

NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS



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CONTENTS

	Page
NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS	7
Preamble	
Introduction	
 COMMENTS ON ROMANS BY CHRISTIAN WRITERS	 11
 Paper No.	
 1. PAUL, THE CALLED AND CHOSEN APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES	 12
<i>(Romans 1: 1 to 6)</i>	
 2. PAUL ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO THE ROMANS	 19
<i>(Romans 1: 7 to 13)</i>	
 3. PAUL THE EVANGELIST	 23
<i>(Romans 1: 14 to 17)</i>	
 4. THE WRATH OF GOD	 30
AGAINST GODLESSNESS AND WICKEDNESS	
<i>(Romans 1:18 to 3:20)</i>	
1. Depraved Gentile Society	
<i>(Romans 1: 18 to 32)</i>	
 5. THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)	 37
1. Depraved Gentile Society (continued)	
 6. THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)	 43
2. Critical Moralisers	
<i>(Romans 2: 1 to 16)</i>	
 7. THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)	 54
3. Jewish Self-Importance	
<i>(Romans 2:17 to 3:8)</i>	
 8. THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)	 65
4. The Unrighteousness of the Human Race	
<i>(Romans 3: 9 to 20)</i>	

Paper No.		Page
9.	GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED <i>(Romans 3:21 to 4:25)</i> Stage 1: Through Christ's Sacrifice <i>(Romans 3: 21 to 26)</i>	71
10.	GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued) Stage 2: Defended Against Criticism <i>(Romans 3: 27 to 31)</i>	79
11.	GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued) Stage 3. By Reference to Abraham and David <i>(Romans 4: 1 to 25)</i>	84
12.	GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued) Stage 3. Abraham and David (continued)	92
13.	CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTIFICATION <i>(Romans 5: 1 to 21)</i> The Results of Justification <i>(Romans 5: 1 to 11)</i>	101
14.	CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTIFICATION (continued) Through Adam and Though Christ <i>(Romans 5: 12 to 21)</i>	112
15.	THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CHRIST Supplementary Comments on Romans 5	121
16.	UNITED AND ENSLAVED TO CHRIST AND TO GOD <i>(Romans 6: 1 to 23)</i> United to Christ <i>(Romans 6: 1 to 14)</i>	128
17.	UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued) United to Christ (continued)	137
18.	UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued) United to Christ (continued)	143
19.	UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued) Slaves to God by Christian Conversion <i>(Romans 6: 15 to 23)</i>	148

Paper No.		Page
20.	THE LAW AND CHRISTIAN SANCTIFICATION <i>(Romans 7: 1 to 25)</i> 1. Release from the Law <i>(Romans 7: 1 to 6)</i>	155
21.	THE LAW (continued) 2. Positive Comments about the Law <i>(Romans 7: 7 to 13)</i>	164
22.	THE LAW (continued) 3. The Weakness of the Law <i>(Romans 7: 14 to 25)</i>	171
23.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN <i>(Romans 8: 1 to 39)</i> 1. The Ministry of God's Spirit <i>(Romans 8: 1 to 17)</i>	179
24.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 1. The Ministry of God's Spirit (continued)	185
25.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 1. The Ministry of God's Spirit (continued)	193
26.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 2. The Glory of God's Children <i>(Romans 8: 18 to 27)</i>	198
27.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 2. The Glory of God's Children (continued)	204
28.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 3. God's Steadfast Love <i>(Romans 8: 28 to 39)</i>	209
29.	GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued) 3. God's Steadfast Love (continued)	218

Paper No.		Page
30.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN <i>(Romans 9:1 to 11:36)</i> 1. Israel's Fall <i>(Romans 9:1 to 33)</i>	224
31.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 1. Israel's Fall (continued)	229
32.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 2. Israel's Fault <i>(Romans 10: 1 to 21)</i>	242
33.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 2. Israel's Fault (continued)	251
34.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 3. Israel's Future <i>(Romans 11: 1 to 32)</i>	257
35.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 3. Israel's Future (continued)	263
36.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 3. Israel's Future (continued)	270
37.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 3. Israel's Future (continued)	277
38.	JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued) 4. Doxology <i>(Romans 11: 33 to 36)</i>	284
39.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING LEADS TO GODLY BEHAVIOUR <i>(Romans 12:1 to 15:13)</i> The Christian's Relationship to God <i>(Romans 12: 1 and 2)</i>	290
40.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) God's Will For Believers <i>(Romans 12: 3 to 8)</i>	298

Paper No.		Page
41.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) Our Relationship to Our Brethren <i>(Romans 12: 9 to 16)</i>	304
42.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) Our Relationship to Enemies <i>(Romans 12: 17 to 21)</i>	310
43.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) Our Relationship to the State <i>(Romans 13: 1 to 7)</i>	316
44.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) Love Is the Christian's Responsibility <i>(Romans 13: 8 to 14)</i>	325
45.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) The Weak and The Strong <i>(Romans 14:1 to 15:13)</i>	333
46.	CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued) The Weak and The Strong (continued)	343
47.	PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE <i>(Romans 15:14 to 16:27)</i> The Nature of Paul's Ministry <i>(Romans 15: 14 to 22)</i>	355
48.	PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued) Paul's Travel Plans <i>(Romans 15: 23 to 33)</i>	365
49.	PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued) A Commendation and Many Greetings <i>(Romans 16: 1 to 16)</i>	374
50.	PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued) Warnings, Messages and Closing Doxology <i>(Romans 16: 17 to 27)</i>	383

NOTES ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS

PREAMBLE

In the nineteen sixties, the late Brother Hugh Fleming wrote a commentary on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to his research and deeply thoughtful comments. Copies of his work, 'The Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Study', dated August 1970, are still available.

The notes offered in the following commentary are intended to assist the reader to gain a more detailed appreciation of the great Apostle's explanations and exhortations in his long letter to the Roman Church. They were first prepared as a series of papers presented to the congregation in Melbourne.

The King James Version of the Bible has been very influential to Christians since 1611. However, many versions in more contemporary English have become available. In these papers the New King James Version has been used because it is more amenable to study and understanding for Bible students today. Other versions have also been used to assist with this commentary.

INTRODUCTION

The literature based on the inspired Apostle's letter to the Romans is so extensive as to be almost unmanageable. Some commentators on Romans seem to forget that it is, in fact, a letter, and fail to consider its intended meaning and purpose. It is, however, a relatively long letter, consisting of more than seven thousand words, and is the longest letter in the New Testament.

The letter to the Romans is like a lecture, apart from the beginning and ending which are unusually long. The opening greetings occupy the first fifteen verses of chapter one, and the final greetings occupy most of the final chapter, in which there is a long list of brethren sending their love to the believers in Rome.

The letter to the Romans differs from Paul's other letters because he was writing to a congregation with which he had had no personal contact. It may seem a little strange that he

wrote his longest letter to a Church that he had not founded and had not visited. Yet it is clear from his tone that, although he had not had any personal relationship with the members, he wanted to meet them and he wanted them to get to know him.

The letter to the Romans is more intellectual than Paul's other letters, with the possible exception of the letter to the Hebrews, and makes no mention of any crisis or controversy that required his correction, although he did deal with some problems that needed to be addressed by the congregation.

When the letter to the Romans was written, probably in 58 AD, Paul had been preaching and working for Christ for more than twenty years, and had founded Churches in most of the major cities around the eastern Mediterranean. His final act in that region was to make a collection for the poor in Jerusalem which was facing a famine. Paul was in Corinth awaiting good weather to enable him to sail and take the money to Jerusalem, and while waiting he wrote his long letter to the Roman congregation.

But why did Paul write to the Romans? He told us by indicating in his letter three places that he intended to visit. The first was Jerusalem, to take to the saints there the money that the Greek Churches had contributed to help them (15:25). The second was Rome (1:11; 15:23). Thirdly he planned to travel to Spain to continue his pioneering missionary work "*where Christ was not known*" (15:20,24,28). It seems that Paul thought of Rome, situated as it was between Jerusalem and Spain, as a place of refreshment after his stay in Jerusalem, and a place of preparation for his mission to Spain.

Rome, the capital and centre of administration of the fourth world empire of Daniel chapter 2, was a suitable place for Paul to continue his ministry. It was another strategic place for the establishment of the gospel, since in those days all roads really did lead to Rome, in a metaphorical sense. For Paul, Rome could have been on the appropriate pathway to Spain in the west. He had evangelised in the eastern half of the Mediterranean, and then wanted to commence evangelising in the west, and after going to Jerusalem and Antioch he needed a new base nearer to his intended field of missionary work. But Paul did not just want something from the Romans for himself. The tone of his letter is the opposite. He wrote that he wanted

to minister to them (1:11; 15: 24, 28 and 29). He also wanted their fellowship, and asked if they would assist him on his journey to Spain (15:24), presumably with their encouragement, material support and prayers.

It is important to remember the social circumstances in the Rome of Paul's day. Rome was a large metropolis and a hotbed of homosexuality. Of the first fifteen Roman emperors, fourteen were practising homosexuals. Paul outlined various sinful practices throughout the city at that time: antisocial behaviour, children being disobedient to parents, disregard for law and order, and uncontrolled violence and crime, with remarkable parallels to our day. Rome's authorities had major problems with collecting taxes. Paul was particularly concerned that the Church did not become corrupted by the society in which the members lived.

The letter to the Roman brethren is not a theoretical theological work far removed from Paul's missionary activity. It is an intensely practical treatise, and it addresses Church unity, providing insights into how the Church should develop from its Jewish base.

Very little is known about the Church in Rome at that time. There were people from Rome who were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and many of them must have been converted on that day and carried the gospel back to Rome. The number must have been considerable, because we know from history that there were some forty thousand Jews in Rome at that time. So the first Roman Church must have been mostly Jewish, and must have begun with a congregation of believers in Jesus who were given a measure of the Holy Spirit. The Church probably grew and was fostered by Jewish merchants and traders going in and out of the city.

The Roman Emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41 to 54 AD, was anti-Jewish, and expelled all the Jews from Rome. Acts 18 tells us that a couple named Priscilla and Aquila met Paul following their expulsion. But in 54 AD Claudius died and the next emperor, Nero, realised that the Jews were good for commerce and invited them to return.

Thus, when Paul wrote to the Romans in about 58 AD, the Christian Church in Rome would have been predominantly

Gentile. When the Christian Jews returned they would have found that Gentiles were running the Church and they were not made especially welcome, so tensions arose between them.

These historical facts help us to understand Paul's letter. Almost every part of it is dealing with this situation, and Paul, who was appointed to be an Apostle to the Gentiles, was uniquely qualified and equipped to reconcile Christian Jews and Gentiles. He strove to bring before his converted Jewish and Gentile brethren the great doctrines of Christianity, and the proper relationship of the superseded Law of Moses to the Christian teachings.

COMMENTS ON ROMANS BY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

'The theme of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans ... the main subject of the whole Epistle ... is that we are justified by faith:' (John Calvin: The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans [1540] page 5.)

'..... really the chief part of the New Testament, and ... truly the purest gospel. It is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but also that he should occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.' (Martin Luther: Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans [1546] page 365.)

'..... if we have gained a true understanding of this Epistle, we have an open door to all the most profound treasures of Scripture.' (John Calvin, as above, page 5.)

'..... the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament, and most pure Evangelion, that is to say, glad tidings ... and also a light and a way in unto the whole Scripture ... the more it is studied, the easier it is; the more it is chewed, the pleasanter it is ...' (From William Tyndale's translation of the New Testament.)

"..... the climax of Romans is actually chapters 9 to 11, that is, his reflections on the relation between church and synagogue, the church and the Jewish people, and chapters 1 to 8 are a 'preface'. Romans is 'about God's plan for the world and about how Paul's mission to the Gentiles fits into that plan.' (Bishop Stendahl: Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays [1976]).

'Romans is 'a sustained and coherent statement of the gospel'. (Professor Bruce: The Letter of Paul to the Romans [1963] (in Karl Donfried's work, 'The Romans Debate' page 182.)

'Romans is 'the last will and testament of the Apostle Paul'. (Gunter Bornkanom (quoted in the Romans Debate by Karl Donfried [1991] page 16 and onwards).

PAUL, THE CALLED AND CHOSEN APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Romans 1: 1 to 6

- 1. *Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God***
- 2. *Which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,***
- 3. *Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh,***
- 4. *And declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.***
- 5. *Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name,***
- 6. *Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;***

1:1 - *“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God.”*

In the ancient world, the custom was to begin a letter with the name of the writer. Paul did this, describing himself to be a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, and appointed to preaching the gospel of God. The word translated ‘servant’ is the Greek word ‘doulos’ which means literally ‘slave’, that is, a person owned by another and not a free person. Paul thus indicated his acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as his Owner and Master, and showed that his authority came from his Master and Owner Jesus Christ.

Paul was called to be an apostle, a distinctive Christian title which Jesus used for His twelve special followers (Luke 6:12). Paul claimed to have been added to their original number (Galatians 1:1) from which one, namely Judas *“by transgression fell”* (Acts 1:25). The distinctive qualifications of the apostles were that they were directly and personally called and commissioned by Jesus, that they were eye-witnesses of His

ministry and resurrection, and that they were sent out by Him to preach with His authority.

The word 'called' means not merely invited, but actually chosen and appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It was important for Paul to emphasise this because the other apostles had been appointed during Jesus' earthly ministry (John 15:16; Matthew 10:1 and Luke 6:13), whereas Paul was appointed later by the risen Christ (Acts 9:15). Paul had often to indicate his appointment by Jesus Christ to the office and authority of an apostle, as is recorded, for example, in 1 Corinthians 9:1; Galatians 1:12-24 and 2 Corinthians 12:12.

Paul thus had a two-fold designation as 'slave' and 'apostle', two terms in contrast to each other. 'Slave' is a title of humility, of being owned by another, and indicative of personal insignificance without any rights of one's own. This was indeed the case, because Paul had been purchased by Jesus Christ and belonged to Him. But 'apostle', on the other hand, was, and is, a title of great authority, conferring on Paul official privilege and dignity by reason of his appointment by Jesus Christ. 'Apostle' means 'one sent out', and is a special title reserved for the Twelve and for no others.

So, as an apostle, Paul had been set apart for the gospel of God. Paul used the same word 'aphorismenos' in Galatians 1:15, where he wrote that God had set him apart, even before he was born, to preach Christ to the Gentiles. His call to be an apostle may have reminded Paul of God's call to Jeremiah to be a prophet; *"Before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations"* (Jeremiah 1:5; NIV). Paul was set apart *"for the gospel of God"* that is, he was set apart for no other purpose than to preach the Divine message of the Gospel, and he showed by his life and work that he lived only for the faithful discharge of his commission. Paul then, in the first six verses of his letter, proceeded to provide his readers with six main issues of the gospel for which he was set apart.

1. The origin of the gospel is God.
2. Scripture certifies the gospel.
3. The substance of the gospel is founded on Jesus Christ.
4. The scope of the gospel extends to all nations.
5. The purpose of the gospel is the obedience of faith.
6. The goal of the gospel is the honour of Christ's name.

1:2 - *"Which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures".*

God revealed the gospel to the apostles, but this knowledge did not come to them as a complete surprise because God had already promised the coming of the gospel through His prophets in the Old Testament. Jesus Himself was quite clear that the Scriptures bore witness to Him, that He was the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and that He had to suffer to enter into His glory (John 5:39; Luke 24:25-32 and 44-47). In Acts 2:14-36 Peter quoted the Old Testament in reference to Jesus' resurrection, exaltation and the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Paul also reasoned with people out of the Scriptures in Acts 13:32-41 and 17:2,3, maintaining that Jesus Christ had to suffer and die and rise from the dead. Paul similarly insisted in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 that it was *"according to the Scriptures"* that Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day. Thus it was that both the law and the prophets bore witness to the gospel (Romans 1:17; 3:21). The gospel was even preached to Abraham, declaring that in his seed all nations of the earth would one day be blessed (Galatians 3:8).

So the gospel of God has a double certification: the prophets in the Old Testament and the apostles in the New Testament.

1: 3 and 4 - *"concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."*

If verses 1 and 3 are brought together, treating verse 2 as a parenthesis, there is the statement that Paul was set apart for the gospel of God *"regarding his Son"*. The gospel of God is *"the gospel of His Son"* as stated in verse 9 of Romans 1. Martin Luther in his 'Lectures on Romans' (1515), page 4, wrote, 'Here the door is thrown wide open for the understanding of Holy Scripture, that is, that everything must be understood in relation to Christ'. John Calvin also wrote in his work 'The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans' (1540) page 15, '... the whole gospel is contained in Christ ... to move even a step from Christ means to withdraw oneself from the gospel'.

Paul described Jesus by two contrasting statements: *“Who as to his human nature was a descendant of David”* (verse 3), and *“Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord”* (verse 4; NIV). These are references, direct or indirect, to Jesus’ birth (descended from David), His death, His resurrection from the dead, and His reign on David’s throne. Paul’s words express three contrasts:

- (1) between two titles :- the seed of David; and the Son of God;
- (2) between two verbs: - became or was born David’s descendant, yet was declared to be God’s Son; and
- (3) between two qualifying clauses: - according to the flesh; and according to the spirit of holiness.

Contrast 1

The Son of David is a messianic title which can be traced back to 2 Samuel 7:12,13, where God promised to establish David’s throne for ever. Many prophets and New Testament writers confirmed this promise made by the LORD God (Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1,10; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Matthew 1; Mark 12:35; Luke 1 and 2; John 7:42; Acts 2:29,30; 13:22,23; 2 Timothy 2:8; Revelation 5:5; 22:16).

The Son of God is also a messianic title, as evidenced in Psalm 2:6-8. Jesus became a man, a human being, and inherited His right to David’s throne through His mother Mary, who was a descendant of the royal line of David. Jesus also inherited His right to David’s throne because David’s throne is, in fact, the LORD’s throne (1 Chronicles 29:23), and it was, and is, the LORD God’s right to give the authority of His throne to whomsoever He will. The two titles, Son of David and Son of God therefore apply to the Lord Jesus both as a man and as a spirit being, because He has qualified fully to inherit David’s throne in the realm of the flesh and in the realm of the spirit.

Contrast 2

Of the two verbs ‘was born’ and ‘declared’ - the first, ‘was born’, clearly refers to Jesus’ fleshly descent by birth from David. The second verb, ‘declared’, raises a problem, because Jesus, since His creation, has always been the Son of God, and

therefore could not be declared to inherit a position or title which He already possessed. The translation *"declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead"* is not strictly correct. The Greek verb 'horizo' does not really mean 'declare'. It is properly rendered 'appoint', as when God appointed Jesus the judge of the world (Acts 10:42; 17:31). The New Testament does not teach that Jesus was appointed or installed as the Son of God at or by His resurrection, because He has always been the Son from His creation onwards. This leads to the understanding that the words 'with power' should apply to the Son of God and not to the verb 'appoint'.

This means that Paul said that Jesus was given power, that is, appointed to a position of all power *"in heaven and in earth"* (Matthew 28:18) following His resurrection. While on earth carrying out His earthly ministry, Jesus was the Son of God in weakness and vulnerability (2 Corinthians 13:4), but because of His obedience and faithfulness, even unto death, He was raised to life again still as the Son of God, but with all power in heaven and in earth given to Him. Jesus' resurrection was really the resumption point in His continuing existence as God's Son.

Contrast 3

The third contrast is in the two qualifying clauses *"according to the flesh"* (1:3) and *"according to the spirit of holiness"* (1:4). 'Flesh' can have a variety of meanings, but in this context Paul evidently meant Jesus' human nature. He was *"made in the likeness of men in fashion as a man"* (Philippians 2:7,8), and was also a descendant of the royal line of David through His mother Mary (Luke 3). The *"spirit of holiness"* is a Hebrew expression referring to God's Holy Spirit, and there are clear links between the Holy Spirit and the resurrection, because it is *"the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead"* (Romans 8:11), and because it was the risen and exalted Christ Who demonstrated His authority and power by pouring out the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33) and making it available to everyone who believes during the Gospel age (John 14:16).

It may be concluded then that the two expressions *"according to the flesh"* and *"according to the Spirit of holiness"* refer to the two stages of Jesus' ministry: before His resurrection and after His resurrection. So here is a balanced account of both the humiliation and the exaltation, the weakness and the power of

God's Son, His human descent traced back to King David, and the all-embracing power given to Him by God following His resurrection, including the gift of the Holy Spirit which He subsequently was able to "*shed forth*" on all who believe into Him.

1:5 - Paul then turned from his description of the gospel of God to his own apostleship. He wrote, "*Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith*" (NIV). By saying 'we' it seems that Paul meant his brother apostles and himself, who received "*grace and apostleship*" from the Lord Jesus. This would mean the undeserved privilege of being an apostle, for Paul always attributed his apostleship to God's gracious decision and appointment.

Paul continued by outlining the purpose of his apostleship and defining its scope to include all the Gentiles in the message of the gospel. He affirmed that the gospel is for everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (1:16). Paul was called to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and we should learn from this that we must free ourselves from any and all pride of race, nation, tribe, caste and class, and acknowledge that the gospel of God is for everybody without exception and without distinction (Galatians 3:28). This is a major theme of this letter to the Roman brethren.

Paul stated that he received his apostleship "*to obedience of faith among all the nations*" (Diaglott). "*Obedience of faith*" was Paul's declaration of the response which the gospel demands. The expression is noteworthy since it occurs at the beginning (1:5) and at the end of Paul's letter (16:26).

Some have contended that the meaning is 'obedience to the faith', taking faith as meaning a system of belief. Certainly this is a New Testament expression (Acts 6:7; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). However, if 'faith' has this meaning here in Romans, the definite article ought to be in place – 'the faith'. But the whole context really demands a reference here simply to 'faith' as in 1:8, 16, and 17; belief and commitment to Christ, defined in Hebrews 11:1.

The NIV translates the clause as "*the obedience that comes from faith*", which immediately reminds us of Abraham who

“by faith ... obeyed” (Hebrews 11:3). This is the full and proper response to the gospel: faith to begin with, then a lifetime of obedience. Paul meant by *“the obedience of faith”* a total, unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ, that is, a lifetime of commitment and obedience, which all Christians must strive to maintain.

The words *“for his name’s sake”*, which the NIV places at the beginning of verse 5, actually come at the end of the Greek sentence and so form something of a climax. Paul desired to bring the nations to the obedience of faith for the sake of the glory and honour of Christ’s name. God had *“highly exalted him”* and had given Him *“a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:9-11). Therefore if God desires every knee to bow to Jesus and every tongue confess Him, so should we.

We should always be eager for the honour of His name, saddened when it remains unknown or ignored, troubled and disappointed, even indignant, when it is blasphemed, but always anxious and determined that it will, if not now at the present time, eventually be given the honour and glory which is due to it. The earliest Christians, as John told us, went out *“for the sake of the Name”* (3 John 7). John did not tell us what the name was, but we know, and Paul told us, it was, and is, the incomparable name of Jesus.

1:6 - *“among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;”*

Paul affirmed that the Roman brethren, to whom he was writing, were included among those called by Jesus Christ; those who have been given the invitation to follow Him, and do His will to the best of their knowledge and ability, according to His instructions and commands. Jesus said, *“You are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (John 14:15).

Romans 1: 1 to 6 presents six fundamental truths about the gospel as mentioned in the notes on verse 1: (1) Its origin is God the Father and (2) its substance is Jesus Christ His Son. (3) Its certification is Old Testament Scripture and (4) its scope is all nations. (5) Our purpose in proclaiming it is to bring people to the obedience of faith, and (6) our ultimate goal is the greater glory of the Holy name of Jesus Christ.

PAUL ADDRESSED HIMSELF TO THE ROMANS

Romans 1: 7 to 13

7. *To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
8. *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*
9. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,*
10. *making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.*
11. *For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established*
12. *that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*
13. *Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.*

1:7 - *"To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

The Apostle extended a greeting to all Christians in Rome, those who were called to be saints, that is, sanctified or separated for a holy purpose. The word 'saint' does not mean a heavenly being, as is often understood, but one who has decided to separate his or her life in committed service to the Master.

Paul told the believers in Rome, firstly, that they were loved by God, secondly, that they were called to be saints *"to belong to Jesus Christ"* and thirdly, that they were recipients of God's grace and peace. By 'grace' Paul would have meant the free and undeserved favour of God's justification of disobedient people, and by 'peace' Paul would have meant the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in the Church or flock of

Jesus Christ. Peace is the opposite of warfare, and we may take it as a reference to the changed attitude of mind in each committed Christian because of release from his or her conflict with sin and sinfulness, and the peace of mind that comes from reconciliation to God, as addressed again in Romans 5:1.

Today we may not realise the effect that the thought or mention of Rome might have had on people in the first century who lived far from Rome in one or other of the provinces. Bishop Stephen Neill, in his book 'The Wrath and Peace of God: Four Expositions of Romans 1-8' (1943 page 2) wrote that Rome 'was the eternal city which had given them peace, the fount of law, the centre of civilisation, the Mecca of poets and orators and arts', but at the same time 'a home of every kind of idolatrous worship'. Nevertheless, there were some of God's people in that city.

After these introductory comments, Paul told his readers of his concern and feelings for them, and in doing so made four important points.

1:8 - *"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world."*

The first point was that he thanked God for them all. It would have been encouraging to churches throughout the Roman Empire that there was a church of believers in Rome. Indeed, the faith of the church at Rome was spoken of throughout the Roman Empire. Although Paul had not been responsible for bringing the gospel to them, this did not prevent him from giving thanks that Rome had been evangelised.

1: 9 and 10. - *"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."*

Paul's second point was that he prayed for them, and continually remembered them in his prayers at all times, even though most of them were unknown to him personally, and called on the LORD God to witness what he said. In particular, he prayed that at last by God's will, the way might be opened for him to go to them.

Paul said that he served God with his whole heart, meaning that he served God with a sincere, deep and devoted obedience in preaching the gospel of His Son. He did have an answer to his prayer, but not in the way he might have anticipated. He was apprehended by the Jews, appeared before King Agrippa and Festus, the Roman governor, was compelled to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:10,11) and subsequently was taken to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 23:10,11; 26:32; 27:1,2; 28:16-20).

1: 11 and 12. - *“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.”*

Paul's third point was that he longed to see them so that he could impart some spiritual gift to make them strong. This may be a reference to his office as an Apostle, by means of which he could bestow one or more of the miraculous gifts on the believers, so that they could become more fully established in the faith. This was the Divine intention of the gifts, which were to endure until the embryonic Church came to an understanding and practice of the spiritual attributes of love, the *“more excellent way”* (1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:1-13).

The fact of Paul's presence in Rome and his imparting of the gifts would have resulted in both his faith and their faith being strengthened, *“that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith”* (NIV). We can see his intention to do this from Acts 19:21, *“After these things were ended (that is, at Ephesus) Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘after I have been there I must also see Rome’”* (KJV).

1:13 - *“Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.”*

Paul's fourth point was that he had often planned to visit them. He did not say what had prevented him from doing so. The most likely explanation is perhaps the one he referred to towards the end of his letter, namely that his evangelistic

work in and around Greece had not been completed and that he had to visit Jerusalem to minister to the saints there (Romans 15: 22 to 33).

Paul wished to *“bring forth fruit”*, as the Lord Jesus said in John 15:16; that is, he wished to bring about the conversion of some to the faith. He did not wish to see the capital of the Roman Empire, or go there just for the love of travel, but to further his mission, make converts, and edify the Church already established there in accordance with the Lord Jesus’ words to His chosen Apostles recorded in John 15:16, *“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”*.

PAUL THE EVANGELIST

Romans 1: 14 to 17

14. *I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.*
15. *So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.*
16. *The just live by faith for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*
17. *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'.*

1.14 - *"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise."*

In the three verses 14, 15 and 16, Paul made three firm personal statements about his eagerness to preach the gospel in Rome: *"I am obligated ...", "I am so eager ...", "I am not ashamed ..."* (NIV).

These statements should remind us of the need to strive to interest people in the Christian gospel, whether unbelievers or Christians going about their lives in a state or attitude of indifference or apathy towards the Christian life. There is, or seems to be, an attitude or mood of reluctance among some Christian churches or groups towards evangelism. Paul wrote of it as an obligation, and his attitude was one of eagerness and enthusiasm. He was not ashamed of the Gospel, and we should strive to emulate his eagerness and enthusiasm.

We should remember that Paul had good reason to feel reluctant about evangelising in Rome. Rome was the centre and also the symbol of imperial pride and power in Paul's day. What could Paul hope to accomplish in the midst of the proud might of imperial Rome? What influence could he exert in that city of immorality, vice and corruption? Would he not be wiser to stay away or remain silent?

Evidently Paul did not think so. He wrote, as mentioned earlier, *"I am obligated" ... "I am so eager" ... "I am not ashamed of the Gospel"*.

Why was Paul so obligated and eager to evangelise? There were two main reasons.

The first reason was, as Paul wrote, that he was a debtor. The translations *"I am obligated"* (NIV) and *"I am under obligation"* (RSV) should properly be translated *"I am a debtor"* as in the KJV, RV and the NRSV. Jesus had made Paul a debtor by committing the Gospel to his trust to be passed on to the Romans in particular, and to the Gentiles and the Jews in general. As the Apostle to the Gentiles he was in debt to the Gentile world, both to the Greeks and non-Greeks (literally 'barbarians'), to the wise and the foolish (NIV).

1:15.- *"So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also."*

It was in this sense that Paul was in debt. He had not borrowed anything from the Romans that he had to repay. But Jesus Christ had entrusted him with the Gospel to be passed on to the Romans, the Jews and the Gentiles. Because of this sense of debt to them he wrote, *"That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome"* (NIV).

Similarly, we as Christian believers are debtors to the world, though we are not apostles. The gospel has come to us, and we have no permission to keep it to ourselves. No-one may claim a monopoly of the Gospel. We are under an obligation to make it known to others. Paul was eager to preach the Gospel because he was in debt. We should be as eager to discharge our debt as Paul was to discharge his.

The Apostle was ready to go to the educated and the ignorant, the wise and the simple. This obligation arose not from any favour that the Romans had done for him, but as a result of the power God had shown to him as an appointed Apostle of Jesus Christ, especially chosen to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Romans 11:13).

Paul's ardent desire was to proclaim the Gospel, and he therefore intended to preach it at Rome just as he had done at

Antioch, Galatia, Ephesus, Athens and Corinth. These verses brought to a close Paul's introduction to his letter. He had declared to the believers in Rome his deep interest in them, then proceeded to discuss the great doctrines of the Gospel message.

1:16. - *"The just live by faith for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*

Paul then gave a second reason for being eager to preach the Gospel and not be ashamed of it. The reason was, and is, that *"it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"* ((NIV). Jesus Himself warned His disciples against being ashamed of Him (Mark 8:38), and Paul gave Timothy similar advice (2 Timothy 1:8,12).

Paul was well aware of the temptation to feel ashamed by the Gospel and its message. He told the Corinthians that he came to them *"in weakness and fear, and with much trembling"* (1 Corinthians 2:3). He also wrote that the message of Christ crucified was *"foolishness"* to some and a *"stumbling block"* to others (1 Corinthians 1:18-23), because the whole concept undermines self-righteousness and pride. And it is a fact that wherever the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, it arouses opposition in some quarters of society, and contempt and ridicule from some unbelievers.

How is the temptation to be ashamed of the Gospel overcome? It is overcome by keeping in mind the fact that the Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The Gospel is God's saving power for *"everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"* (NIV). Faith that saves, which is the necessary response to the Gospel, is a great leveller. Everyone who is saved by faith is saved in exactly the same way.

That fact applies equally to Jew and Gentile. There is no distinction between them in respect of salvation (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28). The priority for the Jews is theological because God chose them and made His covenant with them, and also historical: *"We had to speak the word of God to you first"* (Acts 13:46; NIV).

We have seen that the Apostle made three affirmations in 1: 14 to 16, namely his indebtedness, his eagerness to preach and proclaim, and his resolve not to be ashamed of the Gospel. He regarded the Gospel given to him as an unpaid debt both to the saving power of God and to the world. He had a sense of obligation – the gospel had been put in his trust; and a sense of conviction – it had saved him and it would save others. We can learn from Paul's resolve by grasping the truth that the Gospel for us is a debt to pay and a power to save in our lives and the lives of all who will believe. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel whenever and wherever we can.

The Gospel is essential to God's plan and is His requirement. It is not the device of man. It is, moreover, a powerful message, not a feeble or ineffective theory or simply a code of ethics, but on the contrary it is *"mighty to the pulling down of strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4,5; KJV). The NRSV translation renders this passage in 2 Corinthians 10:4,5 in this way, *"For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ"*. The word *"stronghold"* has a military significance, a fortified defence set up to resist and repel an invader. It is so used in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 11:11). Many people retreat within the fortresses of their minds to preserve error, superstition, pride and untenable beliefs. Such fortresses within people's minds are the strongholds against which the power of the Gospel does battle. The entrenched sophistries of evil and the evil one, the latter often posing as *"an angel of light"* (2 Corinthians 11:14) are the challenges that the Gospel of Christ takes up and demolishes.

1:17 - *"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'."*

The reason the Gospel is God's saving power is that God's righteousness is revealed in it. This righteousness of God is *"from faith to faith"*, in fulfilment of Habakkuk 2:4, *"the righteous will live by his faith"*. Many commentators have called Romans 1: 16 and 17 the 'text' of which the rest of Romans is the exposition. Be that as it may, three basic questions now confront us:

1. What is *"the righteousness of God"*?
2. What is the meaning of *"from faith to faith"*?
3. How should we understand the quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 and Paul's use of it in this context?

1. The Righteousness of God

The meaning of this expression has been discussed throughout church history, and has prompted the writing of a great quantity of literature. To attempt to summarise the main conclusions of the many commentators would be difficult and time-consuming, and would tend to deflect the reader's attention from the Apostle's continuing message. The NIV rendering, *"righteousness from God"* in this context and in Romans 3:21, is probably what Paul meant.

God requires a righteous status in us, and in all true believers, if we are to be reconciled to Him. All true and sincere Christians can achieve this status through belief in and acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, as revealed in the Gospel message, which status is graciously and undeservedly bestowed freely on all who believe and trust in Jesus Christ. God's righteousness is not subjective, that is, referring to God's character and activity, but objective, referring to the righteousness which God freely and graciously grants to believers directly and solely on the basis of their faith.

Paul contrasted the righteousness of God with the righteousness that some may think they have, and may endeavour to establish, instead of submitting to God through Jesus Christ and obtaining God's free gift of imputed righteousness, which is offered and obtainable by faith and faith alone (Philippians 3:9; Romans 10:3; 5:17, 3:22). In 2 Corinthians 5:21 Paul wrote that in Christ we actually *"become the righteousness of God"*, and in Romans 4:3, 24 and 25 he wrote about righteousness being credited, reckoned or imputed to us, as it was to Abraham, and in 1 Corinthians 1:30 he wrote that it is Christ Himself *"who has become for us our righteousness"*.

Therefore it is in order to affirm that *"the righteousness of God"* is God's righteous initiative in making sinners right with Himself by granting them righteousness that is not theirs but His.

“The righteousness of God” is God’s justification of the unjustified, His righteous way of declaring the unrighteous to be righteous. In doing so God demonstrates His righteousness and gives righteousness to us. He has done this and continues to do it through Jesus Christ the righteous, and He does it because of our faith when we put our trust in Him and implore Him for mercy.

2. From Faith to Faith

The Apostle wrote that the righteousness of God is revealed “*from faith to faith*”. If Paul meant that God’s righteousness comes to us by faith, which it does, then the expression should be rendered “from God’s faithfulness to our faith”. His faithfulness becomes a firm basis for our faith. If Paul meant that faith should be spread by evangelism, the expression should read “from one believer to another”. But if the expression is rhetorical, stressing the primacy of faith, then the NIV rendering would be correct “by faith from first to last”. We must make up our own minds about this statement of Paul, or simply keep an open mind about its meaning.

3. The Quotation from Habakkuk 2:4

The Apostle confirmed his emphasis on faith by quoting Habakkuk 2:4; “*The righteous will live by faith*”. Habakkuk had complained that God would use the ruthless Babylonians to punish Israel. But why would He use the wicked to punish the wicked? Habakkuk was told that the Babylonians would fall, but that the righteous Israelite would live because of his faith, that is, in the context, by his steadfast trust in God.

Paul used this text in his earlier letter to the Galatians (Galatians 3:11) to remind the Galatians that the Bible teaches justification by faith, not by law. This is probably what the Apostle meant here in Romans. Paul’s concern was not how righteous people live, but how disobedient people can be regarded as righteous.

Some translations and scholars maintain that the sentence in Habakkuk should read, “The justified by faith shall live”, that is, he or she who is righteous through faith shall live. So, how should the passage be understood? Is faith the way to righteousness or the way to life? The issue is whether the righteous by faith will live, or the righteous will live by faith. It seems to me that both statements are true. Righteousness and

life are both obtainable by faith. Those who are righteous by faith also live by faith. Having been converted and having begun to lead a life in faith, believers, those who are committed to Christ, continue in this way throughout their lives.

The believer who has righteousness imputed to him or her shall live confidently, trusting in God and convinced of the fulfilment of God's promises. In the Gospel, there is a revelation of God's righteousness, an invitation to strive for a life of righteousness based on the principle of faith and offered to all for acceptance by faith. To live, in this context, means to find support, comfort and deliverance. In the Gospel, the blessing of salvation is represented as life, eternal life. Man is represented by nature as 'dead' in trespasses, and on the path to extinction in death (Ephesians 2:1).

The Gospel restores hope of salvation through Christ, a new pattern of life in the present and eternal life in the future (John 3:36; 5:29; 5:40; 6:33, Romans 5:18; 8:6).

THE WRATH OF GOD AGAINST GODLESSNESS AND WICKEDNESS

Romans 1:18 to 3:20

Introductory Overview

Many people do not acknowledge Christ's teachings or bring Christian principles into their lives. They do not see that they need His message, or, if some have reservations about bringing Christ's teachings into their lives, they are unwilling to admit it. Many people consider themselves good-living, law-abiding persons, prepared to do a good turn to others, and believe in apparent justice for everyone. In that condition of self-satisfaction, they may not come to understand Christ's teachings. They do not realise that they are disobedient people before God, and as such, they are destined to die and pass out of existence.

It is our duty as Christians to bring people to realise their true position in the sight of God, because they do not realise that they are guilty before God, and cannot be declared innocent or not guilty without first coming to acknowledge Christ's achievements. Just as people who become ill and cannot cure themselves will finally admit to their condition and consult a doctor, so people who will admit to being guilty before God and unable to escape from condemnation, will accept what Christ has offered and find salvation, grace and freedom in the Gospel message. This principle applies to all difficulties in life: deny the problem and nothing can be done about it; admit the problem and at once there is the possibility of a solution.

The plain and unpopular principle that Paul expounded in Romans 1:18 to 3:20 is that disobedience and guilt are universal - the whole world is guilty before God (Romans 3:19). Paul's purpose in this passage was to show that everyone, Jews and Greeks alike, are under the power of sin, so that the whole world may come under God's judgment. All men and women (except the Lord Jesus) are transgressors, guilty and without excuse before God. They are under His wrath, and stand condemned. The whole theme is deeply solemn.

The way Paul demonstrated the universal fact of human sin and guilt was to divide the human race into four sections and accuse them one by one. In each case he began by reminding each group of their knowledge of God and of His goodness.

He then confronted them with the fact that they had not lived up to their knowledge, but had suppressed and even contradicted it by continuing to live in unrighteousness. Therefore they were inexcusably guilty before God. They could plead neither innocence nor ignorance.

1. In the first section (Romans 1: 18 to 32) Paul portrayed depraved Gentile society in its idolatry, immorality and antisocial behaviour.

2. In the second section (Romans 2: 1 to 16) he addressed critical moralisers – Gentiles as well as Jews – who professed high ethical standards and applied them to everybody but themselves.

3. Thirdly (Romans 2:17 to 3:8) he turned to self-important Jews, who boasted of their knowledge of God's law, but did not obey it.

4. Fourthly (Romans 3: 9 to 20) he included the whole human race, and concluded that all were guilty and without excuse before God.

Throughout this long passage, Paul did not lose sight of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Romans 1:17 he said that *"in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed"*. In Romans 3:21 he repeated that statement almost word for word; *"But now a righteousness from God ... has been made known"*. Between these two authoritative statements of God's gracious righteousness, Paul placed his relentless exposure of human unrighteousness.

1. DEPRAVED GENTILE SOCIETY

Romans 1:18 to 32

Romans 1:18 to 20

- 18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,***
- 19. *Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.***
- 20. *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,***

In Romans 1: 16 to 20 the great Apostle developed a sustained logical argument. He referred to the power of God in verse 16, the righteousness of God in verse 17, the wrath of God in verse 18, and the glory of God in creation in verses 19 and 20. Paul linked each statement to the previous one by the Greek conjunction 'gar' or 'dioti', meaning 'for' or 'because'.

