 104)*

## **Verses 11-12**

***Again I ask, Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring?***

***“Again I ask...”*** - A rhetorical question expecting a negative answer, similar to that of Verse 1, advances the discussion to the next thought. In the preceding verses, Paul has firmly asserted the hardening of Israel and the preservation of a believing remnant. He now proceeds to define the redemptive purpose of God in His judgement upon apostate Israel. ***“Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?”*** ***“Stumble”*** (Greek - *“ptaio”*) literally means to collide with or crash against something. It is commonly used in the sense of stumbling over an obstacle. James uses the same word in a spiritual sense in reference to sinning: ***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*** (James 2:10; cf. also 3:2; 2 Peter 1:10). In this instance, the stumbling of Israel is her rejection of Christ and the righteousness of God offered through Him. ***“To fall beyond recovery”*** (Greek - *“pipto”*) is the result of the stumbling. The term is used in the same sense in the Septuagint’s translation of Isaiah 24:20 - ***“The earth staggers like a drunkard, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it and it falls and will not rise again.”*** The term is often used in the New Testament to denote apostasy and spiritual ruin (cf. Romans 11:22; 14:4; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 4:11). The question posed here pertains to God’s perspective on Israel’s apostasy and His purpose therein, thus the use of the Greek preposition *“hina”* (*“so as”*). John Murray is correct in his assertion: *“We are here advised, therefore, of the overriding and overruling design of God in the stumbling and fall of Israel.”* (Murray, p. 76) Dr. Stöckhardt amplifies that thought in this way: *“The sense of the question is this: did they stumble just so that they might never rise again? Is their fall an end in itself? Could it simply have been God’s intent that they fall and be destroyed so that He might find pleasure and satisfaction in their destruction?”* (Stöckhardt, p. 514) Is this merely an example of the vengeful judgment of an angry God? The answer is immediate and emphatic. ***“Not at all.”*** Our God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked - ***“Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the***

***Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?***” (Ezekiel 18:22). Even in judgment there is redemptive intent, for above all else, God is love. God’s desire for the salvation of His people never weakens or comes to an end. Even in the face of their obstinate rejection He would still restore them. Even as He punishes, He seeks to lead them to repentance and the punishment visited upon one becomes the occasion of blessing for another.



***“This Generation Will Be Held Responsible for the Blood of all the Prophets..to the Blood of Zechariah who was Killed between the Altar and the Sanctuary” by J. James Tissot***

***“Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.”*** - Paul now returns to the concept introduced in 10:19, based on Deuteronomy 32:21, namely the offer of salvation to the Gentiles as a means of stimulating a renewal of interest among the Jews. The “*transgression*” of Israel is once again their rejection of the Messiah and their attempt to attain a righteousness based upon the law which is the opposite of the righteousness of God in Christ. In the redemptive purpose of God, just judgment upon Israel’s sin serves both as the occasion of salvation for all the nations and yet another opportunity to provoke within the Jews the jealous desire to recapture that which they had thrown away. “*Such is the*

*astounding mercy of God that He makes even the hardening and the fatal fall of the Jews serve His redemptive purpose.*” (Lenski, p. 693)

***“But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!”*** - The apostle is unwilling to simply write off ethnic Israel. He argues from the lesser to the greater to suggest the possibility that despite the Messiah’s rejection by the majority of the nation, those Jews like himself who have come to faith in Jesus are still uniquely positioned to play a special role in the blessing of mankind. God’s redemptive purpose in believing Israelites is greater still than His redemptive purpose in unbelieving Israelites. Paul, the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, is the perfect example of this truth. The key words here are the contrasting terms ***“loss”*** (Greek - *“hettema”*) and ***“fullness”*** (Greek - *“pleroma”*). *“Hettema”* is unusual in New Testament Greek. It is derived from a verb which means *“to be less,” “to be weaker,”* or, *“to be defeated.”* Israel’s ***“transgression”*** in rejecting Christ has been for her the ultimate spiritual defeat. The term is never used in a numerical, statistical sense. ***“Fullness,”*** in direct contrast, refers to completeness or fulfillment. The sense of the term in its every Biblical use is qualitative not quantitative. That which was lost by the apostate majority has been completely restored to the believing remnant (11:5,7) through whom the Gospel is now being proclaimed throughout all the world. Thus, ***“their fullness”*** is not something yet to be realized in the far distant future. It is present reality as Paul writes to the congregation in Rome. Millennialist fantasies about a general conversion of ethnic Israel during the Tribulation Period on the eve of a thousand year earthly kingdom for the Jews find no support in Romans 11. Lenski correctly defines the contrast in this way:

*“The thought is not that if the Jewish loss made the world rich, then the Jewish gain would make it even richer. It is this: if the Jewish loss makes the world rich (which it surely does), this fact stands out as such still more when many of these very Jews themselves now embrace this fulness, these riches.”* (Lenski, p. 694)

### **Verses 13-15**

***I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry, in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?***

***“I am talking to you Gentiles.”*** - This is the first instance in the letter where Paul addresses the Gentile members of the Roman congregation as such. He speaks as

*“the apostle to the Gentiles”* and urges them to avoid the temptation to view the Jews or Jewish Christian with scorn and disdain. To do so would be to fall prey to the same sinful pride which has resulted in the downfall of Israel. Paul has been an aggressive and unapologetic advocate of the mission to the Gentiles and of their inclusion as complete equals in the Christian Church. He has consistently been their spokesman and defender even in the face of bitter opposition. But even in this, a part of Paul’s motive has been a desire for the salvation of his own nation, the Jews. Like the God whom he serves, Paul is determined to find even in man’s rejection a way to enhance the progress of salvation. Franzmann notes: *“Paul cannot reach his fellow Jews directly; they break into anathemas at the sight of him. He must seek them*



*“If You Are the Christ, Come Down from the Cross” by R. Schuler*

*roundabout, through the Gentiles; the Gentile Christians are Paul’s mission to the Jews.”* (Franzmann, p. 200, 201) It is the apostle’s intent by the very emphasis of his ministry as an outreach to the Gentiles *“to arouse my own people to envy”* and in this way to reach out to the elect remnant of the nation - *“save some of them.”* In this context, *“their rejection”* refers to God’s rejection of Israel as the consequence of the nation’s unbelief, not Israel’s stubborn rejection of Jesus. *“The reconciliation of the world,”* the outreach of the Gospel to every nation, and the subsequent conversion of

countless Gentiles to faith in Christ, this is the miraculous result which God has brought about by His judgment upon Israel. **“Reconciliation”** (Greek - “*katallage*”) refers to the action of God in bringing sinners into a peaceful relationship with Himself by removing the barrier of sin which separated Him from fallen mankind by the sacrifice of His Son. The English word “*reconciliation*” is derived from the Latin “*to bring together again.*” It describes the restoration of friendly relationships and peace where before there had been alienation and hostility thru the removal of the offense which caused the disruption of peace and harmony. This reconciliation is an objective reality in the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross. The blessings of this reconciliation are received by each individual through faith, which is, of course, also a gift of God.

*“The reconciliation obtained through the unbelief and the resultant rejection of the Jews, is not the objective reconciliation of the world with God through Christ’s blood and death but the subjective reconciliation, identical with the conversion of the heathen world to God of which 2 Corinthians 5:20 also speaks - “Be ye also reconciled with God.” (Stöckhardt, p. 517,518)*

The theme continues to be God’s wondrous ability to turn negatives into positives; to take man’s most obstinate and flagrant rejection and use it in service of the plan of salvation. Within the apostate nation the faithful remnant is carefully preserved. Every Jew who is a part of that remnant, that is who comes to faith in Jesus (***their acceptance***) is a miracle of ***“life from the dead,”*** like the dry bones of Ezekiel’s valley restored to life again. The application of this principle transcends its specific application to Israel and the Gentiles to remain relevant throughout the history of God’s people:

*“This characteristic feature of the progress of the Kingdom of God can also be observed in the history of the Church of Christ beyond the contrast between the Jews and the Gentiles. The lamentable fact remains that many, indeed most, of those who hear the Gospel do not believe and proceed to damnation. This sad reality will remain unchanged until Judgment Day. Nevertheless, God’s Kingdom continues to move forward on earth. In His own masterful way, God knows how to bring forth good from unbelief, the most terrible of all evils. God knows how to raise up some through the downfall of others. It has often happened that when the Gospel is driven away from one place by the ingratitude of men, that same Gospel moves on to another place, there to establish a firm foundation and bring forth abundant fruit. This is the way in which God’s Word came to the Gentiles from the Jews. In the same way the Word of God came from the Greeks and Romans to the Germanic peoples, and from the Old World to the New World. In the hand of God the*

*persecution of the Christians became the means to spread the Christian Church. As persecuted Christian fled into exile they took their great treasure, the riches of Christ, with them, and there, in exile found open and receptive hearts. The flourishing of faith far away among strangers has often produced the same wholesome reaction upon the church at home. The zeal of the newly converted excites and awakens many who have grown indolent or have already died. It is a particular comfort for Christian pastors to recognize that as Paul provoked Israel by his preaching to the Gentiles, their ministries reach farther than their eyes can see. If they but faithfully carry out their office at home to the souls entrusted to their care, they thus provide the instruments thru which God will carry out His saving work in others. All these are ways and means by which God brings together the elect from all the ends and corners of the earth. In this way, the Church of Christ is led toward her consummation and her glorification.” (Stöckhardt, pp. 519,520)*

Our indolent and apathetic churches would do well to ponder the lesson of this pattern within the history of God’s people.

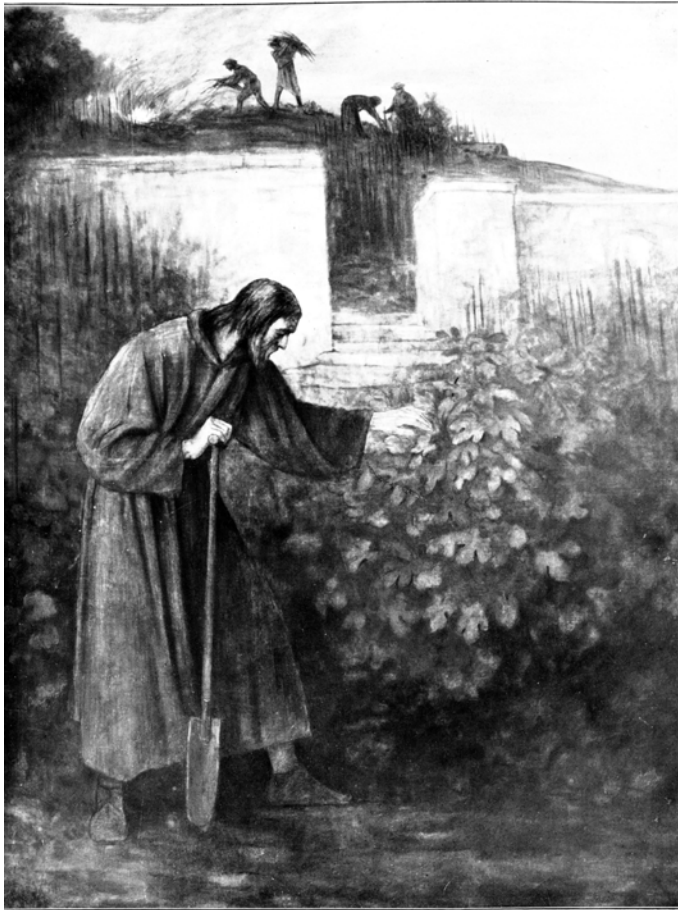
#### **Verses 16-21**

***If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this; You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.***

***“If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy...”*** Two comparisons are offered to illustrate and drive home this fundamental truth. The first is derived from the worship life of ancient Israel (Numbers 15:17-21). From the first dough made of the new grain a portion was set aside and baked for the Lord. This sacrificial offering served to sanctify and bless the entire harvest. Later in the second metaphor (Verse 28) Paul explains that the root of the olive vine represents the patriarchs. That being the case, it would seem that the ***“firstfruits”*** of the batch would also represent the patriarchs of Israel. God’s choice of the patriarchs resulted in the fact that through



them all of their spiritual descendants are sanctified (cf. Romans 4:16-19). Of course, the patriarchs convey spiritual benefits on their spiritual descendants only as recipients and transmitters of the promises of God. That benefit is described in the text in terms of holiness (Greek - *“hagios”*). In the sacrificial language of the Old Testament, holiness carries the technical connotation of having been set apart by God for salvation. That sense suits Paul’s purpose here perfectly. In this way, the illustration of the firstfruits grain offering serves as the transition to the more detailed



*“Christ in the Vineyard” by Wilhelm Steinhausen*

and extended metaphor of the olive vine with the immediate addition of the phrase ***“If the root is holy, so are the branches.”*** The imagery of Israel as the vineyard of God is well established in the Old Testament (i.e.- Psalm 92:13; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 11:17). The dependence of the branches upon the root is also frequently asserted (i.e. - Job 18:16; Jeremiah 17:8; Ezekiel 31:7; Hosea 9:16). Thus, the introduction of the metaphor here is not unexpected. The point is the same as in the preceding phrase. The ***“root”*** represents the patriarchs and the ***“branches”*** which spring from that root represent the true Israel of God. The apostle maintains a careful balance. Physical descent from the patriarchs does not, in itself bring salvation (cf. Romans 2:25-29; 9:6-29). All mankind, both

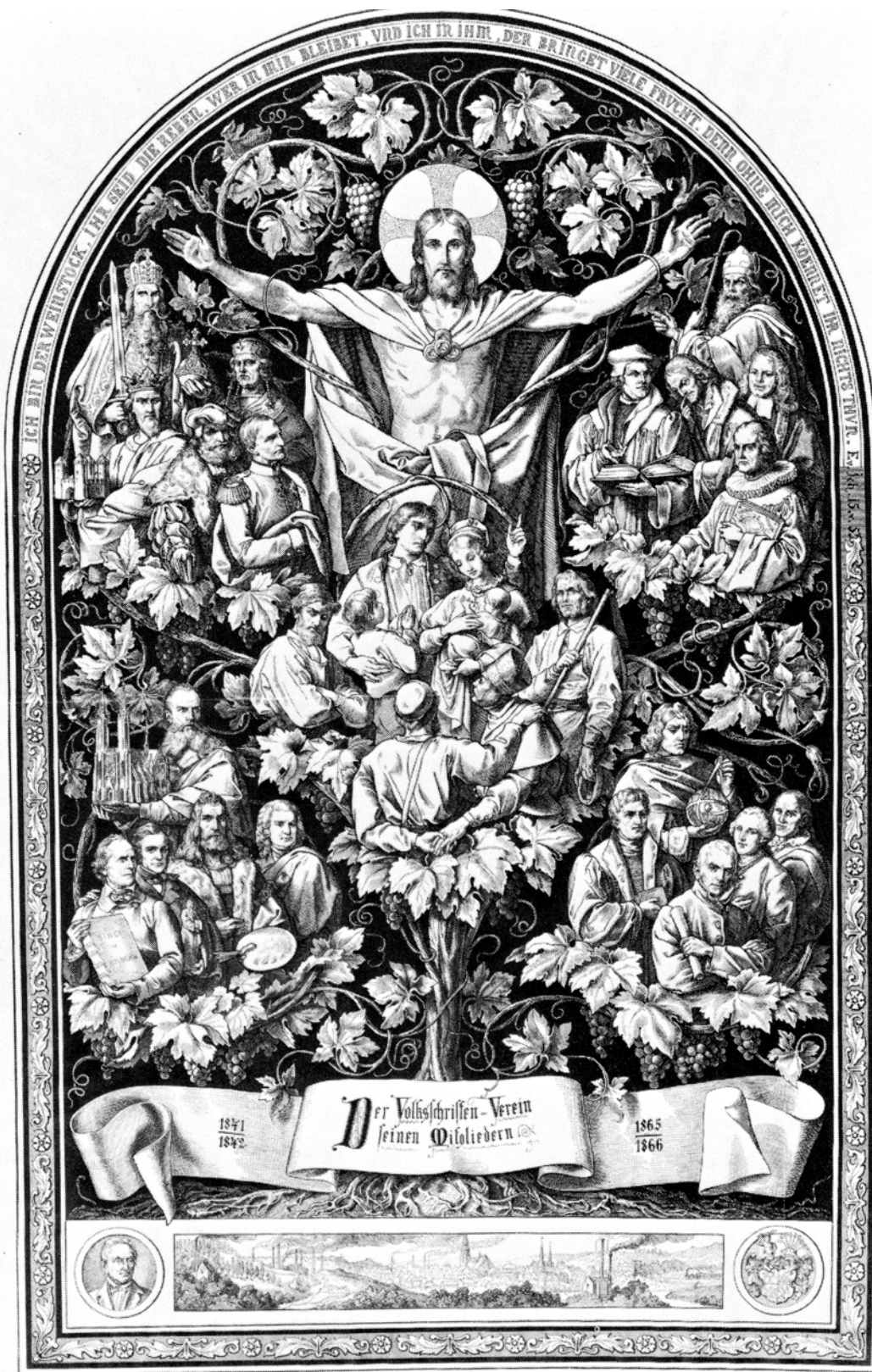
Jews and Gentiles are in the same position by nature in helpless bondage to the power of sin (2:1-3:20) and in need of God’s gift of faith to be saved (3:21-4:25). Yet salvation comes only to those who are *“of Abraham’s seed”* and thus the people of God are one, and that people has both a Jewish root and a continuing Jewish element.

***“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot...”*** - The image of the root and the branches now serves to admonish and warn Gentile Christians. ***“The branches that have been broken off”*** are unbelieving

Israel. The clear implication of the imagery is that the broken off branches were dead. To say that “*some*” branches have been severed from the vine (Note the use of the passive verb to emphasize the divine action involved.) is a genuine understatement in the face of Israel’s overwhelming rejection of Christ. The pronoun “*you*” is highlighted for special emphasis, addressing the Gentile Christians in Rome personally and directly. The olive tree was the most widely cultivated fruit tree in the Mediterranean region. It had been carefully cultured and developed for centuries to provide lush and abundant fruit. The wild olive tree, on the other hand, was an annoying weed, notorious unfruitful. Thus the process of grafting which Paul describes is the exact opposite of what would normally be expected, and in this way the apostle brings out the wonder of God’s amazing grace. Lenski summarizes:

*“The astounding miracle of grace is here pictured by an equally astounding figure; such a wild olive branch grafted in among good living olive branches and thereby made a joint partaker of the root of the good olive tree, of its fatness, its rich sap...The marvel of divine grace, which the Gentile Christians are to note well, is that they, together with the believing Jews are made blessed partakers of all that God originally gave to Abraham and to the great patriarchs of the covenant.”* (Lenski, p. 705, 704)

***“Do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.”*** - Unfortunately, sinful pride and arrogant superiority are not limited to any race or ethnic group. It is the natural propensity of all the fallen children of Father Adam. Gentile Christians are admonished lest they take pleasure in the downfall of the Jews and disparage their Jewish fellow-Christians. Having dealt most severely with all Jewish pretensions and pride, the apostle now bluntly eliminates the possibility of boasting among the Gentiles. The “*root*” which gives sustenance and support to the ingrafted “*branches*” is the Old Testament heritage of the people of God stretching all the way back to Abraham and beyond. To disdain that heritage is to diminish the grace of God which is the only basis for the salvation of every believer, whether Jew or Gentile. In view of that grace, the free gift of God’s absolutely undeserved love excludes all possibility of any kind of boasting (cf. Romans 3:27-28). A careful balance must be maintained here. Every Gentile believer is, in a sense, indebted to Israel as the custodian of the oracles of God. But recognition of and respect for our Old Testament Hebrew heritage must not be equated with an acceptance of Judaism as a viable alternative to Christianity. The acknowledgment of the Jews as “*our elder brothers in the faith,*” to use the language of modern ecumenism, dare



*"I Am the Vine, You Are the Branches" by Karl Christian Andreae*

never be construed as approbation of their ongoing rejection of Jesus as the promised Messiah, the only Savior of the world.

***“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in...’ -*** The argument follows a logical progression. The hypothetical Gentile boaster points out that he must be superior because others were removed to make way for him - ***“branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.”*** Paul ironically agrees - ***“Granted.”*** There is some truth here, but it is only a half-truth. As has already been demonstrated, God had much more in mind than the salvation of the Gentiles in His judgment upon Israel. The divine intent from the beginning was the salvation of mankind, both Jew and Gentile. It is sheer egotism for the Gentile to now conclude that God’s sole purpose in condemning the Jews was to save the Gentiles. This is exactly the same kind of egotism that had led the Jews to conclude that the choosing of Israel was an end in itself because God only the Jews and not the Gentiles. At the root of Israel’s rejection was a lack of faith - ***“they were broken off because of unbelief.”*** Gentiles must now guard against sinful pride and self-exaltation because the basis for their relationship with God is also faith - ***“and you stand by faith.”*** Faith is God’s gift, not man’s doing. This is no inherent virtue, merit, or superiority that contributes to its bestowal by God.

***“Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either.”*** - Thoughts of self-satisfaction, superiority and pride must give way to reverent awe before the mighty God. This is the fear of God which is the beginning of true wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). ***“Only fear of God can keep faith from deteriorating into presumption, since only in trembling creatureliness does faith retain its character as dependent trust.”*** (Dunn, p. 663) The Gentiles are urged to learn from the negative experience of Israel. When the descendants of Abraham fell from faith, they were cut off despite an ethnic pedigree that reached back across the centuries. If God so judged the Jews, who had a natural connection to the sustaining root, He will surely also judge those who have been grafted in as alien branches. We would all do well to heed the warning of Israel’s downfall. ***“Faith cannot become proud at the sight of God’s judgment upon unbelief. When faith sees broken branches lying withered on the ground, faith is filled with fear and says, ‘There but for the grace of God lie I.’”*** (Franzmann, p. 204)

#### **Verses 22-24**

***Consider therefore, the kindness and the sternness of God: sternness to those who***

*fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you will also be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree.*

**“Consider therefore, the kindness and the sternness of God.”** - The point is restated in the customary language of theology. The **“kindness”** (Greek - *“chrestoteta”*) and the **“sternness”** (Greek - *“apotomia”*) of God are set in juxtaposition with one another. **“Kindness”** indicates the generous, giving quality of God’s undeserved love - *“the fountain of all spiritual blessings and gifts.”* (Lenski, p. 709) **“Sternness,”** on the other hand, is a harsh word which literally means *“the cutting off”* derived from the sharp edge of the blade used in the severance. This is the only use of the word in Scripture. In classical Greek it carries the legal connotation of the condemning verdict of the judge in a courtroom. Both of these realities must be kept in mind. Do not presume on the **“kindness”** of God, lest, like those who have fallen, you experience the terror of His **“sternness.”** This is the dialectic of law and gospel. The proper distinction between them is of crucial importance. In this instance, the **“sternness”** of God is demonstrated by His just judgment upon fallen Israel and His **“kindness”** is shown by His gracious



*“Ezekiel in the Valley of the Dry Bones”  
by Rudolf Schäfer*

is of crucial importance. In this instance, the **“sternness”** of God is demonstrated by His just judgment upon fallen Israel and His **“kindness”** is shown by His gracious

call to the Gentiles. Paul cautions that the Gentiles ought to be warned by that which befell the Jews and at the same time comforted by the incredible grace and mercy which they have already experienced. The decisive factor here is faith. If Israel were to return to the faith, God in His mercy would restore them to the position from which they have fallen. Like the father of the wayward prodigal, God is ready and eager to welcome His wandering children home. On the other hand, if the Gentiles were to slip into unbelief, they would be cut off as surely as Israel had been. Paul stretches the terms of his metaphor to emphasize God's readiness to forgive and restore Israel. The *"horticultural impossibility becomes a way of emphasizing the power of God."* (Dunn, p. 675) The branches that have been cut off could be regrafted again if wayward Israelites were to return to the faith. Douglas Moo notes:

*"In speaking of such a regrafting, Paul again reveals how little he is concerned to stick to the details of actual olive cultivation in his metaphor. It is not the logic of nature that explains this regrafting, the **theologic** of the God who "give life to the dead and calls things that do not exist as if they did." (4:17)" (Moo, p. 707)*

The clear emphasis throughout this section is on the gracious action of God to the exclusion of all human effort. St. John Chrysostom properly observes: *"Paul does not point to human works, but to the goodness of God as a reminder to us that our salvation comes from God's grace and to us tremble."* (Bray, p. 295) No room remains for ethnic pride from either Jew or Gentile.

***"After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature..."*** - The apostle again employs an argument from the lesser to the greater (*"a fortiori"*) to defend the appropriateness of the restoration of believing Israel. The argument is signaled by the repetition of the words ***"how much more."*** The Gentiles nations were ***"an olive tree that is wild by nature."*** They were not a part of the chosen people, nor did they enjoy any of the benefits and blessings of Israel's covenant with God. By contrast, Israel was ***"a cultivated tree,"*** meticulously cared for and carefully pruned by the God who had chosen this people for Himself. If God was capable of grafting branches from the wild tree into the cultivated one He would certainly be capable of regrafting the natural branches of the cultivated tree. Once again it is faith, not ethnic identity which is critical. Gentiles must resist the temptation to scorn the Jews lest they fall prey to the same self-righteous pride which had originally led to the downfall of Israel. The grafting of the wild branches into the cultured tree does not represent a new beginning but the reaffirmation of a faith based concept of the people of God, a concept that



*“The Pharisees and Sadducees Come to Tempt Jesus” by J. James Tissot*

had been obscured by Israel’s egotistical misunderstanding. Dr. Moo offers this helpful summary of the entire metaphor:

*“Paul skillfully mixes theology and exhortation in this paragraph. His olive tree metaphor makes an important contribution to our understanding of the people of God. It is notoriously easy to squeeze more theology out of such a metaphor than it is intended to convey. But basic to the whole metaphor is the unity of God’s people, a unity that crosses both historical and ethnic boundaries. The basic point of the metaphor is that there is only one olive tree, whose roots are firmly planted in OT soil, and whose branches include both Jews and Gentiles. This olive tree represents the true people of God. The turn of the ages at the coming of Christ brought an important development in the people of God; the object of ones faith became clearer and more specific and the ethnic makeup of that people changed radically, as God extended His grace in vastly increased measure to the Gentiles. But Paul’s metaphor warns us not to view this transition as a transition of one people of God to another. Gentiles who come to Christ become part of that community of salvation founded on God’s promises to the patriarchs. And “messianic Jews,” following in the footsteps of their believing ancestors, belong to this same community...We must remember that, for Paul, the church was both rooted in the Jews and heavily populated by Jews. The coming of Christ did not for him involve ethnic subtraction, as if Jews were not eliminated, but addition, with Gentiles now being added to believing Jews. Paul’s boundary for the people of God is a religious one - faith in Jesus Christ - not an ethnic one.” (Moo, pp. 709-710)*



### Verses 25-27

***I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited; Israel had receiving a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so, all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”***

***“I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited.”*** - This introduction highlights the profound significance of the conclusion which now follows and serves to draw the reader’s attention to these words. Given the context, the **“brothers”** addressed would appear to be the Gentile members of the Roman Church. Paul’s concern is that they not fall into the same trap of conceit which had so successfully snared their Jewish counterparts. The Greek text literally says - *“so that you might not be wise in your own estimation.”* The warning is against ethnic pride and exclusiveness. If faith is perverted into something other than a complete dependence upon God, a claim upon Him rather than trust in Him, then God’s love comes to be seen as a right to which one is entitled by birth or merit. Faith has then become what James Dunn aptly calls *“unfaith.”* That is the grim fate which befell Israel and against which Paul warns the Gentiles. *“In this way Paul underlines the precariousness of the Gentile believers situation - precarious because the history of Israel shows how quickly faith can be corrupted into unfaith, how easily grace can be perverted into human presumption.”* (Dunn, p. 675) Our eternal security rests in the grace of God alone.