Paul stated in verse 16 that God revealed His power in believers by saving them. God revealed His righteousness in verse 17 by justifying wrongdoers; that is, considering them righteous and dealing with them as though they were righteous because of their of faith in the gospel message. In verse 18 Paul said that God revealed His wrath against the disobedience of those who suppressed their knowledge of the Creator; while in verses 19 and 20 Paul stated that God had revealed His eternal power and divine nature in His creation.

Paul's statement in verse 18 that *"the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of man ..."* is a confronting statement nowadays because some people, including some Christians, seem to view anger as somehow incompatible with a holy God and with the Gospel message.

Certainly the Christian is exhorted to *"put off anger"* (Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8), and the Lord Jesus warned against anger in Matthew 5:22. But the righteous and holy God is often recorded as being angry because of people's disobedience and disregard of His holy laws and requirements, and the Lord Jesus is recorded in Mark 3:5 as looking

“with anger” at the Pharisees and Jews because of the hardness of their hearts. It is sufficient to say at this stage that God and the Lord Jesus are holy, sinless, and can focus their disapproval in righteous ways, while human beings, being wrongdoers, are very likely to allow anger to lead them to unrighteous behaviour and evil consequences.

In view of what Paul wrote about the wrath of God, it will be helpful to discuss God’s wrath under three headings:

- (1) What is God’s wrath?
- (2) Against what is God’s wrath revealed?
- (3) How is God’s wrath revealed?

(1) What Is God’s Wrath?

In our endeavour to understand and try to describe God’s wrath, we must avoid extreme positions. There are some people who see the wrath of God as no different from vengeful human anger, while others think and declare that the very notion of anger as an attribute or attitude of God must not be entertained or believed.

Human anger is for the most part very unrighteous. It is an emotion that is often irrational and sometimes uncontrollable, and contains mixtures of vanity, animosity, malice, evil and hurtful speaking and sometimes the desire for revenge.

God’s anger, on the other hand, is completely free of all such unacceptable components, and is completely different from human anger. God, the Almighty and Ever-living One, never loses His temper, never flies into rage, and is never malicious, spiteful or vindictive. His anger results from His holiness, which causes Him to be opposed to wrongdoing, to refuse to condone it or let it pass unpunished or even to come to terms with it. His judgment must be, and is, to judge, condemn and eventually remove it forever, which He will do on the basis of Christ’s all-atoning sacrifice (Colossians 1:19,20).

(2) Against What Is God’s Wrath Revealed?

The wrath of God is always directed against evil. We, as disobedient human beings, can become angry when we are offended or our pride has been wounded, but there are no

such emotions with the LORD God. Only the awareness of wrongdoing gives rise to God's anger.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:18 that *"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"*. Scripture is quite clear that disobedience is really godlessness. Disobedience arises basically from the attempt by people to rid themselves of God ruling in their lives, and to live as though they have succeeded in doing so. Paul wrote in Romans 3:18, quoting from Psalm 36:1 *"There is no fear of God before their eyes"*.

God's wrath is directed, however, not against *"godlessness and wickedness"* in a vague and general sense, but against the godlessness and wickedness of people *"who suppress the truth by their wickedness"*. Such people know right from wrong, but deliberately choose to ignore and disregard God's laws and requirements and live only for themselves, suppressing the truth which would challenge and expose their self-serving attitude and behaviour.

What did Paul mean by *"the truth"* which Godless people suppress? He told his readers and us in Romans 1: 19 and 20. He meant the knowledge of God which is readily available in the natural world. For *"what may be known of God"* even by finite disobedient people, is plain and open, because God has seen fit to make it so. Paul explained what he meant in verse 20. Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes of eternal power and divine nature have been clearly visible, being displayed by what he has made. The created world is a visible manifestation of the power and knowledge of God, Who is invisible to His earthly creatures, and an understandable revelation of God, Who would otherwise be unknown to us and to people generally. God has revealed Himself in His creation.

The truth of revelation through creation is a recurrent theme in the Scripture. *"The heavens declare the glory of God"* (Psalm 19:1) and *"the whole earth is full of his glory"* (Isaiah 6:3). Job acknowledged that he had only *"heard"* of God, but through the marvels of the natural order, his eyes had seen Him – *"I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you"* (Job 42:5, following chapters 37 to 41).

Paul proclaimed to his pagan audience in Lystra that God made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, but did not leave Himself without witness, but had shown His kindness to the human race by His gifts of rain and crops, food and gladness (Acts 14:15-17; 17:22-31; Matthew 5:45).

The conviction that God has revealed Himself through the created universe is still meaningful to us in the twenty-first century. It is perfectly reasonable to believe that God's power, skill and goodness are displayed in the beauty, balance and intricate detail of the universe.

Paul ended his statement in Romans 1:20 with the words that people are *"without excuse"*. He had been asserting natural revelation, or revelation through the realm of nature. What Paul said is that through general revelation, people can come to know God's power and glory, but unless they recognise that the only way to know God's love and saving grace is by faith in Jesus Christ, their knowledge of God through His creation cannot benefit them spiritually or rescue them from sin and death, but can only condemn them because such knowledge does not lead them to godly living. Instead, they suppress the truth by their wickedness (verse 18), so that they are without excuse (verse 20). It is against this wilful human rebellion that God's wrath is revealed.

(3) How Is God's Wrath Revealed?

There are three answers to this question.

The first is that God's wrath will be revealed in the future, in the final judgment of the present order of things, to which Paul referred in Romans 2: 5,8 and 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

Secondly there is a disclosure of God's wrath through the secular administration of justice, which Paul addressed later in his letter to the Romans (chapter 13, verses 1 to 7).

Thirdly, there is another kind of present disclosure of God's anger, to which the Apostle devoted the remainder of the first chapter of Romans. Paul wrote that God's wrath was being revealed from heaven at that time (verse 18), and continued to explain by his threefold assertion *"God gave them over....."* (verses 24, 26 and 28).

When we read of God's wrath, we tend to think of such phenomena as lightning and thunder, cataclysmic events such as those which brought about the flood of Noah's day, and other visible demonstrations of great power and majesty. But God's wrath can work quietly and invisibly in handing wrongdoers over to themselves, and by letting men and women go their own way. God may choose to abandon disobedient people to their wilful lives of selfishness and misbehaviour, and the consequence of moral and spiritual degeneration is surely a judicial act of God, the revelation of God's wrath from heaven (verse 18).

God's wrath is God's decisive and righteous antagonism to evil. It is directed against people who have some knowledge of God through the created order, but deliberately suppress it in order to go their own way and do whatever may appeal to them. Paul saw that in the moral and social corruption in the world of his day, and we can see it now in the permissive societies of our own day.

THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)

DEPRAVED GENTILE SOCIETY (continued).

In Paul's exposition of the wrath of God, he developed a logical process of deterioration in three stages, according to the principle he established in verses 18 to 20. The following are the three stages of the deterioration of pagan depravity as described by Paul.

Stage One

Romans 1: 21 to 24

21. ***Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.***
22. ***Professing to be wise, they became fools,***
23. ***And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.***
24. ***Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonour their bodies among themselves.***

The opening statement that they knew God must refer to the limited knowledge of God which is available to everyone by general revelation as stated in verses 19 and 20. This must be what Paul meant, since he wrote in other letters that people without the knowledge of Christ do not know God (Galatians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Instead of their knowledge of God leading to the worship of God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him as their benefactor. Their thinking became futile, their foolish heartfelt attitudes were darkened (verse 21), and they became fools (verse 22). Their dark-mindedness and foolishness were shown by their idolatry, in which they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal men and birds, animals and reptiles (verse 23).

The cultural idolatry of the Western World today is really no better than this. The worship of God is neglected and even rejected in pursuit of the contemporary obsession with wealth, fame and power. This obsession is just as foolish and just as blameworthy as that which Paul described, because today those attitudes ignore the great quantity of reading and research material relating to Bible study and Christian living that is available, and the electronic media which can bring a vast amount of scriptural information right into our homes.

God's judgment on people's idolatry was to let them continue to live in the disrespectful desires of their hearts and engage in sexual impurity. The history of the world confirms that idolatry leads to immorality. Paul said that the kind of immorality he had in mind involved the degrading of their bodies with one another (verse 20). Paul was right. This is a divine law. Illicit sexual behaviour is degrading and can be devastating, while sex in marriage is ennobling, as God intended it to be.

Stage Two

Romans 1: 25 to 27

- 25. *Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.***
- 26. *For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.***
- 27. *Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.***

Here the exchanging of the truth of God for "*the lie*" is mentioned. In this statement lies the falsehood of idolatry because it involves the transferring of worship from the Creator to created things. Paul spontaneously included words of praise to God "*who is blessed for ever*" in the midst of his comments on the wrath of God (verse 25).

In this connection Paul said that "*God gave them up to vile passions*" which he specifies as lesbian practices (verse 26)

and male homosexual relationships (verse 27). In both cases he described the people concerned as guilty of yet another exchange: the women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones (verse 26), while the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another (verse 27). Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (verse 27). Paul did not specify what the penalty was. He said only that it was received "*in themselves*".

Verses 26 and 27 are crucial in the contemporary debate about homosexuality. It is clear that Paul was condemning all homosexual behaviour. This understanding is under challenge from the advocates of homosexual practices. They put forward three arguments.

1. They claim that the passage in question in Romans 1 is irrelevant because its purpose is not to teach sexual ethics nor to expose vice, but to portray the outworking of God's wrath. This is true, of course, but surely it is clear that if certain sexual conduct is to be seen to incur God's wrath, it must be displeasing to Him.

2. Paul is alleged to be talking about pederasty (sexual relations between adult males and boys) since that form of male sexuality was widespread in the Roman world of Paul's day. It is further claimed that Paul was opposing the practice because of the humiliation and exploitation of the boys involved. All that can be said in response is that Paul's comments contain not even a hint of it.

3. Some homosexual people are claiming that their activities cannot be described as unnatural since such activities are natural to them. The writer, Richard B. Hays, in his book 'Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans' (1986, page 192), provides ample contemporary evidence that the opposition of 'natural' (kata physin) and 'unnatural' (para physin) was 'very frequently used ... as a way of distinguishing between heterosexual and homosexual behaviour'.

Differentiating between sexual orientation and sexual practice is a modern concept; and Hays further writes (page 200), 'to suggest that Paul intends to condemn homosexual acts only

when they are committed by persons who are constitutionally heterosexual is to introduce a distinction entirely foreign to Paul's thought-world'.

So then, we have no liberty to interpret the noun 'nature' as meaning 'my nature', or the adjective 'natural' as meaning 'what seems natural to me'. The word 'physis' (natural) signifies God's created order. To *act "against nature"* means to violate the order which God has established, and to act *"according to nature"* means to behave in accordance with the intention of the Creator. The intention of the Creator means His original and only intention. Genesis 2:24 informs us what this was, and Jesus confirmed it. *"At the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one"*. Then Jesus added His personal endorsement, *"Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"* (Matthew 19:4-6).

God instituted marriage as a heterosexual union, and the only context which He intends for the *"one flesh"* experience is the marriage of a man and a woman. A homosexual relationship, however loving and committed it may claim to be, is against nature and thus against God's original intention, and can never be regarded as a legitimate alternative to marriage.

Stage Three

Romans 1: 28 to 32

- 28. *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;***
- 29. *Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers,***
- 30. *Backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,***
- 31. *Undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful;***
- 32. *who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practise such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practise them.***

Greek scholars tell us that Paul's opening statement in verse 28 included a play on words between 'ouk edokimasan' (they did not think it worthwhile) and 'adokimon noun' (a depraved mind). Scholars tell us that this play on words is not easy to reproduce in English. A suggested translation is 'since they did not see fit to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to an unfit mind'.

Their unfit or depraved minds led not only to immorality but to a whole variety of antisocial practices "*which are not fitting*" (verse 28). Together they amounted to the breakdown of human communities as standards disappeared and social cohesion disintegrated.

Paul gave a catalogue of some twenty-one vices. His list defies easy classification. He began with four general aspects of disobedience: every kind of wickedness; evil; greed; and depravity. Then he listed five more transgressions which depict broken relationships: "*envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice*" (verse 29).

Next came a couple on their own which seem to refer to libel and slander, which J.B. Phillips translated as "*whisperers-behind-doors*" and "*stabbers-in-the-back*". These two were followed by four which seem to portray different and extreme forms of pride; "*God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful*". Then followed another two words, one denoting people who are inventors of evil things and the other denoting those disobedient to parents (verse 30).

Finally Paul ended the list with four negatives meaning senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless, which Phillips rendered "*without brains, honour, love or pity*" (verse 31).

Verse 32 is a summary of the human perversity that Paul had been describing. Firstly they knew, not God's truth, but His righteous decree that those who do such things are worthy of death. They knew this and their conscience condemned them. Secondly, they disregarded their knowledge. They not only did the things that deserved death, but actively encouraged others to do the same and approved the evil behaviour of which God disapproves.

Paul painted a dark picture, but darker pictures were painted by the most distinguished secular Greek and Latin authors when writing of their own people. Charles H. Hodge informed us of these writings in his work 'A Commentary on Romans' (1972) page 43. Paul was not exaggerating the nature and extent of Godlessness and wickedness when he wrote the words recorded in Romans chapter 1.

THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)

2. CRITICAL MORALISERS

Romans 2: 1 to 16.

In the previous chapter, Paul declared the depraved Gentile world to be guilty and without excuse for their depravity (Romans 1: 20 and 32). Paul proceeded then to pass the same judgment on an individual whom he addressed directly and in direct speech. The individual addressed was evidently a typical individual residing in Paul's mind. This individual was representative of a category of people who remained in Paul's mind throughout the first sixteen verses of Romans 2.

Many commentators believe that Paul, having described and criticised depraved Gentile society in Romans 1: 18 to 32, then turned his attention to Jewish society. This viewpoint is understandable, since one of Paul's main purposes in his letter was to demonstrate that Gentiles as well as Jews are regarded by God to be equal in disobedience as well as in reconciliation. But Paul did not identify the one he addressed as a Jew until verse 17; *"Indeed you are called a Jew ..."*.

So it seems that Paul had in mind both Gentiles and Jews as he wrote verses 1 to 16, since he twice used the expression *"the Jew first and also the Greek"* (Romans 2: 9 and 10). Paul addressed his comments to both Gentiles and Jews, speaking directly in the first place to an individual representing Gentile society, then secondly to an individual representing Jewish society. It may be that Jews were in Paul's mind all the time, but he began in more general terms to cause them to agree with his unreserved condemnation before he turned the focus onto them. In any case, his main emphasis was turning from the world of unrestrained immorality (Romans 1: 18 to 32) to the world of critical moralising. The person addressed in Paul's mind was not simply an individual wrong-doer, but one who judged; *"O man, whoever you are who judges"* (Romans 2:1) and *"O man, you who judge those who do such things, and do the same"* (Romans 2:3).

Paul was surely confronting every human being, Jew or Gentile, engaging in moralising and presuming to pass moral judgments on other people when they were doing the same immoral things themselves.

Paul had envisaged two groups in chapter one verse thirty-two, and chapter two verses one to three. Both groups had some knowledge of God as the creator (1:20) and also as a judge (1:32; 2:2). There is a difference between the two groups. The first group did things they knew to be wrong, and approved of others who did them (1:32); whereas the second group did what they knew to be wrong and condemned others who did them. The first group of wrong-doers was at least consistent, but the second group was hypocritical. The first group disassociated themselves from God's righteous requirements, while the second group identified themselves with God's righteous requirements, failed to do them, then set themselves up as judges, only to find that God was also judging them for their failures and hypocrisy.

The underlying theme of Romans 2: 1 to 16 is the judgment of God on disobedient people who presume to judge. There are three clear aspects of God's judgment:

1. God's judgment is inescapable.
2. God's judgment is righteous.
3. God's judgment is impartial.

1. No-one Can Escape God's Judgment

Romans 2: 1 to 4

1. ***Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practise the same things.***
2. ***But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practise such things.***
3. ***And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practising such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?***

4. Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

In Romans 2: 1 to 4 Paul brought to light a common human failing, namely our tendency to be critical of others while excusing ourselves, or at least being more lenient to ourselves. We have a tendency to gain satisfaction from condemning in others the same faults that we excuse or tolerate in ourselves. This is what Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth century political philosopher, had in mind when he wrote of people who 'are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men'. The work in which Hobbes wrote these words was 'Leviathan' in 1651.

If we do this, we are striving to maintain our self-respect and perhaps a sense of superiority, but in reality we are behaving self-righteously and are deserving of God's judgment. In condemning other people we are condemning ourselves and are without excuse, as the Apostle said, *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge do the same things"* (2:1). We should realise and *"know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practise such things"* (2:2). Paul continued by writing that *"you who judge those who do such things, and do the same"* will not *"escape the judgment of God"* (2:3).

Paul's words were not a call to ignore serious failings in brethren, but were a prohibition of standing in judgment on others and condemning them while failing to judge and condemn ourselves. This sort of behaviour is hypocritical, an attitude involving a double standard, that is, expecting others to meet high standards while behaving to much lower standards ourselves. It is illustrated by Jesus' warning about trying to remove the mote from another's eye while ignoring the beam in one's own eye.

In a futile attempt to escape or side-step God's judgment, some people may take refuge in a theological argument, an appeal to God's holy and righteous attributes, *"the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering"* (2:4), maintaining that God is too patient and kind to inflict punishment on anyone. Scripture

may be misapplied to the advantage of the reader, such as Psalm 103:8, *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy"* and Exodus 34:5-7.

But such theology is wrong, and contrary to God's righteousness because the context of the words quoted is ignored, and the whole concept is dishonouring to God. God's goodness leads to *"repentance"* (2:4), that is, an attitude and state of mind and heart that acknowledges disobedience and failure, and strives to make amends and live righteously, as far as the believer is able. God's patience and kindness should lead to repentance, and not be misconstrued to allow continuance in wrongdoing, as the Apostle made clear later in Romans 5: 1 and 2.

2. God's Judgment Is Righteous

Romans 2: 5 to 11

- 5. *But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,***
- 6. *Who 'will render to each one according to his deeds':***
- 7. *Eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality;***
- 8. *But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath,***
- 9. *Tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;***
- 10. *But glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.***
- 11. *For there is no partiality with God.***

To think that God's patience and kindness combine to allow people to continue their disobedience instead of being led to repentance, is a clear sign of *"hardness"* and an *"impenitent heart"* (2:5). Paul wrote that people who behaved in this way were *"treasuring up ... wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (2:5).

Paul had quoted from Old Testament Scripture in writing that God *“will render to each one according to his deeds”*. The quotation is probably from Psalm 62:12, although the same words in the form of a question are found in Proverbs 24:12. The same thought is also found in Hosea 12:2 and Jeremiah 17:10 and 32:19. Jesus said the same in Matthew 16:27, as did Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10. The theme recurs also in Revelation 2:23; 20:12; and 22:12. The theme is really a principle; a principle of exact retribution, the foundation of all justice.

Some Christians seem to think that Paul had contradicted himself. He declared in Romans 1: 16 and 17 that salvation is by faith and faith alone, but, it is alleged, Paul in this verse stated that salvation is by good works. Paul did not contradict himself. He said here and in other places that justification is by faith, but judgment has been and will be according to works.

Some comments on judgment and what the Scriptures say about it are appropriate at this point. To the minds of many people, the term judgment carries with it the idea of a sentence only. Many people picture themselves and all members of the human race at some future time standing before God’s throne to hear sentences passed on all people who have ever lived. The future time is known as Judgment Day, and by some people is thought of with a certain amount of fear and foreboding. This notion of judgment is found in some heathen mythologies, and has been borrowed from them by some Christians and incorporated into their beliefs.

The Bible Teaching On Judgment

The Bible teaching on judgment is, however, very different. It includes in its significance a very much wider range of prosecution than the mere passing of sentence. That range includes assessment, sentencing and implementation of the sentence.

Judgments have been made by the LORD from earliest times and are still being made, so it is true that God’s judgments are not exclusively a matter for the future. Every judgment God has made, every sentence passed by Him has been on the basis of His laws; a command or requirement: *“thou shalt”* or *“thou shalt not”*, in other words ‘do’ or ‘do not’.

So then, if there is firstly a command or requirement, and a sentence pronounced later, there has to be a period of trial or

probation, that is an assessment, between a command and a subsequent sentence. God has always made known to individuals or peoples, such as Nineveh and Israel, what they must do or not do, so that His commands, periods of trial and subsequent sentences involve people's knowledge; knowledge of God's will and His instructions.

Previous judgments made by God in Eden, in the Age of the Patriarchs and in the Jewish Age, are worthy of close study, but such a study must be left for another occasion. In this present Age of the Gospel, God's purpose is to select a people for His Name (Acts 15:14), and has promised them, if they have faith in Him through the Lord Jesus, and remain faithful until death, that He will give them an inheritance in heaven to assist His King, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the work of resurrection and blessing of the whole human race (Romans 8:16,17; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 2:26,27; 20:4).

To qualify for this heavenly inheritance, called the *"High Calling"* in Philippians 3:14 (KJV), people must believe in God through Jesus Christ, the only way, and accept that faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is the only means of acceptance by God. Such faith if it is heartfelt and sincere, makes the believer a child of God and a member of God's family. But such faith must be maintained throughout life, in other words, the believer must remain faithful until death. This means that faithful believers in this present Gospel Age are under assessment (1 Peter 4:17). They have responded to the requirement of faith, and their period of trial or probation will continue until death, when the LORD God will pass sentence in accordance with His righteous judgment and His wonderful promises, then implement that sentence.

The judgment of the future is, like judgments of the past, selective. The instructions, tests and trials of that future time, the Kingdom Age, will determine who of all the resurrected millions will be worthy of everlasting life on the earth. The whole period of teaching, blessing and testing will be one thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Judgment Is According To Works Done In Faith

As was said earlier, the principle of the basis of God's righteous judgment of believers' efforts will be what they have done. The presence or absence of saving faith in our hearts is disclosed

by the presence or absence of good works of love in our lives. The Apostles Paul and James both taught this same truth, that faith is displayed in good works, and that if the works are not seen, then faith is a sham and even non-existent. James wrote *"I will show you my faith by my works"* (James 2:18), and *"Faith without works is dead"* (James 2:20), while Paul said, that *"Faith works by love"* (Galatians 5:6).

Verses 7 to 10 of Romans 2 expand on the principle stated in verse 6 that God's judgment of us and all believers is based on works – what we do and what we have done. Alternatives have been presented to us in two parallel sentences which concern our goals (that which we seek), our works (that which we have done) and our destination (where we hope to go). The two final destinations of all humanity are called *"eternal life"* in verse 7, and *"indignation and wrath"*, God's judgment on people who behave unrighteously, in verse 8.

The basis on which the separation of people will be made will be a combination of what people are looking for, that is, their aim in life, and what people do, that is, how they respond to God's requirements for themselves and their service to others.

The teaching of the Apostle is the same as that of Jesus in the sermon on the mount, in which Jesus said to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:31), and also to take notice of His teachings and put them into practice (Matthew 7:24).

In verse 7 of Romans 2 Paul wrote that those who seek glory, honour and immortality by patient continuance in doing good, will receive eternal life, while in verse 8 Paul wrote that those who are selfish and self-seeking and who follow evil ways will incur God's indignation and wrath.

In verses 9 and 10 of Romans 2 Paul restated these solemn alternatives and added the word *"peace"* in verse 10, which signifies reconciliation of the obedient believer with God, and also reconciliation with other true believers. Then Paul added *"to the Jew first and also to the Greek"*, drawing attention to the priority of the Jew in judgment and salvation, but affirming that although the Gospel message went to the Jews first, most of them rejected it. Gentiles were and are accepted equally on the same terms, showing that there is no favouritism with God (Romans 2:11), and confirmed by Peter (Acts 10:34).

3. God's Judgment Is Impartial

Romans 2: 12 to 16

12. *For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law*
13. *(For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;*
14. *For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves,*
15. *Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)*
16. *In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*

Jews Under The Mosaic Law And Gentiles Not Under That Law

Paul then developed the theme of the righteous judgment of God in relation to the Mosaic Law, which he mentioned for the first time, and which featured prominently in the remainder of this letter.

The Jews were under the Law Covenant, that is, they were covenanted to obey it, and they heard it read in their synagogues every Sabbath day (verse 13), whereas Gentiles did *"not have the Law"* (verse 14), and could not be obliged to obey it. But, Paul wrote, there was no fundamental difference between Jews and Gentiles in their moral knowledge, since the moral requirements of the Mosaic Law were written on all human hearts (verse 15). So there was, and is, really no difference between them in the disobedience the Jews committed under the Law, and the disobedience the Gentiles committed by ignoring their consciences. Both are guilty in so doing, and both deserve the judgment they will receive.

Verse 12 put Jews and Gentiles in the same category of sinfulness and deserving of death. Paul made two parallel statements, beginning with *"as many as have sinned"*, and summed up their lives of wrongdoing in relation to God's judgment of them by Jesus Christ (verse 16). Paul made the point that all who have disobeyed will be judged, whether they

are Jews or Gentiles, meaning whether they were or were not under the Mosaic Law. All who *"have sinned without law will also perish without law"* (verse 12). Gentiles will not be judged by a standard they have not known. They will perish because of their disobedience, not because of their ignorance of the Law Covenant. Similarly Jews who have transgressed the Law will be judged by the Law (verse 12). Jews will be judged by the standard they have known. God will be completely just in judgment.

In verse 13 Paul wrote *"for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the Law will be justified"*. This is a theoretical statement, since no human being, except the Lord Jesus, has ever fully obeyed the Mosaic Law, so there was no reality of salvation under the Law. But Paul was writing about judgment, not salvation, and was emphasising the fact that the Law did not make the Jews immune to judgment, as they thought. What mattered was not being in possession of the Law but being in obedience to all its commands and requirements.

Paul then applied more fully to Gentiles the principle of judgment according to knowledge and performance. Twice in verse 14 Paul stated that the Gentiles did not, and do not, have the Law; but they did, and do, have some knowledge of its standards in their consciences. They do by nature, that is, instinctively, *"the things contained in the law"*. Paul was not making a universal claim, he was saying that some Gentiles at times do some of the things that the Law requires. This is a fact which anthropologists acknowledge. Not all human beings are criminals, thieves, adulterers and murderers. Most, on the contrary, recognise the sanctity of human life, are loyal to their parents, are honest and truthful, and strive to live peacefully, abiding by the law of their society.

But what did Paul mean by saying that although Gentiles did not have the Law, they appeared to know it? He wrote that they are *"a law unto themselves"*. He did not mean that each person makes his or her own laws to suit individual circumstances, but that their human consciences constitute their law. The reason for this is that God created them sentient, moral persons, and that they show by their behaviour and conduct that the requirements of the Law are *"written in their hearts"* (verse 15). So although Gentiles do not possess the Law Covenant, as the Jews did, they have its requirements in their hearts because God has put them there in the first place by creating all humanity in his image.

Some commentators have suggested that the above-mentioned situation is a reference to God's New Covenant promise to put His law in His people's minds and write it on their hearts. But this is not the case because Paul was writing about judgment rather than salvation. He was not referring to regeneration, but to creation, in the sense that the requirements of the Law had been written on the hearts of all human beings by their Creator, so that human beings intrinsically have some knowledge of God's righteous requirements.

Paul continued by saying that the Gentiles' consciences bore witness, telling them in their minds that they have done wrong, with their thoughts sometimes accusing them and sometimes defending them (verse 15), as if in a court of law where the counsel for the prosecution brings forward accusations and the counsel for the defence challenges or refutes the allegations. It seems that Paul had in mind a three-way debate between the people's hearts, on which the requirements of the Law have been written; people's consciences which condemn wrong behaviour; and people's thoughts or minds which either accuse or excuse their conduct.

Verse 16 concludes this section by adding three truths about the day of judgment, the day of God's wrath, mentioned previously in verse 5. Firstly, *"God will judge the secrets of men"*, meaning the hidden areas of people's lives. Scripture tells us repeatedly that God knows our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 139:1; Jeremiah 17:10; Luke 16:15; Hebrews 4:12).

Secondly, God's judgment will take place through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that the Father had entrusted all judgment to Him (John 5:22,27), and Jesus regularly spoke of Himself as the central figure on the day of judgment (Matthew 7:21; 25:31). Paul declared in Athens that God had fixed the day and appointed the judge (Acts 17:31), as Peter also had earlier told Cornelius (Acts 10:42).

Thirdly, God's judgment is part of the Gospel, for *"God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel"* (verse 16). The Gospel is the good news of ultimate salvation from sin and death, and also a means of present-day deliverance from God's wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Paul in this passage stressed that no-one can escape God's judgment (verses 1 to 4), that it will be a righteous judgment (verses 5 to 11), that our judgment as believers will be according to our works, that is, our continuing response by faith to the Gospel message in the way we conduct our lives. God's judgment will be impartial as applied to Jews and Gentiles (verses 12 to 16). The greater people's moral knowledge is, the greater their moral accountability will be.

THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)

3. JEWISH SELF-IMPORTANCE

Romans 2:17 to 3:8

An Overview

Paul continued in his comprehensive criticism of the human race, moving from critical moralisers, both Jews and Gentiles (2: 1 to 16), and then to Jews, in particular in their self-importance (2: 17 to 29) addressing them directly, "*Indeed you are called a Jew*" (verse 17).

Paul wrote as though he was responding to Jews who objected to what he was writing. Jews in their self-importance considered themselves superior to Gentiles in that they, the Jews, had been given the Mosaic Law and Covenant, and circumcision as a continuance of the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 17:11).

These privileges, they claimed, were in themselves evidence that God had chosen them to be His special people. The Jews considered themselves to be God's elect, and therefore protected from God's judgment because of their special blessings.

In verses 17 to 24 Paul wrote about the Law, and in verses 25 to 29 he wrote about circumcision, making clear that neither of these privileges guaranteed immunity to the Jews from divine judgment. His words constituted a serious rebuke of Jewish pride and presumption.

The Law And Covenant

Romans 2: 17 to 24

- 17. *Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God,***
- 18. *And know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law,***
- 19. *And are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,***

20. ***An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.***
21. ***You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?***
22. ***You who say, 'Do not commit adultery,' do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?***
23. ***You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?***
24. ***For 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you', as it is written.***

In these verses Paul used eight verbs in his comments on Jewish pride and self-importance.

In the first place Paul said, *"Indeed you are called a Jew"* or *"You call yourself a Jew"* (NIV), implying Jewish pride in their distinctive name.

Secondly he wrote *"you rely on the law"* which had been given to the Jews at Sinai, indicating that they trusted in their possession of it as a protection from disaster.

Thirdly, the Jews boasted about their relationship to God, as the NIV renders this passage, the thought being that the Jews boasted about their supposed monopoly of God.

Fourthly, said the Apostle, *"You know his will"*, literally 'the will' (Diaglott), to which all the other wills must be subservient.

In the fifth place you *"discern superior things"* (Diaglott and NIV), meaning, as the NEB translates the passage, *"You know right from wrong"* or as the Jerusalem Bible states, *"You can tell what is right"*.

Sixth, the reason for their moral discernment was that they were *"instructed out of the law"* (verse 18).

As a consequence of their instruction and discernment, continued the Apostle (his seventh verb), they were *"confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness"* (verse 19). Those in darkness would have been the Gentiles, and the Jews were told to be a light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6).

In the eighth place, the Jews, said the Apostle, were also “*an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes*”, meaning proselytes or converts, because they, the Jews, had “*the form of knowledge and truth in the law*” (verse 20).

In these eight statements, Paul said that the Jews had been instructed in the Law, and, having been instructed, there was an obligation on their part to teach and instruct others in the way of God's Law.

But having said all that, Paul turned the criticism onto the Jews. They did not live up to the obligations of their knowledge, and did not practise what they preached. Paul posed five rhetorical questions, all of which drew attention to the inadequacy and inconsistency of the behaviour of the Jews. The first was a general question, “*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?*” (verse 21). This was followed by three questions about particular wrongdoing. “*You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?*” (verse 21). “*You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*” (verse 22).

The last question might refer to the misappropriation of funds intended for the Jewish temple, since Josephus in his historical writings recorded such a scandal, but it is more likely that Paul had pagan temples in mind. The Jews did rob pagan temples, according to H.C.G. Moule in his work ‘The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans’ (1884). He wrote that ‘scruple broke down before thievish avarice’ on page 75 of his commentary. So what Paul did was to accuse the Jews in his rhetorical instances of theft, adultery and sacrilege. In support of Paul's accusations, C.H. Dodd, in his, commentary, ‘The Epistle of Paul to the Romans’ (1947) page 39, quoted Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, a contemporary of Paul, who made the following comments at that time of ‘the increase of murder, adultery, sexual vice, commercial and judicial corruption, bitter sectarian strife, and other evils’.

Paul's fifth rhetorical question was again a more general one. “*You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonour God through breaking the law?*” (verse 23). For “*The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you*” as *it is written*”. This quotation seems to be a combination of Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22. In both instances, God's name

had been mocked because His people had been defeated and enslaved. Paul was saying that just as military defeat of the Jews had the effect of bringing discredit on the name of the LORD God, so moral disobedience and misconduct had the same effect.

The argument of verses 17 to 24 of chapter 2 is the same in principle as the argument of verses 1 to 3 of the same chapter. The argument is not outdated and applicable only to former times. It is just as applicable to us now in the twenty-first century. If we presume to judge others, we must be able to judge ourselves (verses 1 to 3). If we seek to teach others, we must be able to teach ourselves (verses 21 to 24), and be ready to listen and learn and be *“easy to be intreated”*, as James told us in James 3:17. If we set ourselves up as teachers or judges of others, or both, we can have no excuse if we do not teach and judge ourselves. If we were to teach righteous behaviour and conduct ourselves unrighteously, we would invite God’s judgment and condemnation of our hypocrisy.

Circumcision

Romans 2: 25 to 29

25. ***For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.***
26. ***Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?***
27. ***And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfils the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?***
28. ***For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;***
29. ***But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.***

The Jews’ possession and knowledge of the Law did not exempt them from the judgment of God. Neither did circumcision. Certainly circumcision was a God-given sign and

seal of His covenant with them (Genesis 17:9; Leviticus 12:3). But circumcision was not a cover for disobedience, nor did it give the Jews immunity from God's judgment. It was not a substitute for obedience, but rather the sign of commitment to obedience.

Yet the Jews were confident that circumcision made them acceptable to God and immune from His wrath. Rabbinic epigrams expressed this, as, for example, 'Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna', and 'Circumcision will deliver Israel from Gehenna' (quoted by Charles Cranford in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [1975], Volume 1, page 172).

What did Paul say about the Jews' false confidence in their self-importance? He began by saying, "*For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law*" (verse 25). He did not deny the God-given origin of circumcision, but proceeded to tell the Jews that he who is circumcised "*is required to obey the whole law*" (Galatians 5:3). Circumcision was the sign of being bound by the Law Covenant, and such bondage demanded obedience.

Paul then made two complementary statements. First he said, "*If you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision*" (verse 25). Next he said, "*..if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?*" (verse 26). So what Paul said was this: circumcision without obedience is regarded by God as the same as uncircumcision, while uncircumcision with obedience is the same as circumcision.

This situation would have been, and still is, deeply shocking to Jewish people. They considered themselves as sitting in judgment on uncircumcised pagan people, whereas the judgment was reversed. Paul said in unmistakable terms, that the one who was not circumcised but yet obeyed the Law, would, by example, condemn the Jew, even though the Jew had been given the Law and circumcision, because the Jew disobeyed the Law (verse 27). The ultimate sign of membership of God's covenant was neither possession of the Law nor circumcision, but the obedience which both the Law and circumcision demanded. Jewish disobedience exposed them to the judgment of God in the same way that the Gentiles, who were without the Law and without circumcision, were under God's judgment.

The extraordinary reversal of Jewish perception which Paul described in verse 27, by which the Gentile condemned the Jew instead of the Jew condemning the Gentile, was brought about by Paul's redefinition of Jewish identity.

The Jews considered themselves superior to Gentiles in that they possessed God's Law and were covenanted to God under that Law, and were in a position to teach and guide others and lead them to truth and righteousness (2: 17 to 20).

But Paul proceeded to redefine Jewish identity by stating what a Jew is not (verse 28), then what a true Jew is (verse 29). A Jew is not one outwardly, that is, visibly and to all appearances, and true circumcision is not physical and in the flesh (verse 28); but a true Jew is one inwardly, that is, in mind and character, and true circumcision is, symbolically, that of the heart, mind and spirit (verse 29).

Paul would have had in his thoughts this concept from the Old Testament. God complained of His people's "*uncircumcised hearts*", and appealed to them to circumcise their hearts, promising that He would do it to them Himself so that they might love Him with all their being (Leviticus 26:41; Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6). God even promised to give His people a "*new heart*" (Ezekiel 44:9; 26:36; Jeremiah 9:25; 4:4).

But Paul was looking for something more than is mentioned in the Old Testament. What Paul was looking for and advocating was a circumcision of the heart that would supersede and replace the physical rite. It would be by the Spirit and not by the written Law (verse 29). It would be an inward working by the Holy Spirit, which the Law, as an outward written code, could not bring about.

Paul thus succinctly summed up the difference between the Law Covenant, an external written law, and the New Covenant, the agreement by which the gift of the Holy Spirit resides in the heart and mind of the individual believer.

The great Apostle had more to say on this subject in chapters 7 and 8 of his letter to the Roman believers. He added in verse 29 that the believer's praise would not be "*from men but from God*". Scholars have suggested that this may have been a play

on Hebrew words, because Jews were so named because of their ancestor Judah, and Paul's name in Hebrew was associated with, and may have been derived from, the Hebrew word for 'praise'.

Paul thus made four points in his redefinition of what it means to be a true Jew:

1. Being a true Jew is not something outward and visible, but something inward and invisible;
2. True circumcision is that of the heart, not that of the flesh;
3. The true Jew is under the continuing influence of the Spirit, not the Law;
4. The true Jew gains the approval of God rather than the approval of people.

Most people are content with outward appearances, things that are visible, material and superficial, but what matters to God is a deep, inward and invisible working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart and mind.

What Paul described and declared about being a true Jew and circumcision could also apply to the Christian and baptism. The true Christian, like the true Jew, is one inwardly; and the true baptism, like the true circumcision, is that of the heart and by the Spirit.

The inward and spiritual do not do away with the outward and physical, but rather the visible rite of baptism is a witness of the invisible reality which is the acceptance of cleansing from condemnation and the gift of guidance and comfort of the Spirit. Baptism in water is a witness and a sign of a spiritual renewal of heart and mind.

Some Christian people exalt the ceremony as all-important, making it a necessary condition of acceptance and membership of a church or organization. It is a serious mistake to exalt the visible ceremony at the expense of the inward experience, the latter being signified and revealed by the ceremony.

Some Jewish Objections

Romans 3: 1 to 8

1. *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?*
2. *Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.*
3. *For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?*
4. *Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That you may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when you are judged.'*
5. *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.)*
6. *Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?*
7. *For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner?*
8. *And why not say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'? - as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just.*

Some of Paul's Jewish readers and opponents would have responded to his writing and teaching with a mixture of disbelief and indignation, and probably anger. They would have regarded Paul's inspired comments as an undermining of their Jewish traditions, practices and foundations, and of their very Law and Covenant relationship with God. This is shown by their enmity towards him (Romans 9:23; 20:3)

In this section, Paul's comments are somewhat difficult to grasp because he stated his position in only brief outline. A more detailed explanation is given in chapters 9 to 11. In chapter 2 verses 25 to 29 we have seen that Paul taught that there was no fundamental difference between Jews and Gentiles, and that the Law and circumcision did not guarantee Jewish immunity from God's judgment, nor did Jewish identity guarantee them to be God's chosen people.

In verses 1 to 8 of chapter 3, Paul stated and responded to four main objections.

Objection 1: That Paul's teaching undermined God's covenant (verses 1 and 2).

Paul and his critics were in agreement with the teachings that God chose Israel out of all nations, (Amos 3:2) made a covenant with them (Exodus 19:8), gave them a code of law, and gave them circumcision as a sign and seal of His covenants with them.

But Paul redefined the meanings of 'Jew' and 'circumcision'. Therefore he asked "*What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?*" (3:1). Paul did not go back on what he wrote about the true Jew and the true circumcision. The fact that the Law Covenant and circumcision have no value in protection from God's judgment, does not mean that they have no value. Indeed, as Paul, argued, they have much value "*in every way*", but a different kind of value, that of responsibility rather than security. To the Jews were committed the oracles, the very words of God (verse 2). The 'oracles' are more than God's commandments and promises, but included all the Old Testament Scriptures which were committed to Israel's care. This was a most highly privileged responsibility which had been given to no other nation (Psalm 147:19; Deuteronomy 4:8).