That which is here explained is a **“mystery,”** a dimension of the plan of salvation that cannot be discerned by human effort but must be revealed or disclosed by God (cf. Ephesians 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 6:19). The implication is that that which Paul now uncovers for his readers has been revealed to him by God Himself. Paul uses the same word in Ephesians 3:6 to describe the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles in the plan of salvation: ***“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.”*** C.F.W. Walther comments on the appropriateness of the use of the term **“mystery”** in this regard:

*“It is true to us, who look back on the eighteen centuries of the history of the Christian Church, who still have the Jewish nation before our eyes, who know of the conversion of Jews in all ages and countries, who observe how even today God faithfully keeps His covenant with Israel - to us this no longer appears as a great mystery, as little as the wickedness of Antichrist revealed to us by the Reformation.*

*However, if we imagine ourselves in the position of the Roman Gentile Christians to whom Paul wrote, it will soon become clear to us that for them the apostle's prophecy of Israel's survival and admittance to the Kingdom of Christ to the Last Day was bound to be an unexpected, great, marvelous mystery.” (Pieper,III, p.531)*



*“The Pharisees are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man both will fall into a pit.” By J. James Tissot*

***“Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved.”*** - The mystery includes three components: (1) the partial hardening of Israel; (2) that partial hardening will persist ***“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in;”*** and, (3) in the end, according to the plan of God, ***“all Israel will be saved.”***

The mystery's first component is that there will always be a remnant within Israel. The hardening which has come upon the nation will always be only ***“in part.”*** It is clear from that which has come before that the hardening which has befallen much of Israel is the judicial action of God upon men who have obstinately chosen to defy and disobey Him (cf. Romans 1:18f.; 9:18; 11:7). Nonetheless, a faithful remnant

remains within the apostate nation which continues to trust in the Lord and will be saved by Him. This repeats the point stressed earlier in the chapter. ***“God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.”*** (Vs.2) The Jews will never be excluded from the church. Israel’s remnant will continue to play an important role in the plan of salvation.

Next Paul asserts that this partial hardening of Israel will continue throughout the New Testament era, until the end of this age and the coming of the judgment when ***“the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”*** The verb ***“has come in”*** (Greek - *“eiserxomai”*) consistently refers to entrance into the kingdom of God in the New Testament. John Murray describes the phrase as *“the standard term in the New Testament for entering into the Kingdom of God and life.”* (Murray, II, p.93) (cf. Matthew 5:20; 7:3; 18:3; 19:17; Mark 9:43,45,47; John 3:5; Acts 14:22). The phrase ***“the full number of the Gentiles”*** echoes the same language used in reference to Israel in Verse 12. In both instances it refers to all of the elect within each group, each and everyone of those whom God has chosen for salvation. The end will not come until all of the elect have been saved, for God is unwilling to allow one of those whom He has chosen to be lost. (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) Considerable attention has been devoted to the preposition ***“until”*** (Greek - *“achri”*) Those who misuse this passage in support of mass Jewish conversion theories insist that the preposition implies a period of time that will come to an end and be followed by a change in the condition denoted. According to this view, the current hardening of the Jews will one day be removed and the Israelite nation will experience a spiritual rejuvenation. The Greek preposition, however does not necessarily imply a consequent change in condition. The same term is used, for instance, in the Septuagint version of 2 Samuel 6:23 - ***“Micah daughter of Saul had no children until the day of her death”*** - surely without any implication that the barrenness of Saul’s daughter changed and she began to have children after her demise (cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:25; Revelation 2:10,25,26). The preposition is used similarly in this instance to indicate that there will always be a remnant in Israel, right up to, ***“until”*** the end of time.

The third element in the mystery is the salvation of ***“all Israel.”*** The phrase has prompted widespread debate among commentators, and spawned a host of millennial fantasies about a general conversion of ethnic Israel at the beginning of Christ’s thousand year reign on earth. What would be the point of a national conversion of the last generation of ethnic Israel, a tiny fraction of the totality of the nation, which left all the preceding generations dead and damned? Recognizing the inadequacy of this view, some extreme millennialists, driven by the flawed logic of their own position, have gone so far as to offer the ludicrous suggestion that there will be a

resurrection of the Jews alone for or during the millennium which will literally enable each and every physical descendant of Abraham to be saved.

Despite the impressive array of interpreters who have advocated some variety of this view, both the immediate and general context of the phrase preclude this interpretation. The phrase is introduced with the Greek preposition “*houtos*” which means “*thus*” or “*in this way*.” Accordingly, the relationship between the mystery’s three elements is not a matter of time sequence. Those who anticipate a future - end time, general conversion of the Jews outline the proposed sequence in this way: first the partial hardening of Israel during the dispensation of the Gentile church, followed by the incoming of the fullness of the Gentiles at the end of the church age, which in turn would be followed by the general conversion of ethnic Israel during the tribulation period on the eve of the millennium. The temporal sequence is essential to this view. However, there is no temporal sequence in the Greek text. The text does not say “*and then* (Greek “*kai tote*”) *all Israel will be saved*”; it says “*and in this way* (Greek - “*kai houtos*”) *all Israel will be saved*.” The preposition which introduces the final phrase indicates that the salvation of all Israel occurs through or by means of the partial hardening which preserves Israel’s remnant and the incoming of the fullness of the Gentiles. The grammarians call this an “*adverb of manner*.” The point is not when it happens but how it happens. Lutheran theologian Wilbert Garwisch explains the significance of the preposition in this way:

*“The word ‘houtos’ does not mean ‘then.’ It means ‘so in this way, in this manner.’ It sums up what Paul has said. In the preceding he emphasized that there is still a remnant chosen by grace from among the Jews. The hardening of Israel, the blood descendants of Jacob, is only ‘in part.’ It does not include the whole nation. Through the years some will come to faith. But also the elect from among the Gentiles will come into Christ’s church. By adding the full number of these Gentiles to the remnant of Jewish believers, all of God’s true Israel, and the full number of His elect, consisting of believers of both Jewish and Gentile stock, will be saved.”*  
(Garwisch, p. 725)

This view fully agrees with Paul’s repeated assertions that salvation can never be a matter of national entitlement. “*All Israel*” refers to the whole people of God, the elect among Jew and Gentile alike, for these are the true descendants of Abraham (Romans 9:6f.), the true Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). This was the view of the early church fathers. Theodoret of Cyprus writes in the Fourth Century: “*All Israel means all those who believe, whether they are Jews, who have a natural relationship to Israel, or Gentiles who are related to Israel by faith.*” St. Augustine rightly contends: “*Not all the Jews were blind; some of them recognized Christ. But the*

*fullness of the Gentiles comes in among those who have been called according to the plan, and there arises a truer Israel of God...the elect from both the Jews and the Gentiles.”* (Bray, p. 298) A recent study on eschatology and millennialism by the CTCR argues that this is the only interpretation consistent with the text of Romans 9-11 and Paul’s description of the Israel of God elsewhere in the New Testament.

*“The apostle plainly states that **“not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel”** (9:6). The **“children of the promise”** not the **“children of the flesh”** (the national Israel), are God’s children (9:8). If Israel refers merely to Jews as a nation, then this distinction is removed. However, if Israel refers to **“children of the promise,”** then the distinction is maintained, and Paul’s argument in Romans 9-11 continues - namely, that God’s elect, both Jews and Gentiles, will be saved according to His plan which has been revealed in the Gospel (the **“mystery”**). The heirs of the promise are those who believe, Jew and Gentile alike (Romans 4). Thus it is that elsewhere the apostle can refer to the church as **“the Israel of God.”** ... In Romans 11:1 Paul addresses the question of whether God has rejected all Jews, not whether He will save all Jews. In vv. 1-10, he answers in the negative. There is even in Paul’s day a remnant of believing Jews. In the rest of the chapter, the apostle explains the purpose served by the unbelief of the majority of the Jews. Paradoxically, through their rejection of the Gospel, the Gospel went to the Gentiles (11:1-12,19,25,30). In turn, the salvation of the Gentiles serves to make the unbelieving Jews **“jealous,”** i.e. to incite them to hear the Gospel and also be saved (10:19; 11:11,13-14,31). The mystery revealed in 11:25-27 is that **“a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.”** The word **“so”** means **“in this manner,”** that is, in the way just described, not **“then,”** as if it meant after the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. How will all Israel be saved? The answer is given in vs. 25 and is explicated throughout the chapter. The hardening upon part of Israel has allowed the Gospel to go to the Gentiles, and the inclusion of the Gentiles serves to incite the unbelieving Jews to believe the Gospel and thus be saved (regrafted into the olive tree). This process will continue until the end, **“until the full number of the Gentiles comes in.”** ...In summary, **“all Israel”** consists of the groups mentioned in v. 25, the believing part of the Jews and the **“full number of the Gentiles.”** **“All Israel”** is the whole olive tree consisting of the natural branches (Jews who believed), the wild olive branches (Gentiles who believe), and the grafted branches (Jews who will believe). These constitute the **“all”** in verse 32. **“All Israel”** is made up of **“everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord”** (10:13), the elect of the Jews and the Gentiles, the **“new Israel”** (Romans 4:11-12, 16; 9:24; Galatians 3:26-29; 6:15-16) (CTCR, pp.36-37)*

***“As it is written, **“The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.”*****

- In the characteristic fashion, the point is now affirmed by Old Testament Scripture

through a series of allusions to Isaiah 59. Martin Franzmann describes Paul's method of citation in this way:

*“Paul’s quotation of the promise from the Old Testament is extremely free; it might almost be called variations on a theme from Isaiah (Isaiah 59:20-21). The basic thought is from Isaiah 59, that mighty liturgy of repentance and absolution, an absolution spoken by the Lord, who Himself restores righteousness and brings salvation, so that all the world in East and West might fear His Name. But there are added touches from the Psalms (Psalm 14:7; 53:6), and the picture of the promised covenant is colored by reminiscences of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:33-34).”*  
(Franzmann, p. 207)

The prophet foretells the coming of the **“Deliverer”** (Greek - “*ruomenos*”) This is the classic Hebrew Messianic title “*Go’el*,” which means “*Vindicator*” or “*Redeemer*” best known from Job 19:25 - ***“I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand on the latter day upon the earth.”*** The promised Messiah will come ***“from Zion.”*** “*Zion*” is the hilltop upon which the original Davidic fortress of Jerusalem was located which became the site where the temple was later constructed.



*“I Know that My Redeemer Lives” by Rudolf Schäfer*

The term comes to be used more broadly in the Old Testament in reference to the entire city of Jerusalem, the kingdom of Judah, and the Jewish nation. At this point, Paul digresses from the text of Isaiah 59 which says ***“for Zion”*** and uses instead the wording of Psalm 14:7 which says ***“from Zion.”***

In this way, the apostle avoids rekindling the concept of some sort of national primacy for Israel. Christ did not come only to save Israel. He came from Israel as the Redeemer of mankind. The purpose of

His coming is to ***“turn godlessness away from Jacob”*** and to ***“take away their sins.”*** The reference is the incarnation, the first coming of Christ and the results of His coming upon both Jew and Gentile throughout the New Testament era: *“It is a sweet statement because it teaches clearly that in the New Testament forgiveness of sins is to be preached. This liberation of the people is to be understood as extending from the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel until the end.”* (Melancthon, p. 207) The promised salvation is certain because it is not dependant upon human action. It will be brought about by God in His grace - ***“He*** (the Redeemer) ***will turn godlessness away...I will take away their sins.”***

### Verses 28-32

***As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account, but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.***

***“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account...”*** - The apostle now returns to the subject of Israel’s remnant and urges his Gentile readers not to despise the Jews, for there are those among them who will yet come to believe. At the present moment ***“they are enemies”*** ***“as far as the gospel is concerned.”*** They have failed to respond to the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ and have chosen instead to pursue a righteousness of their own making based upon the legalistic observances of Judaism. They are adamantly opposed to Christ and His Gospel and have thus chosen to be ***“enemies”*** of God. But even in the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah God has a saving purpose. Paul again reminds the Gentiles that they are the beneficiaries of Jewish apostasy - ***“they are enemies on your account.”*** Nonetheless, the remnant still remains, hidden, as it were, among the great mass of their unbelieving countrymen. Gentile Christians cannot yield to the temptation to give up on the Jews, no matter how bitter their opposition to the Gospel may be, for the sake of this remnant. ***“God did not reject His people whom He foreknew.”*** (Romans 11:2) There are still those among them whom God has chosen for salvation. Of this remnant yet to be Paul says, ***“as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs.”***



*"The Call of Abraham" by E.M. Lilien*

The language parallels that of the preceding phrase. As the Gentiles became the beneficiaries of the Jew's rejection of Christ - ***"they are enemies on your account"*** - so also the remnant are the beneficiaries of the covenant God established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - ***"they are loved on account of the patriarchs."*** In them, God's ancient promises to the patriarchs will be fulfilled, for they will be true children of Abraham not by mere accident of physical descent but by the faith which God will create within them. The promises of God do not and cannot fail - ***"for God's gift and His call are irrevocable."*** ***"Irrevocable"*** (Greek - *"ametameleta"*)



is a legal term used to indicate a commitment that is absolutely unbreakable. God's will for the salvation of His elect has not changed over all the centuries that have passed since Father Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to wander as a stranger and a foreigner in the land of promise. God's plan of salvation for all those who are true children of Abraham by faith will be carried out, even for those who are, at the moment, still adamantly opposed to the Gospel of Christ.

***“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.”*** God in His grace will accomplish the salvation of the elect among the remnant of Israel in the same way that He has demonstrated His undeserved love to the Gentiles through the disobedience of the Jews. God gracious purpose throughout time has been for the salvation of Jew and Gentile alike. All who are saved must be saved by His grace alone. The crucial concept here is God's ***“mercy”*** (Greek - *“eleos”*), undeserved love extended to those who have no basis upon which to claim or expect that love. There is no room for pride or particularism here. Both the Jew and the Gentile are guilty of ***“disobedience”*** and therefore absolutely dependent upon the mercy of God. And yet, even the stubborn disobedience of man becomes a tool in the hands of our loving God who uses the disobedience of one as a source of blessing for another.

***“For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.”*** - The colorful language of the phrase serves to illustrate the effects and consequences of sin. The opening words of the verse literally say *“for God has imprisoned all in disobedience.”* The verb *“has imprisoned”* (Greek - *“synkleio”*) actually means *“to lock someone up in jail.”* Man's sin confines him within a prison of his own construction. This most appropriate description of sin's impact is completely consistent with Paul's earlier description in Romans 1:18ff. James Dunn writes:

*“God's wrath as a handing over of man to his own desires and passions = God shutting all up to disobedience. Without detracting from man's responsibility for his own acts, without preventing man from pursuing his own ends, God has nevertheless so ordered things (the way things work out at individual and social, human and natural levels) that persons who decide to go their own way regardless of God find themselves more and more confined and hemmed in by the consequences of their decisions. A path of disobedience freely chosen becomes more and more shut in and enclosed by that very disobedience.”* (Dunn, p. 696)

Paul emphasizes the fact that this confinement applies to **“all men,”** Jew and Gentile alike. They are locked up together equally helpless and hopeless, without the possibility of releasing themselves. Jewish presumption of national advantage and Gentile condescension toward apostate Israel are equally inappropriate. There is only one exit from this prison, the open door of God’s mercy.

*“The Jew was not a whit better off than the Gentile; all his rights, prerogatives, claims, and boasts were gone, he lay in the same prison of disobedience with the Gentiles. The Gentile could not be high-minded and look down on the Jew as being one who had fallen so terribly, for his pagan disobedience was the same fearful prison.”* (Lenski, p. 738)

Yet the wonder of God’s love is such that even the disobedience of men is enlisted to serve the cause of His mercy - **“so that He might have mercy on them all.”** The universal reality of man’s disobedience serves to confront man with his own helplessness and convince him of his absolute need for God’s gracious love. The Law must do its grim work before the sweet promises of the Gospel can be heard. *“In His wisdom He has by strange ways brought all men, both Israelite and Gentile, into that blind alley where disobedient man must turn about and face the wrath of God, acknowledging his disobedience.”* (Franzmann, p. 210) Only those who recognize themselves to be disobedient can be recipients of God’s mercy. As long as we rely on anything else, as long as we continue to cling to the delusion of our own worth or worthiness, we will continue to spurn and reject God’s grace. As Jesus declared: **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”** (Matthew 9:12-13) In this way God uses the self-reinforcing consequences of sin to prepare the way for His mercy.

Dr. Stöckhardt discerns in these verses a valuable evangelism insight for the church in every age:

*“By the way, the text of verses 30-32 contains a general word of warning which Christians would do well to keep in mind. We should never consider all the unbelievers with whom we have to work as people who are hopelessly lost, just because at the present time they vehemently oppose the Gospel. Instead, we would do well to consider the fact that the mercy of God is unlimited, and that He could very well do the same thing with others that He has done with us. If only we will forcefully bear witness to the mercy which we ourselves have experienced in word and deed wherever we are, then many souls can be influenced and helped.”* (Stöckhardt, p. 549)



*"The Heavenly Praise of Saints and Angels"  
by Albrecht Dürer*

#### Verses 33-36

*Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! "Who had known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counselor?" "Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?" For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen.*

*"Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" - Having elucidated the mystery of God's plan for the salvation of both Jew and Gentile, the apostle now breaks forth in spontaneous doxology. This powerful hymn of adoration opens with the exclamation "Oh," which expresses strong emotion. "The human and weak Paul exclaims not in awe and fear, but in wonder and gratitude, at the*

*boundless providence of God in arranging the mutual assistance of Jews and Gentiles in the attainment of salvation."* (Fitzmyer, p. 634) ***"The wisdom and the knowledge of God"*** are depicted as an inexhaustible treasury of unimaginable immensity and scope - ***"the depths of the riches."*** The image in further emphasized in the following sentence - ***"How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!"*** The language is reminiscent of the inter-testamental book the 2 Apocalypse of Baruch: *"But who, O Lord, my Lord, can comprehend the workings of Your judgment? Who can search out the depths of Your way? Or who can trace the profundity of Your path? Or who can describe Your unfathomable counsel?"* (14:8-9) The terms ***"wisdom"*** (Greek - *"sophia"*) and ***"knowledge"*** (Greek - *"gnosis"*) are closely related to one another (cf. Colossians 2:3). Wisdom is the ability to put knowledge to work in a proper and appropriate manner. Knowledge provides the information, the facts which are utilized by wisdom. ***"The wisdom and***

*the knowledge of God*” are beyond the scope of human comprehension. They may be known by us only to the extent that God deigns to reveal Himself to us in His Word. The term “*judgments*” is used here in the broader sense of decisions in general. From man’s limited perspective these divine “*judgments*” are most often “*unsearchable*,” all of our efforts to decipher them are presumptuous and in vain. No man is capable of mapping out the ways of God or of predicting the course He will follow for “*His paths are beyond tracing out.*” Martin Franzmann rejoices:

*“All men end up in beggary (11:32); only God is rich, inexhaustibly rich, rich in kindness and forbearance (2:4); rich in glory (9:23), and the Lord whom He gave to Jew and Greek is rich in His beneficence toward all who call on Him (10:12). God cannot fail for lack of means in accomplishing His ends. And God is wise. He uses all His riches in a sure, astounding governance of history that overawes and humbles men. When men put their trust in chariots and horsemen, those reliable makers of successful history, “...He is wise and brings disaster...When the Lord stretches out His hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.” (Isaiah 31:1-3) And when world empires fall (Isaiah 10) and Israel is judged and ruined, royal house and all, He makes His Spirit of Wisdom rest upon the Shoot that grows from Jesse’s stump (Isaiah 11:1-2) and through Him makes His earth a land of righteousness, a paradise of peace (Isaiah 11:3-9). Men quarrel with His ways; they carp at His prophet, the Baptist crying in the wilderness, and at His Son, the Son of Man who eats and drinks with men, and yet His “wisdom is justified by her deeds” (Matthew 11:16-20). God knows as no man knows; His knowing is a knowing with a will and an effect. When he “foreknows” His people (11:2; 8:29), He has shaped His people’s history. As man only riches worth the name are to be enriched by Him, so man’s only real knowledge is to be known by Him (2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Corinthians 8:3). Man’s only wisdom is to fear, to stand in awe of, Him and to obey. His judgments are unsearchable; out of them salvation springs (cf. 11:32): “Thy judgments are like the great deep; man and beast Thou savest, O Lord.” (Psalm 36:6) His ways through history are inscrutable; who could have predicted that the fulfillment of His promises to Israel would bring judgment upon Israel? Or that the darkling Gentiles should reflect the light of God upon the Jew?” (Franzmann, pp.214-215)*

The hymn draws to its triumphant conclusion with a series of Old Testament allusions. First from Isaiah 40:13 - “*Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed Him as His counselor?*” In the face of historical circumstances that are often bewildering or discouraging, the prophet urges man to remember his proper place and to humbly bow before the greater wisdom of God. The Lord always knows best, and man should never presume to question or challenge His will. The Creator does not require the advice or counsel of those whom He has created in determining His plan nor does He require their assistance in accomplishing His purpose. The next

citation is drawn from the Book of Job - ***“Who has a claim against Me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to Me.”*** (41:11) God exercises His will with sovereign independence. He who fashioned *“Behemoth”* and *“Leviathan”* (Job 40&41) is answerable to no one. No human being could ever have any claim upon Him or control over Him. Paul’s expanded paraphrase of the latter portion of the Job passage is an acknowledgment of the triune God as the Creator, Sustainer, and Goal of all the Universe - ***“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things!”***

A mighty *“Soli deo gloria!”* sounds forth in the closing words of the hymn - ***“To Him be the glory forever! Amen.”*** These words clearly reflect and are intended for use in the liturgical worship of the church designed to affirm and enhance God’s glory and renown by praise, prayer and thanksgiving.



***“Rejoice in the Lord Always!” By Rudolf Schäfer***

# Romans Chapter 12



*“The Vineyard of the Lord” by Lucas Cranach the Younger*

## Introduction

*“In other letters addressed to congregations, Paul follows the same course as he does here and leaves the admonition concerning the Christian life, to the last. So he begins with the fundamental transformation and then marks the range of his first admonitions; the Christian as a member of the spiritual body created by faith in Christ (12:4,5). He shows the Christian among Christians. In the grand section chapters 6 to 8 the great fundamentals of the Christian life have already been fully*

*presented as the results of the righteousness of God apprehended by faith. There we are shown as such results: newness of life and salvation (chapter 6); deliverance from the law (chapter 7); guidance of the Spirit (8:1-17); consolation of hope, etc. (8:18-39) The present section, concerning the details of this life might have followed at once, but Paul chose to insert the intervening sections as to how the mass of Judaism lost God's righteousness by unbelief, and how God shaped His plans accordingly. How justification by faith governs this life in its details is thus reserved for the last and is unfolded with proportional fullness. By placing this portion with its details last Paul helps to round out the great subject of the letter even formally in an excellent way." (Lenski, p. 744)*

## **Verses 1-2**

***Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will.***

***"Therefore, I urge you, brothers..."*** - The conjunction ***"therefore"*** (Greek - *"oun"*) marks the transition to the next segment of the letter grounding the exhortation which is to follow firmly on the theology of justification by grace which has preceded it. The reference to ***"God's mercy"*** indicates that the link is not merely to the paragraphs which concluded chapter 11. Lenski is correct to assert - *The "oun" reaches back much farther.* All that which God in his gracious compassion has done to establish our justification becomes the basis for that which now follows. Sanctification must always be recognized as the result of justification. To view sanctification, even to the slightest extent, as a contributing factor in justification is to overthrow the grace of God in favor of human works. Paul addresses the entire congregation in Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, with the fraternal salutation ***"brothers."*** The verb is most significant - ***"I urge you"*** (Greek - *"parakaleo"*). The Greek term means to exhort and encourage from the perspective of mutual concern and love. It sets the tone for all that is to follow. This is neither a threatening demand nor a command of the law. This is evangelical persuasion in contrast to legalistic coercion. Martin Luther notes the fundamental theological importance of this distinction in an Epiphany sermon on this text. The Reformer's forceful language is indicative of the profound significance of this point for the Christian faith and life:

*"Paul does not say, "I command you." He is preaching to those already godly Christians through faith in the new man; to hearers who are not to be constrained*



by commandments, but to be admonished. For the object is to secure voluntary renunciation of their old, sinful, Adam-like nature. He who will not cheerfully respond to friendly admonition is no Christian. And who attempts by the restraints of law to compel the unwilling to renunciation, is no Christian preacher or ruler; he is but a worldly jailer. A teacher of the law enforces his restraints through threats and punishments. A preacher of grace persuades and incites by calling attention to the goodness of God. The latter does not desire works prompted by an unwilling



“Law and Gospel” - The Cranach Workshop in Wittenberg c.1550

spirit, or service that is not the expression of a cheerful heart. He desires that a joyous, willing spirit shall incite to the service of God. He who cannot, by the gracious and lovely message of God’s mercy so lavishly bestowed upon us in Christ, be persuaded in a spirit of love and delight to contribute to the honor of God and the benefit of his neighbor, is worthless to Christianity and all effort is lost on him. How can one whom the fire of heavenly love and grace cannot melt, be rendered cheerfully obedient by laws and threats? Not human mercy is offered to us by divine mercy and Paul would have us perceive it and be moved thereby.” (Lenker, VII, pp.11-12)



The apostle links the congregation's response to **"God's mercy."** The Greek noun is actually plural - **"God's mercies"** - thus indicating everything that God has done on behalf of His people. *"In that phrase Paul sums up the creative and transforming power of the Gospel of God as he has been proclaiming it in the first 11 chapters of the letter."* (Franzmann, p. 216) Charles Hodge summarizes: *"All the doctrines of justification, grace, election, and final salvation, taught in the preceding part of the epistle, are made the foundation for the practical duties enjoined in this."* (Hodge, p. 393) The preposition **"in view of"** (Greek - *"dia"*) explains the basis for or the source of the exhortation. God's undeserved love toward us in Christ is not only the foundation for our sanctification, it is the present empowerment which enables us as Christians to live in a manner consistent with the will and Word of God.

**"To offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."** - Paul effectively uses sacrificial imagery to express the reality of the Christian life. While the Old Testament sacrificial system was rendered obsolete by the perfect, once for all, sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, the New Testament continues to use sacrificial language (cf. 1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15), thus signaling the fulfillment of the institutions of the Old Testament in Christ. In this passage, however, the traditional language dramatically shifts. Paul urges not merely the offering of a sacrifice but the offering of **"your bodies as living sacrifices."** The **"bodies"** in question are not merely physical bodies as such. The reference here is more broadly to the entire person with special emphasis on the person's interaction with the physical world. John Calvin accurately captures the sense of the language in his observation: *"By bodies he means not only our skin and bones but the totality of which we are composed."* (Calvin, p. 264) The substance of the sacrifice in this instance is the totality of our being. Franzmann points out the interplay of the new and the old in Paul's language and the theological meaning it conveys:

*"With the hallowed term "sacrifice" Paul marks the continuity of the new worship with the old worship under the Law; with the modifier "living" he marks the discontinuity, the newness of the new worship. The worshiper no longer gives to God the life of another creature, he gives God his living self. Since all men have bodies, all can sacrifice, all have become priests. Since men are never without their bodies, worship is constant. Since bodies are visible, all worship becomes a witness and a proclamation, a lived doxology to God; God is glorified in His servant people (cf. Isaiah 49:3). This is "spiritual" worship. What the old system with its ritual prescriptions for sacrifice foreshadowed has become reality. This is now worship in its deepest and truest sense. All previous worship has been but a parable of this reality."* (Franzmann, p. 217)

Three adjectives modify the sacrifice to be offered - **“living,” “holy,”** and **“pleasing to God.”** The sacrifice in question is not a dead animal like the sacrificial victims of old, but the very life of him who offers the sacrifice. To this extent, the experience of the Christian reflects that of the Christ. The language here continues the thought of chapter 6 where Paul asserted that the believer is a participant in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians are called upon to die to sin and live to Christ in the

context of the same sacrificial language:



**“The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel”**

**Woodcut by Lucas Cranach the Elder - 1534**

***“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather, offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to***

***life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness.”***  
(Romans 6:11-13)

Lenski commends this phrase as *“one of Paul’s wonderful expressions.”* He carefully defines both the similarities and the differences between the sacrifices in question:

*“It strikes a chord of many notes: likeness and difference as far as all Jewish and all pagan bloody animal sacrifices are concerned; the differences implying a vast superiority, for these are our own bodies and when the slaughter sacrifice is completed, these bodies not only live, they partake of a higher life, one that, even as far as the bodies are concerned, shall end in blessed eternal life. And this fact that we are such a sacrifice and yet live not only duplicates Christ in His death and His life, it is the result of His death and His life. However, the duplicate in us is not one that expiates, for a genuine expiation admits of no repetition, nor is it needed; the*

*duplication in us, i.e. in our bodies, is the evidence of our union with Christ, the evidence of the effectiveness of His truly expiating sacrifice in us.” (Lenski, pp. 747.748)*

The second adjective is **“holy”** (Greek - *“hagios”*), the characteristic cultic term to describe offerings that have been set apart to be dedicated to God. In the same way, we are to be set apart from the world with its corruption and sin to be wholly dedicated to God. Hence the ethical connotation of holiness as absolute separation from sin is also clearly present in the text.