Objection 2: That Paul's teaching made "*the faithfulness of God without effect*" (verse 3).

If many Jews did not have faith, would their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? It was contended that Paul's teaching seemed to imply this. If God's people are unfaithful, does that mean that God is also unfaithful?

Paul's response was stronger than the expressions "*Not at all*". (NIV), "*By no means*" (RSV), "*Certainly not*" (REB), or even "*God forbid!*" (KJV). Modern translators have suggested that "*Not on your life*" or "*Not in a thousand years*" are nearer the mark. God will never break His covenant, as Paul explained in chapters 9 to 11. His truth and faithfulness are absolutely fixed and will never waver. "*Let God be true but every man a liar*" (verse 4).

The first part of this statement is fundamentally and eternally true. The second part is a quotation from Psalm 116:11. Human unfaithfulness cannot undermine God's faithfulness, so,

if every single human being were a liar, God would still be true, because He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18); and with Him is *“no variableness neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). David even acknowledged that he had disobeyed and done evil in God's sight in order that God's word might be proved right and His verdict justified; *“That you may be justified in your words, and may overcome when you are judged”* (verse 4; quoted from Psalm 51:4).

Objection 3: That Paul's teaching called God's justice into question (verses 5 and 6).

The Jewish objector seems to be making the point that our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly. The more unrighteous we are, the more righteous the judge appears. Our unrighteousness benefits God because it displays His character all the more brightly. If this is the case, shall we conclude (as the objector demanded) that God is unjust in bringing His wrath on us (verse 5)?

Paul declared that God's wrath was on the immoral Gentiles (1:18), and would fall on the critical moralisers (2:5), but the objector asked would He bring wrath on His own people, the Jews? Would it be fair of Him to punish His people for something which was to His advantage?

It seems that Paul must have felt some misgivings about the false reasoning of the objector because he wrote, *“I speak as a man”* (verse 5), meaning ‘I am using a human argument’. Paul responded with another categorical denial, *“Certainly not!”*, then posed a counter-question. If God were unjust how could He judge the world? (verse 6), (Genesis 18:25). To reflect badly or call in question God's justice is to undermine His competence to judge, and reveals the absurdity of the objection.

Objection 4: That Paul's teaching falsely promoted God's glory (verses 7 and 8).

Paul used the first person singular in verse 7; *“If the truth of God has increased through my lie to his glory”*, meaning as in verse 5, if our unrighteousness displays God's righteousness more clearly, then God should be pleased because I am and we are doing Him a service. If this were the case, then Paul asked *“Why am I also still judged as a sinner?”* (verse 7).

Paul also asked “*And why not say, ‘Let us do evil that good may come?’ as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say*”. This is the false doctrine of antinomianism – the doctrine that claims that Christians are freed from the moral law by the dispensation of grace set forth in the Gospel. This is a rationalisation of lawlessness; specifically, if evil behaviour brings about the promotion of God’s glory, then let us increase evil so that goodness may increase.

It is noteworthy that Paul did not respond to this fourth objection. The objection does not merit a serious refutation, because it is manifestly perverse. The Old and New Testament Scriptures constantly and repeatedly condemn wrongdoing, and the Christian believer is frequently exhorted to put off or renounce every form of evil. No allegedly good results can justify toleration or encouragement of evil, as evil never promotes the glory of God. As Paul wrote in verse 8 “*Their condemnation is just*”.

In this passage (3: 1 to 8) Paul not only proclaimed and expounded the Gospel, but also argued for its truth and reasonableness, and defended it against misunderstanding and misrepresentation. He reaffirmed God’s faithfulness to His promises, His justice as judge, and His glory which is promoted only by good, and never by evil.

We in our time should also be prepared to proclaim and defend the Gospel. As Christians we should take into account people’s objections to the Gospel, listen respectfully to their problems, respond as best we can in all kindness and seriousness, and proclaim the Gospel so as to affirm God’s goodness and promote His glory. The Lord Jesus did so, as did His true Apostles and disciples, so we in doing this are following the best possible examples.

THE WRATH OF GOD (continued)

4. THE UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE HUMAN RACE

Romans 3: 9 to 20

The Apostle was reaching the end of his lengthy and weighty account of the unrighteousness of the Gentile world, the hypocrisy of moralisers and the proud self-righteousness of the Jewish people, who boasted that they had exclusive rights to God's Law and His Covenant with them but failed to obey and keep both.

Romans 3: 9 to 20

9. ***What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.***
10. ***As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one;***
11. ***There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.***
12. ***They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.***
13. ***Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips;***
14. ***Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.***
15. ***Their feet are swift to shed blood;***
16. ***Destruction and misery are in their ways;***
17. ***And the way of peace they have not known.***
18. ***There is no fear of God before their eyes.'***
19. ***Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.***
20. ***Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.***

Then Paul asked, “*What shall we conclude then?*” (3:9; NIV), as if to say, ‘How shall I sum up all that I have written?’ or ‘What more can I say to rest my case?’

Among scholars there is some uncertainty about the meaning of the second verb in verse 9.

The NIV renders the question, “*Are we any better?*” meaning, ‘What advantage is there in being a Jew?’ He asked that question in 3:1, and replied “*Much in every way!*” (3:2). Then in verse 9 he asked, “*Are we (Jews) any better off?*” (REB), to which he replied “*Not at all!*” At first sight it seems that Paul was giving different answers, saying firstly that there was great advantage in being a Jew, then secondly that there was none.

The differing answers that Paul gave can be understood by clarifying the benefit or advantage that Paul had in mind concerning each of the two questions.

In responding to the first question, Paul had in mind the privilege and responsibility that God had entrusted to them. They were His chosen people under His Law and Covenant exclusively (Amos 3:2).

In his response to the second question Paul meant that the Jews were no better off than unbelieving Gentiles, because they (the Jews) could not keep God’s Law nor His Covenant with them, and were disobedient just as the Gentiles were. Paul wrote that “*Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin*” (3:9).

Paul then supported from Old Testament Scriptures the universal bondage of sin and its consequence death. He quoted seven passages from the Old Testament, the first from Ecclesiastes 7:20; the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth from the Psalms (14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; 140:3 and 10:7), and the seventh from Isaiah 59:7. All of the above passages testify in different ways to human unrighteousness.

Three features of these biblical passages are clear; and remember that sin is defined as transgression of the law, that is, disobedience.

In summary these are:

1. the ungodliness of sin;
2. the pervasiveness of sin; and
3. the universality of sin.

1. The Ungodliness Of Sin

The first passage quoted by Paul declares that *“there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God”*. Paul was saying that Scripture describes sin as ungodliness. The LORD God has declared that people do not acknowledge Him or try to understand His ways. He surveys human nature to see if there are any who might turn to Him and worship Him (Psalm 14:2), and come to love Him as their heavenly Father, but finds that there is no-one who does so.

Sin is therefore disobedience of God's righteous requirements, and the promotion of self and selfish desires with the aim of self-gratification, rather than the placing of the worship of and obedience to God as the first and foremost aim in life.

2. The Pervasiveness Of Sin

Sin affects every part of the human constitution, every faculty and function, including the mind, emotions, sexuality, conscience and will. In verses 13 to 17 of Romans 3 Paul deliberately chose passages which refer to different parts and features of the human body. *“Their throats are open graves”* the inspired Apostle quoted, meaning people are generally guilty of corruption and dereliction; *“Their tongues practise deceit”* instead of declaring truth; *“The poison of vipers is on their lips”*, meaning that people say things that are deeply hurtful and even poisonous; *“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness”* indicating that people curse and swear and are constantly bitter; *“Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways”*, signifying people's willingness to resort to violence, having ruin and misery as consequences of their ungodly actions. *“The way of peace they do not know, there is no fear of God before their eyes”*. This final quotation declares that people generally do not walk in the paths of peace, their eyes are turned away from God and they do not revere Him as they should.

The human body with all its features was created and given to us to use in serving others and glorifying God. Instead, the minds and activities of many human beings are used to harm others and reject God. In writing this, the inspired Apostle was describing the human race in general. He was not saying that everyone without exception was completely sinful and godless. Such a notion is clearly untrue, and our own observation of people and life confirms that not all people are rebellious and contentious, not all are drunkards, adulterers, murderers, and deliberate law-breakers.

Paul himself said that some people “*do by nature things required by the Law*” (Romans 2: 14, 26 and 27), indicating that there are some people who do their best to live truthfully and honourably. Dr. J. I. Packer expressed this observation aptly in ‘Concise Theology’ (1993, page 83) by saying ‘no one is as bad as he or she might be, no action of ours is as good as it should be’.

3. The Universality Of Sin

The Old Testament passages quoted by Paul teach the universality of sin in both a negative and a positive sense. In the negative sense “*there is no one righteous, not even one*” (verse 10); “*there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God*” (verse 11); and “*there is no one who does good, not even one*” (verse 12). In the positive sense “*all have turned away, they had together become worthless*” (verse 12).

We should note how Paul emphasised the points of his argument by repetition. Twice he wrote that all have gone their own way, four times that no one is righteous, and twice that not even one is an exception. To be righteous is to live in complete obedience to God’s requirements in every respect and in every detail, which no one can do or has ever been able to do, other than the Lord Jesus.

Verse 19 has puzzled many commentators. The purpose of the Apostle’s words is clear, namely “*that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God*”. But what did the Apostle mean? He was probably thinking of the Jews who would read the quotations he drew from the Old Testament, and who would apply them to the wicked and lawless Gentiles but not to themselves. And of course God’s judgment would apply to them.

But Paul reminded the Jews of what they already knew *“that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law”* (3:19), namely the Jews themselves, so that they were included in God’s judgment as well. In this way every mouth would be silenced and every excuse would be unacceptable, and the whole world would be guilty and so deserve God’s judgment. These words suggest a defendant in a court of law who is unable to speak in his (or her) own defence because of the weight of the evidence brought against him (or her). There is nothing more to be said or brought forward. The pronouncement and execution of the sentence would follow immediately.

This is the point to which the Apostle had been steadily and logically moving. The idolatrous and immoral Gentiles were *“without excuse”* (1:20) and the critical moralisers, both Jews and Gentiles, also *“have no excuse”* (2:1). The special privileges and status of the Jews did not exempt them from God’s judgment. All the peoples of the world without exception (3:19) are inexcusable before God. The reason, the Apostle revealed, is plain, because all have known something of God and morality, either through Scripture or nature, but all have turned aside in order to go their own ways. The evidence shows that all are guilty and condemned by God’s justice and impartiality.

“Therefore” Paul concluded, *“by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in his sight”* (3:20). The *“deeds”* or *“works of the Law”* (RSV) have traditionally been taken to mean good deeds of right conduct and charity done in obedience to the Law, and considered by Jews as meritorious enough to make them acceptable to God.

Verse 20 is the climax of Paul’s argument against any and every attempt at salvation by works or merit. In this verse Paul wrote *“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”*. Paul declared that the Law brings the knowledge of sin, but not the forgiveness of sin. Martin Luther wrote, in his Commentary on Galatians (page 316) written in 1531, ‘The principal point ... of the Law ... is to make men better not worse, that is to say, it sheweth unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so come to that blessed Seed (Christ)’.

How should we, in the twenty-first century respond to the chosen Apostle's relentless exposure of disobedience and guilt? We should not try to evade the fundamental issue by talking about the need for self-esteem, or by blaming our conduct on our genes, our upbringing, our education or society in general. There can be negative influences on our behaviour, and however much we may be affected by them, we are not helpless victims; we are and must be responsible for our own conduct.

We should respond to Paul's indictment in two ways. Firstly, we should accept Paul's diagnosis of our fallen condition as true, and consequently that we have been able to avoid the just judgment of God by the only way, that is, by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Who died for our sins. In and of ourselves we have no merit to plead and no excuse to make, and stand condemned before God. In this state and frame of mind we are ready to listen to the "*But now ...*" of verse 21, as the great Apostle began to explain how God has intervened through Christ and His sacrifice for our salvation.

In the second place, the Apostle's words should challenge us to share our faith in Jesus Christ with others. We have the good news of the Gospel to proclaim, and we should not keep the message of salvation to ourselves. Without Christ all people are condemned; all people, no matter how good and helpful they may be. People's good works, their scientific knowledge, their religion, their altruism cannot save them from God's condemnation. Only Christ can. We should make it our business, whenever and wherever we can, to tell others the good news of salvation and the good news of the new heavens and earth to come, where righteousness will prevail (2 Peter 3:13).

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED

Romans 3:21 to 4:25

Paul declared in Romans 1:18 to 3:20 that all members of the human race, without exception, are guilty of disobedience, and inexcusable before God. From this terrible predicament there was no hope of reprieve and no prospect of rescue by any human means.

Then Paul wrote "*But now....*" meaning that God has intervened to rescue the whole human race from the condemnation which involved everyone without exception, and from which no-one could escape, no matter how hard they might strive. Paul wrote, "*But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed*".

This was a new revelation dependent on Christ and His sacrifice, although "*the law and the prophets*" had testified to it in their prophecies and at times, veiled fore-shadowings.

What Paul did was to contrast the righteousness of God with human unrighteousness; to highlight the grace of God to believing sinners against His wrath on evil-doers; and to establish His justification for His judgment and condemnation.

In the section of his letter from 3:21 to 4:25, the Apostle argued through three stages:

1. The manifestation of God's righteousness through Christ's sacrifice, by which the foundation of justification was laid (3: 21 to 26);
2. He defended the gospel of justification against Jewish critics (3: 27 to 31);
3. He illustrated the gospel of justification by reference to Abraham, who was justified by faith and so became the spiritual father of all who believe, and to David (4: 1 to 25).

Stage 1

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED THROUGH CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Romans 3: 21 to 26

21. *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,*
22. *Even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;*
23. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*
24. *Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*
25. *Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,*
26. *To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

The six verses in this passage are very compact. Dr. Leon Morris in his book, 'The Epistle to the Romans' (1988, page 173), went so far as to say that this passage may be 'possibly the most important single paragraph ever written'.

"The righteousness of God" is brought forward and emphasised in this passage, and was foreshadowed by the Apostle in 1:17. The NIV in both passages translates the phrase as *"a righteousness from God"* which is better, because God's saving grace does not encompass the full range of His righteousness. In Christ's sacrifice God has provided the means by which wrongdoers can be given a righteous status in His sight.

The passages in chapters one and three speak of God's righteousness as being *"revealed"* or *"made known"*, and both declare that it is made known both *"in the gospel"* (1: 16 and 17) and *"apart from the law"* (3:21). But both passages say that this fundamental act of grace is a fulfilment of Old Testament Scripture, indicating that it was not some divine after-thought.

Both passages also say that righteousness by faith is available to us and to everyone.

Scholars have pointed out that the tenses of the main verbs in 1:17 and 3:21 reveal a significant difference. In 3:21 the main verb is in the perfect tense - *"has been made known"* - indicating that the death of Christ and its benefits to believers, are both facts which have been accomplished; while in 1:17 the main verb is in the present tense *"is being revealed"* indicating that God's gift of righteousness by faith is made known by the teaching of the gospel message whenever and wherever it is preached.

In 3:22 Paul repeated the expression *"righteousness from God"* and added two more truths about it. The first is that it comes *"through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe"*. It is offered to all because it is needed by all. *"There is no difference"* between Jew and Gentile, as Paul declared throughout 1:18 to 3:20, or between any human groups *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*. The glory of God could mean His approval or praise, but more likely His image or glory in which all were made (Genesis 1:26,27 and 1 Corinthians 11:7) and which all have failed to attain. There are, of course, degrees of disobedience; some people live exemplary lives by human standards; but no-one even approaches God's standard.

The second truth in verses 21 to 26 is that for the first time *"a righteousness from God"* is identified with justification, a state of *"being justified freely by his grace"* (verse 24). This righteousness from God is a combination of His righteous character and His gift of a righteous standing before Him. It is God's righteous way of declaring believing people to be righteous in spite of the fact that they, and everyone else, are, in fact, unrighteous.

Justification is really a legal term belonging to the rule of law. Its opposite is condemnation. Both are findings and pronouncements of a judge. In the case of the LORD God, the righteous judge, there is His declaration that there is now a way for everyone to gain acceptance by Him,; that is by faith; and in the age to come the same way will be available for everyone to turn from disobedience and condemnation to acceptance and life. That way is, of course, belief in the saving grace that comes from faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Some scholars maintain that justification is the same as pardon, and is simply forgiveness freely granted. But surely this is not the case. Pardon is in a sense negative, the remission of a penalty or debt; but justification is positive, the granting of a righteous status and a continuing acceptance and position of favour with God. Charles H. Hodge in his 'Commentary on Romans' (1972, page 82) made the following clarifying comments: 'To condemn is not merely to punish, but to declare the accused guilty or worthy of punishment; and justification is not merely to remit that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted. Pardon and justification therefore are essentially distinct. The one is the remission of punishment, the other is a declaration that no ground for the infliction of punishment exists.'

So justification is not pardon, but neither is it sanctification. To justify is to declare or pronounce righteous, not to make righteous. This was the point at issue in the sixteenth century debate about justification. The Roman Catholic view, as put forward at the Council of Trent (1545-64), was that justification takes place at baptism, and that the baptised person is not only cleansed from sin but at the same time is given a new supernatural righteousness.

The motive that led to this view was the fear that a mere declaration of righteousness would leave the person involved to be still unrighteous, and might even encourage the continuance of disobedient conduct. This view was precisely that which was directed at Paul, and which will be encountered when we consider chapter six, particularly verses one and fifteen.

This criticism led Paul to comment most vigorously to the effect that committed and baptised Christians have chosen to obey God, and have committed themselves to a new way of living to Christian principles. They cannot accept to live any longer as disobedient people. This means that once a person believes, justification and regeneration occur at the same time but are not identical occurrences. Believers are justified, reconciled to and declared right with God, and also regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that is, they have put into practice a new attitude of heart and mind, and are beginning a new life of progression in holiness.

Calvin, in his work on Romans (1540, page 8) wrote, 'no one can put on the righteousness of Christ without regeneration'. He also wrote on page 121 'the Apostle maintains that those who imagine that Christ bestows free justification upon us without imparting newness of life shamefully rend Christ asunder'.

In summary then, justification is God's gift of imputed or reckoned righteousness, while sanctification is the change made by the believer, becoming separated from former spiritual ignorance and disobedient ways to a new way of life working towards holiness, a continuous process throughout life which begins with belief and justification.

In verses 24 to 26 of chapter 3 Paul explained three truths about justification:

- (a) its source and origin;
- (b) its ground or basis; and
- (c) how it is obtained.

(a) The Source of Justification

Paul wrote in 3:24 that believers are "*justified freely by his grace*". It is fundamental to the gospel of salvation that the means of salvation, from start to finish, belong to God the Father and no-one else. The Lord Jesus made the gift of grace possible by His atoning sacrifice, but He did so at the Father's initiative and request. He came to earth to do the Father's will, as Psalm 40:6-8 and Hebrews 10:7 tell us. So the first move was from God the Father, and believers' justification, His free and undeserved favour, is given as a gracious gift,

(b) The Basis of Justification

God justifies sinners by His grace and mercy. But on what basis or ground does He do so? How can it be possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without compromising His own righteousness or condoning sinners' unrighteousness? God's answer is the death of His Son. The only reason that God "*justifies the ungodly*" (Romans 4:5) is that "*Christ died for the ungodly*" (Romans 5:6). Because Christ's blood was shed (3:25) in a sacrificial death for sinners, God is able to remain just and to justify the ungodly.

What God did through the death and resurrection of His righteous Son Paul explained in three ways. Firstly, God justifies sinners by *"the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (3:24). Secondly, God set Him forth *"to be a propitiation by his blood through faith"* (3:25). Thirdly, He did this *"to demonstrate his righteousness"* (3:25), *"that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"* (3:26).

The key words in this context are redemption, atonement and demonstration. All three words refer to what happened once for all through Christ's sacrifice, His blood being a clear reference to His sacrificial death. So, associated with the sacrifice is the redemption of sinners, the propitiation of God's wrath, and a demonstration of His justice.

(i) Redemption. The word translated *"redemption"* is the Greek word 'apolytrosis', which is really a commercial term borrowed from the market-place, meaning to buy back. In the Old Testament it was used of slaves who were purchased in order to be set free or redeemed (Leviticus 25:47). The word was also used of the people of Israel who were redeemed from Egypt (Exodus 15:13), then subsequently from Babylon (Isaiah 43:1), and restored to their own land.

In the New Testament Christians were held captive by disobedience and utterly unable to rescue or save themselves, but have been 'redeemed', that is bought back, by Jesus Christ Who died and shed His blood as the redemptive price for all. And so we, and all the human race, belong to Him (Mark 10:45; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; 7:23).

(ii) Propitiation. The word rendered *"propitiation"* is the Greek word "hilasterion". Some Christians are unhappy with propitiation because it has the sense of appeasement or placation of an angry God, which seems to them inappropriate, mainly because of heathen practices of the sacrifice of animals and even humans to appease the anger of the heathen gods.

But in the context of Romans 3 the word 'propitiation' is a satisfactory rendering. Paul described God's solution to the human predicament, which is not simply disobedience, but God's wrath upon it (1:18; 2:5; 3:5). Where God's wrath is incurred, there is the need to remove the cause of His wrath. Christians should not have doubts about using the word 'propitiation' in relation to Christ's sacrifice, nor should they

avoid using the word 'wrath' in relation to God. The Christian doctrine of propitiation is totally different from pagan superstitions and practices. The need, the author and the nature of Christian propitiation are all different from pagan concepts.

The need for Christian propitiation occurs because God's holy wrath is directed towards, and rests upon, evil-doing. Pagan gods are thought to be bad-tempered, subject to moods and fits, and capricious, and must be appeased by sacrifices whether animal, vegetable, human, or all of them. But there is nothing unpredictable or uncontrolled about God's wrath. It is aroused by transgression and nothing else.

Who needs to do the propitiating? The pagan answer is that we do; we have offended the gods, so we must placate them. The Christian answer, however, is that we cannot placate the righteous anger of God. We Christians are sinners and cannot be otherwise. But God in His love and mercy has done for us that which we could never do by ourselves. God sent His Son to be a sacrifice of atonement, as John wrote in 1 John 4:10, *"God ... loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice"*. The love, the purpose and the action were all God's.

How has the propitiation been accomplished? What is the propitiatory sacrifice? The pagan answer is that we have to bribe the gods with sweets, vegetables, animals and even human sacrifices. The Old Testament sacrificial system was entirely different, because it was recognised that God Himself gave the sacrifices to His people to make atonement (Leviticus 17:11). And in the Christian propitiation, God gave His only Son to die for our transgressions (Romans 5:8; 8:32). God's great love propitiated His own holy wrath by the gift of His only Son, Who was *"made sin"* for us and the whole human race (2 Corinthians 5:21).

(iii) Demonstration. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a demonstration, a public revelation as well as an achievement. It accomplished the propitiation of God and the redemption of sinners, and it also vindicated His justice. Paul made a deliberate contrast between *"the sins that were previously committed"* which *"in his forbearance God had passed over"* (3:25), and the present time in which God acted to demonstrate His righteousness (3:26).

This means that God left unpunished the sins of former generations in His forbearance, because He intended in due time to accept propitiation for those sins in the death of His Son. This was the only way that God could be just and at the same time be *“the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (3:26). Both justice and justification would be impossible without Christ’s sacrifice. What God did by means of that sacrifice was to redeem His people, propitiate His wrath, and demonstrate His justice. Surely we must all marvel at the wisdom, holiness, love and mercy of God Who so intervened to save us all.

(c) How justification is obtained

The means of our justification is faith. Three times in 3: 21 to 26 Paul stressed the necessity of faith; *“through faith in Jesus Christ”* (3:22), through faith in *“his blood”* (3:25), and God justifies *“the one who has faith in Jesus”*. (3:26). Justification is by faith alone, one of the great watchwords of the Reformation. It is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and through faith alone. The word ‘alone’ does not occur in these Scriptural contexts, but its inclusion helps to clarify and emphasise the means of justification.

Justification by faith is the heart of the gospel and unique to Christianity. No other system, ideology or religion proclaims a free forgiveness and a new standard of living for those who have done nothing to deserve such, but much to deserve judgment instead. All systems of religion other than Christianity teach some form of self-salvation through good works, moral rectitude or charitable gifts.

Christianity is classified as a religion, but it is really a gospel, good news that God’s grace has replaced His wrath. God’s Son died for our transgressions and took away our guilt and condemnation, and God’s mercy is available to us and to everyone who believes in Him through Jesus Christ. All that is left for us to do is to believe and show our acceptance of what God’s grace offers to us by committing ourselves to His way of living.

The contrast between grace and law, mercy and merit, faith and works, God’s salvation and self-salvation, is absolute, and no compromising mixtures are possible. We are reminded of the words of Joshua, *“choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”* (Joshua 24:15).

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued)

Stage 2:

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DEFENDED AGAINST CRITICISM

Romans 3: 27 to 31

- 27. *Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.***
- 28. *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.***
- 29. *Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,***
- 30. *Since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.***
- 31. *Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.***

In verses 1 to 8 of chapter 3 Paul stated that all human beings including the Jewish people are under the judgment of God. The Law and the Covenant that God made with the Jews did not shield them from God's judgment, because they could not keep either the Law or the Covenant, and thus came under God's divine justice, just as the Gentiles did.

The Gentiles were not God's chosen people, and were not under the Mosaic Covenant. They had been always under God's judgment since the first disobedience in Eden. The Jews thought that they were God's chosen people under His Law and Covenant, but they came under God's judgment because they, all of them without exception, were guilty of breaking His Law and Covenant.

Paul's teaching in 3: 1 to 8 caused the Jewish people in general to object to it with disbelief and indignation. In this section Paul dealt with four main objections to his teaching. The four objections were outlined and discussed in Paper No. 7.

Then, in verses 27 and 28 of chapter 3, Paul anticipated a further four questions that Jews might raise related to justification by faith and faith alone.

Question 1. Where is boasting then?

The verb translated “*boasting*” is the Greek verb ‘kauchaomai’, to boast. Evidently Paul was thinking of the Jews’ self-confident assumption of national, cultural and religious superiority. The Jews were immensely proud of their privileged status as the chosen people of God. They considered themselves to be under God’s protection and favour, which is why Paul depicted them as relying on their possession of the Law and boasting about their relationship to God as in 2: 17 and 23.

But these outward appearances were not the only objects of Jewish boasting. Jewish people were also proud of their personal righteousness. Paul himself remembered his Jewish inheritance saying that he was “*circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless*” (Philippians 3:5,6). “*But*” Paul continued, “*what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ*”. (Philippians 3:7). In these words Paul remembered that he once boasted of his presumed relationship to God under the Law and the Mosaic Covenant, and the personal righteousness he thought he possessed until his conversion, when he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ and began to boast only in Him (Philippians 3:3; Diaglott).

Boasting, however, was not limited to the Jews. The Gentiles were also “*violent, proud, boasters*” (Romans 1:30). The Gentiles were so described by Paul in his day, and they remain so in our day. Boasting, which is the result of assumed self-worth, is part of fallen human beings’ self-centredness and opposition to God.

But for those who have been justified by faith, boasting as self-centredness must be renounced completely, because the Christian’s acceptance by God and salvation are due to Christ and to Him alone. Paul wrote in 3:28, “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law*”. The ‘deeds’ or ‘works’ of the Law are probably all of them, both moral and ceremonial, but observance of them could not and

cannot gain the favour or forgiveness of God. As the Apostle also wrote to the Ephesians, *“not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:9).

Salvation will be gained only by faith in Jesus Christ, so the only boasting that may be permitted to a Christian is a boasting in the Lord Jesus, and never in self or anyone else. *“Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”* said the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 1:31 (Diaglott). He also said, *“But it is not for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Galatians 6:14; Diaglott). In any case, praising God and Christ rather than boasting should be the characteristic activity of believers.

Question 2. Is God the God of the Jews only?

Question 3. Is He not also the God of the Gentiles?

The Jews were extremely conscious of their covenant relationship with God, in which the Gentiles did not share. Later in his letter, the Apostle wrote that the Jews were *“my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises, of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came...”* (Romans 9: 3 to 5). But what the Jews ignored, or perhaps did not understand, was that their privileges were not intended to remain exclusive of the Gentiles, but to include them when, through Abraham’s seed, all peoples and nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).

The promised covenant of blessing through Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ. Christ is Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:16,29), and through Him the blessing of salvation extends to everyone who believes, without exception or distinction (Galatians 3:28). The gospel of justification by faith excludes all elitism and discrimination. God is the God of Jews and Gentiles, and He will justify the circumcised and the uncircumcised, Jews and Gentiles, only by faith (3: 29 and 30).

This fundamental truth applies to all distinctions, whether of race, nationality, class, gender or age. Such distinctions are still part of the present order of things, for men remain men and women remain women. Jews are still circumcised while Gentiles generally are uncircumcised, and human skin colours continue despite change. But, since Jesus died for all, these distinctions are rendered of no significance with God. They neither affect our relationship with God, nor should they hinder

our fellowship with one another. Because of Christ's sacrifice and because of our faith in Him, all believers are on the same level as brothers and sisters in Christ, and all belong to the same family of God.

Question 4. Do we then make void the law through faith?

The Law was the Jews' most treasured possession because it was given by God and no other nation had such an affirmation of divine favour. By 'the Law' Jews usually meant the Mosaic legislation embodied in the Pentateuch, often referred to as the 'Torah'. Sometimes, however, since the word 'Torah' was derived from the verb 'to instruct', the Jews extended its meaning to embrace all the Old Testament Scriptures, because the Jews saw these as the whole of Divine instruction.

It is understandable, but not excusable, that the Jews reacted with disbelief to Paul's unrelenting insistence that justification was by faith only, and that *"the works of the law"* could not possibly provide a satisfactory basis for acceptance by God. The Jews maintained that Paul was setting 'Law' and 'faith' in opposition to each other, and was exalting faith so as to make void the Law completely.

Paul denied this accusation, and affirmed the contrary. As he wrote, *"Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law"* (3:31). Paul did not say what he had in mind concerning 'the law', whether he meant the whole of the Old Testament or simply the Mosaic Law as embodied in the Pentateuch or Torah.

If the Apostle meant the whole of the Old Testament, then his gospel of justification by faith upholds rather than undermines 'the Law', by showing that the Old Testament taught this great truth of justification, as expressed in 3:21. If this was Paul's meaning, then 3:31 becomes a transition to chapter 4, in which the Apostle maintained that both Abraham and David were in fact justified by faith.

But if Paul had in mind 'the Law' in its more restricted sense of the Mosaic Law, then his assertion that faith established rather than nullified or 'made void' the Law, may be understood in two ways. Firstly, faith established the Law by placing it in its rightful place in God's plan of salvation. In God's plan, the function of the Law was, and is, to expose and condemn sin,

and keep sinners imprisoned in their guilt until Christ released them through faith. In this way, the Gospel and the Law mesh with each other, since faith in the Christian Gospel enables justification of those whom the Law condemned.

Secondly, the following understanding is perhaps the more likely one that Paul had in mind. Paul seemed to be responding to critics who held that, by declaring justification to be by faith and not by obedience, Paul was actively encouraging disobedience. The charge brought against him was that he was preaching antinomianism, that is, the doctrine that Christian believers are freed from moral obligations by the grace given freely to them by God.

Paul did not refute this charge in this part of his letter, but simply affirmed that *“faith establishes the law”* (3:31). But later in his letter, in chapters 6 to 8, Paul directed his attention to this charge, and refuted it decisively. What he had in mind, as he explained later in this epistle, was that justified believers who live by the Spirit would fulfil, by faith in Christ, the righteous requirements of the Law (8:4; 13: 8,10).

In summary, there are three direct implications of justification by faith and faith alone:

- (i) It humbles sinners and excludes boasting;
- (ii) It unites believers and excludes discrimination;.
- (iii) It establishes the Law and excludes antinomianism (freedom from moral obligations).

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued)

Stage 3

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS ILLUSTRATED BY REFERENCE TO ABRAHAM AND DAVID

Romans 4: 1 to 25

Paul had by this stage in his letter declared the gospel of God's righteousness as evidenced in justification by faith (3: 21 to 26), and defended it against critics, particularly Jewish critics (3: 27 to 31). In doing so, Paul had insisted that what he was proclaiming had already been foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

He therefore chose Abraham, Israel's most famous patriarch, and David, Israel's most famous king, in order to supply precedent and example to verify what he was proclaiming. In this connection Matthew introduced his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, declaring Him to be *"the son of David, the son of Abraham"*.

Some modern commentators consider Romans 4 to be irrelevant, with little interest to us, being remote and unenlightening. This attitude, however, ignores the fact that Romans 4 occupies a very important part of Paul's letter for two main reasons.

Firstly, Paul used what Scripture has to say about Abraham and David to emphasise the significance of the two words, *"justification"* and *"faith"*. *"Justification"* meant, and still means, the reckoning of righteousness to those who are unrighteous, both Jew and Gentile, and *"faith"* meant, and still means, being convinced of the existence of the God of creation and of His power of resurrection (Hebrews 11:1).

Secondly, Paul wanted Jewish Christians to understand that the fact of justification by faith was not something new, without precedent, but was proclaimed in the Old Testament, as Paul wrote in Galatians 3:8.

Paul also wanted Gentile Christians to appreciate that they had entered by faith in Jesus Christ into a rich spiritual inheritance with the Old Testament people of God. Abraham and David illustrate that justification by faith is God's one and only way of reconciliation and salvation for Jews as well as for Gentiles.

It is a mistake to think or believe that the faithful people of the Old Testament were saved by works, while the New Testament faithful are saved by faith. The only possible way to salvation now and in the age to come is by faith in God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

This means, of course, that millions who have not heard of Jesus Christ, and millions who lived and died before Jesus gave His life, will be raised from death in the age to come and will be given the opportunity to believe and, through faith, live for ever.

Paul chose Abraham as his main example for two reasons. The first was that he was the father (grandfather) of Israel (Jacob), *"the rock whence ye are hewn"* (Isaiah 51:1,2), and he was the recipient of God's promises.

The second reason was that Abraham was held in the highest regard by the Jewish Rabbis as righteous and the *"friend of God"* (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). The Rabbis mistakenly understood and believed that Abraham had been justified by works of righteousness.

The Rabbis quoted Scripture in which God promised to bless Abraham because he had obeyed Him (Genesis 22:15-18; 26:3-5), but they failed to acknowledge that these verses referred to Abraham's life of obedience after he was justified. They even quoted Genesis 15:6, *"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness"* -and quoted it in such a way as to represent Abraham's faith as meaning his fidelity or faithfulness, which was therefore a work of merit to him. They also wrote, in 1 Maccabees 2:52, *"Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?"*

In James' letter there is a suggestion of the Jewish belief that Abraham was justified by works. However, James was not saying that the Christian can be justified by works any more than Abraham was, but rather that the faith which justifies is

evidenced by good works to which that faith gives rise. The Christian should say “*I will show you my faith by my works*” (James 2:18), because without good works faith is ineffectual or seems to be dead (James 2:17). Behind James’ argument lies the Jewish tradition, which James rejects, that Abraham was justified by works.

When Paul wrote the section of his letter which constitutes chapter four, he took for granted that his readers, particularly his Jewish readers, would be familiar with the Scriptural record of Abraham’s life. There were four main episodes.

Firstly, God called Abraham to leave his home and people in Ur, and promised to lead him to another land, give him a large posterity, and through him to bless all peoples on earth (Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-3).

Secondly, God made His promises more specific, identified the land of promise as Canaan (Genesis 13:14,15), and declared that Abraham’s posterity, though he was still childless, would be as innumerable as the dust of the earth or the stars in the sky (Genesis 13:16; 15:5,6). It was by believing this latter promise that Abraham was justified.

Thirdly, when Abraham was ninety-nine and Sarah ninety years old (Genesis 17:1-17), God confirmed His promise of a son, changed the faithful man’s name from Abram to Abraham to signify that he would be “*the father of many nations*” (Genesis 17:5), and required circumcision as the sign of His covenant with him and his descendants (Genesis 17:9-13).

Fourthly, God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac, who was the subject of God’s promise, and when Abraham was willing to obey, God re-affirmed His covenant (Genesis 22:1-18).

These four episodes correspond to the four occasions in Hebrews 11, which tell us that Abraham acted “*by faith*” (verses 8, 9, 11, 17 and 18). He obeyed God because He trusted God completely and believed utterly that God could and would keep all His promises.

Paul made four assertions about Abraham's justification, the first three of which developed the three questions and answers of his exposition of verses 27 to 31 of chapter 3.

The three matters which Paul dealt with were:

- (i) that boasting is excluded (3:27);
- (ii) that circumcision makes no difference (3:29); and
- (iii) that the Law had its proper place and function (3:31).

Paul's four assertions were:

- (a) Abraham was not justified by works (4: 1 to 8);
- (b) Abraham was not justified by circumcision (4: 9 to 12);
- (c) Abraham was not justified by the Law (4: 13 to 17);
- (d) Abraham was justified by faith (4: 17 to 22).

(a) Abraham Was Not Justified By Works

Romans 4: 1 to 8

1. ***What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?***
2. ***For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.***
3. ***For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'***
4. ***Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.***
5. ***But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,***
6. ***Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:***
7. ***'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;***
8. ***Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.'***

Paul began this section by asking a question. *“What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh?”* (4:1; NRSV). The NIV in its translation omits the two Greek words ‘kata sarka’ (*“according to the flesh”*) as also does the Diaglott. According to scholars ‘kata sarka’ refers to Abraham himself as *“our ancestor by natural descent”*, as in the REB, and not the verb *“gained”* as in the NRSV or *“found”* as in the KJV. This direct reference to Abraham is surely correct, as it prepared the way for Paul’s later statements that Abraham was *“the father of us all”* (4:16) and *“father”* (4: 17 and 18) of all who exhibit the same faith.

Paul responded immediately to his own question with the wrong answer that Abraham was *“justified by works”* (4:2), and countered it with the correct answer that *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness”* (4:3). *“If”* said Paul, *“Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory”*, he would have had something to boast about, *“but”* he added somewhat abruptly, *“not before God”* (4:2). Boasting is an expression of self-righteousness, and to think that unrighteous people can become righteous before God by their own efforts is untenable and impossible, as Paul had already shown in Romans 1:18 to 3:20.

Paul proceeded to give a second reason why Abraham was not justified by works. That reason was, and is, given in Scripture. Paul asked *“For what does the Scripture say?”* (4:3). Paul used the present tense to indicate that God’s voice can always be heard by reading and heeding the written word. Paul also meant that in every situation, in every problem or difficulty, believers should turn to the Scripture for authoritative guidance, as Scripture is the final court of appeal to truth.

In answer to his question *“For what does the Scripture say?”* Paul quoted Genesis 15:6; *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”* (NIV). The word translated *“credited”* is the Greek verb ‘logizomai’, which Paul proceeded to use five times in six verses (4: 3 to 8). The Greek word means to ‘credit’ or ‘reckon’, and when used in a financial or commercial sense, means to charge something to someone’s account, as when Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus. *“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me”* (Philemon 18).

There are two different ways in which money can be credited to our account, namely, as salary or wages which are earned, or as a gift, which is free, that is, not earned. These two ways are different and not compatible. As the Apostle wrote, *“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation”* (4:4; NIV) meaning literally ‘not according to grace (charis) but according to debt (opheilema)’.

But this is not the case with justification, where ‘work’, ‘wages’, ‘debt’ or ‘obligation’ are entirely inapplicable. Instead, *“to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness”* (4:5; NIV). This means, in the context of justification, that those who do not work and therefore have no right to payment, but who instead put their trust in God Who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited to them as righteousness; that is, they are given imputed righteousness as a free and unearned gift of grace because of their faith.

The Jewish Rabbis thought that Abraham’s faith meant his faithfulness, that is, Abraham’s righteousness was his reward for his work of obeying God. But Paul clearly taught that *“Abraham believed God”* and that God’s crediting faith as righteousness was not a reward for merit or work, but a free and unmerited gift of divine grace. Faith is not an alternative to righteousness, nor a work which believers do, but is a godly belief and trust because of which believers are declared righteous.

Paul then moved on from Abraham to David, from Genesis 15:6 to Psalm 32:1,2, and proclaimed a fundamental agreement between the two passages. *“David says the same thing when he describes the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works”* (4:6; NIV). God, by His grace, does the crediting and what He credits to believers is not faith, or some mixture of faith and righteousness, but righteousness itself.

David’s declaration, according to Hebrew scholars, consists of Hebrew parallelism. Three times he referred to evil deeds; once as transgressions (lawlessness or sins of commission), and twice as sins (disobedience or sins of omission); for transgressions collectively consist of unlawful acts and failures to act as one should. And three times David told us what God

has done with them. Transgressions are forgiven and sins are covered, that is, discounted; believers' misdeeds and failures are not counted against them (4: 7 and 8). Instead of putting believers' sins and failures in account against them, God disregards them as if they are hidden from view.

At this stage in the study of the great Apostle's letter, it is of benefit to us to sum up what he had said. He made it clear that God's righteousness (or the righteousness from God), which is revealed in the gospel (1:17; 3:21), is His just justification of the unjust (3:26). In the second part of chapter 3, Paul used the verb "*justify*" several times in verses 24, 26, 28 and 30; and continued to use it in chapter 4 verses 2, 5 and 25. Paul continued to use "*justify*" in chapter 5, verses 1, 9, 16 and 18.

He dismissed conclusively the possibility that Abraham could have been justified by works (4:2). But when he affirmed how God justifies the wicked (4:5), he used new expressions. Firstly, God credits righteousness to believers because of their faith; secondly, He credits righteousness to believers apart from works; and thirdly, He refuses to credit believers' sins against them, but disregards them and hides them from view.

These three expressive statements do not mean exactly the same, but they all belong together in justification. Justification involves both a negative and a positive reckoning. Negatively, God will not count believers' disobedience against them, but, positively, God will credit each believer's account with righteousness as a free gift, through faith, entirely apart from works.

The Apostle made another similar statement to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:19,21. He said that the LORD God was reconciling the world to Himself through Christ, "*not counting men's sins against them*", but instead "*made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (NIV). The Lord Jesus became our sin-bearer, and by carrying our sins, provided the way so that we by faith in that action, might be declared righteous by God's righteousness.

In the King James Version the Greek verb 'logizomai' is sometimes translated not to 'credit, count, or reckon' but to 'impute', as in 4: 6 and 8. "*Blessed is the man to whom the*

Lord will not impute sin”, even as David described “the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works”. To credit, count or reckon and to impute all mean to reckon or consider something as belonging to someone, but the imagery is different. The imagery of crediting, counting or reckoning refers to financial matters, while the imagery of imputing refers to legal matters, that is, innocence or guilt.

This terminology was prominent in debates of the sixteenth century. The Roman Catholic Church taught that God, in the act of justification, infuses righteousness into believers, whereas the Protestant Reformers insisted that God imputes righteousness to believers. The Reformers were right, because God’s justification of believers does not make them righteous, but believers are considered by God as though they are righteous, and treated by Him as if they are legally righteous, that is, completely innocent and guiltless. The writer, C.H. Hodge in his Commentary on Romans, page 115, puts the matter clearly: ‘To impute sin is to lay sin to the charge of anyone, and to treat him accordingly. To impute righteousness is to set righteousness to one’s account, and to treat him accordingly’.

Thus in Romans chapter 4 Paul wrote of God not imputing sin to sinners, although sin actually belongs to them, and of imputing righteousness to Christians, although righteousness does not belong to them. What Paul in Romans 4 affirmed was that it was because of his faith that Abraham came to be treated as righteous, and not that faith was taken as a replacement for obedience.

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS DISPLAYED (continued)

Stage 3:

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS ILLUSTRATED BY REFERENCE TO ABRAHAM AND DAVID (continued)

(b) Abraham Was Not Justified By Circumcision

Romans 4: 9 to 12

9. *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.*
10. *How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.*
11. *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,*
12. *And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.*

In the first three verses of Romans 4 Paul asked the question: 'Was Abraham justified by works or by faith?' In verse 9 Paul asked a second question, 'Is this blessedness (meaning justification) only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?'

Paul had already shown in verses 4 to 8 that Abraham was not justified by works. His second question in verse 9 raised a further question. Was Abraham justified after he was circumcised or before? What was the order of events? Paul's answer was brief and to the point. *"It was not after, but before!"* (4:10). In fact, Abraham's justification happened

long before his circumcision. His justification is recorded in Genesis 15, and his circumcision in Genesis 17, after an interval of some fourteen years.

Abraham's circumcision was not the reason for his justification, but was its sign and seal. Abraham *"received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised"* (4:11). God Himself had called circumcision *"the sign of the covenant"* that He had established with Abraham (Genesis 17:11). Paul called circumcision a sign of Abraham's justification (4:11), meaning a distinguishing identification, setting Abraham and his descendants apart as God's covenanted people. So circumcision was a sign to identify God's people and a seal to authenticate them as such.

Thus Abraham received two distinct gifts from God: justification and the seal of circumcision, in that order. Circumcision was the visible sign and seal of the justification that he had already received. It is the same with Christian baptism. Christians are justified by their commitment of faith then baptised by immersion as a sign and seal of their commitment, and a recognition of the grace of justification. Christians must get the order right, and must clearly distinguish between the sign (baptism by immersion) and the thing signified (justification).

There was a double purpose in the facts that Abraham was first justified by faith but circumcised later. Firstly, it was that Abraham might be *"the father of all who believe"* and have been justified, *"but have not been circumcised"* (4:11). In other words, Abraham is the spiritual father of all Gentile believers, not only of Jewish believers. Secondly, not only of Jewish believers, that Abraham might also be *"the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised"* (4:12).

Thus Abraham is the father of all believers, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. Circumcision was (and still is) of supreme importance to the Jews, but it must not be allowed to undermine or disrupt, as it did to the Galatians, the unity of believers committed to Christ. According to the Jews, Abraham was 'the great dividing point in the history of mankind', while according to Paul, Abraham through his faith became 'the great

rallying point for all who believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised' as Anders Nygran wrote in his 'Commentary on Romans' (page 175) 'Circumcision divides, but faith unites'.

(c) Abraham Was Not Justified By The Law

Romans 4: 13 to 17

- 13. *For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.***
- 14. *For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect,***
- 15. *Because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.***
- 16. *Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all***
- 17. *(As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations') in the presence of Him whom he believed - God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;***

Paul began this new section with a negative, 'not', and a subsequent positive, 'but'. Paul had already asserted that justification did not come by the Law but by faith (4:13). The promise that God made in Genesis 15:5 that Abraham's posterity would be as numerous as the stars was a promise made without any conditions or requirements. God's word was a promise given freely to Abraham and was not a law. And it is recorded that Abraham believed God and was justified by his faith in the giver of the promise.

In verse 13, Paul surprised his readers by saying that Abraham "*would be the heir of the world*". In Genesis 13:12, 14 and 17 God promised Canaan to Abraham "*north, south, east and west*" of where he was standing. How then did "*the land*" become "*the world*"? In the first place, as a general principle, the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy can often be greater and more comprehensive than the initial promise. In Abraham's case, secondly, God made a further promise that through Abraham's descendants "*all nations on earth*" would be blessed

(Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Thirdly, the reason for Paul's statement that Abraham would inherit *"the world"* is surely messianic. As soon as Abraham's seed was identified as the Messiah (Galatians 3:16; John 8:56), it was further realised that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, would reign over all the earth (Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 9:7). Also, Christ's people are His fellow-heirs who will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), and through Christ *"all things are ours"* including the world (1 Corinthians 3:21).

Paul clarified the promise to Abraham, then strongly asserted that the promise was received and inherited by faith and not by law. He gave three reasons for his assertion. The first reason is an argument from history. Paul stated clearly in Galatians 3:17 that *"the covenant previously established by God"* could not possibly be annulled by the Law which was given through Moses 430 years later. This same truth is implied in Romans 4, but is not developed.

The second reason is an argument from language. In the verses under consideration, the Apostle used many relevant words: law, promise, faith, wrath, transgression and grace. We must strive to follow the Apostle's logic and development of his argument.

He had stated in verse 14 *"For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless"*. His meaning was that if the inheritance depended on obedience, then faith has no validity and the promise is rendered of no effect. God is the author of law and of promise, but they do not and cannot operate at one and the same time. Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians *"if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise"* (Galatians 3:13). Law and promise belong to different categories of thought and behaviour, and are incompatible. Law demands our obedience, but promise demands our faith.

In verse 15, Paul developed this reasoning further, showing why law and promise exclude each other. It is *"because law brings wrath"*, and because *"where there is no law there is no transgression"*. The words 'law', 'transgression' and 'wrath' belong to the same category of thought in the Apostle's exposition. Law highlights the sinfulness of sin, redefining it as transgression, meaning actual or deliberate disobedience, and

such transgression provoked God's wrath. On the other hand, *"where there is no law there can be no breach of law"* (REB), and therefore no wrath.

In verse 16 Paul brought together *"grace"* and *"faith"*. The Greek sentence, according to scholars, is more dramatic than the English, because in the original there are no verbs nor the noun *"promise"*. The Greek reads literally *"therefore by faith in order that according to grace"*. The meaning is that God is gracious, and salvation is assured by grace alone, and in order for this to operate and function, the human response must be by faith. Faith's function is to receive what grace offers, otherwise *"grace would no longer be grace"* as the Apostle wrote in chapter 11 verse 6.

What Paul argued may be briefly summarised thus: God's law makes demands which we transgress, and so we incur wrath; but God's grace makes promises which we believe, and so we receive blessing. Law, obedience, transgression and wrath belong to one area of thought, while grace, promise, faith and blessing belong to another contrasting area of thought.

The third reason Paul gave that God's blessing is inherited by faith and not by law is an argument from theology, especially the doctrine of Jewish and Gentile unity in the seed of Abraham. The reason that justification is by grace through faith is that *"the promise may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham"*, that is all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles who belong to the practice of, that is, who exercise faith (4:16). All believers in Christ belong to Abraham's seed by exhibiting the same faith, and so inherit the promise (Galatians 3:29).

Abraham's fatherhood of the faithful is a theme running through Romans 4. In the first verse Paul called him *"our forefather according to the flesh"* which applied to the Jews. After this, Paul made three affirmations: *"he is the father of all who believe"* whether circumcised or uncircumcised (4: 11 and 12); *"he is the father of us all"* (4:16); and *"he is our father in the sight of God"* (4:17). Thus the Scripture has been fulfilled which says *"I have made you a father of many nations"* (4:17) which applies to all believers in a spiritual sense. Only justification by faith could have made this possible.

Much of Romans 4 so far has a negative aspect. Paul made it abundantly clear that Abraham was justified, but not by works, not by circumcision and not by the Law. In each case Paul stressed the priority of Abraham's faith. His faith came first, and works, circumcision and law all came later. So then, the Apostle reached his positive conclusion.

(d) Abraham Was Justified By Faith

Romans 4: 17 to 22

- 17. *(As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations') in the presence of Him whom he believed - God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;***
- 18. *Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, 'so shall your descendants be.'***
- 19. *And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb.***
- 20. *He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,***
- 21. *And being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.***
- 22. *And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.'***

Paul moved in his exposition from Abraham's faith to its reasonableness. To describe faith as reasonable may surprise many people, since many consider that faith and reason are incompatible. Faith, it is sometimes argued, is really credulity, superstition and irrationality. Bertrand Russell, in his book of essays titled 'Why I am Not a Christian' called faith 'a conviction which cannot be shaken by contrary evidence'.

It is true that faith may sometimes go beyond reason, but faith always has a firm rational basis. Faith consists in believing and trusting someone, and its reasonableness depends on the one being trusted. It is always reasonable to trust someone who has proved to be trustworthy, and there is no-one more trustworthy than God. Abraham knew this, and we today are

more privileged than Abraham was because we live after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, by means of which God has forever and supremely confirmed and displayed His power and faithfulness. God's power and faithfulness are the two attributes that constituted the foundations of Abraham's faith, and on which Paul reflected in the latter section of chapter 8.

Two evidences of God's power are mentioned in verse 17. God is called the "*God who gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not as though they were*" (NIV), or, as the REB has it, "*calls into being things that are not*". Human beings are at a loss to explain non-existence (or nothingness) and also death. Death is, of course, one event from which humans cannot escape. And many people are unable to cope with the prospect of death. But nothingness and death are no problem to God. Out of nothing He created the universe, and out of death He raised Jesus.

The creation and the resurrection were and remain the two major manifestations of the power of God. Jeremiah, in prayer to God acknowledging His creative power said, "*Nothing is too hard for you*" (Jeremiah 32:17). Paul, also in prayer to God, asked that the Ephesians might come to know the greatness of God's power when He raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19,20).

Abraham's firm conviction about the power of God enabled him to believe against the hopelessness of the human condition, and in hope at the same time when God promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, even though Sarah had not given birth (Genesis 15:4-6). Abraham "*became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him 'So shall your offspring be'*" (4:18). So, "*without weakening in faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about a hundred years old – and Sarah's womb was also dead*" (4:19; Genesis 17:17; 18:11).

Out of that double disability God brought a new life, as an act of creation and resurrection. Abraham believed that God could and would do this; and later, when he faced the supreme test of his faith when told to sacrifice Isaac, he reasoned "*that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from death*" (Hebrews 11:17). Abraham "*did not*

waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened by his faith and gave glory to God” (4:20).

Abraham knew by faith that God would keep His promises because of His power to do all that He promised, and His faithfulness to keep His words of promise. *“By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren - was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Hebrews 11:11).* He was *“fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised” (4:21).* *“This is why”,* Paul added, *“it was credited to him as righteousness” (4:22).*

Abraham’s Faith And Ours

Romans 4: 23 to 25

- 23. *Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,***
- 24. *But also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,***
- 25. *Who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification.***

Paul concluded his comments on Abraham by applying lessons from Abraham’s faith to his readers, including ourselves. He wrote that the Biblical words *“it was credited to him were written not for him alone” (4:23),* but also for the Roman congregation, and so for us today.

The whole account of Abraham and the rest of Scripture were written for our instruction (Romans 15:4). So God, Who credited faith to Abraham as righteousness, *“will credit righteousness for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:24).* Abraham was not the only one to be justified by faith. Justification by faith is God’s way of offering reconciliation and salvation for everyone.

The reason for and means of our justification is the Lord Jesus Christ, for He *“was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (4:25).* The Greek verb ‘*paradidomi*’ translated ‘delivered over’ evidently refers to the Father Who *“did not spare His own Son but gave Him up*

for us all” (Romans 8:32). The death and resurrection of Jesus are due to the Father’s will and initiative; He delivered Him over to death and raised Him up to life.

We today are much more fortunate than Abraham, and really have no excuse for unbelief because we are living centuries after Jesus’ resurrection, and have all of the Scriptures readily available to us. It is therefore more reasonable for us to believe than it was for Abraham. If we grasp and hold firmly God’s promises to us, His children, we shall prove to be Abraham’s spiritual seed because we are Christ’s, and heirs according to God’s promise (Galatians 3:29).

CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTIFICATION

Romans 5: 1 to 21

It is important to remember that justification involves both a negative and a positive reckoning. Negatively, God will not count or reckon believers' disobedience against them; and positively, God will count or reckon righteousness, which is graciously given for a believer's faith, as a gift entirely apart from work.

The changes in pronouns that Paul made are noteworthy. In the first half of chapter 1, Paul used the first person 'I' as in *"I am not ashamed of the gospel"* (1:16), while in the second half of the same chapter, Paul used the third person plural 'they' in his condemnation of the godless pagan world; *"although they claimed to be wise, they became fools"* (1:22). In chapter 2 the pronoun was changed to the second person 'you' as he addressed the moralisers, *"You, therefore, have no excuse"* (2:1), and then the Jew, *"Now you, if you call yourself a Jew"* (2:17). In chapter 3 Paul reverted to 'they', and described firstly, *"the whole world held accountable to God"* (3:19), and secondly, *"all who believe"* (3:22), the spiritual offspring of Abraham as recorded in the first half of chapter four. Then in verse 16 of that chapter Paul reverted to the first person plural by calling Abraham *"the father of us all"*, and in verse 17 *"our father"*.

The first person plural was used for the remainder of chapter 4, and Paul continued in chapter 5 with a number of statements also beginning with the first person plural. *"We have peace with God"* (5:1), *"we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand"* (5:2), *"we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God"* (5:2); *"we also rejoice in our sufferings"* (5:3), *"how much more shall we be saved"* (5:10), and *"we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (5:11).

With these statements of faith Paul identified himself with everyone who is, or has been, justified by faith, whether Jew or Gentile, and he proclaimed the unity of the people of God who have become joined together by faith and acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which is the only way for everyone to become God's children and members of His family

THE RESULTS OF JUSTIFICATION

Romans 5: 1 to 11

1. *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
2. *Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
3. *And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;*
4. *And perseverance, character; and character, hope.*
5. *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*
6. *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*
7. *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.*
8. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
9. *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*
10. *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*
11. *And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

Having expounded the need for justification (1:18 to 3:20) and the means of justification (3:21 to 4:25), the Apostle then described the consequences, *"the blessedness" "of those to whom God imputes righteousness without works"* (4:6). The whole section (5: 1 to 18) follows on from the opening words *"Therefore being justified by faith"*. Paul made six authoritative statements in the first person plural, as has been stated above.

(a) We have peace with God (5:1).

The desire for peace is a prevailing human obsession, whether that peace is international, industrial, domestic or personal. But more fundamental than all of these is peace with God,

reconciliation with Him as the first blessing of justification. 'Justification' and 'reconciliation' belong together, because God, Who justifies, confers righteousness on the believer, extends friendship to overcome enmity or alienation, and establishes peace between Himself and every believer. This peace becomes ours *"through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (5:1), *"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification"* (4:25).

Faith in God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ brings about a condition of imputed righteousness, reconciliation and peace with God, as Isaiah wrote; *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever"* (Isaiah 32:17).

The obstruction to reconciliation arising from God's justice and the transgression of the Law has been removed, and He is now willing to be at peace with the transgressors. The obstruction to the reconciliation of human beings, arising from their rebellion and disobedience and their awareness of guilt, can be taken away, and believing people can regard God as their Father and friend. The sinner can therefore experience peace, a peace which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take away (Philippians 4:7; John 14:27).

(b) We stand in grace (5:2).

The literal rendering of the first two clauses of verse 2 is, according to Greek scholars, *"through Him (that is, Christ) we have obtained our introduction into this grace in which we have taken our stand"*.

'Grace' is usually understood to mean God's free and undeserved favour arising from His infinite love, and is conditional according to the first commandment. But here it is not so much His quality of loving and undeserved favour as *"the sphere of God's grace"* (NEB) meaning the privileged position of being reconciled to God that true believers enjoy.

Two verbs were used in relation to *"this grace"* which denote firstly our entrance into it, and secondly our continuance in it. Both verbs are in the perfect tense. Firstly *"we have gained access"* into this grace. Scholars say that a better translation of 'access' would be 'introduction', because 'access' suggests that believers take the initiative to enter, while 'introduction'

suggests believers' unfitness to enter and their need for someone to bring them in and introduce them.

Secondly, believers have taken their stand in this grace to which they have been introduced. Justified believers enjoy a blessing far greater than a periodic approach to God or an occasional audience with Him, as might be the case with an earthly ruler. Believers are privileged to enjoy continued access to God at any time and in any situation. Believers' relationship with God, into which justification has brought them, is not spasmodic or occasional but continuous, not precarious or unstable but secure. Believers do not fall in and out of favour like earthly courtiers, who may fall in or out of favour with their earthly sovereign, or like politicians who may fall in or out of favour with the voting public. Believers stand firmly in grace: nothing can separate them from the love of God (Romans 8:38,39).

(c) We rejoice in hope of the glory of God (5:2).

Because of justification, Christian believers have the hope of obtaining God's glory of character from which everyone falls short by breaking God's law. The hope also refers to obtaining the glory of substance similar to that of God who is a spirit being, when believers will be changed at their resurrection and gain the heavenly inheritance promised by God as recorded in 2 Peter 1:4.

Christian hope is not uncertain, as are our ordinary everyday hopes about the weather or our health; it is a joyful and confident expectation based on the promises of God, as was the case with Abraham. The glory of God has been made manifest in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word (John 1:14; 2:11), through His life, death and resurrection (John 12:23); 17:1). God's glory is being continually revealed for all to see, if they will, in the heavens and earth (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:8); and one day His glory will be revealed in a way that will be clear to everyone and unmistakable.

First, Jesus Christ Himself will appear "*with great power and glory*" (Mark 13:26; Titus 2:13). Secondly, believers will not only see His glory, but be changed into it (1 John 3:2; Colossians 3:4) so that He will "*be glorified in his holy people*" (2 Thessalonians 1:10). At the appointed time redeemed human beings, who were originally created in "*the*

image and glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:7; Genesis 1:26; 9:6; James 3:9); but through disobedience fell *"short of the glory of God"* (3:23) will be resurrected to share in His glory (3:17). In the third place, even the groaning creation *"will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God"* (8:21). The *"new heavens and a new earth"* (2 Peter 3:13) will be full of God's glory. This is the Christian's sure hope and certain expectation.

After the great Apostle's affirmation of peace, grace, glory and hope, his fourth affirmation may seem surprising.

(d) We glory in tribulations (5:3).

The Greek word translated *"tribulations"* is 'thlipsis', which means literally 'pressures'. It is used in Mark 13:19 and Revelation 7:14 to refer to the sufferings which God's people must expect in the last days, meaning, in this case, the Gospel Age. Jesus warned His disciples that *"in this world"* they would *"have trouble"* (John 16:33), and Paul similarly warned his followers that they *"must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22).

What attitude should Christians adopt to these 'tribulations'? The NIV renders the expression *"We also rejoice in our sufferings"*. So the Christian must not merely endure sufferings stoically and without complaint, but rejoice in them. How can this be? How can anyone rejoice in suffering? In the first place suffering is involved in the path to glory, because God has decreed that it must be so. It was so for the Lord Jesus and it is so for Christian believers. Paul said this in Romans 8:17, namely, that Christians are *"co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory"*. That is why Christians are to rejoice through sufferings, because of the prospect of sharing that glory.

In the second place, suffering as a Christian can lead to maturity if Christians respond positively to it, and not become angry or bitter. Suffering should produce perseverance, or alternatively from the Greek word 'hypomone', endurance. Christians could not learn endurance without suffering, because if there was no suffering it would mean there was nothing adverse to endure, whereas God told Adam that disobedience would bring adversity. Perseverance or endurance towards a good result produces a good character, that feature of a person

who has been tested and has passed the test, and has become *“a mature character”*, as in J.B. Phillips’ translation. Then, finally, good character contributes to hope, because a mature Christian believes that God is developing his or her character in preparation for the contribution he or she will make, and the example he or she will set in the Kingdom Age to come.

Thirdly, strength to persevere through suffering is an assurance to Christians of God’s love, and suffering should not make them doubt the care and love of God. He allows chastisement because of that love, seeking the betterment of the believer (Hebrews 12:6). We should consider carefully the Apostle’s argument.

He followed the sequence of reactions from tribulation to perseverance, perseverance to character, and from character to hope. Then he added that *“hope does not disappoint us”* (5:5). This hope will not disappoint or betray us, because it is not an illusion or a ‘fantasy’ as the REB has rendered the clause. But how can we be sure of this? On what basis does our Christian hope of glory rest? The basis is God’s love. Our hope should not fail us because God will never fail us. His love will never give us up if we continue in perseverance.

But how can we be sure of God’s love? We can be sure in two main ways. The first is that *“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which He has given us”* (5:5). This is the first mention in the letter to the Romans of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, and it teaches us three important lessons.

The first lesson is that the Holy Spirit is God’s gift to all believers, so that it is not possible to be justified by faith without at the same time being regenerated by the Spirit which dwells in us.

The second lesson is that the Holy Spirit was given to us at a particular time, namely at our conversion when we were justified.

The third lesson is that one of the Holy Spirit’s ministries is to pour God’s love into our hearts. Some Christians see this as a reference to the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, since the same Greek verb is used, ‘ekcheo’ (pour out). However, it is

not the outpouring of the Spirit about which the Apostle wrote here, but the outpouring of God's love by the ministry of the Spirit in our hearts. It is God's love for us, not ours for Him, which was in the Apostle's mind. What the Holy Spirit does is to make us deeply aware that God loves us. This is similar to the statement that Paul made later in 8:16 that *"the Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children"*. Being God's children we are assured of God's fatherly love for us.

The second way that we can be assured of God's love is by Christ's death. Previously Paul wrote in 3:25 that God demonstrated His justice by Christ's death and resurrection, but then in 5:8 he wrote of God's love as being demonstrated by Christ's death. 'Demonstrated' is really not a strong enough word; 'proved' would be better, as the REB translates the passage in 5:8. *"Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and that is God's proof of his love towards us"*. This great and fundamental truth was expressed by John in John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"*, and by Paul in Galatians 2:20 *"the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me"*.

The degree or extent of love is indicated partly by the cost to the giver, and partly by the worthiness or unworthiness of the receiver. So we may say that the more the gift costs the giver, and the less the receiver deserves it, the greater the love is seen to be. Measured by these indications, God's love in giving Christ to suffer and die is unique. In giving His Son to die for us, God has given the supreme gift to sinners like ourselves who deserve nothing from Him except judgment.

The supreme costliness of God's gift is clear. Verses 6 and 8 of Romans 5 say only that *"Christ died"*. But verse 10 tells us that God reconciled us to Himself *"through the death of His Son"*. Previously God had sent prophets and sometimes angels, but eventually He sent His Son, as He had promised, not simply to preach and set an example of righteousness unattainable by sinful human beings, but to die for us all.

What Paul wrote is that *"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (5:8). Whenever sin and death are mentioned together in Scripture, death is the penalty or 'wages' of sin (6:23; 5:12). The statement that *"Christ died for sinners"* means that Jesus died as the sin offering, because although the sins were, and

are, ours, the death was His. Jesus bore in our place the penalty that we as sinners and every individual and sinful human being deserved and continues to deserve. This helps us to understand the supreme costliness of God's gift.

The worthiness, or rather the unworthiness of the receivers of God's supreme gift should also be kept in mind. When we were unbelievers, we were unforgiven sinners, for whom the LORD God decreed and permitted the supreme, inexpressible sacrifice of His only begotten Son. Such were described by Paul in four ways.

Firstly, we were "*sinners*" (5:8), that is, we did not follow the way of righteousness, and fell well short of God's standard, and completely out of His favour.

Secondly, "*at just the right time Christ died for the ungodly*" (5:6). We, the ungodly, ignored God and rebelled against Him, instead of humbling ourselves before Him and striving to be worthy of His love.

Thirdly, "*we were God's enemies*" (5:10), that is, we were opposed to God, and resented any imposition of His authority, as Paul also wrote in 8:7 "*the sinful mind is hostile to God*".

But the hostility was not entirely ours, because the context contains references to God's wrath (5:9), that is, God's holy hatred of sin, which is really the consequence of God's justice, not that He shows the human failing of anger. The reconciliation between God and us is said to have been 'received' (5:11), which means that God has reconciled Himself to us when we believe in Him and come to Him through the Lord Jesus.

The fourth way in which Paul referred to human beings before they became believers was "*when we were still powerless*" (5:6) meaning that we were unable to rescue ourselves. This then concluded the Apostle's depiction of unbelievers in Jesus Christ as "*sinners*", "*ungodly*", "*enemies*" and "*powerless*". It is for such people that Jesus died.

The Apostle emphasised the supreme love of God by means of a step-by-step development of his argument. Firstly he said, "*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a*

good man some someone might possibly dare to die” (5:7). But then in marked contrast, he continued, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8).

The extent of God’s love is thus seen in three factors, namely, that when Christ died for us:

- (1) God decreed and permitted the humiliation and suffering of His own Son, *“the firstborn of every creature”* (Colossians 1:15);
- (2) God gave Him to be the sin-offering and to die for everyone; and
- (3) God did this for His enemies who deserved only judgment and condemnation.

God has thus proved His love for us in the death of His Son (5:8), and given us His love by the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (5:5). These are good and sufficient grounds for being convinced of the love of God. The giving of His Son for His earthly mission, and the ministry of the Spirit in our hearts, combine as the most reassuring and satisfying aspects of the Gospel in our lives.

(e) We shall be saved through Christ (5: 9 and 10).

Up to this point the Apostle had been concentrating on what God has done for us through Christ. We have been justified, we have peace with God; we stand in grace; and we rejoice in our hope and also in our sufferings.

But there is greater benefit to come. In verses 9 and 10 of Romans 5 are examples of what Christ achieved at His first advent and what is still to be achieved at His second advent. Statements common to verses 9 and 10 are that we shall be saved.

Salvation has two aspects, present and future. Believers understand that we have been rescued through Christ from the guilt of our sins of our present life and from the judgment of God upon them, but we have not yet been delivered from the sinful nature that dwells within us, or been given new bodies fit for the new heavens and earth which are in the future.

What did Paul have in mind concerning the future salvation? He used two expressions, the first negative and the second positive.

Firstly, Paul said we shall *“be saved from God’s wrath”* through Christ (5:9). We know this when we accept the atoning power of Christ’s sacrifice. God has exempted us from His wrath, the consequence of His justice, so that we have peace with Him and stand in His grace.

But there is a time coming which Paul called *“the day of God’s wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed”* (2:5), and *“His wrath will be poured out on those who have rejected Christ”* (2:8). Believers will be saved from the wrath of God that is still to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 5:9), because, as Jesus said, the believer *“will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life”* (John 5:24).

Secondly, Paul said we shall *“be saved through his life”* (5:10). Jesus died and was raised to life again. He lives now and for evermore, and because of the witness of the Scriptures believers can be aware of the power of His resurrection. These great truths were further elaborated in Romans chapter 8. Paul assured believers of their promised reward in the age to come by his use of *“how much more”* arguments. The structures of verses 9 and 10 are the same, namely, if something has happened, how much more will something else happen.

How do we apply the Apostle’s words? We have been justified and reconciled by that sacrifice. We have been justified by His (Jesus’) blood (5:9), and reconciled to Him (God), through the death of His Son (5:10). So we are pronounced righteous and we have become God’s children.

This was Paul’s logic. Since God has done the really difficult things in justifying us and calling us away from being enemies, He will surely complete the task in delivering all the things that He has promised to Christ’s joint-heirs, and our salvation will be complete in the age to come.

(f) We also rejoice in God (5:11).

The word translated ‘rejoice’ in this verse is the same word that is translated ‘boast’ or ‘brag’ in chapter 2, in which Paul condemned the Jewish attitude to God, when they boasted

about God in such a way as to claim that God was their exclusive benefactor in Whom they had a monopoly interest. The translators have rendered the same verb in chapter 2 as 'brag' or 'boast', but 'rejoice' or 'exult' in chapter 5. This seems a wise rendering because Christian rejoicing in God is quite different from Jewish boasting or bragging about Him.

Christian rejoicing in God begins with the realisation that we have no claim on Him at all because we are sinners and alienated from Him by our unrighteousness, but ends with wonder and worship in that while we were yet sinners and enemies, God sent Jesus Christ to suffer and die for us and bring about reconciliation with Him, our Heavenly Father. To rejoice in God is not to count our privileges and boast about them, but respectfully to receive and accept His grace and mercy.

So in spite of Paul's words that for believers all boasting is excluded (3:2), we nevertheless rejoice in our hope of sharing God's glory (5:2), in our tribulations (5:3) and above all, in our awareness of God Himself (5:11). This rejoicing is *"through our Lord Jesus Christ"*, because it is through Him that *"we have now received reconciliation"* (5:11).

Paul was saying that justified believers should be joyful people, that is, believers should reveal in their demeanour, attitude and disposition an underlying calmness and delight in God and His salvation through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christians should be the most positive people in the world.

CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTIFICATION (continued)

THROUGH ADAM AND THROUGH CHRIST

Romans 5: 12 to 21

Introductory Note

Up to this place in his inspired comments, Paul had summarised the extent of human sin and guilt, and the merciful adequacy of God's grace and justification in and through the Lord Jesus. He also indicated and proclaimed the involvement of Jews and Gentiles in both the guilt and the grace.

On the one hand he *"made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin"* (3:9), while on the other hand he declared that Abraham is *"the father of us all"* through faith (4:16). There are therefore two groups, one identified by sin and guilt, and the other by grace and faith. The former group is condemned through Adam and the latter has been reprieved through Christ.

Paul clearly identified himself with the believing group by his use of the first person plural ('we' and 'us'). We have been justified (5:1) and reconciled (5:11), and so all of us are privileged to have gained peace with God, to stand in grace, to rejoice in present sufferings and future glory, to be assured of final salvation, and to glory in God through Jesus Christ, by Whom all of these blessings have become ours. These benefits and blessings were all expounded in verses 1 to 11 of chapter 5.

Paul continued in verse 12 with the word *"therefore"*. This word makes clear to us that verses 12 to 21 are not a digression or a parenthesis, but a logical development of his argument, showing that what came next depended on what he had said before. There seem to be two links between the two parts of Romans 5 (1 to 11 and 12 to 21).

The first link is that Paul attributed our reconciliation and salvation to the death of God's Son (5: 9 and 10). This statement immediately gives rise to the question of how one

man's sacrifice could have brought about such blessings to so many. Paul's answer is contained in his comparison or analogy between Adam and Christ. In both is demonstrated the principle that many can be affected for good or for evil by one person's action.

A second link between the two parts of Romans 5 is that both sections conclude with the expression "*through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (5: 11 and 21). Paul presented Adam and Christ as the respective heads of the old and new humanities, the old and new dispensations in God's plan of the ages, and in such a way as to demonstrate the overwhelming superiority of the achievement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's exposition in verses 12 to 21 is very condensed. Paul divided his comments into three short sections in which Adam and Christ are related to each other, but with significant differences.

Firstly, in verses 12 to 14, Adam and Christ are introduced, Adam being disobedient and succumbing to sin and death, and also as "*a pattern of the one to come*", that is, Christ.

Secondly, in verses 15 to 17, Adam and Christ are contrasted, the work of Christ being either "*not like*" the work of Adam, or "*much more*" successful than Adam's.

Thirdly, in verses 18 to 21, Adam and Christ are compared. Paul used the form of "*just as ... so also*" in his explanatory comments, that is, just as by one man's deed (Adam's disobedience) the many have been condemned, so also by one man's deed (Christ's obedience) the many have been blessed.

Adam And Christ Introduced

Romans 5: 12 to 14

- 12. *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned –***
- 13. *(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.***
- 14. *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.)***

Paul began a sentence in verse 12 but did not complete it. He wrote, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world..."* but the expected words of completion beginning with 'so also ...' do not follow. Paul did not complete what he intended to say until verses 18 and 19. He broke off his argument mid-sentence in order to explain and defend what he had just said in verse 12. The topic of verse 12 is disobedience and death, and Paul described three worsening stages in human history, from one man disobeying God to all people disobeying and therefore dying.

The first stage was expressed as *"sin entered the world through one man"*. Paul did not name that man, but obviously Adam was meant. Paul was not concerned with the origin of sin in general, but only how it invaded the world of human beings. Sin entered through one man, through his disobedience. Eve was also implicated, being first in the transgression (Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:14), but Paul here left her out of the picture because he held Adam responsible.

The second stage was expressed as *"death through sin"*, meaning that death entered the world through, that is, as a consequence of, disobedience. Paul evidently had in mind Genesis 2:17 and 3:18, in which God said that death was the penalty for disobedience, as Paul had also said in Romans 1:23 and 6:23.

Thirdly, Paul said that *"in this way death came to all men, because all sinned"* (5:12). Paul then moved from the action of disobedience (and death) in one man to the actions of disobedience (and death) in all men, meaning all people, men and women. What is the meaning of the statement that *"death came to all men, because all sinned"*? How has it come about that all have sinned so that all die?

Paul's statement, that death has come upon all people because of Adam's disobedience, has given rise to differing theological explanations and comments. It seems to me that there is only one explanation that is satisfactory. Adam was the progenitor of the whole human race. Every human being has descended from Adam. After Adam sinned and God's penalty of death was passed upon him, Adam and his subsequent descendants could only beget sinners, so that all people without exception come under the sentence of death.

This fact was expressed in the Apocrypha, in the second book of Esdras, chapter 7 verse 118. *“O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants”*.

The Psalmist made the matter clear in Psalm 51:5 *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”*. These words should indicate to us that every descendant of Adam is not only born with the taint of sin, but is tainted by Adam’s sin from the moment of conception.

Paul continued his comments in verses 13 and 14. He made three points. The first was *“before the law was given, sin was in the world”*. The *“law”* was the Mosaic Law. Sin was in the world because Adam had sinned, and his descendants have been and will be stained by his sin.

Paul’s second point was that *“sin is not taken into account when there is no law”*. This means that sin is not regarded as a violation of a specific command or edict when no law exists, and therefore it is not counted against sinners. But it does not mean that sin was not in existence during the time from Adam to Moses, because death continued throughout that time, death being the *“wages of sin”* (6:23).

Paul’s third point was *“Nevertheless death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam”* (5:14).

The Scripture tells us that many people wilfully disobeyed God’s moral law which was written in their hearts (2: 14 and 15), and were punished in the flood, in the judgment of those who built the tower of Babel, and in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But there were many who did not sin by disobeying a direct command as Adam did, and as the people of the flood, the people of the tower of Babel, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah did. No doubt many infants and some who were born severely retarded or physically disadvantaged all died along with the knowingly and wilfully disobedient. There is only one explanation. All died because all were sinners through Adam, the progenitor of the human race.

In the five verses 15 to 19 of Romans 5, Paul stated five times, once in every verse, that the disobedience of one man brought condemnation and death to all people. The language varies slightly from verse to verse, but the meanings are the same. Verse 15 states, *“the many died by the trespass of the one man”*. Therefore, universal death is attributed to a single solitary sin.

There is in this context an analogy or comparison between Adam and Christ, and between those who are *“in Adam”* and those who are *“in Christ”*. The writer, C.H. Hodge, in his Commentary on Romans, page 142, said, ‘Paul has been engaged from the beginning of the Epistle in inculcating one main idea; specifically, that the ground of the sinner’s acceptance with God is not in himself, but the merit of Christ’.

The correspondence between Adam and Christ must always preserve this truth. In other words, as we are condemned by what Adam did, even so we are justified by what Christ did. The whole story of the human race can be summarised by what has happened because of Adam, and by what has happened and will yet happen because of Christ.

We should always retain in our hearts and minds what Jesus has done for us and for the whole human race. We may think of Pilate who washed his hands and declared himself innocent of *“the blood of this just man”*. The world at large says, ‘What has that to do with us?’ We must take care that we do not say or think that we too were not guilty or that the whole scenario of Christ’s ill-treatment and crucifixion has nothing to do with us. Herod, Pilate, Gentiles and Jews conspired against Jesus (Acts 4:27), but it was not only their sins that led to Jesus’ death – our sins and all the sins of the human race also nailed Him to the cross. The Negro spiritual asks ‘Were you there when they crucified my Lord?’ The answer must be that spiritually we were there, and there as guilty contributors.

But the cross of Christ is not simply an historical event, but a sacrifice offered for us and for the whole human race. How can we benefit from Christ’s death which took place nearly two thousand years ago? Paul told us in his second letter to the Corinthians *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for*

themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). We are implicitly involved in Christ’s death and resurrection in dying to sin and self as Christ did, and in living for Him in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Paul concluded this section (5: 12 to 14), in which he concentrated on Adam’s sin and death, with a brief reference to Christ. He wrote that Adam “*was a pattern of the one to come*”, that is, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Adam is referred to as a ‘type’ of Christ (Diaglott) because he ‘prefigured’ Christ (J.B. Phillips) and ‘foreshadows’ Him (REB). Adam was the head of the old humanity alienated by disobedience, while Christ is the Head of a whole new humanity reconciled by His sacrifice, culminating through him in the future Kingdom of God.

Adam And Christ Contrasted

Romans 5: 15 to 17

- 15. *(But the free gift is not like the offence. For if by the one man's offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.***
- 16. *And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offence resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offences resulted in justification.***
- 17. *For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)***

Paul called Adam a type (Greek ‘typos’) of Christ in verse 14. There is a comparison between Adam and Christ, in that each is one man through whose single deed vast numbers of people have been affected. The comparison shows not a parallel but a contrast. Adam is the head of the old humanity, the age of death, whereas Christ is the Head of the new humanity, the age of life. So the structure of each of verses 15, 16 and 17 reveals a statement that Christ’s gift is either not like Adam’s trespass, or much more effective than Adam’s trespass.

The differences concern the natures of the two actions (5:15), their immediate results (5:16), and their ultimate effects.

Firstly, the natures of their actions were different; *“But the gift is not like the trespass”* (5:15). Adam’s trespass was a fall (Greek ‘paraptoma’), indeed ‘the fall’ as we usually say. With Adam’s disobedience Paul contrasted Christ’s gift (Greek ‘charisma’), an act of self-sacrifice in complete contrast to Adam’s act of self-will. Paul commented on this complete contrast in verse 15 by saying *“if the many died by the trespass of one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many”*. The gift mentioned in these words is surely eternal life, as stated in 6:23.