The third adjective which modifies the sacrifice is **“pleasing to God.”** The graphic imagery of the Old Testament depicted the smoke from the sacrifices of the faithful rising up to God in heaven as a **“sweet savor”** which pleased and satisfied Him (cf. Genesis 8:21; Exodus 29:18,23; Leviticus 1:9,13,17). Paul uses the same language here to indicate that such sacrifice is a delight to God and is accepted by Him.

**“This is your spiritual act of worship.”** - The term **“worship”** in this phrase is the Greek noun *“latria.”* This word is the characteristic term for the formal rituals and services of the temple in the Septuagint. *“Latria”* occurs much less frequently in the New Testament. Although it is used on occasion, primarily in Hebrews, in reference to the temple cult, the New Testament tends to broaden the term to include every form of divine worship, adoration, praise, and prayer. The most significant development in the New Testament’s usage of the word can be seen in its extension of the concept of *“latria”* to a total view according to which the whole life of the Christian is now worship as it corresponds to the will of God and is distinguished from the way of the world. Romans 12:1-2 is the classic statement of this view. Worship can no longer be isolated to one particular place or time, but reaches out to include whatever the believer does wherever he may be. St. John Chrysostom explains:

*“And how is the body, it may be said, to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it hath become a sacrifice; let thy tongue speak nothing filthy, and it hath become an offering; let thine hand do no lawless deed, and it hath become a whole burnt offering.” (Moo, p. 754)*

Given the vibrant dynamic of the believer’s new relationship to God in Christ, the traditional cultic view of worship with its segregation of formal worship for the reality of life as a whole is no longer viable. Just as the Old Testament believer was in the sacred presence of God within the confines of the Temple, so the Christian believer is

now constantly in the presence of God through the Christ who lives within Him. This insight is unique to Christianity. It is of basic importance for the Christian to understand the reality that all of life is a continuous act of worship. This unique perspective defines our corporate acts of worship and places the gatherings of believers around Word and Sacrament in dynamic relationship with every other dimension of our lives. Thus, our formal worship services are only one aspect of, and are crucially supportive of, the ongoing sacrifice of our bodies to the Lord throughout each and every day. Ernst Käsemann writes:

*“Christian worship does not consist of what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times and with sacred acts...It is the offering of bodily existence in the otherwise profane sphere...Worship services and the sacraments are no longer, as in cultic thinking, fundamentally separated from everyday Christian life in such a way as to mean something other than*

*the promise for this and the summons to it...Either the whole of the Christian life is worship and the gatherings and sacramental acts of the community provide equipment and instruction for this, or these gatherings and acts lead, in fact, to absurdity.” (Moo, p. 754)*



*“Daniel at Prayer” by Rudolf Schäfer*

Paul characterizes that kind of worship as **“spiritual.”** The Greek adjective is **“logikos.”** The term is only used one other time in the New Testament in 1 Peter 2:2 where the contrast is drawn between physical milk which nourishes the body and the **“pure spiritual milk of the Word”** which nourishes and sustains the faith of the believer. In this context **“logikos”** designates worship that is genuine and heartfelt in distinction to an external going through the motions.

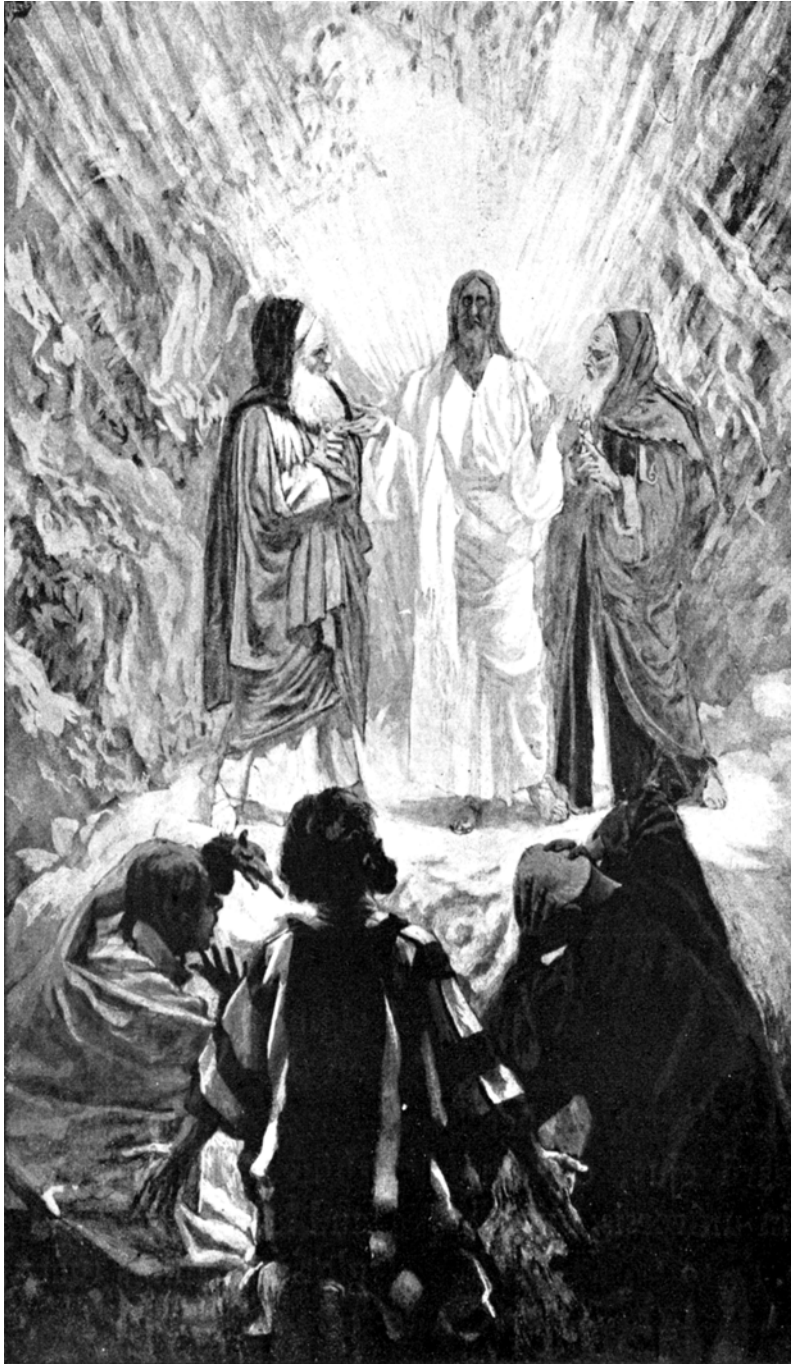
***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*** - Verse 2 provides an explanation and an amplification of the sweeping exhortation provided in the opening verse of the chapter. This link is expressed in the original text by the conjunction “*kai*” (“*and*”). The apostle reminds his readers that the Christian is at war with the sinful world in which we live. This fundamental reality must be reflected in the Christian’s attitude and actions toward all the things of this present age. James Montgomery Boice offers the following paraphrase: “*Do not let the age in which you live force you into its scheme of thinking and behaving.*” The instruction begins with a present, negative imperative - “***do not conform to the pattern.***” The Greek verb is “*suschematizo*” which refers to an outward expression that does not reflect that which is within. It is used of maquerading, or putting on an act, specifically by following a prescribed pattern or scheme. It also carries the connotation of being transitory, unstable, or impermanent. Thus, J.B. Phillip’s paraphrase - “*Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould.*” - catches the sense of the verb very well. New Testament Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest expresses the full implication of the term in his extended paraphrase: “*Stop assuming an outward expression that is patterned after this world, an expression which does not come from, nor is representative of what you are in your inner being as a regenerated child of God.*” The pattern or scheme to which the Christian is not to conform is that “***of this world.***” The Greek text literally says “*of this age*” (“*ainon*”). This is the sin-dominated, death producing era that has prevailed since father Adam’s fall into sin. John Murray defines the concept well:

*“This age is that which stands on this side of what we often call eternity. It is the temporal and transient age. Conformity to this age is to be wrapped up in the things that are temporal, to have all our thought oriented to that which is seen and temporal. It is to be a time-server. How far reaching is this indictment! If all our calculations, plans, ambitions, are determined by what falls within life here, then we are children of this age. Besides, this age is an evil age (1 Corinthians 2:6,8; Galatians 1:4) and if our fashion is that of this age then the iniquity characteristic of this age governs our life.”* (Murray,pp. 113-114)

This is, of course, precisely the world-view of modern secularism which would exclude God and eternity altogether from contemporary life. R.C. Sproul explains:

*“For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in the light of this present time. What matters is now and only now. All access to the above and to the beyond is blocked. There is not exit from the confines*

of this present world. The secular is all we have. We must make our decisions, live our lives, make our plans, all within the closed arena of this time - the here and now." (Sproul, p. 35)



*"The Transfiguration" by J. James Tissot*

The people of God in Christ must firmly resist the temptation to conform to this world and yield to the spirit of the times both in their individual lives and together as the Church. When, in a desperate but doomed attempt to remain relevant, the Church allows the culture or man's perception of his own needs to determine its agenda or shape its message, she falls prey to the often subtle temptation to ***"conform...to the pattern of this world."***

The contrast to ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world"*** comes in the positive imperative which follows - ***"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*** The Greek verb is *"metamorpho"* from which is derived our English word *"metamorphosis."* The word occurs four times in the New Testament, here and in 2 Corinthians 3:18 to describe

our being transformed into the likeness of Christ, and twice in the Gospels (Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:2) to describe the glorious transfiguration of Jesus. On the Mount of

Transfiguration, Jesus put aside the earthly humiliation so that Peter, James, and John might glimpse the radiance of heavenly glory. To the Corinthians, Paul writes: ***“We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”*** (2 Corinthians 3:18) As Christ’s divine nature was revealed on the mountain top, so also the inner reality of our redeemed nature must be revealed in the outward transformation of our actions and attitudes.

***“The renewing of your mind”*** is the means through which this transformation takes place. That which is to be made new is the ***“mind”*** (Greek - *“nous”*). The word refers to more than intellectual capacity. It is the organ of moral consciousness and will. St. Paul uses the term in this sense 18 times in his New Testament letters. Lenski catches the sense of the term in his translation - *“moral mentality.”* The apostle’s careful wording serves as a warning against the anti-intellectual, feeling focused emotionalism of much of modern Christianity. The renewal in question begins in the mind and the moral will as they are informed and governed by the Word of God.

*“This is not a mystic’s dream of being absorbed into the life of God; it is conscious, waking, responsible life in the presence and in the service of God. This transformation, therefore, involves a perpetual renewal of the mind, a making new of the religious intellect for the life of the new age.”* (Franzmann, p. 218)

The term ***“renewing”*** (Greek - *“anakainosei”*) carries on the *“age”* (Greek - *“aion”*) language of the preceding phrase. Thus Paul indicates that transformation by the renewal of the mind involves the penetration of the coming new age into this present evil age. Origen, the great Bible teacher of the early church notes:

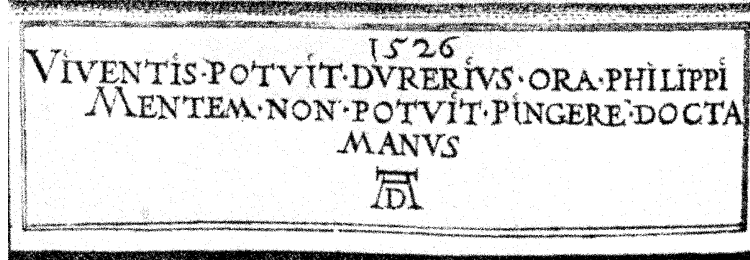
*“By this Paul shows that there is one form of this world and another of the world to come. If there are those who love this present life, and the things which are in the world, they are taken up with this present age and pay no attention to what is not seen. But the things which are not seen are eternal and they are being transformed and renewed in the form of the age to come. For this reason the world does not acknowledge them but hates them and persecutes them.”* (Bray, p. 308)

The downward spiral of sinful man’s thoughts outlined in Romans 1:18-32 is reversed in those who have been redeemed from sin. Their minds are not given over to meaningless and futility but are made new in the truth of God. The concept of *“newness”* (Greek - *“kainos”*) is the core of this verb. It relates closely to ***“newness”***



*of life*” (Romans 6:4) and “*newness of Spirit*” (7:6) previously emphasized.

**“Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - His good, pleasing, and perfect will.”** - The practical result of this renewal is the ability to discern and implement the will of God in a pattern of ethically responsible conduct. The NIV translation “**test and approve**” reflects the Greek verb “*dokimzein*.” It refers to a conclusion reached after a process of evaluation - “*to weigh and ponder and decide*.” (Franzmann, p. 218) The verb repeats the language of Romans 1:28 - “**Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God...**” That which the hardened sinner rejects as worthless, the renewed mind of the believer acknowledges and cherishes. In



**“Phillip Melancthon”** Woodcut by Albrecht Dürer

the connotation of implementation: “*to understand and agree with what God wants of us with a view of putting it into practice*.” (Moo, p. 757) The object of evaluation is “**God’s will**.” To offer one’s life as a living sacrifice to God includes the subjection of our will to the will and purpose of God. We must be willing to lay aside our own plans and desires and to trustingly accept that which God has in mind for us. The emphasis on ethics, moral choice in matters of right and wrong, is suggested by the three adjectives which follow - “**good,**” “**pleasing,**” and “**perfect**” all of which carry a moral connotation. Phillip Melancthon observes:

*“I understand this imply as the will of God set forth in His commandments and promises. He commands us to be renewed in such a way that we*



*conceive a new concept of God and put on new feelings, namely, true fear of God and true faith. These feelings will exercise themselves in all kinds of good works and afflictions so that we understand that obedience in afflictions is pleasing to God, and therefore bear adversities and do not flee from the cross. (Melancthon, p. 213)*

The three adjectives are substantivised and stand in apposition to **“God’s will.”** Accordingly, they might be translated as nouns, *“the good,” “the pleasing thing,”* and *“perfection.”* The point of the phrase is not that the believer must determine for himself whether the will of God conforms to these categories, but rather that the will of God is the ultimate expression of that which is good, God-pleasing, and perfect. **“Good”** (Greek - *“agathos”*) refers to that which is morally good and beneficial. **“Pleasing”** (Greek - *“euarestos”*) is once again borrowed from the sacrificial language of the Old Testament. It designates an offering that is acceptable to God. **“Perfect”** (Greek - *“telion”*) indicates absolute completion - that which is all that it should and must be.