Secondly, the immediate effects of their two actions were different. *“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of one man’s sin”*. These words are almost identical with those that introduced the previous verse, but here the emphasis is on the consequence of each action. In the case of Adam, God’s *“judgment brought condemnation”*; in the case of Christ, God’s *“gift brought justification”*. We should note that God’s judgment was the consequence of only one sin, whereas God’s gift exonerates all sins. The human mind would expect many sins to merit sterner judgment than one sin did, but God’s grace is so much greater it is beyond human comprehension.

In the third place, the ultimate effects of the two actions are different. The outcomes of the actions of Adam and Christ are said in verse 17 to be death and life, and the superiority of the work of Christ is emphasised. On the one hand, Paul told us that *“death reigned through one man”* not temporarily but continually, and on the other hand Paul wrote *“how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness, reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ”*.

By the words *“reign in life”*, Paul told us that justified believers have been released from the tyranny of everlasting death and have in prospect to become kings to rule and reign with Christ, the King of kings, in the world to come, when righteousness will prevail, and death will finally be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:26,27; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5).

Further Comparison Of Adam And Christ

Romans 5: 18 to 21

18. *Therefore, as through one man's offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*
19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*
20. *Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,*
21. *So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Paul then changed his means of comparison. His sentence structure is no longer either 'not like' or 'how much more' (as in verse 15 to 17), but 'just as so also' (in verses 18, 19 and 21). The structure 'just as ... so also' was intended to highlight the distinction between Adam and Christ, which is that the one action of each man determined the destinies of many. The emphasis is on the parallel between them, *"just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men"*.

In 5:15 the emphasis of the actions of Adam and Christ is on the resulting trespass and gift; in 5:19 the emphasis is on disobedience and obedience. The emphasis in verse 19 is also in a parallel manner in that *"just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous"*. The expressions *"made sinners"* and *"made righteous"* do not mean that people suddenly became morally evil or morally good, but rather that people were considered or reckoned (in a legal sense) unrighteous or righteous in God's sight.

Verse 20 is really a digression which Paul embarked on, it would seem, in deference to his Jewish readers. Paul had been writing about Adam and Christ in this context with no reference to Moses. Paul's Jewish readers might have asked

why Moses had not been included. They might have thought that there should have been three ages designated by the three leading figures, Adam, Moses and Christ. But such would be a misunderstanding of the role of the Mosaic Law, because it was given by God to a chosen people and did not involve the whole human race.

Paul in his explanatory comments then said that the Law *“was added so that the trespass might increase”*. Paul had already commented in 3:20 by saying that the Law reveals sin (3:20) and that the Law identifies sin (or transgression) (4:15; 5:13; Galatians 3:19). In Romans 7:8 Paul even said that the Law provokes sin. Such statements would have shocked Jewish people because they believed that the Law had been given to increase righteousness, and not to increase sin. Yet Paul said the opposite; the Law revealed and highlighted sinfulness rather than reduced or prevented it.

But God had made provision for the increase of sin by the increase of His grace, for *“where sin increased, grace increased all the more”*. God’s purpose is that *“just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life”*.

The reign of grace sums up the blessings of being *“in (committed to) Christ”*. Grace means favour, the undeserved favour of God to sinners who believe in Him and come to Him in repentance through Jesus Christ. God’s throne is a *“throne of grace”* and we are exhorted to approach it *“with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16). All this is *“through Jesus Christ our Lord”*; through His death and resurrection. This same reference to the Lord Jesus concluded the first section of this chapter at verse 11, and also concluded this chapter as well as the next three chapters, 6, 7 and 8.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF CHRIST

[Romans 5: Supplementary Comments]

The Belief In Universalism

The parallels, comparisons and contrasts on which Paul commented in Romans 4, have led to some Christians concluding that Paul was teaching universalism, namely, that every human being, without exception, will be saved, that is, resurrected to eternal life. It is argued that, according to 5:18, one trespass brought condemnation for all men, while one act of righteousness brought justification for all men. Similarly, according to 5:19, through one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, while through one man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous.

It is also argued that Paul supported universalism in 1 Corinthians 15:22, "*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive*". Professor Cranfield, in his Commentary on Romans, volume 1, page 271, commented that 'Something has been accomplished by Christ which is as universal in its effectiveness as was the sin of the first man. Paul is no longer speaking just about the church; his vision now includes the whole of humanity'. While this is true, Christ's achievement extends only to those who believe and commit themselves to Him now and in the age to come. Any who will refuse to believe will fail to gain eternal life and will perish.

One of the arguments used by universalists is that in Romans 5:18 and 19 the expressions "*the many*" and "*all men*" appear to be synonymous and are therefore interchangeable. In an article in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, however, a contributor, Joachim Jeremias, showed that the Greek words "*hoi polloi*" in Romans 5 do not mean everyone without exception, but simply refer to the many or the majority.

The use of "*all*" in Scripture does not always mean every person without exception. For example, on the day of Pentecost, the statement that God poured out His Spirit "*on all people*" (Acts 2:17) does not mean every human being in the world, but people of different categories, of different nations, ages and social classes, and of both genders who were present at that

time. When Luke later declared that *“all...who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord”* through Paul when he was in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), he obviously did not mean every single human being, but many representatives from every part of the Roman province of Asia. Thus in Romans 5 the *“all men”* who are affected by the work of Christ cannot refer to everybody without exception, for a number of reasons.

In the first place, the two groups of people who are represented by Adam and Christ, are represented in different ways. It is true that everyone without exception is *“in Adam”* by natural birth, but the many who believe in Christ and in God through Christ are no longer *“in Adam”* in God’s sight but become *“in Christ”* by faith and by spiritual renewal.

So, although the phrase *“as in Adam all die”* means literally that everyone without exception will die, the *“all”* who are in Christ and made alive are identified as *“those who belong to Him”* (Mark 9:41; Corinthians 15:23). They are no longer, by God’s grace, *“in Adam”* in the spiritual sense.

In the second place, those who *“reign in life”* through Christ (5:17) are not all people without exception, but *“those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness”* (5:17).

Thirdly, Paul emphasised throughout his letter to the Roman Church that justification is *“by faith”* (1:16; 3:21; 4:1); therefore not all people are justified because not all have faith in the work of Christ. Paul also wrote solemn warnings that God’s wrath, the application of divine justice, will be poured out at a future time on people who persist in evil-doing, and all who continue in wrongdoing will perish (2: 5, 8 and 12).

In addition to this evidence, the Scriptures tell us that people who persist in evil-doing after the enlightenment of the saving power of the Gospel has been made available to them, will perish. Some may not even be resurrected in the world to come. The Lord Jesus spoke of this possibility in His warning to the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:33, *“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna?”* ‘Gehenna’ is the Greek form of a combination of Hebrew words meaning ‘valley of Hinnom’.

The valley of Hinnom was a deep and narrow ravine outside Jerusalem with steep, rocky sides. In New Testament times it was used as the garbage destructor of the city. It was also used for the burning and destruction of the bodies of criminals thrown into it after they had been executed. The bodies of the criminals which were cast into the valley were destroyed by the fires kept burning constantly to consume the refuse of the city. The bodies of the executed criminals were thus deprived of a tomb which could be identified and remembered, and therefore they could be said to have died twice, physically and also to memory.

This aspect of Gehenna is used symbolically in the book of Revelation as the *"lake of fire"* outside the New Jerusalem which is called *"the second death"* in Revelation 20:10,14; 21:8.

The lesson to be learned from this is the thoroughness of the destruction of the wilfully wicked, in that even the memory of them shall perish. The *"lake of fire"* in Revelation is a symbolic prediction of the total destruction, in the future Kingdom of God, of all who refuse to conform and comply with the new conditions of righteousness and peace which will apply and be made known to everyone in that promised time to come.

When the Lord Jesus said to the Scribes and Pharisees, *"How can ye escape the condemnation of Gehenna?"* He indicated that the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees was so great, their perversity so obstinate and their opposition to God and His Son so serious and wilful, that it would be a marvel if they escaped condemnation to the second death.

The possibility of incurring in this life the condemnation of the second death is indicated by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12:31,32. *"Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come"*. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is here designated as the most reprehensible of all evil, even more so than speaking against Jesus Himself.

Blasphemy is often thought to mean taking the LORD's name in vain, swearing and uttering oaths, and so it is, but in the verses in Matthew 12, the Lord Jesus meant something more specific and serious than that. The Lord Jesus healed the sick and disabled and cast out devils, not by His own power, but by the power of God, to Whom He constantly gave the honour and ability. When Jesus cast out a demon from a man who was possessed, and was blind and dumb, and healed him, the Scribes and Pharisees attributed the miracle to Satan under the name of Beelzebub. In doing this they displayed an inexcusable degree of wilfulness and perversity, for which the Lord Jesus gave them the very severe warning mentioned above.

If it should happen in this life that a person who has been enlightened and has tasted the grace and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ, and then turned away and sinned against the Holy Spirit, as stated in Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-31; and hardened himself or herself in wrong-doing, forgetting that he or she had been purged from former disobedience (2 Peter 1:9), there can be only one outcome – total and final extinction without hope of resurrection. Such people, if there should be any, are described as *“twice dead”*, *“plucked up by the roots”* in Jude 12 and 13, and in 2 Peter 2:17-22.

Another future prophecy on the subject of universalism is seen in Revelation 20:7-10 in which Satan will be released from his thousand-year bondage, and will endeavour to lead astray the millions who have been resurrected and have enjoyed the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It seems from the context in Revelation that some, we are not told how many, will follow Satan in rebellion against God's righteous Kingdom, and will rise up against the righteous government that has instructed and enlightened them, and helped them to turn voluntarily from wrongdoing, accept forgiveness through Jesus Christ, and move on to justification, peace with God and eventually everlasting life. The fate of those who so rebel will be total destruction, along with the arch-enemy Satan himself.

God's Forgiveness And Saving Grace Through Christ

From the evidence presented above, it is surely clear that, although the possibility of eternal life is now available and will be available to earth's millions in the age to come, not everyone will avail themselves of God's forgiveness and grace. But

Romans 5: 12 to 21 gives us a firm basis for confidence that vast numbers of people will be saved and go on, because of God's love and mercy, to eternal life. There are at least three indications of this in the language that Paul used in the text.

Firstly he used language that is associated with a king and kingdom. The Greek word 'basileuo' occurs five times and means to reign as a king ('basileus'), to wield kingly rule and exercise authority. It is also used of the reign of sin and death (5: 14, 17 and 21), and twice of God's people reigning in life through Christ and of grace reigning unto life. This use of language that is associated with kings and a kingdom surely means that Paul had in mind God's promised kingdom with Christ in full authority and His joint-heirs (8: 16 and 17) as kings responsible to Him.

The reign of sin and death is universal in that the entire human race is involved. The reign of Christ will also be universal in that it will also have authority over the whole human race. But Christ's reign will, by God's grace, be a reign of righteousness, enlightenment and blessing, and will lead to eternal life for all who will avail themselves of God's love and mercy.

Secondly, Paul used superlative language, especially the verbs 'perisseuo' to abound, exist in abundance, surpass or overflow, and 'hyper perisseuo' to exist in even greater abundance. These words Paul used in relation to God's grace and gift (5: 15 and 17), and he added that where disobedience increased, grace superabounded (5:20). Paul used these words to apply solely to the work of Christ. The words cannot apply to the work of Adam. Adam's disobedience led to universal sin and death, but the grace of God, through Christ, has been given in superabundance in quality and quantity to overcome and replace the reign of sin and death, a superlative achievement which was the absolute opposite from and entirely missing from Adam and the consequences of his disobedience.

In the third instance Paul used 'a fortiori' language, that is, "*how much more*" twice to attest that "*the gift is not like the trespass*" (5:15). Paul said that if through one man's trespass the many died, how much more through the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, did God's grace and gift overflow to the many, and how much more will those who receive God's

abundant grace and gift reign in life (5: 15 and 17). The one man's trespass led to death, which was a penalty that was deserved, whereas the grace and gift of God were entirely free and undeserved.

Thus three contrasts were made relating to one man's action and the consequences which followed, and all three display the excellence of the work of Jesus Christ.

The ultimate confidence of believers is in the grace of God. 'Grace' is a key word in Romans 5 and indeed in much of Paul's writing. We have read that the grace will "*reign*" (21), grace "*overflows*" (15), and much more will those who receive God's grace reign in life (17).

Before Christ came to earth, sin and death reigned without the means of reprieve, and the world was full of people dying because all were under sentence of death. But when Christ made His sacrifice the means to escape death were established, so the reign no longer belongs to sin and death, but to God's grace and the promise of life which are freely available by faith to the whole human race. As believers, we are not living in pre-Christian times when the entire world of mankind was dominated by Adam's transgression, but we are living in New Testament times with the Scriptural record of Christ crucified for the sins of all of us, risen from death and granted all power in heaven and earth, the basis for our hope of everlasting life.

Satan and sin have not yet been dethroned, and millions of people are still captive to them, but by Christ's death and resurrection, they have been decisively defeated, and we wait for Christ's enemies to be made His footstool (Psalm 110:1; Ephesians 1:20) and God's promise of a new heavens and earth to be fulfilled (2 Peter 3:13).

The Historical And Scriptural Fact Of Adam And Eve

Some brief comments on the existence of Adam and Eve as the original human pair seem at this stage to be in order. It is fashionable nowadays to regard much of Genesis and many Scriptural accounts as symbolic myths because, it is alleged, science has disproved the Genesis account of creation and the fall of man.

To obviate delay of the commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans, suffice it to say that Scripture clearly intends us to accept the literal existence of Adam and Eve as the original human pair. The Biblical genealogies trace the human race back to Adam (Genesis 5:3; 1 Chronicles 1:1; Luke 3:38). Jesus taught that *"at the beginning the Creator made them male and female"* and then instituted marriage (Matthew 19:4; Genesis 1:27). Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God had made every nation *"from one man"* (Acts 17:26); and indeed Paul's carefully constructed analogy between Adam and Christ depends for its validity on the physical existence of both. He declared, as we have seen, that Adam's disobedience led to condemnation for all, just as Christ's obedience leads to justification for all (5:18; 1 Corinthians 15:22,45).

Nothing in modern science contradicts this. All human beings share the same anatomy, physiology and bio-chemistry, and the same genetic make-up. There are certainly different races (Caucasoid; Negroid, Mongoloid and Australoid), but the human race is a single species, and people of different races can intermarry and interbreed. This homogeneity of the human species is best explained only by descent from a common ancestor. Paul said to the men of Athens in Acts 17:26 that God *"hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth"*.

UNITED AND ENSLAVED TO CHRIST AND TO GOD

Romans 6: 1 to 23

Introductory Comments

Thus far the Apostle had given a summary of the spiritual benefits of God's people who come to Him through Christ. God's people have been justified by faith, they stand in grace and rejoice in the glory of God. At one point in the history of God's people, the nation He chose, Israel, was given the Mosaic Law which was added to their experience (and to us also, for our information), so that sin might increase, that is, be made more apparent (5:20). But where sin was exposed, grace, that is, unmerited favour from God, increased all the more, so that grace might reign (5:21). Against the dark background of human guilt, Paul portrayed grace as increasing and reigning.

To this place in his letter, Paul had said little about Christian life and discipleship. This omission appeared to have left him open to misrepresentation and the charge by his critics that he was saying *"Let us do evil that good may result"* (3:8). Paul did not answer their charge at that earlier part in his letter, but later in Chapter 6 he refuted their misrepresentation in detail. This refutation by Paul is the main feature of Romans 6.

Paul's critics asserted that his teaching of justification by faith without works made the doing of good works unnecessary, and encouraged people to sin freely and without restraint. They put their charge in the form of a question: *"Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?"* They were implying that Paul's teaching of abundant grace encouraged lawlessness because it promised lawbreakers the best of both worlds, in that they could indulge their passions and sinful desires freely, and still gain God's forgiveness and acceptance.

The charge made against Paul is known as antinomianism, a doctrine which means that Christians are freed from the moral law ('nomos') by the dispensation of God's grace set forth in the Christian gospel. The doctrine of antinomianism has already been considered in chapter 3.

The doctrine has had a long history in the Christian Church. Jude wrote of it in his letter (written between 80 and 90 AD) in which he described teachers of false doctrine as *“godless men, who change the grace of our God into a licence for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord”* (Jude 4).

We, at this much later time in the Gospel Age, must take care not to be influenced by antinomian thinking by making light of our inadequacies and failures because we know that God will forgive them, so therefore we do not need to concern ourselves greatly.

This attitude would be displeasing to the LORD because He expects and requires us to be truly repentant of our sins, and humbly grateful that He has accepted us and extended His grace to us as His children, because we are doing our utmost to be holy and to walk in newness of life through the commitment to the Lord Jesus.

It is most important for us, and indeed all Christian believers, that Paul was charged with antinomianism and that he took the time and trouble to answer his critics without changing or even modifying his message. He preached the gospel of grace without works because works can never save the Christian. Only God's gifts of justification and grace can save us, along with all believers who come to God in repentance through Jesus Christ.

Paul's answer to his critics was that God's grace not only allows forgiveness of disobedience but also continuously delivers believers from the guilt of disobeying, because God's grace not only justifies believers but also sanctifies them. Grace unites believers spiritually to Christ (6: 1 to 14) and brings them into a new slavery, that is, dedication to righteousness (6: 15 to 23). These two parts of Romans 6 are closely related to each other in at least five respects.

Firstly, both parts give praise to God's grace. The first part follows on from 5:20 in which Paul wrote that *“grace increased ... so that ... grace might reign”*, and the second (15 to 23) follows on from 6:14 by the statement that *“we are not under law but under grace”*.

Secondly, both parts ask the same question about sin in relation to grace. In 6:1 Paul wrote *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?"* Then in 6:15 he wrote, *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?"* In other words, Paul asked, does grace do away with moral responsibility and allow sinning to go on without restraint?

Thirdly, both parts contain Paul's indignant reaction to the questions mentioned above; *"By no means!"* (NIV, RSV); *"God forbid"* (KJV); *"Certainly not!"* (REB); *"What a ghastly thought!"* (J.B. Phillips) (6: 2 and 15).

Fourthly, both parts outline the same reason for the source of the antinomian question. It arose from ignorance concerning the beginning of the Christian believer's new life in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?"* (6:3). He also wrote, *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey as slaves, you are slaves to the one you obey?"* (6:16). If the meaning of baptism and conversion had been understood by his critics, the question would not have been asked.

Fifthly, both parts teach the same discontinuity between the old pre-Christian life and the new life committed to Christ. Both parts teach the totally incongruous situation of disobedience being allowed to remain unhindered in converted and baptised believers. Both parts express this by a question. *"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"* (6:2). *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey ...?"* (6:16). In other words we have offered ourselves as slaves to obey Christ; so how can we renounce this commitment?

UNITED TO CHRIST

Romans 6: 1 to 14

1. *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*
2. *Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*
3. *Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?*
4. *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*
5. *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,*
6. *Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.*
7. *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*
8. *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:*
9. *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*
10. *For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.*
11. *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
12. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*
13. *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*
14. *For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

In the consideration of the two parts of Romans 6, five similarities have been identified. This first part of Romans 6 will be outlined in eight stages, mainly because this first part is such a concise and closely-developed argument. These are the eight stages by which the Apostle developed his argument in 6: 1 to 14.

Stage 1: We died to sin. This is the basic fact of Paul's argument. How can we live in that to which we have died? (6:2).

Stage 2: We have died to sin in that our baptism united us to Christ in His death (6:3).

Stage 3: Having benefited by Christ's death, God wants us to live a new life in Christ (6: 4 and 5).

Stage 4: Our former self was crucified with Christ in order that we might be freed from slavery to sin (6: 6 and 7).

Stage 5: The death and the resurrection of Jesus were decisive events. He died as a sin-offering once for all, and now lives forever unto God (6: 8 to 10).

Stage 6: We are exhorted to realise that we must count ourselves as being like Christ, *"dead to sin but alive to God"* (6:11).

Stage 7: Being now alive from death, we must offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness (6: 12 and 13).

Stage 8: Sin must not be our master because we are not *"under law but under grace"*, and grace does not encourage sin but in fact completely rejects it.

We need now to consider these eight stages in detail.

Stage 1: We Die To Sin

"How shall we who have died to sin live any longer in it?" (6:2).

Paul stated this fundamental truth as being in itself a sufficient answer to the antinomians (those who contend that Christians are freed from the moral law and its moral obligations because of the gift of grace as previously commented). Antinomians

hold that believers may persist in sin, whereas Paul declared that believers have died to it. The Greek verb 'zesomen' is in the simple future tense, so the sentence means literally 'We died to sin (in the past); how then shall we live in it (in the future)?' Paul did not say that it is impossible for believers to sin, but that it is utterly and morally incongruous for believers to sin knowingly and wilfully. J.B. Phillips saw this point in his translation; *"We, who have died to sin – how could we live in sin any longer?"*.

What did the Apostle mean by Christian believers having died to sin? I had held the view that to die to sin means to become insensitive to it, that is, to be as unresponsive to temptation and sin as a person who has died is unresponsive to any and all physical stimuli: touch, sound, sight, taste or smell. It is claimed that support for this understanding occurs in 6:6, in that our old nature was in some way crucified with Christ. He bore not only our guilt but our 'flesh', that is, our fallen nature which was nailed to His cross and killed, and being included in his death our task is to reckon it dead. I intend to show in the ensuing paragraphs, that the weight of evidence in connection with this view, in spite of it being held by many reputable commentators, is all to the contrary.

There are three strong objections to the view outlined above. The first objection is that the view is not compatible with the death of Christ. The expressions *"died to sin"* or *"dead to sin"* occur in the first part of Romans 6, twice referring to Christians (6: 2 and 11) and once referring to Christ (6:10). It is a correct principle of interpretation that the same phrase occurring more than once in the same context must have the same meaning, so we must find an explanation of death to sin which is true of Christ and of Christians.

What is meant, therefore, when Paul wrote that Christ *"died to sin once for all"*? (6:10). The meaning cannot be that Christ became unresponsive to sin, since this would imply that Christ was formerly responsive to it. We know that Christ was *"tempted in every way, just as we are - yet without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). He was also subjected to three specific temptations by Satan, all of which Jesus rejected with quotations from the Scriptures (Matthew 4:1-11). These temptations were real, but Jesus did not yield to them and did not sin.

So what did Paul mean by saying that Jesus *“died to sin once for all”*? (6:10). An answer will be offered after two more objections have been outlined.

The second objection to the view that Christians have become unresponsive to our sinful nature is that the view is incompatible with Paul’s further exhortations such as not to let sin *“reign”* in our bodies in case we obey its *“evil desires”* (6:12), and not to *“offer”* our senses and faculties to sin (6:18). The Apostle also said to his readers to *“put aside the deeds of darkness”* and not think *“how to gratify the desires of our sinful nature”* (13: 12 and 14). How could Paul have written these things if our fallen nature were dead and had lost its desires to sin, or if we had become so virtuous that we were no longer affected by temptation and inclinations to yield to sinful thoughts and actions?

The third objection is that the view under consideration is incompatible with Christian experience. Paul was writing to Christians who had believed and had been baptised into Christ, as he wrote in 6: 2 and 3. So the *“death to sin”* about which he wrote, is common to all Christian people. *“Death to sin”* cannot mean a state or condition of being unresponsive to sinfulness, because the Scriptures, combined with our own day-to-day experiences, deny such an understanding. Our fallen nature is not dead, but is so alive and strongly active that the Christian is urged not to obey its desires and leadings, and Christians moreover are given the Holy Spirit to help them to resist, subdue and control the failings and inclinations of our fallen nature. If we claim to be dead to sin in the sense of being unresponsive to it, when we know full well that such is not the case, then we risk hypocrisy or exhibiting an unreasonable attitude in striving to support a belief which cannot be sustained.

In summary to this stage, it had been pointed out that Christ did not die to sin in the sense of becoming insensitive or unresponsive to it, because He never was alive to sin, as Paul’s exhortations explain and our own opposite experiences of temptation and conscience demonstrate. We are told to *“put to death”* our fallen nature and its activities (8:13). We cannot, obviously, put to death something that is already dead. There must be a better understanding of death to sin which is true of Christ and true of all Christians.

The basis of the misunderstanding of the meaning of death to sin lies in arguing from an analogy. An analogy is a likeness or correspondence between the relation of things to one another, a similarity between two or more things on which a comparison may be based. In every analogy we need to consider at what point the similarity or correspondence is being drawn, and we must not press a resemblance at every point.

For example, when Jesus told His hearers, in Matthew 18:1-6, to become like little children, He did not mean that His hearers should copy every characteristic of children, but emulate only their trust, humbleness and dependence. In the same way, to say that we have died to sin does not mean that we must display every characteristic of dead people, such as their insensibility to stimuli. Such an understanding is to take the analogy further than Scripture has intended. We must consider and try to discover at what point the analogy of death was being made.

To reach a satisfactory answer, we must turn to the Scriptures and their teaching about death, and move away from arguing from analogy. Death in Scripture is represented as the penalty for sin. This is the case in Scripture, from Genesis 2:17; 3:17-19, to Revelation 21 and 22 where the fate of the wilfully unrepentant is called the *"second death"*. The teaching of Scripture that death is the penalty for sin is made clear in this epistle to the Romans in which we read that those who sin *"deserve death"* (1:32), that death entered the world because of sin (5:12), and that *"the wages of sin is death"* (6:23).

In 6:10 the Apostle wrote *"the death he died, he died to sin once for all"*. This means that Christ, although He did not commit sin, bore sin's condemnation, namely death. He met its claim and paid its penalty *"once for all"* (Greek 'ephapax'), an adverb which is used many times in the New Testament to apply to His atoning sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,26,28; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18). This was God's way of offering salvation for the whole human race – a righteous man to give His life as a ransom and a redemptive price by which God can forgive sins and impute righteousness to sinful people, who come to Him acknowledging and repenting of their sins, and doing so through the Lord Jesus, the only way (Acts 4:12).

Truly, as the prophet declared, *“the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6; KJV). Death can therefore have no demand or claim on Him. Because He had no sin, God raised Him from death, *“because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him”* (Acts 2:24). As the Apostle wrote to the Corinthians, *“For him who knew no sin, he made a Sin-offering on our behalf, that we might become God’s righteousness in him”* (2 Corinthians 5:21; Diaglott).

What is true of Christ is also true of believers who are spiritually united to Christ. We too have *“died to sin”* in the sense that through our commitment to Christ we acknowledge that he bore the iniquity of us all. We cannot of course share in Christ’s atoning and sin-bearing sacrifice, but we can share in its benefits by being united to Christ. Christ died, took the penalty of death on our behalf, instead of us, and we will never need to die for our sins because his death lifted that condemnation. He died for us as our representative, as it were, so that we may be said to have died in and through Him.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died”* (2 Corinthians 5:14). That is, by being united to Him by faith, His death broke the penalty of everlasting death for those who are committed to Him. In his *“Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans”* (page 239), Robert Haldane wrote, ‘Paul is referring not to a death to the power of sin, but a death to its guilt, that is to our justification’.

So our death to sin is not being insensitive to sin’s power and influence, but is a state of being freed from its guilt, being declared not guilty by the LORD God, and consequently, by His mercy and grace, being accepted as His children and members of His family through our Lord Jesus Christ.

UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued)

UNITED TO CHRIST (continued)

Stage 2: Baptised Into Christ's Death

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death?" (6:3).

In order to follow Paul's argument three clarifications about baptism need to be made.

Firstly, baptism means immersion in water unless otherwise stated in the context. The New Testament defines other kinds of baptism, such as baptism *"with fire"* (Matthew 3:11), and baptism *"with the Spirit"* (John 1:33; Acts 1:5). Some commentators have suggested that in Romans 6:3 Paul is referring to baptism with the Spirit as uniting us to Christ, and have quoted 1 Corinthians 12:13 in support; *"For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body..."* This thought is understandable, but does not really fit the context of being baptised into Christ's death.

It is my contention that whenever in Scripture the words 'baptism' and 'being baptised' occur, without the element with which the baptism takes place being mentioned, the reference is to baptism in water by immersion, as in Acts 2:38 (*"Repent and be baptised ..."*). Whenever baptism in water is not meant, the alternative element is specifically mentioned, for example, *"with fire"* and *"with the Spirit"* as mentioned above.

It seems that the reason for some commentators thinking that in Romans 6 Paul is not referring to water baptism, is the belief held by some Christians that the mere ceremony of water baptism will ensure membership of Christ's Church and salvation to eternal life. Paul did not teach that the baptismal ceremony of itself brought about salvation, or was anything more than a symbol of the changed attitudes of heart and mind in a person who comes to God through Jesus Christ in belief and repentance.

Secondly, baptism signifies our union with, that is, our commitment to Christ. This is not its only meaning because other meanings are mentioned, such as cleansing from sin and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, but its essential significance is that it unites believers to Christ, as indicated by the Greek preposition 'eis' (into). At its institution, baptism was said to be *"into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19). Some brethren question the authenticity of these words, and give sound reasons for questioning their authenticity, but there is as yet no incontrovertible evidence that the words in question are not authentic. Elsewhere, baptism is said to be *"into the name of the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 8:16), or simply *"into Christ"* (Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27). To be baptised into Christ means to enter into a close spiritual relationship with Him as our leader and saviour, in a similar way to the Israelites who were *"baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea"* (1 Corinthians 10:2), that is, into a relationship with a responsibility to Moses as their leader.

Thirdly, baptism in water does not of itself secure what it signifies, namely a changed heart and mind, with the habits and practices of one's former life rejected and replaced by a new way of life in Christ. The ceremony of baptism in water is a symbol of and a public witness to the forsaking of a former life of self-will consisting of the following of fleshly and worldly desires, and the replacement of these by a continuing walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ (6:4). How are we then to understand the New Testament terms of washing away our sins (Acts 22:16), clothing ourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27) and of being saved by baptism (1 Peter 3:21)?

In view of the significance to individual Christians of their determination to completely reform heart, mind and life to the standards which are described in Scripture, the terms used in the references mentioned above are examples of the visible ceremony of water baptism being used to symbolise the reality of the complete change of heart and mind. It seems unreasonable to consider that Paul, having spent three chapters explaining that justification is by faith alone, should then shift his ground and declare that salvation is to be gained by water baptism. The inspired Apostle's thoughts and words are consistent throughout his epistle.

In such statements as mentioned above, the faith of the baptised person or persons was taken for granted. The essential point that Paul was making is that being a Christian involves a close, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and that this spiritual union with Him is accomplished by the true baptism of heart and mind, which is symbolised by the ceremony of baptism in water. For a full explanation of baptisms as recorded in Scripture, the reader is recommended to consult the booklet 'The Church and its Ceremonies', in which the doctrine of baptisms is fully discussed in the section on pages 64 to 96.

Stage 3: Sharing Spiritually In Christ's Resurrection

The basic theme of verses 1 to 14 of Romans 6 is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not only historical facts and vitally-significant doctrines, but also personal experiences for Christians, because by baptism in faith we have come to share in them as spiritual experiences.

It would seem that this is what the Apostle meant when he wrote that *"we were baptised into his death"* (6:3), and that *"we were therefore buried with him through baptism into death"* (6:4), *"in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life"* (6:4). The Apostle commented further in 6:5 of our empathy with Christ's death and resurrection. His words, translated literally, are, *"if we have been with him in the likeness of his death, we will be with him in the likeness of his resurrection"*.

How are we to understand what the Apostle wrote? The verses in this section (6: 3, 4 and 5) seem to refer to the pictorial symbolism of Christian baptism. We know that Christ died to sin in the sense of paying its penalty, and in doing so paid the only penalty acceptable to God for the sins of the whole human race. We can be said to share in Christ's death in the sense that Christ paid the penalty for our sins which we ourselves could not do.

By having faith in Christ's sacrifice we have relinquished the responsibility for our disobedience to him, thus in God's judgment we have died to sin in Christ, because He has paid the penalty due to us, and we are therefore, by faith, not guilty before God. By the profession we made in baptism, we have

pledged to renounce sin and live unto God and Christ. So if we are consecrated to Jesus, and to God through Him, and identified with Jesus in His death, we shall also be identified with Him in His resurrection (Philippians 3:10-14; John 17:24, John 14:1-3; 1 John 3:2; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

After Jesus was raised from death to begin a new life, so we, having devoted ourselves to serving Christ and God by baptism in faith, have begun new lives, that is, our lives have been re-aligned in the Christian walk, having been freed from the guilt and condemnation of sin because of the Lord Jesus and all He has done for us. It can also be said that, through our appreciation of and faith in Christ's sacrifice we participate spiritually in his death and resurrection, and by sharing in the blessings that come to us by faith, which unite us to Christ's death and resurrection. This inclusiveness of Christ's death cannot and does not mean sharing in His offering for sin; because only Jesus, Who did not sin, could have been sacrificed as an offering acceptable to God.

Stage 4: Our Old Self Crucified With Christ

"We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (6:6).

"Our old self" ("our old man"; KJV) does not mean some part of us that existed in the past, but our former self, *"the man we once were"* (NEB), *"our old humanity"* (REB), that is, all that we were before coming in belief to Christ. So what was crucified with Christ was not some part of our fallen nature, but our whole attitude of heart and mind as we were before our conversion. The phrase *"our old self was crucified"* (6:6) has the same meaning as *"we died to sin"* (6:2).

Some commentators associate the use of the verb *"crucified"* in Romans 6:6 with Galatians 5:24, where those who belong to Christ Jesus are said to *"have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires"*.

In the booklet entitled 'Notes on Paul's Letter to the Galatians', on pages 114 and 115, some comments were offered to explain why Paul used such a strong word as *"crucified"*. In summary, it was said that there are three reasons for Paul's use of *"crucified"*: Crucifixion was: (1) a pitiless death, (2) intensely painful; and (3) decisive.

While the significance of “*crucified*” is the same in both verses, the contexts are different. The verse in Romans 6:6 describes something that has happened to us (“*our old self was crucified with him*”), whereas in Galatians 5:24 something is described that we ourselves have done (“*we have crucified the sinful nature*”). In Romans 6:6 we are said to have died to sin because Christ bore our sins and paid the penalty in full, while in Galatians 5:24 we are said to have decisively rejected our sinful nature with all its desires and allurements, so that we must take up our Christian obligations daily and follow Christ, by being united to Him, that is, acknowledging our awareness of His example in all that we do, say or think (Luke 9:23).

Our death to sin in Christ is really a legal death, a death which is a penalty, while our death to the power and enticements of sin, that is, our rejection of temptation to disobey, is really a moral death, the rejection of immorality. Our death to sin occurred once only in the past, with Christ, while the putting to death of our sinful nature is continuous and belongs to the present.

Paul was concerned in Romans 6 mainly with death to sin, which must take place before our sinful nature is put to death, that is completely subdued. The latter, moreover, cannot be achieved without the former, our death to sin.

But how has it come about that the crucifying with Christ of our former self resulted in rejection of our sinful nature and freedom from slavery to sin? Paul answered this for us in 6:7. This has happened “*because anyone who has died has been freed from sin*”. The word ‘freed’ should really be translated ‘justified’, as in the Diaglott – “*because anyone who has died has been justified from sin*”. So what did Paul mean? How are our death and justification the basis of our freedom from sinfulness?

The only way to be justified from sin is that the penalty of sin be paid. In human law the only escape from conviction resulting from a crime is by going to prison and serving the term of imprisonment imposed by the court; in other words, by paying the penalty. Once the term of imprisonment has been served, the prisoner is set free and is no longer guilty. He need have no more fear of prosecution because the demands of the law have been met. He has been justified in the sense of being declared no longer guilty.

The same principle applies if the penalty is death. There is no way of escape except by paying the penalty. In countries where the death penalty is still applicable, there is no way of escape for the prisoner because once he has been executed, his life on earth is finished. He cannot continue his life as a free man as can a person who has served a prison sentence and has been set free.

Thus the wonderful feature of Christian justification is that death to sin and our former way of life is followed by re-instatement to a new present life in which Christians can live again as justified persons, no longer guilty because the death penalty for sin without any hope of life, has been paid by the Lord Jesus.

The result for the believer is that we deserved to die, pay the price for our sins, and we did die, pay the price, in the person of Jesus Christ Who died, paid the price in our place, and with Whom we have been united by faith and by baptism. And by commitment to Christ we have been raised to a new life of justification, of freedom from guilt. We will still die, but we are promised a resurrection, because being justified, that is, considered righteous by God, death will not be allowed to keep its hold on us. Our former sinful life has been rejected, we have *“risen with Christ”*, and our *“life is hid with Christ in God”* (Colossians 3:1-3).

Our new life *“in Christ”* began when we chose to make the commitment to Him, because by God’s grace and our faith, we are justified and therefore considered by God as not guilty of death, the penalty for disobedience. But as long as this life lasts, we will in fact continue to sin inadvertently and against our will, and therefore will need to ask forgiveness every day. And if we continue and remain faithful, God has promised that through Jesus Christ, He will raise us to live in the new heavens and earth as spirit beings no longer bound by our present limitations and circumstances. The new heavens and earth will be a righteous world order ruled over by God’s King, Jesus Christ, Who will in turn be assisted by the resurrected Gospel Age Church members in their changed status as spirit beings, and the faithful people of the ages before Jesus’ sacrifice as princes in all the earth, to work together to fulfil God’s promise of blessings to all nations and all families of the earth (2 Peter 3:13; Romans 8:16-18; Revelation 1:6; 2:26,27; Psalm 45:16; Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 28:14).

UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued)

UNITED TO CHRIST (continued)

Stage 5: We Will Also Live With Christ

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (6:8).

In 6: 6 and 7 we saw that our former self (our *“old man”*, KJV) was crucified with Him. In 6:8 and 9, Paul wrote *“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him”* as already quoted above. Commentators are divided as to whether the verb *“will live”* refers to our sharing in Christ’s life now in the present, or sharing life with Him when we are raised to life again in the future.

It would seem that Paul meant both because he would not have thought of one without the other. In 8:10 he wrote that *“your spirit is alive”* and that the Holy Spirit *“will also give life to your mortal bodies”*. Life with Christ means now in this life, and in the future after the resurrection, when dying and death will eventually be cancelled at the end of the kingdom age.

The guarantee of the continuing nature of our new life, beginning now and continuing after the resurrection, is to be found in Christ’s resurrection. *“For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again”* (6:9). Jesus, Who did not sin, yet by God’s will paid the penalty for sin on behalf of the whole human race, has been raised to a new plane of existence from which there will never be any return. *“Death no longer has any mastery over him”* (6:9), wrote the Apostle. As Jesus Himself declared, *“I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever”* (Revelation 1:18).

Paul referred briefly to the death and resurrection of Jesus, indicating that they belong together and should not be separated, but also emphasised the differences between them. *“The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God”* (6:10).

There are differences of time (death was a past experience, life began in the past and continues in the present); of nature (He died to sin but lives to God); and of quality (death was *“once for all”*, whereas the resurrection to life was, and remains, continuous in the heavenly realm).

These differences are important to us in our commitment to Christ, because our new life began with a death to sin and has resumed with a continuing life of service to God. We died with Christ (6: 6 and 7) and we have risen with Christ (6: 8 and 9). Our former way of life ended with the death it deserved, but thanks to the Lord Jesus and to God’s mercy and grace, our new way of life began with our revival to newness of life.

Stage 6: Dead To Sin But Alive To God

“ dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11).

By faith we have died to serving sin and risen to serving God. We must therefore *“reckon”* (KJV), *“consider”* (RSV), *“regard”* (NEB), *“look upon”* (J.B. Phillips), *“count”* (NIV), *“account”* (Diaglott) ourselves *“dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus”* (6:11). *“In Christ Jesus”* surely means by reason of or because of our union by faith with Him.

This ‘reckoning’ or ‘accounting’ must not be pretence or a kind of make-believe. We must not try to pretend that our old nature is completely dead when we know full well that it is not. The *“old man”* or former sinful nature lurks in the background and recesses of our minds, and we must be ever mindful and ready to resist and not allow it to entice us and cause us to stumble.

We must realise and remember that our former self died with Christ and came to an end, and we must consider now that we are in fact *“dead to sin and alive to God”* (6:11), just as was Christ’s experience and example. Our old life has ended, the score has been settled and the debt paid, and we must have nothing more to do with it.

We must in our Christian walk recall our baptism, the symbol of our new life of union with Christ, and live in accordance with the resolve and undertaking we gave. Spiritually we have died and we have risen to a new life. How can we possibly turn back to the former life to which we have died?

Stage 7. We Must Therefore Offer Ourselves To God

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (6:12).

The word *“therefore”* brings us to the conclusion of Paul’s argument. Our whole attitude to sinfulness and to God must change. The Apostle said in effect, do not offer yourselves to sin because you have died to it; but offer yourselves to God (6:13), because you have risen to live for His glory. This is the whole emphasis of verses 12 and 13 of Romans 6.

Paul’s exhortation here had both negative and positive aspects. The negative came first. *“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (6:12).* The word *“mortal”* shows that Paul was referring to our physical bodies. Not all desires of our bodies are evil, of course, but temptation can side-track our minds and lure our bodies to lead us astray and cause us to think, speak and do things that we as believers should not do. So Paul called believers to combat temptation because we have been freed from sin but nevertheless must still fight against it.

Paul then issued another prohibition. *“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness” (6:13).* Paul had been referring to the human body, so its parts must surely be the various limbs and organs and probably our human faculties and capabilities which a sinful nature can use as instruments of wickedness.

We should not devote our tongues, hands, feet or any bodily members to purposes of iniquity or any wrong or doubtful practices, as though we were under the direction of sinful passions and corrupt desires. The tongue should be consecrated to God’s praise and to the speaking of truth, kindness and benevolence; the hands to useful labour for Him and His cause; the feet should be swift to do Him service, and should not travel along the paths of evil. The eyes should see the works of God and should bring about thanksgiving and appreciation. The ears should not be used to listen to words of deceit or to persuasive words that would lead us astray, but should be eager to hear the word of God as He speaks to us in His word of truth and in the wonders of His creation as in Psalm 19:1-4.

The Greek word 'hoopla' is a general word for tools, implements or appliances of any kind. Some commentators think that sin in this context is personified as a military commander to whom it would be possible to offer our organs and faculties as weapons, as agents of wrongdoing, citing Romans 13:12; 2 Corinthians 6:7 and 10:4 in support of their thought.

But instead of yielding to sin, Paul then exhorted his readers to the positive alternative, *"rather offer yourselves to God"* (6:13). Paul moved to the presentation of our bodies to God, the *"parts"*, including capabilities and faculties, as *"instruments of righteousness"* (6:13), because we *"have been brought from death to life"* (6:13). Since we are alive to God, we should offer ourselves and our faculties to Him.

The theme of life and death runs right through this section. Christ died and rose, and we by faith have died and risen with Him, and being alive to God by our faith, we must continue to offer ourselves to His service through the Lord Jesus.

Stage 8. Sinfulness Must Not Be Our Master

"For sin shall not be your master, because ye are not under law, but under grace" (6:14).

Law and grace are the opposing principles of the old and the new orders, as represented respectively by Adam and by Christ. To be under law is to accept the obligation to keep it, and thus to come under its curse and condemnation, as the Apostle wrote in Galatians 3:10.

To accept our position to be under grace is to acknowledge our dependence on the work of Christ for reconciliation, and thereby to be justified, that is, considered not guilty, to be imputed as righteous, and to be set free from sin and death. With this knowledge and assurance, we should be assisted and even enabled by it to resist sin with new strength and confidence.

The first part of Romans 6 (verses 1 to 14) is contained within two clear references to sin and grace. In the first verse, the question is asked whether grace will encourage sin, while in the last verse (14) the answer is given that, on the contrary, grace not only discourages but forbids sinning. Law identifies and

exposes sin (5:20), while grace opposes it, and places upon us the responsibility of striving for holiness. This was the thought of William Tyndale in his 'Prologue on Romans' written in 1526. 'Now go to, reader Remember that Christ made not this atonement, that thou shouldest anger God again; neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them; neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return (as a swine) unto thine old puddle again; but that thou shouldest be a new creature and live a new life after the will of God and not of the flesh'.

UNITED AND ENSLAVED (continued)

SLAVES TO GOD BY CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

Romans 6: 15 to 23

15. *What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*
16. *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*
17. *But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.*
18. *And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*
19. *I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*
20. *For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.*
21. *What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.*
22. *But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*
23. *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Introductory Comments

The question in 6:15 "*Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?*" takes us back to 6:1, "*Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?*" There are differences between sinning because we cannot help it, and persistently and deliberately sinning; and between sinning so that grace might increase and sinning knowingly because we are under grace.

The issue as Paul presented it may be paraphrased thus:

- (a) Does grace allow us to disobey and not be concerned about our disobedience? and
- (b) Does grace encourage sinning because we know we need not worry about the consequences of wrong-doing?

To both aspects of the issue concerning sinning and grace, Paul replied vigorously, "*By no means!*" (6: 2 and 15).

Paul argued that freedom to do wrong is incompatible with Christian commitment, and described this truth in terms of being united to Christ in chapter 6: 3 to 14, and being enslaved to God in 6: 16 to 23.

Paul introduced two figures of speech:

- (1) "*dead to sin but alive to God*" in 6:11; and
- (2) "*free from sin and ... slaves to God*" in 6:22.

Paul's emphasis in (1) was on what was done for us (being united to Christ by mercy and grace), and in (2) was what we have done (we offered our lives in obedience to God and cast ourselves on His mercy, through the Lord Jesus). We were converted and baptised, turning from a sinful way of life to serve God through the Lord Jesus, being enabled by God's grace to do so.

In the first part of Romans 6 (1 to 14), Paul concentrated on baptism, and in the second part (15 to 23) Paul emphasised commitment. In both parts Paul commenced his argument with the same question. "*Don't you know?*" (6: 3 and 16) and then examined his readers' understanding of their Christian beginnings.

He said, in effect, since we have been at one with Christ and therefore become dead to sin and alive to God, how can we possibly continue in sinfulness? He also said we have offered ourselves to God and become His slaves, and therefore are committed to obey Him, so how can we possibly think we can be free to disobey?

Surrender Leads To Slavery (6:16)

The Apostle wrote, *"Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?"*. This may sound surprising to us because we tend to think of Roman slaves as having been either captured in war or bought at a slave market, but not as having offered themselves. Yet there was such a thing as voluntary slavery. John Ziesler in his book 'Paul's Letter to the Romans' (page 167) reported that 'People in dire poverty could offer themselves as slaves to someone simply in order to be fed and housed'. He made the point that those who so offered themselves invariably had their offer accepted. They could not, of course, give themselves to a master and then expect to retain their freedom.

The same situation pertains to spiritual slavery, the commitment to serve God with heart and mind. We as Christians can either allow ourselves to become slaves to our sinful nature, remaining under the condemnation it brings, or become slaves to God through the Lord Jesus, which leads ultimately to righteousness and life.

The notion of slavery to sin was spoken of by Jesus when He said, *"everyone who sins is a slave to sin"* (John 8:34; NIV). Paul told us in 6:23 that sin leads to death because death is the wages which sin pays. Paul wrote in 6:16, *"...you are slaves to the one whom you obey ... whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness"*.

The parallels drawn by the Apostle are not quite exact, but not difficult to understand. He contrasted *"slaves to sin"* with *"slaves to obedience"*, which is the same as comparing *"slaves to sin and death"* with *"slaves to obedience of Christ and life"*. Obedience is a requirement of slavery, and righteousness in 6:16 is really synonymous with life, as indicated in 5:18.

Paul's general meaning is surely clear. Christian conversion is an act of surrender which in turn leads to slavery, that is, total and exclusive obedience to God through the Lord Jesus. No-one, as Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, can serve, that is, be the slave of, two masters. We cannot claim to be God's servants if we stray or lapse into sinning, and try to excuse ourselves by saying that occasional disobedience now and then won't hurt us.

Once we have offered ourselves to Jesus and to God through Jesus, we are His slaves, and it is not acceptable for us to go back. We have chosen our Master and we must obey Him, as best we can, now, and for the rest of our lives.

Conversion Means An Exchange of Slaveries (6: 17 and 18)

Paul reminded his readers that their conversion involved a change or transition of slaveries. So complete was the change that had taken place in their lives that Paul wrote spontaneously, *"Thanks be to God"* (6:17).

He then summarised his readers' experience in four stages:

- (1) what they were (slaves to sin);
- (2) what they did (obeyed God through Christ);
- (3) what then happened to them (set free from sin);
- (4) what they had become (slaves to righteousness).

These stages involve some further details.

(1) What they were (slaves to sin)

Paul said to his readers *"you used to be slaves to sin"* (6:17). There are only two slaveries, either to transgression or to God, and everyone is a slave to one or the other. Christian conversion is a transfer from one (sin) to the other (God through Christ).

(2) What they did (obeyed God through Christ)

Paul wrote, *"You wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted"* (6:17). What did the Apostle mean by *"form of teaching"*? The NEB and REB render this as *"pattern of teaching"*, while the RSV has *"standard of teaching"*. This surely must mean what the Apostle wrote to Timothy, *"What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 1:13).

What Paul taught must have been basic gospel doctrine as in 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4, and elementary personal ethics as in 1 Thessalonians 4: 1 and 2. Paul saw Christian conversion as trusting in Christ and in God through Christ, as well as believing, acknowledging and obeying the truth.

Supporting references for this understanding are:

- (a) for believing the truth
(2 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Timothy 4:3);
- (b) for acknowledging the truth
(John 8:32; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:25, Titus 1:11);
- (c) for obeying the truth
(Romans 2:8, Galatians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:22).

Paul wrote, not that this pattern of teaching was committed to them, but that they were committed to it, that is, they were entrusted with it. The verb he used was “*paradidomi*”, which is the usual Greek word for passing on a teaching or tradition. This is perhaps unexpected. We would expect the doctrine to be handed over to the hearers, but Paul told us that the hearers were handed over or made subject to the doctrine. This different view is understandable because Christians are not masters of doctrine or tradition, they are called to become “*a new creation*” by the Word of God, and remain in subjection to that Word.

(3) What then happened to them (set free from sin)

The Romans, and all Christians, “*have been set free from sin*” (6:18) and delivered from its mastery. Christians have not become perfect or righteous in and of themselves, because they are still capable of sinning (6: 12 and 13); but they have been rescued from sin’s mastery and delivered into the mastery of God; from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13).

(4) What they had become (slaves to righteousness)

The Romans and all Christians “*have become slaves to righteousness*” (6:18). This conversion or transfer by the power and grace of God from slavery to sinfulness, to slavery to righteousness, is included in Paul’s thanksgiving in 6:17; “*But thanks be to God*”.

Paul’s Analogy Of The Two Slaveries (6:19)

In Romans 6:19 Paul expressed a kind of apology for the ‘human terms’ with which he described Christian conversion. Slavery is not a really appropriate metaphor with which to liken the Christian life. It certainly indicates the total allegiance of the Christian to the Lord Jesus, but does not convey the gentleness

and meekness of Jesus, nor the easy yoke that He places upon us (Matthew 11: 29 and 30), nor indeed the freedom His service brings to us. The Apostle used this metaphor *“because you are weak in your natural selves”* (6:19). Their weakness is surely their fallen minds and characters, making them vulnerable to temptation, thus making it necessary for the Apostle to remind them of the obedience to God and Christ to Whom they had committed themselves.

Paul then drew an analogy between the two slaveries *“Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness”* (6:19). The analogy Paul drew was in the way both slaveries develop, the one exhibiting the sorry process of moral degeneracy and the other the uplifting process of transformation to moral goodness. Both slaveries are dynamic, the one steadily deteriorating, the other steadily progressing and gaining in strength.

A Paradox:

Slavery is freedom and freedom is slavery (6: 20 to 22)

A paradox is a statement or proposition that seems to be self-contradictory or even absurd, but yet expresses a truth.

The Apostle stated that each slavery is also a kind of freedom, but one is true and the other false. Each freedom is a kind of slavery, but one is degrading and the other noble. Paul wrote *“When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness”* (6:20), such freedom being in fact licence. He also wrote, *“But now ... you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God”* (6:22), such freedom being better expressed as liberty.

The way to assess the claims of these two slaveries and freedoms is to evaluate their consequences. The consequences of slavery to sinning and freedom from righteousness are a sense of guilt over *“the things you are now ashamed of”* or *“blush to remember”* (Phillips), which *“things result in death”* (6:21). The consequences of freedom from sinfulness and slavery to God are *“holiness now”* and *“eternal life”* in the future (6:22). Thus, paradoxically, there is freedom which leads to death, and a bondage which leads to life.

Conclusion (6:23)

In 6:23 Paul continued his comparison and contrast between the two slave masters, sin and the LORD God. All human beings are in bondage to one or the other, and the ultimate destinies to which the two slaveries lead are either death or life; that is, either to condemnation or justification.

Paul then introduced a new contrast which concerns the terms of service of the two slave-masters. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (6:23). Sin pays wages, which all persons deserve, but God gives a free gift (charisma) which no person deserves. The ground, the only ground, on which God's gracious gift is given, is the atoning death of Jesus Christ, and the only way to receive it is to be personally committed to Jesus Christ by faith and baptism.

In summary then, we have been told of two ways of living totally opposed to each other. Jesus portrayed them as the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road which leads to life (Matthew 7:13). Paul called them two slaveries. By natural birth we are under the Adamic curse and are the slaves of sin, but by God's grace and our faith, we are, through Christ, the slaves of God. Bondage to sin yields only shame and moral deterioration culminating in death, while bondage to God yields progressive holiness culminating in the resurrection and the gift of eternal life.

In Romans 6 Paul brought his high and noble theology down to the level of practical everyday experience. We must remember who we are because of our conversion and baptism. We are one with Christ (6: 1 to 14) and slaves of God (6: 15 to 23). Being united to Christ we are *“dead to sin but alive to God”* (6:11), and committed to obedience (6:16). In practice we need to remind ourselves constantly who we are, that we are striving to be new persons in Christ, and by God's grace will continue to live accordingly.

The Duke of Windsor who abdicated the throne of England in 1936, recalled in an interview that his father (King George V) said to him, when he had done something wrong, ‘My dear boy, you must always remember who you are’. We should behave as though our Heavenly Father said to us every day, ‘My dear child, you must always remember who you are’.

THE LAW AND CHRISTIAN SANCTIFICATION

Romans 7: 1 to 25

Introductory Notes

In Romans 7 Paul's explanations and comments are both historical and personal. He was endeavouring to explain the place of the Law in God's purpose for the human race. The "*Law*" the "*commandment*" the "*written code*" is mentioned in every one of the first fourteen verses of chapter 7, and thirty-five times in the whole passage from 7:1 to 8:4.

In chapters 1 to 6 of this epistle, Paul wrote about the Law in adverse terms. The Law reveals sin (3:20), condemns the sinner (3:19), defines sin as transgression (4:15; 5:13; also Galatians 3:19), "*brings wrath*" (4:15), and was "*added so that the trespass might increase*", that is, be more apparent (5:20). Later in Romans 10:5 (quoting Leviticus 18:5), Paul wrote that the person "*who does these things will live by them*". But no human being, apart from the Lord Jesus, has ever succeeded in obeying the Law perfectly, so the Law could not be the way of salvation (Galatians 3: 10 and 21).

God's righteousness has been revealed in the Gospel "*apart from law*", that is, separate from it (1:17; 3:21), although the Law helped to bear witness to it (1:2; 3:21). Sinners are justified by God, not by obeying the Law but by faith in Christ (3:27). And this faith upholds the Law (3:31) by assigning to the Law its appointed place in God's purpose for the human race. Abraham gave evidence to this principle in the way that he received God's promise "*not through law ... but through the righteousness that comes by faith*" (4:13). These words of Paul show that the Gospel of promise, grace and faith is incompatible with the dictates of the Law.

So far, then, Paul had written that the Law reveals sin, not salvation, and brings wrath, not grace. Such statements by Paul that Christian believers are "*not under law, but under grace*" (6:14), must have shocked many Jews, and given them cause, in their own estimation, for persecuting Paul with fury and malice.

What Paul wrote in Romans 6 was preparatory to his next chapter, which begins with the statement that we have *"died to the law"* (7:4), and so have been *"released from the law"* (7:6). Such statements, no doubt, led many Jews to believe that Paul was being dismissive of God's Law, from which sincere and godly Jews gained great satisfaction and pleasure. Certainly it is written that the Law was to godly Jews *"more precious than gold, than much pure gold"*, and *"sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb"* (Psalm 19:10).

The Jews were under the impression that the Law given to them was to continue always. They did not realise that the period or dispensation of the Law was for a limited time only, and the majority of Jews during Christ's earthly ministry and Paul's ministry did not understand that the dispensation was at an end, and that a new dispensation of the Gospel and the New Covenant had come to them and all people. The majority of the Jews neither listened to nor heeded Christ's and His Apostles' teachings. Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, *"a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem ... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth ..."* (John 4:21-24). Paul wrote *"Christ is the end of the law"* (10:4); *"you are not under law"* (6:14), and many similar statements already quoted above.

It seems that confusion among Christians has arisen in relation to the application of the Mosaic Law. Some professing Christians believe that the Mosaic Law consists of two main parts, the moral and the ceremonial, and that only the ceremonial parts have been abolished by Christ and His atoning death, leaving the moral parts to apply to Christians.

In response, it is essential to realise that the death of Christ is mentioned as bringing about a *"change of the law"* in Hebrews 7:12. This *"change"* is not a change in the sense of a revision of existing provisions and statutes, but something more radical, a *"blotting out"* and *"taking away"* of the Law with all of its requirements and statutes.

The temporary character of the Law Covenant is made plain in the New Testament, since it was but a *"shadow of good things to come"* (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1); the *"good things"* being the benefits to come through Jesus Christ, the new High

Priest, and the New Covenant (Galatians 2:21; Romans 8:3,4). For a fuller and more detailed discussion of the alleged division of the Mosaic Law into two sections, moral and ceremonial, the reader is invited to consult the booklet 'Sabbath Observance'.

The New Testament Scriptures tell us repeatedly that the Mosaic Law has been abolished and does not apply to believing Christians. Many Christian writers comment that Christians are still bound by moral laws and to the Mosaic Law because it contains moral commands. But this is not what the Scripture says. Important Scriptures, in addition to those already quoted, that tell us of the end of the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, which took place when Christ was crucified, are Colossians 2:14; Ephesians 2:15,16; 2 Corinthians 3:13; Romans 10:4; and in particular the clear statements in Hebrews 2:18; 8:13; 9:11-18; 10:9-25.

The Mosaic Law was given as one comprehensive system of law without any division, and it was removed as one undivided law. For anyone to reject one part and cling to any other part is inadmissible. The Law was given to make sin appear more sinful (Romans 7:13), and was to remain for a limited time until the promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, should come (Galatians 3:19). When He was crucified, the Mosaic Law as embodied in the Law Covenant was nailed to His cross and came to its everlasting end (Colossians 2:14). *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17; Romans 6:14).

The Mosaic Law has been taken out of the way, and the Christian believer is required to *"fulfil the royal law according to the scripture"* (James 2:8), as the Lord Jesus commanded; *"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"* (John 13:34). Jesus repeated this comment in John 15: 12 and 17, *"This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you"*. *"These things I command you, that ye love one another"*. This command we must keep, and to help us, Jesus and His inspired New Testament writers have given us further specific instructions which fall within the general command to love one another.

We are not to lie, we must not steal. We must not be angry, nor allow corrupt communication to proceed from our mouths.

We are to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice. In contrast we are to be kind, tender-hearted and forgiving, thereby imitating God, Who, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:5-17). There are also New Testament commands and requirements concerning marriage and the home, the conduct of masters and servants, and the work and conduct of believers in church matters and worship in church congregations.

It may be argued that many of the New Testament requirements are identical with the commands given by Moses. This is true, of course, but not all are identical. The 'new commandment' is not to be found in the Mosaic Law, nor anything like it. There are many commands in the Mosaic Law that are not repeated in the New Covenant. The New Covenant commands, such as prohibition of lying and stealing, that are identical with those of the Law Covenant, are observed by Christians because they are New Covenant commands, not because they appear under the Law Covenant.

Moreover, our observance of commands that are made under the New Covenant as well as under the Law Covenant, are not to be understood as acknowledging or admitting that we are still under the old Covenant. We refrain from lying and stealing, for example, not because Moses said so, but because the Lord Jesus and His inspired apostles and disciples have said so.

Romans 7 can be divided into three sections:

1. Release from the Law (7: 1 to 6);
2. Positive comments about the Law (7: 7 to 13);
3. The weakness of the Law (7: 14 to 25).

1. RELEASE FROM THE LAW

Romans 7: 1 to 6

1. *Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?*
2. *For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.*
3. *So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*
4. *Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another - to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.*
5. *For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.*
6. *But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.*

Paul began this section by addressing his readers as brothers and asking them for the third time *“Do you not know?”* He asked this when talking about baptism (6:3) and slavery (6:16). His next question concerned the limited jurisdiction of the Law. This is the dominant theme of this section, since he used *“released from the law”* three times (7: 2, 3, and 6), and referred to the Law in every verse. He assumed that they did know, because he added that he was *“speaking to men who know the law”* (7:1).

a. The legal principle (7:1)

Paul made reference to the principle that he assumed his readers knew, *“the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives”*. The RSV has a better rendering, *“the law is binding on a person only during his life”*. The Greek word for *“has authority over”* or *“is binding on”* is *‘kyrieuo’*, which is rendered in Mark 10:42 as *“lord it over”*. The word expresses the

authority of law over those who are subject to it. But this authority is limited to a person's lifetime, and the only event that invalidates the authority is death. Law is for life, only death annuls it. Paul stated this as a legal axiom, which is universally accepted and not subject to challenge.

b. The domestic illustration (7: 2 and 3)

Paul chose marriage as an illustration of the legal principle mentioned above. Death annuls not only the obligations of the dead person, but also the obligations of those still living who had a contract with the dead person during his lifetime.

The Apostle wrote, *"For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage"* (7:2). The contrast is clear – the law binds her, but her husband's death frees her, and her release is complete. Then Paul drew a conclusion, *"if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man"* (7:3). The second marriage is morally legitimate because death has terminated the first. These references to death, freedom from law and remarriage prepared Paul's readers for the application that he was about to make.

c. The theological application (7:4)

Paul next turned from human laws to the law of God. The Apostle implied, without explicitly saying so, that his readers were married to the Law and under its authority. So, as death terminates a marriage contract and permits remarriage, we *"also died to the law through the body of Christ, that we might belong to another"* (7:4).

In this connection, two questions arise. The first question is how have we died to the Law? Paul told us that it took place *"through the body of Christ"*. This cannot mean the Church as Christ's body, because membership of the Church would not bring about death to the Law. It must refer to Christ's physical body which died on the cross; that is, the sacrifice he gave once, and for all.

Paul explained this in Romans 6, that it is through our personal union with Christ that we have shared spiritually and by faith in

His death. He died and paid the penalty for us (and the whole human race), so we, united to Him by faith and baptism, may be said to have died because of that sacrifice, through His body on the cross.

The second question is, what is the meaning of we *“died to the law”*? The meaning is the same as we *“died to sin”* in 6:2. To die to sin means to pay its penalty which is death, and the Law also prescribes this penalty for those who fail to keep it. Therefore to die to sin and to die to the Law really have the same meaning. Through participation by faith in the death of Christ, the penalty for sin has been paid and the Law’s condemnation has been taken away for all believers, both Jew and Gentile (Galatians 2:19; 3:10,13).

We should keep in mind that Paul was writing to a church of Gentiles and former Jews. There are many parallels between Romans 6 (freedom from sin) and Romans 7 (freedom from the Law). As we died to sin (6:2), so we died to the law (7:4). As we died to sin by union with Christ’s death (6:3), so we died to the Law through the body of Christ (7:4). We have been justified and freed from sin (6: 7 and 18), and have been released from the Law (7:6). We have benefited from Christ’s resurrection (6: 4 and 5), so we belong to Him who was raised from the dead (7:4). We now live in newness of life (6:4), and serve and live in newness of Spirit (7:6). The fruit we produce leads to holiness (6:22), and so we bear fruit to God (7:4).

Paul next spelled out the purposes of dying with Christ to the Law. The immediate purpose is that *“we might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead”* (7:4). With this statement, Paul made a change in his comparison. In the marriage situation, the husband dies and the wife remarries, but in transferring the comparison to the situation of being under the Law, it is the wife (formerly married to the Law) who both symbolically dies and remarries. Some commentators criticise Paul for the change he made in his comparison, but their criticisms are unfair. Paul was not writing a parable, nor an allegory in which every detail in his picture had to correspond exactly to the point he was making, the point being that Christ’s death, and ours by union with Him, has secured release from the Law and enabled union (or spiritual remarriage) with Christ.

The ultimate purpose of union with Christ is *“that we might bear fruit to God”* (7:4). Some commentators have stated that Paul had continued his comparison with marriage, and that *“fruit”* refers to children born of the marriage, that is children born to believing parents. Such an extension of the comparison Paul had made seems unwarranted. The meaning of *“fruit”* (Greek ‘karpos’) as ‘children’ does not appear anywhere in the New Testament. Other Greek words could have been used for ‘children’ if that is what the Apostle had in mind. In the context of Romans 7, Paul used ‘fruit’ in the sense of ‘outcome or ‘benefit’ as he did in 6:21.

Whether *“fruit”* means ‘children’ or not, the result of being freed from sin and the Law, and being united with Christ, is holy living. To become a Christian involves a complete change of allegiance. In chapter 6 two slaveries were contrasted: slavery to sin; and slavery to God through Christ. At the beginning of chapter 7 two marriages were contrasted: marriage to the Law (and by implication to sin) and marriage to Christ. Both comparisons signify the Christian’s new freedom to serve, which theme the Apostle next discussed.

d. The fundamental contrast (7: 5 and 6)

With his Jewish readers in mind, Paul contrasted the old and the new lives. *“For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. But now by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code”* (7:5,6). The literal rendering of the last two phrases is *“in newness of Spirit and not in oldness of letter”*.

The distinction Paul had in mind was between the Old Covenant, which was of the letter (‘gramma’), and the New Covenant, which was and is of the Spirit (‘pneuma’), for the new dispensation is the age of the Spirit, in which the Spirit writes God’s law in our hearts (Romans 2:29; 2 Corinthians 3:6).

The contrast in 7: 5 and 6 is between two dispensations and two covenants. Believers have been transferred from the old to the new, from the ways of the flesh - sin and death, to the ways of the Spirit - holiness and service to God through Christ. We bore fruit for death (7:5) and now bear fruit for God (7:4). The cause for release from the old ways to the new is the double

fact of spiritual death and revival. We died to sin through the death of Christ, now we belong to Christ, having been raised from the dead through our commitment to Him (7:4). *"We serve in the new way of the Spirit"* (7:6), for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the distinguishing characteristic of the new dispensation and the new life in Christ. The Christian life is serving the risen Christ in the power of the Spirit.

THE LAW (continued)

2. POSITIVE COMMENTS ABOUT THE LAW

Romans 7: 7 to 13

7. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, 'You shall not covet.'*
8. *But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.*
9. *I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.*
10. *And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.*
11. *For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*
12. *Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*
13. *Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.*

The first six verses of Romans 7 told us about release from the Law. First, those under the Law died to it through Christ's bodily sacrifice so that they might belong to Him (7:4). Believers cannot be devoted to the Law and to Christ at the same time. Just as marriage must be ended by death before the widow or widower can remarry, so death to the Law must occur before commitment to Christ can be made.

Secondly, the Law provoked sinful desires, so that those under the Law "*bore fruit for death*" (7:5). These words written by Paul probably gave his readers the impression that he was saying that the Law was responsible for sin and death.

In the third instance, believers have been released from the Law in order to serve in the newness of life which the Holy Spirit brings (7:6). This new way of life led by the Spirit was unreachable until those who were brought up under the law were released from its bondage by realising that it was dead and would not be re-instated.

These comments by Paul are strong meat expressed in clear language. The Law was characterised as preventing unity with Christ, exposing sinfulness, the cause of death, and hindering life in the Spirit. It seems that Paul anticipated reactions of doubt or denial by some of his readers, so he asked *“Is the law sin?”* (7:7), and *“Did that which is good ... become death to me?”* (7:13). Paul was posing the question - is the Law actually responsible for sin and death? He responded immediately and firmly by writing *“Certainly not!”* (7:7), and *“By no means!”* (7:13).

The above-mentioned comments were Paul's second response to objections raised against his teaching. Paul's first response was in chapter 6, *“Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?”* *“Shall we sin because we are under grace?”* (6: 1 and 15). This was a question about grace and whether it encourages people to sin.

Paul's second response concerned law, and whether it is the origin of sin and death. The Apostle defended both grace and law against his detractors. In Romans 6 Paul argued that grace does not encourage sin, but renders sin abhorrent to and unacceptable for Christian believers who are motivated by love for God and His Son and for their fellow human beings. In Romans 7 Paul further argued that law does not create sin and death, but, on the contrary, it is fallen human nature which is to blame for the prevalence of sin and death.

Paul continued with his comments on the Law, describing it as *“holy, righteous and good”* as the Law of God would be (7:12 and 14). But it was unable to save anyone, being *“weak through the flesh”*, (8:3) that is, impotent to give life to any human being because no-one could keep it in its entirety.

The identity of the first person pronoun

The remaining verses of Romans 7 (verses 7 to 25) are full of the first person singular, 'I' and plural 'we'. Many theologians interpret the 'I' as referring not only to Paul's actual

experiences, but also as representations of the experiences of Adam and of Israel. Certainly some parallels may be drawn between the experiences of Paul and Adam, and between Paul and Israel, but Paul did not mention them and did not even allude to Adam, Eve or Israel in the relevant verses in 7: 7 to 25.

The explanation now put forward in this commentary is that Paul was describing stages in his own experience. He might have been thinking of Adam and Israel, but that is a matter of conjecture, as he did not mention either of them. He did mention the tenth commandment in 7:7 and 8, but he did so in reference to his own life and experience. It seems an unwarranted assertion from these two verses to affirm that Paul was talking about Israel as a whole in this context.

Four events outlined in 7:9 need to be understood as applying to Paul himself. They are:

- (i) *“once I was alive apart from law”*;
- (ii) *“the commandment came”*;
- (iii) *“sin sprang to life”*;
- (iv) *“and I died”*.

Two explanations seem possible, and both apply to Paul himself. The first is that he was thinking of his own boyhood. In his childhood he was *“alive apart from law”*, meaning he had not in his mind become conscious of being unable to keep the Mosaic Law, and of the Law’s condemnation of him because of his inability to keep it. Then as he became older, and began to assume responsibility for his own behaviour, *“the commandment came”*, that is, his conscience was stirred by the teachings of the Law, and *“sin sprang to life”* as he realised his failure to keep the Law in its entirety, and so he *“died”* by realising he was under the Law’s condemnation.

The second explanation is that Paul was referring to his former life as a Pharisee. He was *“alive”* in his own estimation and untroubled by the Law, regarding himself as *“blameless”* (Philippians 3:6; Romans 1:17). When *“the*

commandment came", that is, when he realised his inadequacy and inability to keep the Law, *"sin sprang to life"* and he *"died"*. The tenth commandment evidently opened his eyes to his own sinfulness, and the consequence that it convicted him and brought about his spiritual death.

It seems most likely that Paul was recounting his experience of life from his earliest years to his later life as a chosen Apostle. He was *"circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal persecuting the Church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless"* (Philippians 3:4-6).

Paul had been telling his own story from which we may draw parallels. His experience of early innocence, his instruction in the Law, his realisation of sin and its inevitable consequence - death; although uniquely his own, can apply by extension to everyone, whether to Adam in Eden, to Israel at Sinai and even to ourselves today as we think back on our own lives and our decision to turn from following our own desires to following the LORD, as best we are able, and doing as He wants us to do.

The Law, Sin And Death (7: 7 to 13)

In this section, Paul asked two questions - *"Is the law sin?"* (7: 7 to 12), and, did the law *"become death to me?"* (7:13).

In response to the first question, Paul wrote, *"Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law"* (7:7). It seems from this statement that Paul had come to recognise the deep seriousness of sinning because the Law revealed it as rebellion against God, and also that the Law convicted him of sinfulness. It was the tenth commandment prohibiting covetousness that convicted him: *"For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'"* (7:7).

We remember that Paul described himself as *"blameless"* as a Pharisee in regard to righteousness under the Law in Philippians 3:6. This state of being blameless was surely in a legalistic sense, an outward conformity to the requirements of the Law. But covetousness (epithymia) is a personal matter, a desire that occurs within a person, as it evidently did with Paul. He spoke of it as idolatry in Colossians 3:5, meaning that covetousness put an object of desire in the place of God,

Whose worship and service should be the believer's desire. It may be that Paul obeyed the other nine commandments faithfully, but covetousness lay within him, and possibly other evil thoughts of which Jesus spoke in the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). The prohibition of covetousness in the tenth commandment evidently alerted Paul to his particular failing. The rich young man is another case in point (Mark 10:17-23). It would seem that it was Paul's conscience that accused and convinced him of his sinfulness when he realised that the Law really required more than outward conformity on the part of the believer.

Having said that the Law revealed sinfulness, Paul next wrote, *"But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead"* (7:8). What Paul meant was that the sinful nature within us causes us to be provoked by the commandments to do what they forbid. It is a common experience to want to ignore law or go against it. Ever since Adam and Eve, many human beings have been enticed and led astray by forbidden fruit. The phenomenon to disobey or disregard an instruction is known as 'contra-suggestibility', that is, the desire to disobey or react negatively to a command or directive. Small children sometimes behave in this way as they endeavour to do what they want to do, and will sometimes risk punishment by refusing to do as they are told by caring parents.

The real culprit in such matters is not the Law, but rebelliousness which opposes God's Law (8:7). The Law exposes and reveals this flaw, which allows fallen human beings to be provoked to do what the Law forbids, and also not to do what the Law commands.

In Romans 7: 9 to 11 Paul said that *"the law condemns sin"*. Paul outlined four stages in verse 9, *"I was alive apart from law, the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and I died"*. Paul was writing primarily of himself, but he was probably thinking of the whole human race, and the Jews in particular.

He continued, *"I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death"* (7:10). In other words, Paul was saying that the Law condemned him. To explain this further, Paul repeated the words from verse 8 that *"sin seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment"*, and

added, that sinfulness first *“deceived me”* and *“through the commandment put me to death”* (7:11).

All three verses, 9, 10 and 11, have spoken of the commandment in relation to death, and have anticipated verse 13 in which Paul made clear that what caused his death was not the Law, but sin, as rebelliousness, which used the Law to provoke disobedience.

In this passage, Paul presented the three devastating effects of the Law in relation to sin. The Law exposes, provokes and condemns sin. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *“the power of sin is the law”* (1 Corinthians 15:56). The Law is not in itself sinful, nor is it responsible for sin. It is sinfulness, affecting our fallen nature, which uses the Law to provoke us to sinning. The Law is not to blame, it is sinning that is to blame. Paul wrote that *“the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good”* (7:12), that is, the Law’s requirements are holy and righteous and good, meaning that the Law was intended to bring benefits, but could not do so because of man’s fallen sinful nature.

Having said all this, Paul then turned to his second question, *“Did that which is good, then, become death to me?”* (7:13). In 7:10 Paul seemed to imply that the law was responsible for death, stating that *“the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death”*.

The Apostle answered the second question with an emphatic *“By no means!”*. The Law does not cause sin, it exposes and condemns it. The Law does not bring death, sin does. *“But in order that sin might be recognised as sin , it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful”* (7:13). The extreme sinfulness of sin is seen in the way it exploits a good thing (the Law) for an evil purpose (sin ending in death).

So Paul answered his two questions by declaring that the culprit for the plight of us all is not the Law, which is holy, righteous and good, but sinfulness, which takes advantage of and misuses the Law. Verses 8 and 11 are closely parallel to each other in meaning. Both verses describe sin as *“seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment”* either to produce sin (7:8) or to inflict death (7:11).

As an illustration, we hear and read about people being arrested, brought to trial, found guilty and imprisoned. The law defined their crime, legal process brought about their conviction and sentence, but cannot be blamed for their imprisonment. The people themselves are to blame for their actions. Similarly, Paul exonerated the Law. The villain is sinfulness which dwells in everyone, and is aroused, exposed and brought into focus by law.

As Paul continued to say in the passage to come, it is indwelling sinfulness which accounts for the weakness of the Law. The Law cannot save anyone because no-one can keep it, the reason being the sinful nature that dwells in everyone.

THE LAW (continued)

3. THE WEAKNESS OF THE LAW Romans 7: 14 to 25

Introductory Comments

In 7:7 to 13 Paul showed that the Law was not responsible for sin or death, and then proceeded to show that the Law could not be responsible for holiness either. Paul affirmed that the Law is holy and righteous and good, but cannot make people holy. This is an important truth that is contained in the section of Romans 7:14 to 25. It was right for good people to look to the Law for moral guidance, but wrong to look to it to find the means of salvation.

In this passage of chapter 7, Paul retained the first person 'I' but changed the tenses of all his verbs. He had been using the past tense, "*Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came I died*" (7:9). In such statements Paul seemed to have been referring to his experience of life before his conversion. But suddenly he changed his verbs to the present tense, "*What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do*" (7:15). Again the question to be answered is, was the Apostle speaking of his own actual experience, or writing in a theoretical way of a Jew, such as he was, who became a Christian and struggled to reject the Law?

To whom does the 'I' refer?

Theologians are divided on this question. Some argue that Paul was impersonating an unregenerate person in Adam, not in Christ. Others argue that Paul was writing of himself as a truly regenerate and mature believer struggling to come to terms with a new way of life free from the Law.

John Stott in his book 'The Message of Romans' page 207, wrote that neither position is entirely satisfactory. He stated that in endeavouring to identify the 'I' of Romans 7:14 to 25, we need to take three facts into account.

Firstly, Paul's opinion of himself as "*unspiritual*" (RSV 'carnal') (7:14), and that "*nothing good lives*" in him, that is, in his "*sinful nature*" (7:18), combine to identify the "I" as a person aware of his inadequacies in a way that unbelievers are not aware.

Secondly, Paul had acknowledged the innate goodness of the Law, and had shown that he had loved it, delighted in it, and had been submissive to it and not rebellious against it (7:12,14,19,22 and 25).

Thirdly, Paul's cry for deliverance was a cry of desire, not despair (7:24).

In summary then, the three features of the person, the "I" of Romans 7: 14 to 25, are that he loved the Law but was still a slave of sin (7: 14, and 22), even though he was struggling to serve in the new way of the Spirit (7:6).

In chapter 7 it is uncertain whether Paul was writing in the present tense of his personal life as a converted Christian, or of his past experiences under the Law Covenant. The condition which he so fully explained of the fleshly or carnal mind warring against the spiritual or converted mind certainly applies in the Christian walk as much as in the mind of a person endeavouring to keep the Law Covenant. Paul's comments show the strong natural propensity for disobedience and its power even under the restraining influence of the Gospel.

We should note and keep in mind that Romans 7 is full of references to the Law (thirty-one times in all), and it is not until we come to the next chapter that the Holy Spirit comes into prominence, being mentioned twenty-one times. Also, in chapter 8 the indwelling of the Spirit is called the identifying mark of belonging to Christ (8:9).

We may better understand the "I" of 7:14 to 25 by considering the context in the light of God's purpose for the human race as revealed in His Plan of the Ages, with emphasis on the Jewish and Gospel Ages.

The best understanding of the "I" of Romans 7 seems to be Paul as he remembers his life as an Old Testament believer, living in the Jewish Age, under the Mosaic Law, but now living as a converted Christian in the Gospel Age. Many Old Testament believers loved the Law and wrote of their love in glowing terms *"Blessed is the man (whose) delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night"* (Psalm 1:1,2). The LORD's precepts give both *"joy to the heart"* and *"light to the eyes"* (Psalm 19:8). *"I delight in your*

commands because I love them" (Psalm 119:47; NIV). *"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long"* (Psalm 119:47). Such was Paul's position until the risen Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

But those sincere Old Testament believers who loved the Law lacked the Holy Spirit as it is given under the New Covenant. The penitential Psalms bear witness to believers' inability to keep the Law that they loved. Certainly the Spirit came upon specially chosen people for specific purposes, but once those purposes were fulfilled, the Spirit departed from them, and did not remain with them nor dwell in them. The promise of the indwelling Spirit belongs to the Gospel and Kingdom Ages. Ezekiel wrote, *"I will put my Spirit in you"* (Ezekiel 36:27), and Jesus said that the Spirit *"lives with you and will be in you"* (John 14:17). So it seems accurate to describe believers before Pentecost, and Paul before Damascus in terms of love for the law but lack of the Spirit.

Even after Pentecost, it is evident that many of the Christians converted from Jewry took some time to adjust to the transition from the old way of life to the new. Even those who had grasped that they were *"not under law but under grace"* for their justification, had not always understood that they were also *"not under law but under the Spirit"* for their sanctification. They took time to exchange *"the old way of the written code"* for *"the new way of the Spirit"* (7:6).