**“Testing and approving what God’s will is”** may never be reduced to a subjective process of human consideration. *“And what God’s will is, namely this thing which He wills, we discover from His Word and from that alone, and we subject all our own conceptions of what is good, etc., wholly to that Word. Every test made without the Word is deceptive and wrong.”* (Lenski, p. 752)

### **Verse 3**

***For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.***

**“For by the grace given me...”** - Paul begins his exhortation with a strong affirmation of his own apostolic authority. What follows is not simply good advice or personal opinion. The apostle has frequently expressed his awareness of the undeserved love which God had bestowed upon him in his apostolic commission (cf. Romans 1:5; 15:15,16; 1 Corinthians 3:10; Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:7,8; 1 Timothy 1:13-16). He labors under no illusions in regard to his worthiness for this office or his ability to carry it out apart from the grace of God. He freely acknowledges: ***“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect.”*** (1 Corinthians 15:9,10) The

exhortation is emphatically addressed to the entire congregation - ***“I say to every one of you.”***



*“Paul on the Damascus Road” by Rudolf Schäfer*

Paul’s specification of what it means to offer up one’s body as a living sacrifice to God begins with an emphasis upon harmony among believers. *“Believers who live wholly for God are committed to community. They do not live for and unto themselves any longer, but they become involved with the new people of God and minister to the needs of others with the gifts granted to them by God. Love is the mark of Christians, the most evident insignia for the*

*new people of God.”* (Schreiner, p. 649) This emphasis parallels Pauline remarks in other New Testament epistles (cf. 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-16). The link with the preceding verses is indicated by the conjunction ***“for”*** (Greek - *“gar”*).

***“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment...”*** - Harmony within the community originates in accurate self-assessment by each member of the community. Martin Franzmann observes that *“pious pride is the nastiest form of pride there is.”*

*“Paul address the individual in order to overcome individualism, with its self-will and pride. For there is in the individuality of faith a temptation; the individual endowment given to the believer tempts him to be “conformed to this world,” in which greatness consists in being greater than others, in exercising authority over and lording it over others (cf. Matthew 20:25). The world’s pride invades the church and its worship in Christian form, as pious pride, the nastiest kind of pride there is...All men are solist by nature and inclination; they must learn the art of playing in God’s orchestra.”* (Franzmann, p. 220)

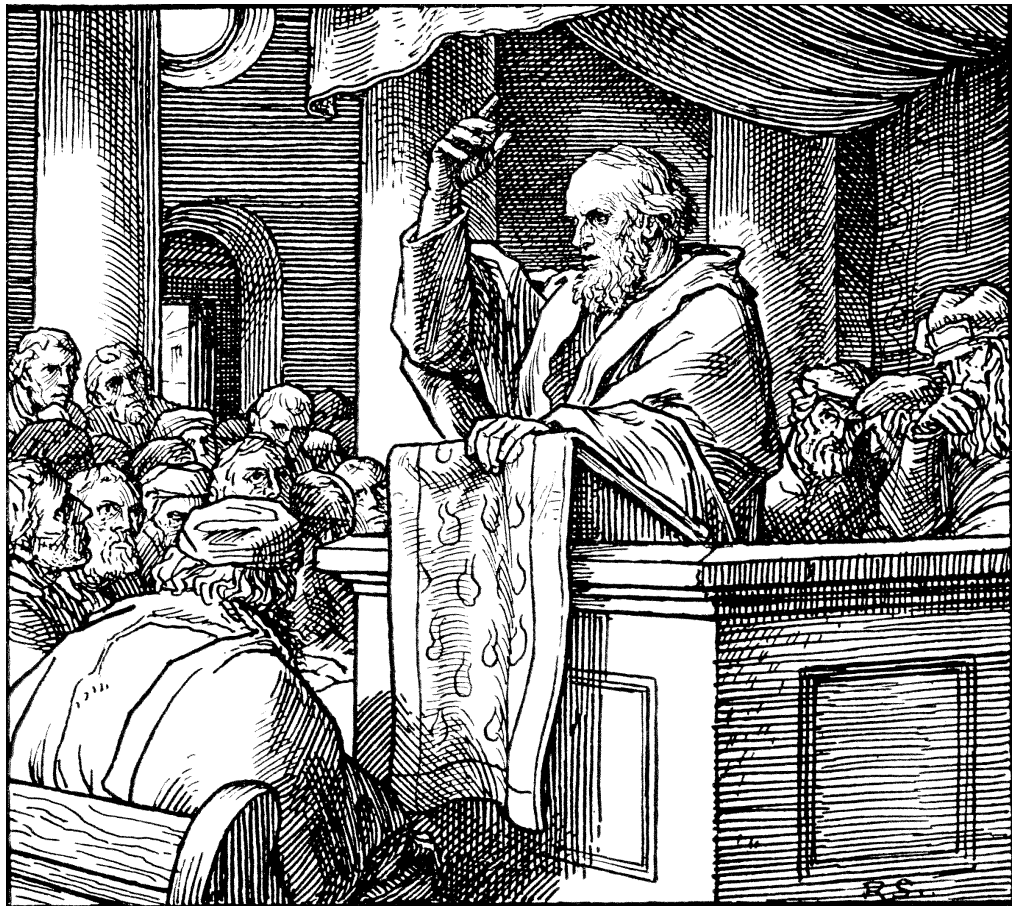
The key word in this phrase is the Greek verb “*phroneo*” which means “*to think*” or “*to make an accurate assessment.*” This word does not refer so much to the act of thinking in itself, but to the direction of one’s thinking, the way in which a person considers or thinks about something. The verb occurs four times in this phrase in the original, twice with prefixes to indicate a particular shade of meaning. The Greek could be literally translated: “*You should not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think of yourself but you should think of yourself in such a way as to have sensible thoughts about yourself.*” Paul urges the rejection of “*hyperphronein*” (“*to think proudly or highly*”) in favor of “*sophronein*” (“*to think wisely or sensibly*”). A realistic sense of humility is a foundational Christian virtue. As the apostle warns elsewhere “***For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.***” (Galatians 6:3) John MacArthur notes that the inclination of fallen humanity to self-absorption is not merely a modern problem, but has characterized fallen mankind since the days of the New Testament:

*“Such humility, which is essential for all spiritual matters, is not easily found or maintained. In New Testament times, some churches were characterized by members who desired to have more showy and spectacular gifts, the church at Corinth being the chief offender...With a clearly implied rebuke, the apostle John identified a self-seeking believer by name, a man named Diotrephes, “who loves to be first.” (3 John 9). Sadly, the church is still well saturated with members, who proudly seek personal pre-eminence and thereby forfeit the power of humility. Modern society looks down on true humility. It is, instead, characterized by brash, even exalted, self-centeredness, ego-building, pampering the body, and striving to fulfill every personal lust and ambition with little regard for who may be harmed. It is small wonder that depression and emotional chaos are so prevalent. In his book **Psychological Seduction, the Failure of Modern Psychology**, professor William K. Kilpatrick writes: “Extreme forms of mental illness are always extreme cases of self-absorption...The distinctive quality the thing that literally sets paranoid people apart is hyper-self-consciousness. And the thing they prize most about themselves is autonomy. Their constant fear is that someone else is interfering with their will or trying to direct their lives.” (MacArthur, pp. 158-159)*

***“In accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”*** - The standard by which such sober sensible self-assessment is to be made is “***the measure of faith God has given you.***” The phrase “***measure of faith***” is unique to this verse, it occurs nowhere else in Scripture. The noun “***faith***” (Greek - “*pistis*”) ordinarily refers to that which we call “*saving*” or “*justifying*” faith, the personal trust bestowed upon the believer by God, through which the saving merit of Christ’s death in our place is

appropriated. That does not appear to be the meaning of the term in this context. Nowhere in Scripture is there any suggestion of such apportionment in regard to saving faith. Stöckhardt rightly declares:

*“This faith (“pistis”), then, certainly does not refer to saving (“salvifica”) faith - trust in God’s grace in Christ, as, for example, both Fritsche and Meyer suppose. Nowhere in Scripture is it taught that God has measured out justifying and saving faith in varying measures among men. If a Christian is weak in faith, of little faith, that is his own fault, and not the result of a deficiency in the grace of God. In regard to faith in the customary sense of the word Scripture only says that it is worked by God (Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12) or given by God (Philippians 1:29). Scripture never says that God measures out faith in this sense. No, the faith (“pistis”) of which Paul speaks here is not the faith that makes a Christian a Christian, but something that is measured out to believing Christians after they have become believers or Christians.” (Stöckhardt, p. 562)*



*“Paul Preaching at the Synagogue in Antioch” by Rudolf Schäfer*

The “*faith*” in question here refers to saving faith at work within the community of believers in the variety of gifts which God richly bestows upon all believers. Stöckhardt aptly describes it as “*practical faith*,” that is the trusting confidence to use the particular gift with which the individual has been blessed by God. As the gifts are each and all different from one another, so also the “*measure of faith*” necessary for the exercise of that gift will be unique to each particular individual. The sensible self-assessment which the apostle encourages must take place in terms of the practical faith which God has given to each to make effective use of the gifts which God has bestowed for the benefit of all.

#### Verses 4-5

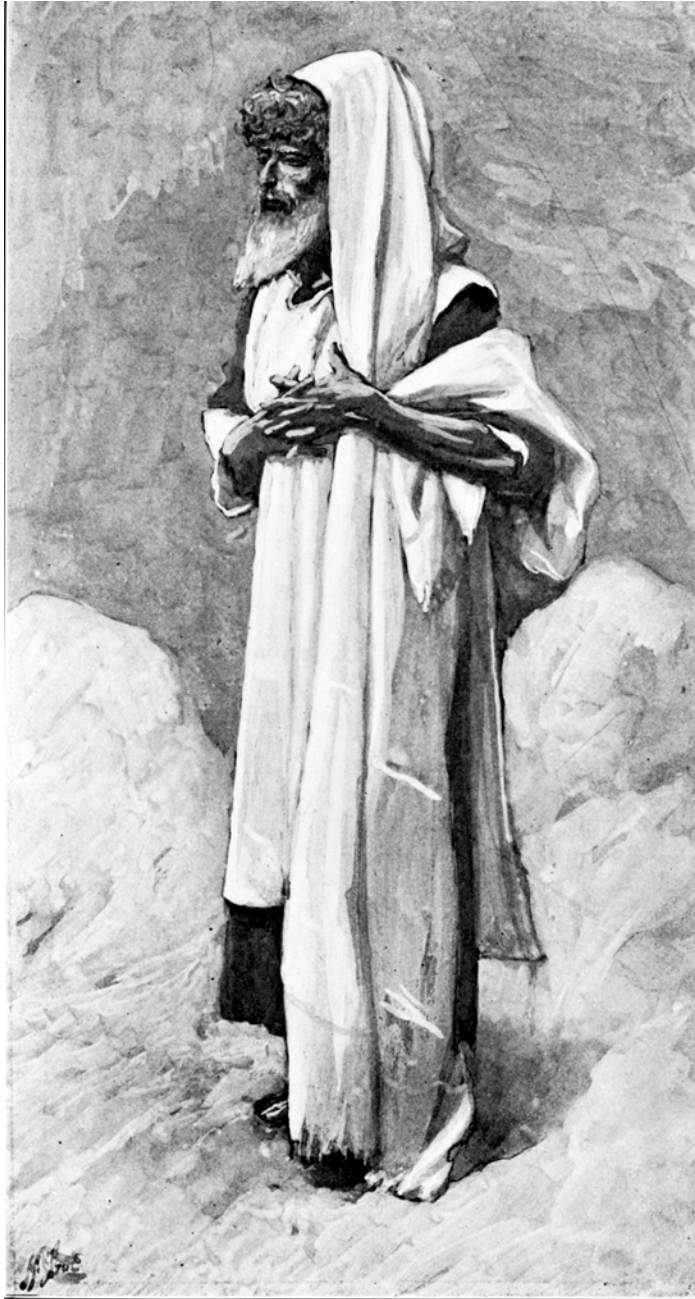
***Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.***

“*Just as each of us has one body with many members...*” - The New Testament image of the church as the Body of Christ effectively expresses our relationship with and our dependance upon one another as believers. The radical individualism that infects much of Protestant Christianity today undermines and contradicts that interdependence. To be united with Christ means to be united to the Body of Christ, the church. The proper understanding of one’s role within the Body of Christ is seen as the natural consequence of a proper understanding of one’s self “*in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.*” (Verse 3). If you know who you truly are in Christ then you will also know your place within the Body of Christ. The image of the church as the Body of Christ serves to simultaneously express both the unity and the diversity of the Christian community. Its usage here is similar to Paul’s other presentations of the concept in I Corinthians 12:12-31, Ephesians 1:23, 4:12, and Colossians 1:18; 2:19. Here, as in the other “body texts,” diversity of talent, interest, and ability within the church is depicted as healthy, and, in fact, essential for the overall well-being of the whole. The verses which follow amplify and apply the point.

#### Verses 6-8

***We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.***

***“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.”*** - The rich diversity of gifts is a gracious blessing of God to His church. Those blessings are described as “*charismata*” - from the crucial Greek noun “*charis*” which means “*undeserved or unearned love*,” “*grace*.” The term occurs seventeen times in the New Testament, almost always (sixteen times) in the writings of Paul. The “*charismata*” are literally



***“Aaron” by J. James Tissot***

the “*things of grace*.” All believers are the recipients of God’s grace, for without God’s grace they would not be believers. In the same way, all those who have become believers by God’s grace are recipients of the richly varied “*things*” or “*gifts*” of grace, the “*charismata*.” Thus the dual emphasis of unity and diversity again comes through. Every Christian is in this sense “*charismatic*,” that is, “*grace gifted*.” These gifts are also called *pneumatika*” - “*spiritual gifts*” cf. 1 Corinthians 12:1) - for they are graciously bestowed through the Holy Spirit. Representative lists of spiritual gifts are given five times in the New Testament (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11). There is no standard or complete list. Overall, nineteen gifts are mentioned. But each of the five is unique and the terminology used moves back and forth between functions and offices. The language also appears to overlap as different words describe the same activity or position. Thus, none of the lists are exhaustive nor should a compilation of their nineteen gifts be regarded as

complete. Romans 12 includes seven grace gifts. The consistent emphasis in the New Testament discussion of the “*charismata*” is upon function or office, not upon personal attributes which every individual must search out and indentify often with the assistance of a so-called “*spiritual gift inventory*.” This misunderstanding is an unfortunate innovation of the modern church.

The first is prophecy. The Greek word for “*prophet*” literally refers to one who stands in front of another and speaks on his behalf. This is exactly the sense of Exodus 7:1 where God says to Moses: “***See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet.***” Earlier at the burning bush, God had offered Aaron as the solution to Moses self-professed lack of eloquence: “***You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth... He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth, and as if you were God to him.***” (Exodus 4:15,16) Hence, in Scripture a prophet is one who speaks for God, who proclaims the Word of God. A prophet, in the strictest sense of the term, is one who speaks or writes by plenary verbal inspiration. Each and every word he speaks or writes are the words of God Himself. The term is also used more generally at times to describe proclamation that is based upon the Word of God but is not verbally inspired. It takes the form of the speaker’s own words but is completely consistent with the truth of Scripture. The gift of prophecy was prevalent in the Christian Church of the first generation until the end of the apostolic era and the completion of the New Testament.

Paul’s admonition here is that any man who has received the gift of prophecy ought to make use of that gift “***in proportion to his faith.***” “***Faith***” in this context is not the subjective act of believing, but the objective content of faith, that which is believed (Latin - “*fides quae creditur*” - “*the faith that one believes*”). The NIV translation “***his faith***” is incorrect. It suggests a note of subjectivity which is not present in the original text which simply reads “*the faith.*” The phrase “***in proportion to***” might be literally translated “*in accordance with the analogy of faith*” (Greek - “*ten analogia es pistos*”). The Greek noun “*analogia*” refers to a standard or rule. The sense of the phrase is that those who prophesy must not deviate from apostolic doctrine. Their words must measure up to the standard of divine revelation. The historic principle of Biblical interpretation known as the “*analogy of faith*” is based upon this text. Phillip Melancthon notes: “*Now he teaches that the interpretation of the Word of God should be analogous, that is, in agreement with the faith. It should not depart from the articles of faith, nor extinguish the true knowledge of Christ or faith in Christ.*” (Melancthon, p. 215) Any purported

revelation from God, or any proposed interpretation of a Biblical text, no matter how winsome or convincing it may be, which contradicts another article of faith clearly revealed in Scripture must be rejected and excluded (cf. Galatians 1:8).

The second grace-gift is **“serving”** (Greek - *“diakonian”*). Jesus declared: **“*the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*”** (Matthew 20:28) This term is used broadly in the New Testament from everything from waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-6) to the offering of financial or material assistance (Acts 11:29). The common thread that unites all the various meanings of the word is that action is taken on behalf of another to the glory of God. This is the only occurrence of *“diakonia”* on a list of specific gifts. In this instance it may refer to the ability to provide for the physical or material needs of those within the church. To assert, **“*If it is serving, let him serve.*”** emphasizes the importance of recognizing the *“on behalf of others”* nature of this gift, lest the gift become an occasion for pride.

**“Teaching”** (Greek - *“didaskalia”*) is enumerated next. This gift is included on the lists in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. In both instances it is also linked to prophecy, indicating the close relationship between the two. While prophecy tends to focus on the original revelation from God, **“teaching”** stresses the passing on of the truth of the gospel to others in the church. In this sense, **“teaching”** is the means by which prophecy is conveyed throughout the church and to subsequent generations. The term becomes very prominent in the later pastoral epistles (cf. 1 Timothy 1:10; 3:2; 5:17; 6:3; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10; Titus 1:9; 2:1; 7:10). We use the word *“preaching”* in a very similar way. The concern, once again, is the faithful use of the gift, in a manner consistent with the truth on behalf of others. In our day, pastors are called upon to carry out many different roles within the institutional church. It is all too easy to forget in the midst of all our organizing and administrating that a pastor’s first and foremost role is that of a teacher. James Montgomery Boice, Senior Pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, paraphrases the text in a word of collegial advice that ought to be well taken:

*“I am a pastor. This is the preeminent gift of pastors, and this leads me to say to pastors that, having been called to teach, they must teach. No one has the opportunity a pastor has for carefully studying and faithfully expounding the Bible. What is more, if he does not do it, then in most churches it will not be done at all. Teaching is hard work because we must learn ourselves before we teach. But what better calling can one have? So get on with it, and be faithful in it, it that is your gift. I notice that Paul handles his admonition here exactly as he handled it when he spoke of serving earlier,*



and as he will speak of encouraging later. No fuss. No fanfare. Just do it.” (Boice, p. 1586)



*“The Office of the Holy Ministry by Michael Ostendorfer  
from the Altar of the Neupfarrkirche in Regensburg - 1553*

The fourth gift is **“encouraging”** (Greek - *“paraklesis”*). This term occurs 107 times in the New Testament. In John 14, Jesus uses the word as a title for the Holy Spirit (John 14:15,26). In that context the English translations render the noun as *“Comforter”* or *“Counselor.”* At times the term is simply transliterated as the English title *“Paraclete.”* The word literally means *“one who is called alongside of another for the purpose of rendering aid or assistance.”* Its Latin counterpart is *“advocatus.”* In this context **“encouraging”** is closely linked to teaching (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:13). It serves to emphasize the *“pastoral application of the gospel and focuses on its concrete applications for everyday life...Teaching concentrates more on the content of the tradition, while exhortation summons others to action and stirs them from lethargy.”* (Schreiner, p. 658)

Number five on this representative listing of “*charismata*” is “**contributing to the needs of others.**” (Greek - “*ho metadidous*”). The emphasis here appears to be on one who shares his or her own resources with those less fortunate. Those who have been given this gift are urged to exercise it with cheerful generosity. The text does not imply great personal wealth on the part of the giver for the most generous and joyful givers are often those who have the least (cf. 2 Corinthians 8).

The next gift, “**leadership**” (Greek - “*ho proistamenos*”) has elicited a good deal of discussion. The etymology of the word refers to “*he that is placed in front*” much like the traditional German title for an elder - “*Vorsteher*.” This word is used elsewhere to denote the leaders of the local congregation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and should probably be associated here with the office of elder/overseer. Kurt Marquart points out that this particular “*charismata*” illustrates the fallacy of viewing spiritual gifts as personal talents to be inventoried, identified, and implemented:

*“Perhaps the most telling case against the “gift as personal attribute” idea is that of the “presider” or “ruler” (“proistamenos”) of v.8. It would be absurd to imagine St. Paul meaning something like this: “If you have the ability to preside or rule, then be eager to organize somebody to preside over!” What he obviously means is this: “If you have been appointed to preside or rule (perhaps as pastor/bishop, or as president at the eucharistic assembly), then put your heart into it”... It is not at all a question of asking oneself: “Do I enjoy teaching, or ruling, or giving. Do I then have these gift abilities? What office in the church should I try to get in order to put these abilities to use?” The proper question is: “How can I serve the common good best and most faithfully in the responsibility or office with which I have been entrusted?” (Marquart, p. 53)*

The apostolic admonition in this instance is - “**let him govern diligently.**” The term denotes an eagerness to carry out the assigned responsibility. Lenski says it well: “*The word means “haste” in the good sense; prompt efficiency, no delay, no excuses, no dilatoriness.*” (Lenski, p. 765)

The concluding “*charismata*,” number seven in the listing, is “**showing mercy.**” The reference should be understood broadly as ministry in general including “*any act of mercy toward others, such as visiting the sick, caring for the elderly or disabled, and providing for the poor.*” (Moo, p. 769) The attitude in which such activities are to be carried out is to be one of cheerfulness. The Greek word is “*hilaroteti*” from which the English word hilarity is derived.

*“He who does acts of mercy should let his acts be the free and splendid radiation of the mercies of God, which he himself has received. Let him perform them with cheerfulness, not with the sullen, grey demeanor that degrades the recipient of the gift and make ungracious even our most gracious deeds.” (Franzmann, p. 223)*



*“Charity” by Lucas Cranach the Younger c. 1560*

### Verses 9-13

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*“Love must be sincere.”* - In 1 Corinthians 12-13 Paul’s masterful treatment of the grace-gifts is followed by an eloquent assertion of the central importance of love (Greek - “*agape*”). The same pattern prevails here. The charismata can only be rightly understood and properly used in the context of the selfless giving love which is to be present in every Christian as the result of their experience of such love from God in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 4:9-11). Such Christ-like love *“must be sincere.”* The English adjective “*sincere*” is based upon the Latin words “*sine cera*” (literally - “*without wax*”). In the ancient world inferior pottery was often disguised and sold for a higher

price by carefully concealing its cracks beneath a layer of wax. The master potter who wanted to assure his customers of the superior quality of his wares often stamped them with the words “*sine cera*” to show that they had not been doctored. Hence one who is “*sincere*” is a person who does not attempt to conceal his true feelings or opinions with hypocritical words or actions. The Greek adjective used in the original text is “*anhypokritos*” which literally means “*not hypocritical*.” It serves to modify and explain the preceding phrase. A literal translation could read: “*without a mask*” with reference to the theatrical masks used in ancient Greek plays. “*Agape*” love must be real, not a matter of pretense or role-playing. John Calvin observes:

*“It is difficult to express how ingenious almost all men are in counterfeiting a love which they do not really possess. They deceive not only others, but also themselves, while they persuade themselves that they have a true love for those whom they not only treat with neglect, but also in fact, reject.”* (Calvin p. 271)

**“Love must be sincere, hating what is evil and clinging to what is good.”** The hating and clinging describe how genuine love operates. The deliberate juxtaposition of true love and hate in this text is striking. Authentic love necessitates hate. Origen, the great teacher of the early church points out:

*“Perhaps it seems odd to find hatred listed among the virtues, but it is put here of necessity by the apostle. Nobody doubts that the soul has feelings of hatred in it; however, it is praiseworthy to hate evil and to hate sin. For unless a person hates evil he cannot love.”* (Bray, p. 314)

The Greek verb “*apostygountes*” is most emphatic, even stronger than its English counterpart. This is the only instance in which the term occurs in Biblical Greek. It should be translated “*to hate most intensely*” or “*to abhor*.” To love God and good must involve the utter hatred and rejection of all that is evil. Hatred is not love’s opposite. It is, in fact, its inescapable counterpart, the two sides of our strongest and most intense emotions. Apathetic indifference is the opposite, the denial of love. The second verb is equally intense in the Greek text - **“Cling to what is good.”** The verb is “*kolaomai*.” It is typically used elsewhere in Scripture to refer to the intimacy of sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 6:16,17; Matthew 19:5). Lenski aptly translates “*Glued to the good thing!*” Authentic love necessitates an absolute rejection of evil and an unwavering commitment to that which is good.

Now follow a series of nine admonitions which further define and apply the concept

of genuine love. The Greek text is nicely balanced with each of the nine opening with a dative or accusative of relation. The placement of the nouns at the beginning of each phrase provides both emphasis and structure - as regards brotherly love, honor, etc.

***“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”*** - The Greek text makes use of a paronomasia, that is, a play on words, in the first phrase as it effectively presents variations of the same term to make its point. The verb *“philostorgoi”* (*“to be devoted to”*) is linked to the noun *“philadelphia”* (*“the love of family members for one another”*). The church is the family, the household of God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15), and thus its members should conduct themselves toward one another as members of an extended family who care about and are concerned for one another. As St. John Chrysostom notes: *“You should love one another because you are brothers and have been born from the same spiritual womb.”* (Bray p. 315)



*“Paul’s Farewell from the Ephesian Elders” by Rudolf Schäfer*

***“Honor one another above yourselves.”*** - Next, the apostle deals with the subject of recognition and praise. In Philippians 2:3-4 Paul offers this advice: ***“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** The apostolic urging here is very similar. A literal translation of the phrase might read: *“And in respect to honor, lead the way for each other.”* This understanding reflects the typical meaning of the verb *“proegoumenoi”* which

normally means to go before or to lead, hence, to set an example. Evidently, the same destructive envy, jealousy, and resentment which exact such a toll in the modern church were also prevalent in the congregation in Rome. Boice paraphrases: *“In other words, Don’t wait around for people to recognize your contributions and praise you. Instead, be alert to what they are contributing and honor them.”* (Boice, p. 1599) We should eagerly seek to outdo one another in bestowing honor and recognition upon one another.

***“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”*** - The noun ***“zeal”*** (Greek *“spoude”*) means eagerness, earnestness, zeal, or diligence. It conveys the sense of vitality and energy. The negative thrust of the admonition is provided by the Greek word *“okneroi”* which is often used of indolence or laziness (i.e. Matthew 25:26). Hence the phrase literally reads - *“In regard to diligence, don’t be lazy.”* As Paul urges elsewhere: ***“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*** (Galatians 6:9) The striking combination of these two opposites, zeal and laziness, serve well to make the point. The Christian life is not a sprint - it is a marathon. It is all too easy to grow weary and discouraged as we struggle day after day against the weakness of our own sinful nature and the relentless opposition of the devil and the world around us. *“Such slowness is a common fault; many necessary tasks are put off. Procrastination is the thief of time.”* (Lenski, p. 768)

The next phrase, number four in the series of nine, draws the contrast even more forcefully - ***“but keep your spiritual fervor.”*** (literally - *“as regards the spirit be set on fire”*). The same phrase is used in Acts 18:25 in reference to Apollos: ***“He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and he spoke with the fervor of the Spirit...”*** Given the phrase which follows, most commentators understand the *“spirit”* in this phrase as a reference to the Holy Spirit rather than the spirits of men. Hence the antidote to the slothfulness of sinful human beings is the mighty power of the Spirit of God whose presence was demonstrated at Pentecost in the tongues of fire which appeared over the apostles. ***“Fervor”*** (Greek - *“zeontes”*) means to bubble, to boil, or to burn.