The Apostle was well aware of the struggle that many Jewish Christians were experiencing. He described what happens to anybody who tries to live according to the Law instead of the Gospel, that is, according to the flesh instead of the Spirit. The result of trying to live like this is, of course, defeat, but this is not the fault of the Law, for the Law is holy, righteous and good, but it cannot give life to anyone because no-one can keep it. The culprit, as the Apostle said, is *"sin living in me"* (7:17,20), indwelling sinfulness, which the Law cannot control or nullify.

But God has done, for those under the Law, and indeed all people, what the Law could not do for the Jews and proselytes under the Law. He sent His Son to die for the sins of the world, Jews and Gentiles alike; and caused the Law to be symbolically crucified with Christ (Colossians 2:14) and therefore abolished (2 Corinthians 3:13).

Jesus fulfilled the Law by His life on earth and became a curse by hanging on a tree at His crucifixion, and so delivered Israel from their bondage to the Law and their state of being accursed because no-one could keep the Law (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:10,13). Because of Jesus' sacrifice we today and every Christian believer can live "*not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit*" (8: 3 and 4).

To what, if any, application does Romans chapter 7, with its repeated emphasis on the Law, have to us today? To begin with, we were never under the Law; we live in the times after Pentecost as justified and sanctified believers in God through the Lord Jesus, the only way, and we have the Holy Spirit given to us by God to help us overcome the weakness of our sinful nature to unremitting temptations (8:9).

But there are some church-goers today whom John Stott in his book 'The Message of Romans' called 'Old Testament Christians'. Of them he wrote on page 210, 'They show signs of new birth in their love for the church and the Bible, yet their religion is law, not gospel; flesh, not Spirit; the 'oldness' of slavery to rules and regulations, not the 'newness' of freedom through Jesus Christ. They need to add to their life liberty'.

The remainder of chapter 7 (14 to 25) can be divided into two sections (verses 14 to 20 and verses 21 to 25), both of which begin with a positive reference to the Law. "*We know that the law is spiritual*" (7:14) and "*in my inner being I delight in God's law*" (7:22).

But despite the spiritual character of the Law, the saddening problem is that no-one can keep it, and so attempted obedience to the Law cannot save anyone. Both of these two sections of chapter seven expound the weakness of the Law, that weakness being attributed to disobedience.

The Law And The 'Flesh' In Unbelievers

Romans 7: 14 to 20

- 14. *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.***
- 15. *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do.***

16. *If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.*
17. *But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*
18. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*
19. *For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise.*
20. *Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

In this section, the Apostle wrote almost the same things twice, first in verses 14 to 17, then in verses 18 to 20. The two parts will therefore be considered together. Each of the two parts begins, continues and ends in the same way.

Firstly, each part of this whole section begins with an acknowledgement of sinfulness within everyone. The Apostle wrote “*we know*” (7:14) and “*I know*” (7:18), so it seems that self-knowledge was the issue. The Law is spiritual but the writer described himself as unspiritual or “*fleshly, sold as a slave to sin*” (7:14) or “*the purchased slave of sin*” (NEB).

The Christian, of course, is free from the bondage of sin, because Christ has made him or her free, and is a slave to God and righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, as has been discerned in the previous chapter (6:18,22). Being free from sin does not mean that we as Christians do not commit sin, but that Christ has been sacrificed for us, and He has taken the guilt, condemnation and penalty away if we continue in faith, asking for forgiveness for our failures every day.

It seems, however, in this first part, that the Apostle’s reference to slavery to sin is directed to believers still under the Law.

The second part (verses 18 to 20) begins “*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature*” (7:18). The Apostle surely did not mean that there was nothing good in him, nor for that matter that there was nothing good in all fallen human beings, because humans were created “*in the image of God*” (Genesis 2:27; 9:6; James 3:9). This image has been degraded but not totally destroyed, and Jesus Christ Himself spoke of the possibility of unbelievers doing good (Matthew 5:26; 7:11).

Earlier it was said that the person in Romans 7 may well be the devout Jew under the Law who realised his inability to keep the Law fully, but the impression conveyed in the words written here seems so anguished and heartfelt that surely the Apostle was also speaking of his own experience when he realised how hopeless his position was until Christ rescued him. He continued to write in 7:18 that he had *"the desire to do what is good, but ... cannot carry it out"*, meaning he could not turn his desire into action because of his sinful nature. Paul was saying that those who were under the Law, and loving the Law, were enslaved, and incapable of always turning good desires into good deeds.

In the second place, each of the two sections of 7:14 to 20 continues with a memorable description of the conflict within a sincere believing person trying to keep the Law. *"I do not understand what I do"* wrote the Apostle (7:15). He desired to do good but could not succeed in his endeavours. Paul wrote, *"What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do"* (7:15). He also wrote, *"What I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing"* (7:19). The whole conflict is between desire and performance; the will is there, but the ability to perform righteously is not.

In the third place, Paul ended each part of the two parts of verses 14 to 20 by saying that indwelling sinfulness is responsible for the failure and inadequacies of the person under the Law (7: 16 and 20). Both verses 16 and 20 contain a premise and a conclusion. The premise is *"If I do what I do not want to do"* (16 and 20).

The conclusion in verse 16 is in two parts. *"I agree that the law is good"* (first part), and that *"It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me"*. (second part). The conclusion in verse 20 is the same as in verse 16, *"it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it"*.

Who then, we may well ask, is to blame for the good he does not do and the evil he does? Paul said that the Law is not to blame, and declared its holiness and goodness three times (7:12,14,16). The blame has been clearly attached to the *"sin living in me"* (7:17,18 and 20). So then, the Law is not responsible for the believer sinning, but neither is the Law capable of saving the believer because it is holy, righteous and

good, and human beings are sinners and unable to keep the Law, and unable to gain the life promised to all who might keep it (Leviticus 18:5, Galatians 3:12).

Believers Still Under The Law

Romans 7:21 to 25

- 21. *I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.***
- 22. *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.***
- 23. *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.***
- 24. *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!***
- 25. *So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.***

Believers under the Law, as Paul once was, were presented by him in four different ways. They were: two influences or egos, two laws, two outcries and two slaveries.

Firstly, there are two influences or egos within the believer, “*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me*” (7:21). Paul said that the good and the evil are present at the same time within the person’s mind and personality.

Secondly, there are two laws. “*For in my inner being I delight in God’s law*”(7:22), which delight was also called “*the law of my mind*” (7:23). But Paul also saw “*another law at work in the members of my body*” and called it “*The law of sin waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members*” (7:23). Thus Paul said that “*the law of my mind*” is opposed by “*the law of sin*” which operates “*in the members of my body*” and fights against the “*law of my mind*”, and in effect has taken him prisoner.

Thirdly, then follow two cries from the heart. The first is “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” (7:24). The second is “*Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (7:25). These outcries by Paul are

evidence of his realisation that the Law could not save him, and that in relying on it he was lost, but God had saved him by sending Jesus Christ to be his Saviour, and the Saviour of the world.

In the fourth place there are two slaveries. Paul concluded, *“So then I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin”* (7:25). It seems to be in order to think that Paul was describing the continuing conflict within Old Testament believers, which he formerly was, because he had not yet mentioned the gift of the Holy Spirit which is promised to Christian believers. He was preparing his readers for his detailed comments and explanations of the work of the Holy Spirit which follow in chapter 8.

With respect to Romans 7, we as Christians can see a legitimate application to ourselves today. In verses 4 to 6 Paul described the two covenants as *“the old way”* and *“the new way”*. The old was characterised by the *“letter”*, a written code, while the new is characterised by the *“Spirit”*, the influence on our minds and hearts. Believers under the old order were under the Law and controlled by fleshly appetites, and bore fruit for death; whereas believers under the new order are attuned to Christ, liberated from the old Law, and bear fruit for God. We should not be or become Old Testament Christians trying to keep the old law or any part of it, but should be New Testament Christians, refreshed by our knowledge of Christ and living in freedom with the Holy Spirit to guide us.

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN

Romans 8: 1 to 39

Introductory Comments

Romans 8 is one of the best-known and best-loved chapters in the Bible. In Romans 7 Paul focussed on the place of the Law in the lives of believers, but then in Romans 8 he concentrated on the work of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives.

The essential contrast to which Paul drew attention is between the powerlessness of the Law and the power of the Spirit. Paul declared that the Spirit that dwells within us has liberated us from "*the law of sin and death*" (8:2), and has guaranteed to us resurrection and eternal glory (8: 11, 17 and 23).

Thus the Christian life is life in the Spirit, a life which is directed, sustained and indeed enriched by the Spirit. True Christian living would be inconceivable without the influence of the Holy Spirit in the mind and heart of the believer.

In his exposition of the work and influence of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle related it to another most significant theme of this chapter, namely the security of the Christian as the child of God. The two themes are closely related.

Possession of the Spirit is the identifying mark of those who belong to Christ, that is, committed to obeying His commands (8:9), and its inner witness assures us that we, as believing Christians, are God's children and therefore His heirs (8: 15 to 17). The Spirit's influence on our hearts and minds constitutes the first-fruits of our inheritance and a pledge of the final harvest (8:23).

Chapter 8 can be divided into three sections.

The first section, verses 1 to 17, depicts the ministry of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the liberation, sanctification, guidance and finally resurrection of the children of God.

The second section (verses 18 to 27) foretells the future glory of God's children in which the whole creation will share.

In the third section (verses 28 to 39) Paul stressed the steadfastness of God's love as He works in all things for the good of those who love Him, and promises that nothing will ever be allowed to separate us from His love. The Apostle began with "*no condemnation*" (8:1) and ended with "*no separation*" (8:39) for those who are "*in Christ Jesus*".

"*In Christ Jesus*" means to be living with a sincere and determined commitment to obey Him. This close spiritual association is shown by Philippians 1:1; 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Romans 16:7 to 11, and is compared to the union between the vine and its branches in John 15:1-6. Believers are 'in' Him in that they derive their support from Him, and are united in feeling, purpose and destiny.

1. THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S SPIRIT

Romans 8: 1 to 17

(a) The Freedom Of The Spirit

Romans 8: 2 to 4

- 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***
- 2. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.***
- 3. *For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh***
- 4. *That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***

Chapter 8 begins with the word "*therefore*", which indicates that the Apostle was about to draw a conclusion from what he had written. The conclusion he drew seems to come from his whole argument so far, especially from what he wrote in chapters 3, 4 and 5 about spiritual revival (Colossians 3:1) and future salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The word "*now*" in verse 1 emphasises that this revival is ours if we are "*in Christ*" and not "*in Adam*" (5: 12 to 21).

The first blessing of this foretaste of salvation is expressed in the words *"no condemnation"*, which are equivalent to 'justification'. Paul then explained that there is no condemnation to Christian believers because God has pardoned all our sin through Christ (8:3), because Christ's sacrifice has taken our sins away.

Later in the chapter Paul argued that nobody can accuse us of wrongdoing because God has justified us (8:33), and that nobody can condemn us because the risen Christ is at God's right hand interceding for us (8:34). In other words, the truth of *"no condemnation"* is securely based on what God has done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The second blessing of salvation is expressed in the statement *"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death"* (8:2). In saying this, Paul meant that a liberation is combined with *"no condemnation"* as a second blessing to those who are *"in Christ Jesus"*. The two blessings are linked by the word *"because"*, indicating that Christian liberation means that we are set free from condemnation and so can be justified by God's grace.

So, from what have Christians been set free? Paul said, *"from the law of sin and death"*. This has to be the old, Mosaic Law on which Paul had been concentrating. But, as Paul said earlier, the Christian has been set free from sin itself (6:18), and the consequence of Adam's transgression - death. A major emphasis of Romans 7 was on the relation between the Law on the one hand, and sin and death on the other.

Paul stressed that the Law itself was not sinful, but that it revealed, provoked and condemned sinning (7: 7 to 9). He also stressed that the Law did not *"become death"* to people, but it had *"produced death"* in him (7:13). So, God's holy, righteous and good Law was called *"the law of sin and death"* because it brought about the complicity of both. The Law could not bring about justification and sanctification, so it could never bring about salvation and life.

The liberation, of which the Apostle wrote, was his own experience. Verse 2 of Romans 8 contains the only use of the first person (in the phrase *'set me free'*) which was so

prominent in Romans 7. By this use of the first person singular, Paul indicated that he had been delivered, by Christ and the Spirit, from the condemnation of the Law, and from the anguish of the position he described, and with which he identified himself at the end of Romans chapter 7.

Paul called the means of our liberation "*the law of the Spirit of life*" (8:2) or, as the REB renders the phrase, "*the life-giving law of the Spirit*". At first reading it may seem strange that one law should liberate us from another law, but the liberation of the Christian believer is from the Law Covenant by the Gospel which is "*the law of the Spirit of life*". The Spirit of life is not a law in the sense of a written code, but is a law in the sense of a controlling influence on the mind and heart of a believer which is brought about by the Holy Spirit, in the same sense that Law can have the meaning of any command or influence by which people are ruled or governed.

How the Gospel liberates us from the Law is described in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 8. The fundamental truth declared by Paul is that God took the initiative to do "*what the law was powerless to do*". The Law could neither justify nor sanctify because "*it was weakened by the sinful nature*" (8:3). The Law's weakness is not in itself but in us, in our personalities, that is, in our fallen selfish nature (as in 7: 14 to 20). So what the Law could not do, God did. He sent His Son whose work enabled Him to give us His Spirit. Thus God has justified us through His Son, and sanctified us through His Spirit (Galatians 4:4,6). God's way of justification is not law but grace, and His way of sanctification is not law but through the Spirit.

Paul told us what God has done in five statements. The first was "*the sending of His Son*". The Scriptures testify to the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus, as Jesus Himself said in John 17:5 and 8:58. Jesus was "*the firstborn of every creature*" as Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15. God's love in transforming Jesus from a spirit being to a human being and sending him into the world of mankind to suffer and die is an action of love beyond our comprehension (Romans 5:8,10; 8:32).

The second statement was the sending of His Son "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*". Jesus was made a human being (1 John 4:2; 2 John 7), but was sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21;

Hebrews 4:15; 7:26). Jesus was a human being like ourselves, but was without sin, that is, perfectly obedient, being both human and sinless simultaneously.

Paul's third statement was that God sent His Son *"to be a sin offering"*. The Greek for *"sin offering"* is 'peri hamartias' which was the usual Septuagint rendering of the Hebrew for *"sin offering"* in Leviticus and Numbers. The words 'peri hamartias' should clearly be translated *"sin offering"* in Hebrews 10:6,8; 13:11. Jesus' offering for sin covered all the sins of the human race, and atoned for sins that are unwillingly and inadvertently committed, as Paul wrote in Romans 7:20. *"I do what I do not want to do"*. *"In the likeness of sinful flesh"* must refer to Jesus' incarnation, and *"to be a sin offering"* must refer to His atoning death.

Fourthly, *"God ... condemned sin in sinful man"* (literally *"in the flesh"*), that is, in the humanity or flesh of Jesus, Who did nothing wrong, but Who was made *"to be sin for us"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus God has judged our sins, and continues to judge them in the sacrifice of Jesus, Who bore them in our place. For those who are *'in Christ Jesus'* there is no condemnation, since that condemnation has been fully borne for them by Him.

Fifthly, Paul made clear why God sent His own Son and condemned our sin in Him. It was *"in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit"* (8:4). The words *"requirements of the Law"* should be *"requirement"* (singular) as in the Greek, which is Christian moral and ethical behaviour based on love, and how God wants believers to conduct themselves through Christ. Love is the *"fulfilment of the law"* as Paul wrote in Romans 13: 8 to 10.

The requirement of the Law can be fulfilled only in those *"who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"* (RSV). The Spirit gives us power to obey the law of love and continue to live in Christian discipleship. God said through Jeremiah, *"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts"* (Jeremiah 31:33); and Ezekiel wrote, *"I will put my Spirit in you"* (Ezekiel 36:26). These promises are fulfilled in Christian believers, because when God puts His Spirit in our hearts, He establishes His law there also.

Romans 8:4 is of great importance for our understanding of Christian holiness, which is the ultimate purpose of the atonement. Holiness is Christ-likeness, and consists in the fulfilling of the law of love. Holiness is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts. Holiness follows our justification, and can be attained to a degree acceptable to the LORD God by striving to be obedient through Christ our Saviour, and asking God for forgiveness for the failures of our best endeavours.

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

1. THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S SPIRIT (continued)

(b) The Mind Of The Spirit

Romans 8: 5 to 8

- 5. *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.***
- 6. *For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.***
- 7. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.***
- 8. *So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***

Paul asserted that the righteousness required by God can be fulfilled only by those who live according to the Spirit, that is, those who are controlled by the Spirit's influence, and do not follow the promptings and desires of the flesh. In the verses 5 to 8 of Romans 8 Paul developed the opposition and conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. This conflict recurs implicitly or explicitly in each verse.

By "*the flesh*", Paul meant our fallen human nature, which Luther described as deeply curved in on itself (Lectures on Romans [1515]). By "*the Spirit*" Paul meant the Holy Spirit of God which dwells in the minds and hearts of Christian believers and controls their conduct and behaviour. The tension between "*flesh*" and "*Spirit*" reminds us of Galatians 5:16-26, where the two are in unremitting conflict with each other. In this passage in Romans 8, Paul concentrated on the mind or mindset of those who exemplify the control or influence of either the flesh or the Spirit.

In the first place, people's mindsets express their basic nature as Christians or non-Christians. On the one hand there are "*those who live according to the sinful nature*", that is, those

who simply are like this (8:5), and *“have their minds set on what that nature desires”*. On the other hand, there are *“those who live in accordance with the Spirit (who) have their minds set on what that nature desires”* (8:5). In both cases the nature of the people concerned determines their mindset.

Since the flesh is fallen human nature, its desires are all things that pander to human ungodly desires; and since the Spirit is God's Holy Spirit, its desires are all those things which please God, and those desires can be fulfilled through Christ, Whose example should be emulated by us and all true believers as we follow Him in our lives. Basically it is a question of what preoccupies us, how we spend our time and our energies, of what we concentrate on and to what we devote ourselves. All this is determined by who we are and whether we yield to the flesh or live by our new birth in the Spirit.

In the second place, our mindset has external consequences. *“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace”* (8:6). The mindset of people controlled by the flesh leads to death, because it alienates them from God and renders fellowship with Him or even worship of Him impossible. Such a mindset of so many of earth's peoples will require much reformation work and educational activity in the promised age to come.

The mindset of Spirit-controlled people, however, entails life and peace. Such people are *“alive to God”* (6:11), aware of spiritual realities, thirsting for God like a person thirsts *“in a dry and weary land where there is no water”* (Psalm 63:1), or as a *“deer pants for streams of water”* (Psalm 42:1). They have peace with God (5:1), peace with their fellow human beings, and peace within themselves as they strive for holiness.

In the third place, our mindset influences our attitude to the LORD God. The mindset of those who live according to the flesh is hostile to God, and is antagonistic to His name, His will, His word and His Son. Paul singled out the mindset of the fleshly mind as not submitting *“to God's law, nor can it do so”* (8:7), so it cannot be motivated to try to meet God's righteous requirements. Those who are *“controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God”* (8:8). But those who are in the Spirit strive to please God in everything, even to do so *“more and more”* as the Apostle wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

So then, the Apostle delineated two categories of people: those *“in the flesh”* and those *“in the Spirit”*. They have two mindsets, the mind of the flesh and the mind of the Spirit, which lead to two patterns of conduct resulting in two opposing spiritual states: death or life; enmity or peace. Therefore, the lesson for us is that our minds and how we occupy them play a key role in our present conduct and our final destiny.

(c) The Indwelling Of The Spirit

Romans 8: 9 to 13

- 9. *But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.***
- 10. *And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.***
- 11. *But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.***
- 12. *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors - not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.***
- 13. *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.***

In verse 9 Paul moved from the third person plural ('they', 'their' and 'them') and addressed his readers directly in the second person ('you' and 'your'). *“You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you”*. Thus Christians are in the Spirit if the Spirit lives in them. The Apostle's point is that Christians, by reason of their re-birth and their determination to lead a new life, are not under the influence of the flesh now that the Spirit of God dwells in them. The Apostle then stated, *“if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”*.

We should not think from verse 9 that Christians are completely free from the power of the fleshly or carnal mind. If they were, then there would be no need to seek forgiveness by prayer for sins committed either because of weakness of the flesh or

inadvertence, that is, without realising or being aware of wrong thoughts or actions committed from time to time.

Verse 9 is most important in relation to the understanding of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believing Christians for two reasons. The first reason is that the indwelling or possession of the Holy Spirit is the authenticating evidence of the true believer. Indwelling sinfulness (7: 17 and 20) is the lot of all descendants of Adam, but the indwelling Spirit is the possession of all children of God through Jesus Christ. The indwelling Spirit helps Christian believers to fight and subdue their indwelling sinful nature as Jesus promised in John 14:17, when He said that the Spirit *“lives with you and will be in you”*. In fulfilment of this promise, every true Christian has received the Spirit, so that every Christian’s body has become *“a temple of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:19). As has been said, if we do not have Christ’s Spirit in us, we do not belong to Christ at all.

The gift of the Spirit is an initial and universal blessing to all who truly repent and believe in Jesus, and the personal indwelling of the Spirit is every believer’s privilege from the beginning of their commitment to Him, so that to come to know Christ and to receive of the Holy Spirit are parts of the same experience.

The second reason in verse 9 for the understanding of the Holy Spirit dwelling in believers is the different expressions which convey the same meaning. *“The Spirit of God”* is also called *“the Spirit of Christ”*, and to have the Spirit of Christ in us (8:9) is to have Christ-likeness in us (8:10). This tells us of the complete harmony that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as Jesus explained in John 14:16,21,23. What God said and promised, Jesus also said and promised, and what the Holy Spirit has done and has continued to do has been in complete accord with what God and Jesus have said and promised.

After indicating that to have the Spirit in us is the distinguishing mark of God’s people, Paul proceeded to declare two major consequences of the Spirit’s indwelling. The first he described in terms of *“life”* (8: 10 and 11), and the second in terms of *“debt”* or *“obligation”* (NIV) (8: 12 and 13). Both verses 10 and 11 begin with an *“if”* clause in relation to the Spirit’s indwelling; *“But if Christ is in you”* (8:10), *“and if the Spirit ... is living in you”* (8:11). These two ‘ifs’ were not meant to express any

doubt about the Spirit's indwelling, rather they point to its results. The 'ifs' could be correctly paraphrased to read 'inasmuch as'.

The meaning of verse 10 raises some difficulties. *"Your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness"*. In view of what the Apostle wrote in verse 11 of *"giving life to your mortal bodies"*, and the need to *"put to death the misdeeds of the body"* in verse 13, he must have meant 'dead' in the sense of 'mortal', that is, subject to death and destined for it. This meaning would fit with the Apostle's references to our 'mortal bodies' in Romans 6:12 and 8:11, and also in 2 Corinthians 4:10,16 to our physical mortality.

Yet in the midst of this physical mortality our *"spirit is alive"* (8:10), for we have been made alive, spiritually revived, in Christ, as Paul wrote in 6: 11, 13 and 23. How are we to understand this double condition of a dying body and a living spirit?

We know that our bodies are mortal because of Adam's disobedience, and that they are destined to die and return to dust (Genesis 3:19), but our spirits, that is, our minds and our life's intentions, are alive because of Christ's righteousness (5: 15 to 18, and 21) and the righteous standing He has secured for us. So in our daily lives we regard our bodies as dead, that is, we do not yield to the body's fleshly and corrupt desires, but live in accordance with our renewed minds under the influence of the living principles which the Gospel imparts to us.

When the Apostle wrote of giving life to our mortal bodies (8:11) and the redemption of our bodies (8:23), he did not mean that our fleshly bodies would be resurrected, but that we as believers would be raised to life again each with a new spirit body, as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:42-56, and as the Apostle John wrote in his first epistle chapter 3 verse 2. As God did with the Lord Jesus, in transforming Him from a spirit being to live as a human being and then raising Him to life again after His crucifixion as a spirit being, He preserved Christ's identity, so will God do for us and all who remain faithful. He will change us from human beings to spirit beings and in doing so will preserve our identities.

As human beings we know only life in our human bodies. We express our personalities through our bodies, especially by speech, but also by posture and gesture, by our eyes and by the expressions of our faces. We usually refer to such characteristics as 'body language'. But this language is imperfect and we can easily mis-communicate. But the body we are promised will not have such imperfections. It is only assumption, but there will surely be a perfect correspondence between message and medium, that is, between what we want to communicate and how we do so. The resurrected body will be the perfect means of expression for our resurrected personalities and identities.

We next come to the second consequence of the Spirit dwelling in us. The first is the identifying mark of the genuine believer to assist in the battle to subdue indwelling sin. The second is a debt or obligation. *"Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation"* (8:12), literally *"we are debtors"* (KJV, RSV). What is this debt? The debt or obligation is to live a righteous life. We have no obligation *"to the sinful nature to live according to it"* (8:12). It has no claim on us and we owe it nothing. Our obligation is to the Spirit, to live according to its desires and requirements.

Verse 13 sets before us the option of a solemn life or death alternative, as was given in Deuteronomy 30:15 and Jeremiah 21:8. Paul wrote, *"For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live"*. Verse 13 is a very significant verse on 'mortification' which is the process of putting to death the body's misdeeds. Three truths about mortification are contained in the Apostle's words.

First, what is meant by mortification? It is not some kind of masochism (taking pleasure in self-inflicted pain), nor asceticism (resenting our bodies and bodily appetites). It is a recognition of evil as evil which leads to a decisive rejection of it, symbolised by 'putting to death'. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul called it a crucifixion of our fallen nature (Galatians 5:24). The Lord Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* (Mark 8:34). Jesus meant that believers in Him must follow His teachings implicitly, even to death if necessary.

What we must put to death are *“the misdeeds of the body”*, that is, every use of the body - eyes, ears, mouth, hands and feet - which serves and gratifies ourselves, instead of serving God and our brethren and also indeed our fellow human beings.

Second, how does mortification take place? It is something we have to do. We are responsible for putting evil to death. But Paul wrote, *“if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live”* (8:13).

Certainly the responsibility is ours, but only God’s Spirit can give us the desire, determination and discipline to turn from evil and reject it. So we must take the initiative, and repudiate anything we know to be wrong, and not even *“think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature”* (13:14).

The Lord Jesus expressed this rejection graphically, and symbolically, saying that we must put out our offending eye and cut off our offending hand or foot (Matthew 5:29). We must set our minds on the things the Spirit desires (8:5), set our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1), and occupy our thoughts with what things are noble, right, pure and lovely (Philippians 4:8). The verbs *“set their minds”* (8:5) and *“put to death”* (8:13) are in the present tense, and describe attitudes and actions that should be continuous, involving our Christian obligations every day (Luke 9:23), and setting our minds on the things of the Spirit every day.

Thirdly, why should we practise mortification? It certainly runs counter to our natural tendencies of taking things easy and having a good time. To practise mortification we need strong motives. The first of such motives is that *“we have an obligation”* (8:12) to the indwelling Spirit which gives us renewed strength for the Christian life. Another motive is that it (mortification) leads to life.

Verse 13 contains a wonderful promise *“you will live”*. Paul referred to life as it is lived by God’s children, those who are led by His Spirit, assured of His love as their Father. This life of assurance can be enjoyed only by those who put their misdeeds to death. The pain and difficulty of mortification is worthwhile if it gives believers richness of life now, and leads to life forever in the time of righteousness to come.

In summary it is only by dying with Christ to sin, as in Romans 6, the penalty of sin having been paid, that we rise to a new life of forgiveness and freedom. And it is only by putting our evil deeds to death as in Romans 8, that we experience the fuller and more satisfying life of God's children as we strive to walk the narrow way.

What the world calls life, which amounts largely to self-indulgence, leads to alienation from God which in reality is death, while the putting to death of evil within us, which the world sees as an unnecessary renunciation, is in reality an essential component of the way to gain eternal life.

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

1. THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S SPIRIT (continued)

(d) The Witness Of The Spirit

Romans 8: 14 to 17

- 14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***
- 15. *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.***
- 16. *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,***
- 17. *and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.***

In each of the four verses 14 to 17 God's people are referred to as His sons or His children, and this privileged status is related to the work of the Holy Spirit. In verse 16 it is specifically said that the Spirit "*testifies that we are God's children*", but the whole passage concerns the witness and assurance that the Spirit gives to us personally.

But how does the Spirit bear witness? Paul provided four items of evidence to make the matter clear. Firstly, the Spirit leads us to holiness (14); secondly, in our relationship to God, fear is replaced by freedom (15); thirdly, we are told to address God as "*Father*" (15 and 16); and fourthly, we have become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (17).

First, the Spirit leads us into holiness. In verse 14, Paul changed the imagery. Those who, through the Spirit, put the body's misdeeds to death (13) were then called those who are led by the Spirit (14); and those who have qualified for life (13) were then called "*sons of God*" (14). The leading of believers by the Spirit means that they yield to the Spirit's controlling influence, and alter their ways, thoughts and desires in conformity with the Spirit's guidance.

There is no violence in the Spirit's leading, no extraordinary physical demonstrations or vocal outcries, and certainly no compulsion. The work of the Spirit is to enlighten and persuade, and we should always bear in mind that it is possible by wrongful thoughts and actions to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).

To be "*led by the Spirit of God*" (14) means that believers become children of God (14), and are thus called to live a newer, richer life in His service even now. There is a popular notion abroad nowadays of the universal Fatherhood of God, but it is not a true concept.

Certainly all human beings are God's creation (Acts 17:28), but only those who become God's adopted children, reconciled by new birth through Jesus Christ, can call Him "*Father*". Only those who are led by the Spirit are the children of God (14), and as such are granted a closer, individual and loving relationship with Him; access to Him in prayer, membership of His family and nomination as His heirs, all through the Lord Jesus Christ, the only way to God (John 14:6). We also remember that it is only those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them who belong to Christ (8:9).

Secondly, the Spirit gives us freedom in our relationship with God, and this freedom replaces fear. "*For you did not receive a Spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship*" (or 'adoption' as in the KJV and REB).

The writer and scholar, F.F. Bruce, in his work 'The Letter of Paul to the Romans' (page 157) reminds us that we must understand adoption in the way it was understood in Paul's day. Bruce wrote, 'The term 'adoption' may have a somewhat artificial sound in our ears; but in the Roman world of the first century AD an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was in no whit (that is, not in the smallest degree) inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father's affection more fully and reproduce the father's character more worthily'.

As well as in this verse (8:15), Paul used the imagery of slavery and freedom in Galatians 4:1 to contrast the two eras, the old and the new, and also the Christian's situation of the former life

"in Adam", and the new life *"in Christ"*. The slavery or bondage of the old era led to fear and dread, especially of God as a sentencing judge, whereas the freedom of the new era and the new life gives us confidence to come to God as our Father through Christ, Who loves us. It is true, of course, that we are slaves of Christ (1:1), slaves of God (6:22), and slaves of righteousness (6:18), but these slaveries are figures of speech contained within the freedom that rules our lives, the freedom that has enabled us to be delivered from our former fears.

In verses 15 and 16 Paul stated three truths, which are: that we *"received the spirit of sonship"*, that *"we cry Abba, Father"*, and that *"the Spirit itself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children"*. The Spirit we have received is the spirit of adoption, the spirit which makes us members of the Divine family as God's own children. We then have the affection, love and confidence which belong to children who are loved and guided by their parents, in contrast to the servile and fearing attitude of slaves.

As has been said, adoption is the acceptance and nurture of a stranger as one's own child, and God has established this arrangement. Although we once were strangers and even enemies, God has received us into this family relationship with Him as our Father, a truly wonderfully gracious blessing (Romans 5:10; Colossians 2:21).

Paul wrote that by the Spirit *"we cry, Abba, Father"* (8:15). The word *"Abba"* is a Chaldean word meaning 'Father'. This is the third item of evidence of Paul's explanations of how the Spirit's witness is borne in believers. Paul's use of the word *"Abba"* seems to refer to Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus is recorded as having prayed *"Abba, Father"* (Mark 14:36; Galatians 4:6).

According to Biblical scholars, such as Joachim Jeremias in his work *'The Prayers of Jesus'* (page 57), the word *"Abba"* was an everyday word, a homely, family word. Jesus' use of this colloquial and familiar term of address to God was unique. Some commentators have seen this term of address to God as symbolic of the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in God's family, since no Jew before Jesus would have dared to address God in this manner.

Jesus told His disciples to pray *“Our Father”*, and thus authorised them to address God using the same homely and familiar term that He did (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). As children of God we need protection and help, so we can call on God in the language of affection, endearment and confidence.

In prayers to the Father we experience the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. When we say *“Our Father”* in the spirit of *“Abba, Father”*, we are using in effect the same words that Jesus used, meaning that *“it is the Spirit itself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God”* (9:15,16; RSV). The NEB has *“In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our Spirit in testifying that we are God’s children”*.

This reminds us of the Old Testament principle in which two witnesses were required to establish a testimony (Deuteronomy 18:15). How can we distinguish between the Holy Spirit and our human spirit? The witness of which Paul wrote, was a personal and inward witness. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God to Christian believers (Acts 2:38; 8:18-20; 10:45; 11:15-17; Hebrews 6:4; 1 Peter 4:10). Our human spirit is our disposition of heart and mind which has been renewed by faith in God through Jesus Christ to follow the Christian way of holiness which leads to eternal life.

If we are rightly affected by the Spirit of God, that Spirit will produce in us the appropriate effects of its influence. Our minds and hearts will become holy and produce in us the nine fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). In this way, God’s Holy Spirit combines with our renewed spirit or mind testifying inwardly to us that we are God’s children. And if we are God’s children, our lives and examples to others should exemplify the fruits of the Spirit which we have embraced mentally and spiritually.

The fourth item of evidence of how the Spirit’s witness is borne by believers is that the Spirit is the first-fruits of our inheritance (8: 17 and 23). There are implications for the future in this. *“Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ”* (8:17, also Galatians 4:7). This is surely a reference to the heavenly inheritance which *“can never perish, spoil or fade”* which is kept in Heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4). Jesus Himself prayed that His own disciples might be with Him,

might see His glory and share His love (John 17:24). Our inheritance is still future but it is certain, since the Holy Spirit is its first-fruits (8:23), guaranteeing that the harvest will follow in due course.

There is, however, a qualification. It is, *“if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory”* (8:17). Scripture places a strong emphasis on the fact that suffering is the path to glory. It was so for Jesus, *“did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”* (Luke 24:26; Mark 8:31). It is so also for believers (Romans 5: 1 to 5). Peter also teaches this, *“Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed”* (1 Peter 4:13). The essential component of discipleship is spiritual union with Christ, which entails identification with Him in both the way he suffered and His glory, the dignity and power of His exalted position.

As we reflect on the first part of Romans 8, we have seen something of the many ministries of the Spirit. It has liberated Jewish believers from the bondage of the Law (8:2), and empowered them and us through Christ to meet God’s moral requirements (8:4). We now live according to the Spirit’s requirements, and set our minds on the Spirit’s desires (8:5). The Spirit lives in us (8:9), gives life to our spirit (8:10), and will one day give us life in new bodies (8:11). The Spirit’s indwelling obliges us to live as it directs us (8:12), and its power helps us to put to death, that is to banish our body’s misdeeds (8:13). The Spirit leads us as God’s children (8:14), and bears witness with our spirit that this is what we are (8: 15 and 16).

It is the foretaste of our inheritance in glory (8: 17 and 23), and it is its indwelling that makes the difference between Romans 7 and Romans 8 a fundamental one. In Romans 7 Paul concentrated on the Law Covenant and its inability to bring about life for all those who were governed by it, no matter how hard they tried; whereas in Romans 8 Paul concentrated on the influence of the Holy Spirit in believers’ lives. The essential contrast is between the powerlessness of the Law and the power of the Spirit.

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

2. THE GLORY OF GOD'S CHILDREN (Romans 8: 18 to 27)

Introductory Notes

In these verses, Paul moved on from the ministry of God's Spirit in this present Gospel Age to the future glory of God's children, of which the Holy Spirit is the first-fruits (8:23), a foretaste and guarantee of salvation. Paul referred to Gospel Age believers sharing in the sufferings and glory of Christ in verse 17 of chapter 8, and then developed the theme of sufferings and glory throughout verses 18 to 27; first the sufferings and glory of God's creation (8: 19 to 22), then the sufferings and glory of God's children (8: 23 to 27). Four points relating to these aspects can be made.

First, the sufferings and glory belong together. They did so in the experience of Christ, and they apply together also in the experience of His people (8:17). It is only after we *"have suffered a little while"* that we will enter God's *"eternal glory in Christ"* to which He has called us (1 Peter 5:10). The sufferings and glory are joined together and cannot be separated.

Secondly, the sufferings and glory are characteristic of the two dispensations, the Gospel Age and the Kingdom Age; in other words, the present and the future. The *"sufferings"* include not only the opposition from the world and perhaps from our friends and family as well, but also from the consequences of our human frailty both physical and moral. The *"glory"*, however, is the splendour promised to us by God, eternal and incorruptible. One day it *"will be revealed"* (8:18) to us because we will see it and share in it as spirit beings (2 Thessalonians 1:10). It is *"in store for us"* (REB), although the precise nature of *"what we will be has not yet been made known"* (1 John 3:2).

Thirdly, the sufferings and glory cannot be compared. Paul wrote, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (8:18). Although *"sufferings"* and *"glory"* are inseparable, they are not comparable. They should be contrasted, not compared. Paul

declared to the Corinthians that our present troubles are “*light and momentary*”, but the glory to come is “*eternal*” and “*far outweighs them all*” (2 Corinthians 4:17). So the splendour of God’s glory when revealed to us, will greatly surpass in intensity and extent the trials of our present sufferings.

Fourthly, the sufferings and the glory concern both God’s creation and God’s children. Both parts of creation are suffering and groaning now, and both will be set free together. The created natural world shared in the curse (Genesis 8:17), and now shares in the pain, but it will also share in the glory, “*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed*” (8:19). The imagery of “*eager expectation*” is based on the Greek ‘*apokaradokia*’, which means ‘to wait with the head raised, and the eye fixed on that point of the horizon from which the expected object is to come’. It also depicts someone standing “*on tiptoe*”, as J.B. Phillips renders the word, in order to be able to see. What the creation is looking for is the revealing of God’s children, the disclosure of their identity and the manifestation of their glory. The human creation does not understand this and is quite unaware of it, but is subconsciously looking for a better world of security and freedom from fear and want, which expectation will be fulfilled when the Kingdom of God is fully operational.

The human creation at present knows nothing of the Divine intention, but the expectations of all will be fulfilled when the sons of God, that is, members of the Gospel Age Church, are revealed and the Kingdom Age commences with the reconstitution of all things, and the eventual restoration of the righteousness and happiness of the whole human race (Acts 3:20,21).

(a) The Sufferings And Glory Of God’s Creation

Romans 8: 20 to 22

- 20. *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;***
- 21. *Because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.***
- 22. *For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now.***

Paul personified the creation in much the same way as poets have done, and still do, and as we sometimes do from time to time. Such personifications are to be found in the Old Testament, for example in Psalm 96:11 and 98:7, in which the heavens, earth and sea, with all their contents, the fields, trees, rivers and mountains are all called to rejoice and sing praise to God, acting as a testimony to his power and glory.

The Apostle made three statements about the creation which relate to its past, present and future.

Firstly, *“the creation was subjected to frustration”* (8:20). This reference must be to the judgment of God which fell on the natural order following Adam’s disobedience. The ground was cursed because of him (compare Genesis 3:17 with Revelation 22:3 - *“No longer will there be any curse”*). Consequently the ground would *“produce thorns and thistles”*, so that Adam and his descendants would obtain food only by painful toil, until they died and returned to the dust from which they had been taken. Paul did not refer to these details but summed up the result of God’s curse by one word ‘mataiotes’ (frustration). The basic idea of this word is emptiness, and it is this word that was chosen by the Septuagint translators for *“Vanity of vanities. All is vanity”* (Ecclesiastes 1:2), rendered by the NIV as *“Meaningless! Meaningless! ... Utterly meaningless!”*.

The Apostle added that the creation’s subjection to frustration was *“not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope”* (8:20). We should note that Paul wrote that the present creation was subjected by God in hope, that is, in the hope and expectation of better circumstances and conditions to come, a return to the situation when God saw that everything was very good (Genesis 1:31). Paul’s readers would probably have wondered, how will this be?

The second statement that Paul made was *“the creation itself will be liberated”* (8:21). One day, God has promised the creation will experience a new beginning, a liberation, which has both negative and positive aspects.

In a negative sense the creation will be liberated from bondage, but the outcome or result of the liberation was not at first made clear by the Apostle. The creation will be *“liberated from its bondage to decay”* (8:21). The word the Apostle used,

'phthora' (decay) denoted that nature is locked into an unending cycle of conception, birth and growth, inevitably followed by decline, decay, death and decomposition. Paul indicated that the creation is out of balance because it is under the curse. Nature still works because the functions of nature are fine-tuned and delicately balanced, and much of it is breathtakingly beautiful, revealing the results of the Creator's design. But the whole is in bondage and subjected to disintegration and frustration. In the age to come, however, it will be liberated from the curse of corruption, *"rescued from the tyranny of change and decay"* (J.B. Phillips).