The next phrase, ***“serving the Lord,”*** is linked to that which precedes it as an objective standard by which to assess and direct spiritual manifestations (cf. I Corinthians 12:3; 14:29-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Douglas Moo explains the connection:

*“The exhortation to serve the Lord might at first seem like an anticlimax, too obvious*

*and too broad to have any real application. But a closer look at the context suggests otherwise. The encouragement to be set on fire by the Spirit, is, as church history and current experience amply attest, open to abuse. Christians have often been so carried away by enthusiasm for spiritual things that they have left behind those objective standards of Christian living that the Scriptures set forth. This, it seems, is Paul's concern; and he seeks to cut off any such abuse by reminding us that being set on fire*

*by Spirit must lead to, and be directed by, our service to the Lord. It is not the enthusiasm of self-centered display (such as characterized the Corinthians) but the enthusiasm of humble service of the Master who bought us that the Spirit creates within us.” (Moo, pp. 778,779)*



***“St. Christopher - A True Servant of Christ”  
by Rudolf Schäfer***

This phrase (“*as to the Lord, be a slave*”) balances and establishes the context for the preceding phrase (“*as to the Spirit, be set on fire*”). The Greek text (“*douleuontes*” - literally “*slaving*” or “*being a slave*”) is considerably stronger than the English translation. The connotation of slavery in the Biblical world was not so much that of very hard work, as in our English usage, but of absolute submission to the will and control of the master. That is, of course, exactly the sense

which Paul has in mind here. The Christian is one whose no longer possesses an independent will. He is completely subject to the will of the Lord as that divine will is expressed in the Word of God. The terminology reflects the typical language of the master slave relationship in the ancient times (“*kurios*” - “*master*” and “*doulos*” - “*slave*”).

***“Be joyful in hope.”*** - ***“Hope”*** in Scripture is never a mere sense of tentative expectation but confident trust. That is because Biblical hope deals with that which God has promised but that we have not yet seen or received. Our expectation is sure because it rests completely on the promises of Jesus. Because of the certainty of our hope in Christ we can already rejoice for when God makes a promise that which is promised in a present reality although it may still lie in the future. (Cf. Romans 5:2) *“Believers are to be filled with joy due to the hope that awaits them. Joy evaporates when hope vanishes, and thus the fires of joy can only be stoked by focusing on hope.”* (Schreiner, p. 666)

***“Patient in affliction”*** - Characteristically, when St. Paul discusses the Christian hope it is in the context of trial and tribulation (cf. Romans 5:2-3; 8:24-27). ***“Affliction”*** is a general term which denotes all of the pressures and troubles which afflict believers in this present evil age. These are the consequences of sin and the context of our hope. Affliction is not to be avoided or evaded but expected as an inevitable result of our faithfulness to Christ. ***“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”*** (Acts 14:22) Paul goes so far as to urge us to ***“rejoice in our sufferings.”*** (Romans 5:3). The term ***“patient”*** indicates the willingness to remain under a burden without seeking to evade it with quiet acceptance and endurance. Lenski laments the failure of the modern church to recognize and apply this insight.

*“In the early church affliction was expected as a matter of course; the scars it left were considered medals of honor, bestowed by the Lord’s own hands. Now, most Christians seem to expect to get through unscathed, without even a bruise, and they cry out if they are buffeted a little, as though a great wrong were being done to them instead of experiencing something that is altogether normal. So many even try to avoid the world’s hate and to win its favor by shaping doctrine, practice, and conduct so as to avoid offending the world. So many Christians resemble the children of this world to such an extent to such an extent that they cannot be distinguished from them.”* (Lenski, p. 771)

***“Faithful in prayer”*** - The joyful hope that enables the Christian to patiently endure the hardships of this life is sustained by steadfast prayer. This is the same participle that is used to indicate the unwavering doctrinal faithfulness of the first congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). It denotes deliberate effort - *“to busy one’s self with, be devoted to, hold fast to, or persevere in something.”* (Dunn, p. 743) Persistent prayer as a lifestyle pattern does not just happen. Those who would remain joyful in hope and patient under tribulation must consciously and deliberately set their minds and hearts to do so.





*“Lord, Teach Us How To Pray” by J. James Tissot*

***“Share with God’s people who are in need.”*** - The phrase literally reads - “*as regards the needs of the saints, fellowshiping.*” The language is similar to that which Paul will use in Chapter 15 in reference to the special collection for the needs of the churches in Palestine (Romans 15:25-28) The ***“saints”*** (Greek - *“hagioi”*) are the *“holy ones,”* those who have been cleansed from the guilt of sin by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The verb ***“share”*** is the action form of the crucial New Testament term *“koinoinia”* which means to participate in something together and

thus to share. It is the most significant word in the New Testament for the fellowship of God's people together in Christ. It is often used in the Bible to designate financial and material help for those in need (cf. Acts 2:44; 4:32; 2 Corinthians 8:4,9; 9:13; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 1:5; 4:15; 1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16). That is clearly the intended sense here as the phrase is linked to the practice of hospitality. The **“hospitality”** that is to be practiced is not merely a general social graciousness nor an ability to entertain friends and acquaintances, but rather comes in the form of aid to be supplied to travelers in need, particularly to exiled or persecuted fellow Christians. The ministry of the early church was often characterized by itinerant preachers traveling from town to town, dependent upon the congregations they visited for room and board. Thus, the virtue of hospitality would have been of special importance.

#### Verses 14-16

***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.***

**“Bless those who persecute you...”** - Verse 14 shifts the focus to relationships with those outside of the community of believers, in fact, to those who are actively opposed to the church. The general theme of demonstrating **“sincere love”** which began in Verse 9 continues in this segment. While these words are not cited as a quotation, the language is strongly reminiscent of the preaching of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). The imperative verb **“Bless!”** (Greek - **“eulogeite”**) is repeated twice for special emphasis. The word is usually associated with God as the source of all blessing. **“To bless one's persecutors, therefore, is to call on God to bestow His favor upon them.”** (Moo, p. 780) If blessing refers to the invocation of God's favor, then cursing is its precise opposite. To curse means to invoke God's wrath or judgement. Our Lord Himself is, of course, the preeminent example of this pattern as work as He prayed that God might forgive those who were crucifying Him (Luke 23:34). Stephan, the first martyr of the church, followed Christ's example as he prayed, while he was being stoned to death: **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”** (Acts 7:60) St. Paul was present at that event and must have been powerfully moved by this loving prayer of faith. St. Augustine contends: **“The church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephan.”** (Boice, p. 1609).

***“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”*** - The thrust of the text now returns to relationships within the community of believers. Our connection to one another within the Body of Christ ought to be so intimate and compelling that

we automatically identify with our fellow believers both in the joys and their sorrows. The apostle says the same thing in 1 Corinthians 12:26, in the midst of his discussion of the church as the Body of Christ: ***“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, and the members rejoice together.”***

Instead of resenting or envying the success and the happiness of others, as is so often the case in the world. As the richness of our joy is intensified in its sharing, so the burden of our sorrows is lightened as we bear it together. The classic hymn says it well indeed:



*“Stephan’s Prayer” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

*“We share our mutual woes, Our mutual burdens bear,  
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.  
(ELH # 420)”*

This genuine sense of empathy is only possible where the love of Christ has enabled the individual to transcend the concern of self which is the inherent obsession of every naturally born descendant of Adam and Eve.

*“Love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer’s joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter wholeheartedly into that same joy. Similarly, love that is genuine will bring us to identify so intimately with our brothers and sisters in Christ*

*that their sorrows will become ours.” (Moo, p, 782)*

**“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”** - The way in which the Christian thinks of himself and of his position relative to his fellow believers is of crucial importance in this area. Three variations of the of the Greek verb *“phronein,”* to think,” occur in this verse. Paul is calling us to a common way of thinking, a particular mind-set as the people of God. The opening phrase literally reads: *“think the same thing”* or *“be in agreement with one another.”* The phrase is used elsewhere in reference to doctrinal harmony and unity within the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:16; 6:5; 7:40; 14:37-38). In this context the emphasis appears to be on our thinking in regard to one another, thus the NIV translation - **“Live in harmony with one another.”** The most significant obstacle to unity is pride. Accordingly two warnings against the dangers of pride and conceit immediately follow. **“Do not be proud”** (literally - *“Don not think too highly of yourself.”*) is defined in terms of our opinions about and our actions toward others - **“but be willing to associate with people of low position.”** Those who men scorn as unworthy and insignificant are precious in the sight of God. Remember Christ’s comment from the throne of Judgment: **“If you have done it to the least of one of these, my brethren, you have done it to me.”** (Matthew 25:40). Our perspective ought to be that of God not of men. St. John Chrysostom writes:

*“Here again Paul insists on humility, which is how he started this whole exhortation. For since there was a probability that the Romans would be high-minded because of the greatness of their city and for many other reasons, he keeps drawing off the sickness of pride...There is nothing so likely to cause schism in the church as vanity...If a poor man comes into your house, behave like him and do not put on airs because of your riches. In Christ there is no rich or poor. Do not be ashamed of him because of his outward dress, but receive him because of his inward faith. If you see him in sorrow do not hesitate to comfort him, and if he is prospering, do not feel shy about sharing in his pleasure...If you think you are a great person, then think others are also. If you think they are humble and lowly, then think the same of yourself.”*  
(Bray, p. 318)

**“Do not be conceited”** literally means **“Do not be wise in your own estimation.”**

Origin captures the sense of the phrase as he comments: *“The conceited person is stupid in his own arrogance, no can he know the wisdom of God if he clings to his own foolishness as if it were wisdom.”* (Bray p. 319)

### Verses 17-21

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*



*"The Good Samaritan" by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

*"Do not repay anyone evil for evil..."* - The thrust of the text now shifts to our attitudes toward our enemies and those outside of the family of faith. The famous *"lex talionis"* - *"eye for eye and tooth for tooth"* (Matthew 5:38) - is clearly repudiated. This grim maxim is one of the basic operating principles of sinful humanity. It appears in virtually every human culture (i.e. German - *"Wie du mir - so ich dir!"*). Man's sinful nature twists the charity of the golden rule - *"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."* - into a pre-emptive strike - *"Do unto others before they can do unto you."* This prohibition of just and measured retaliation in the face of evil is strongly reminiscent of Christ's teaching in the

Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:38-42). The forbearance in the face of evil provides a powerful witness to the world and cannot help but make a profound impression upon the unbeliever as he observes the love of Christ in action - ***“Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”*** Leon Morris explains:

*“Paul is calling on them to live out the implications of the gospel. Their lives are to be lived on such a high plane that even the heathen will recognize the fact. They will always be living in the sight of non-Christians, and the way they live should be such as to commend the essential Christian message.”* (Morris, p. 452)

***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*** - Those who follow the *“Prince of Peace”* out to be the ambassadors of that peace wherever they go. Our Lord declares: ***“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God.”*** (Matthew 5:9). And yet, in this sinful world, peace is most difficult to achieve and maintain. The two qualifying phrases (***“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you”***) clearly indicate that at times conflict is inevitable. One may not surrender or compromise the truth of God’s Word for the sake of outward harmony nor may the believer yield to the corruption and wickedness of the world all around us to maintain to avoid conflict and opposition. God’s prophet Jeremiah denounced the religious leaders of his day who urged such surrender for the sake of peace with these scathing words: ***“From the least to the greatest all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. “Peace, peace,” they say, when there is no peace.”*** (Jeremiah 6:13-14). Origen reminds Second Century Christians: *“We cannot have peace and fellowship with evil. It is one thing to love people but quite another to love crimes...Therefore those who are perfect will love the sinner but hate his sin.”* (Bray, p. 320) In matters of truth and morality the Christian in this world is militant, constantly and consciously engaged in spiritual warfare. However that warfare must always be conducted in Christlike humility and self-sacrifice, so that insofar as conscience allows we may be at peace with all men.

*“Paul recognizes that the goal of peace with all people cannot be realized perfectly...Peace with all people is not possible in every situation. One cannot violate the truth of the Gospel and devotion to Christ in order to make peace with those who resist the truth. Further, one may desire to be at peace with others, but they do not extend the same hand of charity back. In this instance, peace is unattainable, not because we have failed to strive for peace but because the other person refuses to be reconciled.”* (Schreiner, p. 672)



*“Jesus Washes His Disciples’ Feet”  
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

***“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath...”*** - Those who would live at peace in a world filled with conflict must be willing to forgo revenge, even, and perhaps particularly, in those situations where the revenge is justified. The desire to *“get even”* is one of humankind’s most basic instincts. Paul urges us, instead, to place the matter in the hands of God and to rely upon His justice. In the Greek text, the second phrase - ***“but leave room for God’s wrath”*** simply reads *“leave room for wrath.”* The insertion of ***“God’s”*** is an interpretive insertion by the translators of the NIV. Most commentators agree that this is the intent of the text given the words that follow. Paul reinforces his assertion with a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35 where God assures Israel that his just judgment will come upon the wicked. ***“It is mine to avenge, I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”*** (Cf. Hebrews 10:30) To exact vengeance is to usurp the place of God as John Murray perceptively reminds us:



*“Here we have what belongs to the essence of piety. The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care on Him and to vest all our interests in Him. In reference to the matter in hand, the wrongdoing of which we are the victims, the way of faith is to recognize that God is judge and to leave the execution of vengeance and retribution to Him. Never may we in our private personal relations execute the vengeance which wrongdoing merits.” (Murray, II, pp.141-142)*

God will balance the scales of justice in His own time and in His own way. We, as His people, are to trust in Him and believe that He will set things right. The noun **“wrath”** is a powerful word in both Old and New Testaments. It carries an eschatological connotation and points toward the last judgment at the end of time. Let the evil-doer beware for **“It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** (Hebrews 10:36)

**“On the contrary, “If your enemy is hungry...”** - Not only is vengeance prohibited, but love is commanded. The Old Testament citation is from Proverbs 25:21-22. The reference to **“coals of fire”** has stimulated a good deal of discussion among the commentators. Some would argue, in terms of the preceding Verse, that this is the fire of God judgment upon the enemies of His people. This view does not appear to be consistent with the thrust of the passage. Rather, the **“coals of fire”** are a metaphor for the shame and repentance stimulated within the sinner by the Christian’s unselfish love. Augustine expresses the consensus of the early church in this way:

*“This may seem to many people to contradict what the Lord teaches, that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, or the apostle’s own statements in verse 14 and 17 above. For how can it be love to feed and nourish someone just in order to heap coals of fire on his head, assuming that coals of fire mean some serious punishment? Therefore we must understand that this means that we should provoke whoever does us harm to repentance by doing him a good turn. For the coals of fire serve to burn, that is, to bring anguish to his spirit, which is like the head of the soul, in which all malice is burned out when one is changed for the better through repentance.” (Bray, p. 322)*

**“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** - This broad summary statement concludes Paul’s series of ethical imperatives. To live by the ways of the world in anger, self-assertion, and retribution, is to have been defeated by the world. To live by the ways of Christ in patient endurance, self-sacrifice, and love is to



triumph over evil. *“Not only have we not allowed it to corrupt our own moral integrity, but we have displayed the character of Christ before a watching and skeptical world.”* (Moo, p. 790)



*“Divine Service in a German Country Village” by Fritz Mackensen*