Positively, creation will be *"liberated ... into the glorious freedom of the children of God"* (8:21). This expectation of the renewal of nature features prominently in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah. Vivid and memorable images are used to foretell that the earth and heavens will be changed like clothing (Psalm 102:25,26), that God *"will create new heavens and a new earth"* including a new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:17,18; 66:20-22); that the desert will rejoice and blossom as the rose, and display the glory of God (Isaiah 35:1; 32:15); that wild and domesticated animals will co-exist in peace, and that even the most ferocious and poisonous creatures *"will neither harm nor destroy"* throughout God's new world order (Isaiah 11:6; 65:25).

The New Testament writers did not take up the details of this vivid and memorable imagery. Jesus Himself spoke of the *"new birth"* of the world at His return (Matthew 19:28); Peter spoke of the reconstitution of all things (Acts 3:19,21); and Paul wrote of the liberation and reconciliation of all things (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20); while John wrote of the new heaven and earth, in which God will dwell with His people, and from which all separation, sorrow, pain and death will have been banished for ever (Revelation 21 and 22; and also 2 Peter 3:13 and Hebrews 12:26 to 28).

This promise from the LORD God of release from the bondage of corruption is to be fulfilled in the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ, when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of Jesus and will come forth to live on the earth, and be educated and trained in the conditions and ways of God's righteous world order, ruled over by Jesus Christ, God's rightful King (John 5:25-29).

This new world order will be in operation for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4). All who react favourably and conform to God's kingdom of righteousness will be rewarded with eternal life in a reconstituted earth in which there will be no more sin, tears, pain or death, and every person will love his brother as himself (Isaiah chapters 2 to 4; 25:6-9; 26:9; all of chapter 35; and 65:17-25). The promised new world order will prepare all people for a life of joy and happiness that will last forever under God's rightful King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The third statement that Paul made concerning creation was *"the whole creation has been groaning right up to the present time"* (8:22). He told his readers that the creation *"was subjected to frustration"* in the past (8:20), and *"will be liberated"* in the future (8:21). Then he added that at the present time, the creation is groaning in pain. Not only human beings, but all members of the animate creation are subject to sickness, pain and death.

The whole creation is in just this condition, and it is no surprise that such is also the condition of the believer who must also exist in a state of bondage, imperfection, sorrow and consequently sighing for deliverance. *"The whole creation has been groaning"*, that is, united in a mutual condition of pain and sorrow, *"right up to the present time"* - until the time the Apostle wrote. The same condition of frustration and longing for release still exists nearly two thousand years after he wrote these inspired words.

The groans of the creation are not made without hope, however, nor are they symptoms of despair. On the contrary, they are like *"the pains of childbirth"* because they rely on the assurance of a coming new world order. Jesus used the same imagery in some of the prophetic words that He spoke. He spoke of false teachers, wars, famines and earthquakes as *"the beginning of birth pains"* (NIV), or *"the first birth-pangs of the new age"* (REB), that is, the preliminary signs of His return (Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8; John 16:20).

Verse 22 of Romans 8 brings together the past, present and future. The *"groaning"* is symbolic of labour pains which presage or look forward to the coming new world order. In each verse of this section (8: 20 to 22) Paul combined the thoughts of present suffering and future glory. The creation's subjection to

frustration was "*in hope*" (20). The bondage to decay will give place to the freedom of glory (21). The pains of labour will be followed by the joys of birth (22). At the time of the resurrection, that is, at the beginning of the kingdom age, the earth itself will not be destroyed, but rather the rules and conditions of life will all be renewed, and the whole world order, man and nature, will be liberated, transformed, and will truly reflect the glory of God through His rightful King, the Lord Jesus Christ, on David's throne for ever, as God has promised (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:7; Luke 1:32; Acts 2:30).

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

2. THE GLORY OF GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

(b) The Sufferings And Glory Of God's Children

Romans 8: 23 to 27

- 23. *Not only that, but we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.***
- 24. *For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?***
- 25. *But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.***
- 26. *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.***
- 27. *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.***

In 8:22 Paul wrote of the whole creation groaning, and then in 8:23 he continued "*Not only so, but we ourselves ... groan inwardly*". So Paul said that we, who are no longer "*in Adam*" but "*in Christ*", we who no longer live according to the flesh but who "*have the first-fruits of the Spirit*", we in whom God's new creation has already begun (2 Corinthians 5:17); even we continue to groan inwardly "*as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*" (8:23).

Christians find themselves in the position of being caught between what God has done for them now in this life by giving them a measure of His Spirit, and what God will do for them in the age to come; and in this position suffer with physical discomfort and also with longing for the promised fulfilment of God's promises to them.

In the meantime, God's indwelling Spirit gives Christians joy (Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6), and the glory to come gives Christians hope (Romans 5:2); but the position of Christians in the interim waiting period is, in effect, one of groaning in pain as they endeavour to battle with the flesh with all its sinful tendencies and the many adverse circumstances encountered in this life.

Paul then made five statements or affirmations of the Christians' position as they continue to retain their standing of imputed righteousness with God by faith in Jesus Christ, and by daily prayers for forgiveness of failings and inadequacies which they cannot eliminate by their own efforts.

Paul's first affirmation was "*we ... have the first-fruits of the Spirit*" (8:23). The Greek word is 'aparche', which signified the celebration of the beginning of the harvest and the assurance that the full harvest would follow in due course. It is likely that Paul had in mind the Feast of Weeks, which celebrated the reaping of the first-fruits, called in Greek, Pentecost, the very festival on the first day of which the Spirit was miraculously "*shed forth*" (Acts 2:33).

Paul also described God's gift of the Spirit as 'arrabon' the 'first instalment, deposit, down-payment, pledge', which guaranteed the future completion of the purchase (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). Christian believers have not yet received the promised fulfilment of redemption, but have received a measure of the Spirit as the foretaste and pledge of the blessings to come.

Paul's second affirmation was "*we ... groan inwardly*" (8:23). The gift of the Spirit, the first-fruits, is a constant reminder to believers that their redemption is incomplete, because we share with the rest of creation the frustration, the bondage to change and decay and the pain experienced with the whole situation. One important reason for our groaning is our physical frailty and mortality.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:2,4, "*Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened ...*" But it is not only our fragile body which makes us groan, it is also our fallen nature which hinders us from behaving as we should, and indeed would prevent us from doing so if it were not for the

indwelling Spirit (7: 17 and 20). We long, therefore, for our fallen nature to be eliminated and for our body to be changed (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

Thirdly, Paul wrote, “*we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*” (8:23). Just as the groaning creation waits eagerly for God’s sons to be revealed (8:19), so groaning Christians wait eagerly for adoption as sons, even their bodily redemption. Christians have already been adopted by God (8:15), and have the assurance of the Spirit that they are His children (8:16).

But there is an even closer and deeper Father and child relationship to come when Christians are fully revealed as His children (8:19), and “*conformed to the likeness of His Son*” (8:29). Christians have already been redeemed (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Romans 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:30), but have not yet been changed from human beings to spirit beings. Christians’ spiritual natures are alive (8:10) but at some future time the Spirit will give Christians life with new, different bodies (8:11).

Paul’s fourth affirmation was “*in this hope we were saved*” (8:24). “*We were saved*” (Greek ‘*esothemen*’) is, according to Greek scholars, an aorist tense, referring to a simple event in the past. It bears witness to our past liberation from the guilt and bondage of our sins, and from the appropriate judgment of God upon them, as in Ephesians 2:8. Nevertheless our fallen human nature has not been blotted out, nor has our fragile human body been changed as it will be in the resurrection. We have been saved “*in hope*” of our complete liberation (8:24), and the creation has been subjected to frustration “*in ... hope*” of being set free from it (8:20). This double hope looks to the future and to things which as yet remain unseen. For “*hope that is seen*”, that is something that has occurred in our lives, “*is no hope at all*”. “*Who hopes for what he already has?*” (8:24). Instead, “*we hope for what we do not yet have*” (8:25), as indicated also in Hebrews 11:1.

Fifthly, we wait for it patiently (8:25), that is, for the fulfilment of our hope. We remain confident in God’s promises that the first-fruits will be followed by the harvest, bondage replaced by freedom, decay overcome by incorruption and the pains of birth defeated at the beginning of the new heavens and earth.

We as Christians are living 'between times', between present difficulties and future blessings, between what now exists and what is to come, between present sufferings and future glory. In these 'between times', the Christian believers must wait, and wait *"eagerly"* (8: 19 and 23), but also *"patiently"* (8:25), and remain steadfast in the endurance of trials. The combination is significant. The Christian must continue to wait eagerly but not lose patience, and patiently without losing expectation; eagerness and patience together.

For this 'in between' existence, the great Apostle brought an encouragement to us. The encouragement is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This ministry Paul had so far portrayed in four respects.

Firstly in relation to the Law which the Spirit enables us to fulfil in Christ (8: 2 to 8); secondly to our fallen nature which the Spirit enables us to subdue (8: 9 to 13); thirdly to our adoption into God's family of which the Spirit secures us (8: 14 to 17); and fourthly to our final inheritance of which the Spirit is the guarantee and foretaste (8: 18 to 23).

Next Paul wrote of the Holy Spirit in relation to our prayers (8: 26 and 27). True Christian prayer must be offered with the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit which causes believers to say *"Abba, Father"*, indicating an especially close relationship to God. *"The Spirit helps us in our weakness"* (8:26). In our ignorance and weakness *"we do not know what we ought to pray for"* (8:26), but the Spirit knows and *"intercedes for us"* (8:26). The Lord Jesus is our intercessor with God in heaven in all matters in our lives, while the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our prayers to God when we may be at a loss to find words to express our feelings.

The Holy Spirit's intercession is said to be *"with groans that words cannot express"* (8:26) or as the RSV renders the expression *"sighs too deep for words"*. Strictly speaking, these translations are inaccurate, because the Greek 'alaletos' simply means 'wordless'. The point Paul made seems to be not that the groans cannot be put into words, but that they are not. The groans are unexpressed, but not inexpressible. They are 'agonised longings', according to J.B. Phillips, for final redemption and the establishment of the new heavens and earth.

But why don't we know what to pray for? It is evident that we do not know what to pray for because:

- (a) we do not know what is best for us;
- (b) we do not know what God would be willing to grant us; and
- (c) we are sometimes perplexed in our trials, illnesses and calamities to which we are subjected.

Perhaps also because we are not sure whether to pray for deliverance from our trials and sufferings, or for strength to endure them (Philippians 1:19; John 12:27). In addition, we do not know what will befall us, and when God will bring this order of things to an end, nor how He will do so; thus we are not in a position to make precise requests. However, the Spirit intercedes for us, and does so with groans that are not expressed in words.

It may seem surprising that Paul wrote of the Spirit groaning. Some commentators have said that the Spirit never groans, so Paul meant only that the Spirit causes us to groan. But Paul's language is clear; the Spirit intercedes for us in groanings that are not put into words. It would seem that the Holy Spirit identifies with our groans. It is discomforted by the pain of the Church and the world as a whole, and shares in the longing for the final freedom from sin and death.

Paul was referring to inarticulate or wordless groans. Although he said they were wordless, he did not mean that they were meaningless. We are told that God *"searches our hearts"* (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 7:9, 138:1; Jeremiah 17:10; Acts 15:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). God *"knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will"* (8:27; 1 John 5:14).

Paul made three statements about the Spirit. Firstly, *"the Spirit helps us"*, secondly, *"the Spirit intercedes for us"*, and thirdly, *"the Spirit intercedes according to God's will"*. The Spirit helps us because of our weakness and because of our situation between our salvation, promised now by faith, and the fulfilment of God's promise in His Kingdom. The Spirit intercedes for us because of our lack of knowledge of what to pray for. *"The Spirit intercedes according to God's will"* thus assuring us that God listens and responds in our best interests.

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

3. GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE **Romans 8: 28 to 39**

Introductory Comment

In the final twelve verses of Romans 8 the Apostle recorded sublime thoughts which are not found anywhere else in the New Testament. In this letter to the Roman congregation he had previously described the main privileges of justified believers:

- (1) peace with God (5: 1 to 11);
- (2) union with Christ (5:12 to 6:23);
- (3) freedom from the Law (7: 1 to 25); and
- (4) life in the Spirit (8: 1 to 27).

His inspired mind drew attention to the whole plan and purpose of God, to God's infinite knowledge and His plan for the whole human race based on His supreme attribute of love, from which nothing, absolutely nothing, will ever be able to separate us, and eventually all the people of earth who will believe, worship and obey Him in His Kingdom to come.

In this life, we as believers, experience trials and sufferings, but we are sustained by the hope of glory to come. This focus of this hope is future, unseen and unrealised, but is by no means uncertain because our Christian hope is firmly and unshakeably grounded on the steadfast love of God from which nothing can separate us.

Fundamental Truths

- 28. ***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***
- 29. ***For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.***
- 30. ***Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.***

The Apostle declared these fundamental truths three times from three different standpoints. He began in 8:28 with five convictions about God working all things together for the good of His people. He then continued with five affirmations (8:29,30) regarding the successive stages of God's purpose of salvation from the time of creation to everlasting time after the completion of the kingdom age. Finally he put forward five questions (8:31 to 39) in which he challenged anyone to contradict the convictions and affirmations that he expressed.

(a) Five Clear Convictions (8:28)

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

This verse is one of the best known verses in the Bible. It begins with the words *"we know"* as though we should already have this knowledge. But many sincere Christians have wondered about the words *"all things work together for good"*. Some Christians have suffered bodily injury, some have suffered serious illnesses, some have had to endure great sorrow; all suffer grief, and some have had to endure persecution, ostracism, trials and other calamities in their lives. How can we respond to these undeniable facts? The Apostle listed five truths in verse 28 about God's providence which He said *"we know"*.

Firstly, true Christians know that God is at work in their lives. The rendering *"all things work together for good"* is not a good translation because all things do not automatically work themselves together into a pattern of good. The order of words in the Greek permits the translation *"we know that for those who love God He is working"* that is, He is active continually and purposefully on behalf of His true people. All afflictions, persecutions, ostracism, trials and calamities, some or all of which the Christian may encounter in life, should have the effect of working for his or her good because they are borne and accepted with calmness of mind; and produce patience, a humble attitude of mind, kindness of disposition through the peace in their hearts.

The undesirable things mentioned above also have the effect of reducing our affection for the present evil world, as they exemplify the reality of our present transitory and dying

condition. They should also have the effect of leading us to God for support and strengthen our hope for the future. It must be said also that things of a more pleasant nature also work for our good, because these things produce in us a spirit of thankfulness and appreciation for God's grace and mercy. With the two types of experiences, the Christian should grow and develop in a balanced manner, showing forth the fruits of the Spirit in mind and conduct (Galatians 5:22,23).

Secondly, as has already been indicated, God is at work *"for the good of"* His people. God is good in all respects, and His works are expressions of His goodness, calculated to advance the good of His people. The *"good"* is the benefit of all His providential dealings with us, our ultimate well-being, and our final salvation. Verses 29 and 30 make this abundantly clear.

Thirdly, God works for our good *"in all things"*. *"All things"* must include the sufferings of verse 19 and the groanings of verse 23. Nothing is beyond the overruling scope of God's providential care, allowing us to be tested while offering strength, comfort and guidance from the Holy Spirit when we acknowledge our dependence upon Him.

Fourthly, God works in all things for the good of *"those who love Him"*. In other words, God's objective for His people is their salvation, His people being those who love Him. This description was unusual for Paul, because his references concerning love in Romans were usually to God's love for us, as in 5:5,8; 8:35,37,39. But elsewhere Paul referred to our love for God (1 Corinthians 2:9; 8:3; Ephesians 6:24). This is a basic biblical concept, since the first and great commandment is that we love God with all that our hearts and minds can give (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30).

Fifthly, those who love God were described by Paul as those *"who have been called according to His purpose"*. Their love for Him is a sign and token of recognition of His prior love for them, expressed in His eternal purpose including His call to believers in Him through Jesus Christ, the only way. God has a saving purpose, and is working in accordance with it. To the believer, this life is not a random happening without sense or purpose, but is in a general state of disarray and corruption, which the LORD God permits to continue until His time comes to put an end to this unsatisfactory order of things and set up His Kingdom of righteousness and peace.

These are the five truths expressed in verse 28, which Paul said “we know”. We do not always understand what God is doing, or why He permits some events to occur, nor are we told that God works only for our pleasure or comfort. But we do know that He is working for our ultimate good. We know this from verse 28 of Romans 8 and from the many examples of His goodness to faithful people in Scripture.

For example, we are told of Joseph’s conviction about his brothers’ cruelty in selling him as a slave in Egypt. He said, “*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good ... the saving of many lives*” (Genesis 50:20). Secondly, Jeremiah wrote in God’s name a letter to the Jews exiled in Babylon after the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem. “*I know the plans I have for you*” declared the LORD, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11).

The same convergence of human evil and God’s plan and purpose occurred in Christ’s crucifixion. Peter attributed both to the wickedness of men and to “*God’s set purpose and foreknowledge*” (Acts 2:23; 4:27).

(b) Five Plain Affirmations (8:29 and 30)

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

In these two verses, Paul made clear what he meant in verse 28 by God’s “*purpose*”, according to which He has called us and is working everything together for our good. He traced God’s good and saving purpose through five stages, called by him:

- (1) foreknowledge;
- (2) predestination;
- (3) calling;
- (4) justification; and
- (5) glorification.

The first affirmation concerns *“those God foreknew”*. To foreknow is to know something beforehand; before it happens, so does this mean that God has known and foreseen who will believe in Him and come to Him through Jesus Christ, or does it mean simply that God has foreseen a particular group of people who will believe without knowing who the members of that group will be? The most that can be said is that God’s knowledge is infinite, and we cannot limit His providence unless the Scriptures clearly tell us. For example, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; 6:18), nor can He be tempted with evil (James 1:13), nor can He break His promises (2 Corinthians 1:20).

We ought not then to say that God did not know beforehand who His individual people in Christ would be. He may have chosen not to know beforehand, but the Scriptures do not tell us so. It seems to me that God in His mercy and grace decided beforehand that there would be a group or company of believers in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and who would come to God through Him by their individual choice, and that God knew beforehand who the individual believers would be.

In this thought I draw on a number of commentators who have told us that the Hebrew verb *“to know”* expresses much more than an intellectual recognition. It denotes a personal relationship of care and affection. When God ‘knows’ people, He watches over them (Psalm 1:5; 144:3), and when He ‘knew’ His people Israel in the wilderness, that meant He cared for them (Hosea 13:5). Israel was the only nation of all the families of earth that God had ‘known’, that is, that He loved, chose, and formed a covenant with them (Amos 3:2).

The commentator John Murray in his ‘Epistle to the Romans’ (Volume 1, page 317) wrote, ‘Know ... is used in a sense practically synonymous with love. Whom he foreknew ... is therefore virtually equivalent to whom he foreloved.’ John Murray also wrote that foreknowledge is ‘sovereign, distinguishing love’ (page 318).

The meaning of ‘foreknowledge’ in the New Testament is similar. *“God did not reject his people whom he foreknew”* that is, the Israelites whom He chose and loved (Romans 11:2, 1 Peter 1:2). This statement is in harmony with Moses’ great statement, *“The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than*

other peoples But it was because the Lord loved you" (Deuteronomy 7:7; Ephesians 1:4). The source and motivation of God's election and courses of action is always His love.

Paul's second affirmation is *"those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers"* (8:29). The verb *"predestined"* is a translation of the Greek 'pro-oriso', which means 'to decide upon beforehand', as in Acts 4:28; *"They did what your power and will had decided beforehand"*. These words tell us that our individual decision to become a Christian believer is a decision we make voluntarily, but it is consistent with God's foreknowledge.

We decided of our own free will, that is, we chose to walk the Christian path, but God already knew that we would do so. The emphasis on God's gracious sovereign planning is reinforced by the Scriptures with which God's decision making is associated. On the one hand it is attributed to God's 'pleasure', 'will', 'plan' and 'purpose' (Ephesians 1:5,9,11; 3:11), and on the other hand it is traceable to the time *"before the creation of the world"* (Ephesians 1:4) or *"before time began"* (1 Corinthians 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8).

Scripture supports this understanding. Throughout the Old Testament, Israel is acknowledged as *"the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself"* to be his *"treasured possession"* (2 Samuel 7:22; Exodus 19:3; Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15; 14:2; Psalm 135:4).

In the New Testament we are told that human beings are spiritually blind, deaf and dead in sin because of their fallen nature, so that their conversion to faith and obedience is impossible unless God calls them and gives them sight, hearing and life (Acts 2:39; Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2,9,24; 7:15,17,22,23; Galatians 1:6; 5:13, Ephesians 4:1,4; Colossians 3:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Timothy 6:12, 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:15; 2:9,21; 5:10; 2 Peter 1:3, Jude 1).

How does this happen? How does God call us? As flawed human beings we have no right to ask for or demand explanations from God. But God has given us sufficient light to help us understand the meaning of predestination.

Predestination means the action of God in foreordaining or predetermining from eternity and age to age whatever happens or comes to pass. It differs from foreknowing in that foreknowing simply means that God knows beforehand what will happen without necessarily making it happen. It seems desirable to offer some thoughts on predestination, because it is frequently misunderstood or not understood.

(i) Predestination is said to encourage arrogance because those who consider themselves members of God's elect tend to boast of this favoured status. But if we believe God has chosen us, we should never boast or think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (Romans 12:3), but should be deeply grateful that God has had mercy on us who do not deserve mercy. We should live *"to the praise of his glorious grace"* (Ephesians 1:6,12,14) and continue to thank Him for the sacrifice of the Lamb Who was slain (Revelation 5:11).

(ii) Predestination is said to foster uncertainty and make people continually anxious about whether or not they have been predestined. This should not be so. Believers know that faith in God through the Lord Jesus, and life in conformity with this faith, assure us of God's mercy, forgiveness and grace, and should bring us comfort and positive hope.

(iii) Predestination is sometimes said to bring about apathy. Some people argue that salvation is entirely the work of God because God's people are predestined and automatically saved no matter what they do. But this is not the case. God is sovereign and almighty, but we are still responsible for our actions. Jesus said, *"no-one can come to me unless the Father...draws him"* (John 6:44), and also *"you refuse to come to me to have life"* (John 5:40). People can choose to come or not to come to God, but they must come, if they so choose, through Jesus. God has not taken from people their ability to choose.

(iv) Predestination is said by some to foster complacency and give rise to rejection of morals and moral behaviour. The thought is that if believers are predestined, they can live as they please without moral restraint. Paul answered this assertion in chapter 6. Those who have been called and chosen by God have become united to Christ. They have died to sin and live a new life to God. Paul wrote that *"he chose us in him before the*

creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). He has predestined us *"to be conformed to the likeness of His Son"* (8:29).

(v) Predestination is claimed to lead to narrow-mindedness, because those who consider themselves the elect people of God become absorbed in themselves. But the opposite is the case. God called Abraham, which involved his family too, not for their blessing only, but that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1). Such promises as this must have been a great encouragement to Paul who was able to broaden his vision to include the Gentiles (Acts 13:47; 26:23). Thus God has called us to be His own people, not to withdraw and live only to ourselves, but *"to proclaim the glorious deeds of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Peter 2:9).

There are two purposes of predestination. The first is that we should *"be conformed to the likeness of His Son"*, that is we should become like Jesus. The second purpose is that, as a result of being like Jesus, we *"might be the firstborn among many brothers"*, enjoying the fellowship of like-minded brethren acknowledging the pre-eminence of Jesus, the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18).

At this stage, we come to Paul's third affirmation, *"those he predestined, he also called"* (8:30). God's call comes to people through the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:13), and when the Gospel is preached to them and they respond with repentance, faith and obedience, we can be sure that they have heard His call. So evangelism, the preaching of the Gospel, is not rendered superfluous by God's predestination, but is indispensable because it is the means by which God's call comes to people and awakens their belief and faith.

Paul's fourth affirmation was *"those he called, he also justified"* (8:30). Those who respond to God's call are justified by their faith. This most important subject has been discussed in earlier chapters, so the discussion will not be repeated here.

Suffice it to say that it is through Christ, by virtue of our spiritual union with Him, our commitment to Him that we have been justified (Galatians 2:17). God laid on Christ *"the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6), Christ bore the sins of everyone in His

sacrifice, so that through our conviction of God's acceptance of that sacrifice we might have righteousness imputed to us, and be dealt with by God as though we were in fact righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Paul's fifth affirmation was *"those he justified, he also glorified"* (8:30). Paul recorded God's promise that if we suffer in the same manner as Christ did we will share His glory (8:17), and that the whole creation will one day be brought into the freedom of the glory of God's children (8:21). When he said, *"those he justified, he also glorified"* he surely meant that believers would be given new bodies in a new world order, and that the whole creation will be transformed and display the glory of God.

These then are the great Apostle's five affirmations. He portrayed God as moving unfailingly from stage to stage, from a foreknowledge and predestination from distant times past to a calling and justification of believers in the Gospel Age, and finally to a glorification; in heaven for His Gospel Age people, and then for all people on earth, in the future new heavens, the new government, and on the restored earth in which righteousness will dwell (2 Peter 3:13).

GOD'S SPIRIT IN GOD'S CHILDREN (continued)

3. GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE (continued)

(c) Five Rhetorical Questions

Romans 8: 31 to 39

- 31. *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?***
- 32. *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***
- 33. *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.***
- 34. *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.***
- 35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?***
- 36. *As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'***
- 37. *Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.***
- 38. *For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,***
- 39. *nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

The Apostle concluded this section of his letter with the kind of question he had asked three times before (6: 1 and 15; 7:7), namely, "*What, then, shall we say in response to this?*" (8:31). In the light of his five convictions (8:28) and five affirmations (8: 29 and 30), the Apostle said, as J.B. Phillips translated the words, "*What is there left to say?*" The Apostle continued with five more questions to which there need be no direct answer, for there is no one and nothing that can harm the people whom God has foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified.

The first of the great Apostle's questions was, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* But, we may say, we have many people and things against us. The unbelieving world is against us, as they were against Paul (1 Corinthians 16:9). Sinfulness is against us, and death, the wages of sinning (Romans 6:23), and the devil *"who holds the power of death"* (1 Corinthians 15:26; Hebrews 2:14), together with all the principalities and powers of darkness which are mentioned in 8:28 and Ephesians 6:12.

But Paul began his question with *"If God is for us ..."*. He meant, of course, 'since' or 'inasmuch as' God is for us, because believers are His special people, foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified. The most dreadful words that could be spoken by the LORD God to any individual or nation are "I am against you". He said these words, for example, against Assyria and Nineveh its capital (Nahum 2:13, 3:5); against Babylon (Jeremiah 50:31; 51:25); against Egypt (Ezekiel 29:3,10; 30:22); against Tyre and Sidon (Ezekiel 26:3; 28:22); and against Edom (Ezekiel 35:1). God even said these words against His own people Israel because of their disobedience and idolatry (Leviticus 26:17; Ezekiel 5:8; 14:8; 15:7, 21:3); and especially against the nation's false shepherds and false prophets (Ezekiel 13:8,20; 14:9; 34:10).

But this is not the case under the New Covenant in Romans 8:31. Paul envisaged the situation as one in which God is concerned for His people who are committed to Him through Jesus Christ. So no person or power can prevail against God's chosen, Gospel Age people, because God is for them; He is on their side.

Paul's second question was, *"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"* (8:32). Believers know that God cares for them and will provide all their needs (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-34). The guarantee that God has given to His people is that He has already given us His Son to die, and such an inexpressible gift should dispel all doubts about His ability or intention to *"give us all things."*

The words *"did not spare his own Son"* reminds us of Abraham of whom God said *"You have not withheld ('spared' in the Septuagint) your son, your only son"* (Genesis 22:16). But God,

speaking of Jesus, *"gave him up for us all"*. The same verb is used in the gospels concerning Judas, the priests and Pilate, who *"handed Jesus over"* to death. So in reality it was not Judas, nor Pilate, nor the Jews, but the Heavenly Father in His indescribably great love who allowed these events. We remember that Jesus said to Pilate, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"* (John 19:11).

Paul argued from the greater to the less, as earlier in 5: 8 to 10, that since God has already given us the supreme gift of His own Son, *"how can he fail to lavish every other gift upon us?"* (REB). In giving His Son, God showed that the sacrifice is the guarantee of the unfailing blessings of God.

The third question Paul posed was, *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies"* (8:33). This question, and the next, bring us in imagination into a court of law. Paul's argument was, and is, that no prosecution can succeed, since God our Judge has already justified us, and that we can never be condemned since Jesus has died for our sins, has been raised to God's right hand, is now our Advocate and is interceding for us.

So who will accuse us? Our own conscience accuses us. The devil accuses us, as indicated by his title 'diabolos', which means 'slanderer' or 'calumniator, and indeed he is called *"the accuser of his brothers"* (Revelation 12:10; Zechariah 3:1). It is possible that we may have human enemies who may seek to accuse or discredit us. But no allegations can stand because God has justified us and declared us innocent. The Apostle may well have had in mind Isaiah 50:8,9; *"He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who is he who will condemn me?"*.

Paul's fourth question was, *"Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"* (8:34). Perhaps there are many persons, powers or organizations that would condemn us if they could. But, as 1 John 3:20 states, our own hearts may sometimes condemn us. However, all condemnations will fail because of the Lord Jesus. He has rescued us from condemnation by His death, resurrection, exaltation and intercession.

In the first place Jesus died, and died for the very sins for which, without Him, we would deserve to be condemned. But God condemned sin in Jesus, Who was made a sin offering for us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Diaglott) and has redeemed us from condemnation, as He has also redeemed the Jews who were cursed under the Law, by His becoming in addition, a curse for them (Galatians 3:13).

In the second place, Jesus was raised to life by the Father, Who thus demonstrated His acceptance of His Son's sacrifice as the only satisfactory basis for our justification (4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:14).

In the third place, the crucified and resurrected Christ *"is at the right hand of God"* resting from His finished work (Hebrews 1:3;10:11), in the position of supreme honour (Philippians 2:9), exercising His power to save (Acts 2:38; 5:31), and waiting for His final triumph (Psalm 110:1). In heaven He is interceding for us, for He is our Advocate (1 John 2:1) and High Priest (Hebrews 7:23). So we, and all believers, know that with Christ as our Saviour *"there is now no condemnation"* for those who are united in faith to Him (8:1). No-one can ever condemn us as we continue to live with Christ as our example.

Finally, in his fifth question, the Apostle asked, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (8:35). He suggested a selection of adversities and adversaries that might come between Christ's love and us. He mentioned seven possibilities - trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. These all portray the pressures and distress caused by an ungodly world, the lack of sufficient food and clothing, and the perils of a dangerous world and even the death of martyrdom. Martyrdom is certainly the final test of Christian faith and faithfulness.

In support of this, the Apostle quoted from Psalm 44, which depicts the persecution of Israel by opposing nations. The Israelites were not suffering because they had neglected God or turned to idolatry, but because of their loyalty to God and their suffering for His sake, which raised the anger of their neighbours. *"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered"* (Psalm 44:22).

The seven afflictions mentioned above are real sufferings, unpleasant, painful, difficult to endure and challenging to faith. Paul certainly understood this because he had experienced them all, and worse (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Perhaps the Christians in Rome were at that time having to endure similar trials. Some of them indeed might have had to suffer a few years later when the Emperor Nero unfairly blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians, and had many of them burnt to death.

We have not been called upon to suffer physically for Christ, for which we ought always to be thankful when we read of Paul's sufferings and the sufferings of the many unnamed people of faith recorded in Hebrews 11:35-39, who were mocked, flogged, chained, stoned and even sawn in half. We remember the heroism of these godly people with the deepest admiration and awe at their unflinching courage and faith.

But, as the Apostle wrote, pain, misery and loss cannot separate Christ's people from His love. Far from alienating us from Him, *"in all these things we are more than conquerors"* (8:37). We bear them with fortitude and triumph over them *"through him who loved us"* (8:37). It seems that Paul meant that as Christ proved His love for us by His sufferings, so our sufferings cannot separate us from His supreme love.

Paul reached the climax of his message in 8:38 by writing *"I am convinced"*. The conviction he expressed was rational and settled. He declared that nothing will, indeed nothing can separate us from Christ's love. He chose ten items in four pairs and two on their own. *"Neither life nor death"* probably refers to the difficulties in our lives and our inevitable death. *"Neither angels nor demons"* is harder to understand. The word translated *"demons"* is 'archai', which in other places refers to principalities and powers as in Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:15. *"Angels"* surely must refer to fallen angels, but as Jesus has triumphed over them all (Ephesians 1:21) and they are *"in submission to him"* (1 Peter 3:22), it is certain they cannot harm us.

The next two pairs refer, firstly to time - *"neither the present nor the future"*, and secondly to space - *"neither height nor depth"*. It seems that Paul's language here is rhetorical rather than

technical, and that he may have had in mind Psalm 139:8 *“neither the highest height nor the deepest depth”* in his message, that neither heaven nor earth nor the grave can separate us from Christ’s love.

Paul concluded with *“or anything else in all creation”* in order to make sure that he had left nothing out. Everything in creation is under the control of God and Jesus Christ, and that is why nothing *“will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (8:39).

Paul gave us five convictions about God’s providence (8:28), five affirmations about His purpose (8: 29 and 30), and five questions which are answered in verse 38. All of which have brought us fifteen assurances about Him. We need them all today as we see on our television screens and read in our newspapers and magazines the instability and unrest in so many countries around the world. Insecurity is prevalent in all human experience. Christians are not guaranteed immunity from temptation, tribulation and even tragedy, but are promised victory over them. God’s pledge, emphasised by the great Apostle, is not that suffering will not afflict us, but that it will never separate us from His love.

God’s love was supremely displayed in Christ’s sacrifice (5:8; 8: 32 and 37) and has been given into our hearts by His Holy Spirit (5:5). This has drawn from us our love in response (8:28), and will never let us go, since it is committed to bring us eventually to glory in the heavenly realm (8: 35 and 39). Our confidence in our love for God and Jesus may be frail and faltering at times, but their love for us is steadfast, faithful and persevering. God and our Mediator Jesus Christ are unfailingly persevering with caring for all their special people.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN

Romans 9:1 to 11:36

1. ISRAEL'S FALL

Romans 9: 1 to 33)

Commentators on Paul's letter to the Romans vary considerably in the importance they attach to the three chapters nine to eleven. Some regard the chapters as a kind of digression, or even a parenthesis which is puzzling in its meaning; while others regard the three chapters as the heart of the letter to which the remaining chapters are only an introduction and a conclusion.

Both of these positions are extreme positions. Far from being a digression or a climax in the Apostle's discourse, chapters nine to eleven are essential to the Apostle's developing argument, and are an essential part of his letter.

These three chapters are concerned with relations between Jews and Gentiles, and particularly with the place of the Jews in God's plan and purpose. Paul had already made reference in his letter to the relationships between Jews and Gentiles in God's overall plan for the salvation of the human race, as for example in 1:16; 2:9; 17; 3:1;29;4:1;5:20;6:14;7:1 and 8:2. Then in chapters nine to eleven he provided his readers with more details.

Paul's dominant theme was Jewish unbelief and the problems which it raised. How could the privileged people of God have failed to recognise their Messiah? The Gospel had been "*promised beforehand ... in the Holy Scriptures*" (1:2; 3:21), so why did the Jews not recognise and accept it? The Gospel, or good news, was God's saving power "*first for the Jews*", so why were they, as a nation, unable to receive it? Further questions follow. How could Jewish failure to respond be reconciled with God's covenant and promises? God promised to raise up a Prophet in Israel like Moses, and told Israel to listen to Him (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). How could the nation have failed to do so? How did Paul's mission to the Gentiles and their conversion fit in with God's purpose? What was God's future purpose for both Jews and Gentiles?

Each of the three chapters in question treats a different aspect of God's relation to Israel, past, present and future. These aspects are:

1. Israel's fall (9: 1 to 33) - God's purpose of election.
2. Israel's fault (10: 1 to 21) - God's profound disappointment over Israel's rejection of His mercy to them.
3. Israel's future (11: 1 to 32) - God's eternal purpose.
4. Doxology (11: 33 to 36) - God's wisdom and mercy.

At the beginning of each of chapters 9, 10 and 11, Paul began with a personal statement in which he identified himself with the people of Israel and expressed his profound concern for them. He wrote of the sorrow and anguish he felt for them (9:1), of his prayerful longing for their salvation (10:1) and of his conviction that God had not rejected them entirely (11:1).

The Argument Of Chapter Nine

Paul began chapter 9 by acknowledging the great sorrow and anguish in his heart that Jewish unbelief had caused him (9: 1 to 3). He was obviously perplexed in his mind as he strove to grasp how it came about that the people of Israel and their unique privileges, eight in all, could have rejected their Messiah (9: 4 and 5). He then proceeded to explain Israel's apostasy by four main questions and answers.

(1) Has God's Word failed? (9:6)

Paul answered in the negative. God kept the promise contained in His Word, which was addressed not to all members of fleshly Israel, but to the true Israel of faith (9:6) whom God had called according to His "*purpose in election*" (9:11,12).

(2) Is God unjust? (9:14)

God is almighty, and as the absolute sovereign He has made choices. God was merciful to Moses (9:15), but exercised judgment on Pharaoh (9:17). Paul declared that it is not unjust to show mercy to the undeserving, nor is it unjust to punish those who resist or harden themselves in relation to God's dealings with them. Both mercy and judgment are completely compatible with justice.

(3) Why does God still blame us? (9:19)

Paul responded to this question in three ways.

(a) God has the right of a potter to shape and form his clay, and we have no right to challenge Him (9: 20 and 21).

(b) God must reveal Himself as He is, making known His wrath as well as His glory (9:22,23).

(c) God foretold in Scripture both the inclusion of the Gentiles and the exclusion of Israel except for a remnant (9: 24 to 29).

(4) Paul asked, in conclusion, *“What then shall we say?”* (9:30)

The explanation of God’s chosen people - the Gospel Age Church consisting of a Gentile majority and a Jewish remnant – is that some Gentiles believed in Jesus, whereas the majority of Israel did not believe and stumbled over Him, the stone that God had laid (9: 30 to 33). The acceptance of the Gentiles is attributed to the sovereign mercy of God, while the rejection of Israel is attributed to their unbelief and rebellion.

Three Affirmations

Romans 9: 1 to 5

1. ***I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,***
2. ***that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.***
3. ***For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,***
4. ***who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;***
5. ***of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.***

Paul began chapter 9 with three strong affirmations by means of which he intended to put his sincerity beyond question and convince his readers to believe him. He said firstly *“I speak the truth in Christ”*; secondly, *“I am not lying”* and thirdly,

“My conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit” (9:1). Paul was conscious of Christ’s promise to him as Christ’s chosen Apostle, and declared that his conscience was enlightened and directed by God’s Holy Spirit.

The truth which Paul disclosed with such firmness and strength was his continuing love for his own people of Israel, who have rejected Jesus Christ. They caused him *“great sorrow and unceasing anguish of heart”* (9:2). He referred to them as his *“brothers”* and as those of his *“own race”*. This should remind us that membership of Christ’s Church as His chosen and holy people does not cancel our natural ties of family and nationality. Paul said, *“I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel”* (9: 3 and 4).

So deep was Paul’s anguish that he expressed this impossible wish; impossible because He had already stated that nothing could ever separate him from God’s love through Christ (8: 35 and 38).

His wish may remind us of Moses, who in his pleading for Israel’s forgiveness, prayed that if this could be granted by his name being blotted out of God’s book of life, then let that be done. We remember the LORD’s reply to Moses, *“Whosoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book”* (Exodus 32:31-33).

The Apostle’s anguish over unbelieving Israel was all the more poignant because of the nation’s unique privileges, some of which he had mentioned earlier in the contexts beginning at 2:17 and 3:1).

The Apostle then began a more detailed exposition. (1) *“Theirs is the adoption as sons”*, as God had said, *“Israel is my firstborn son”* (Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1) and *“I am Israel’s father”* (Jeremiah 31:9). He continued (2) *“theirs the divine glory”* meaning the visible splendour made manifest by God first in the tabernacle (Exodus 29:42,40:34), and the temple (1 Kings 8:10), the splendour that came to be permanently located in the inner sanctuary, the holy of holies, so that God was to be considered as present *“enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark”* (2 Samuel 6:2; Leviticus 16:2; Hebrews 9:5).

He continued, (3) that theirs too, were *“the covenants”*, meaning surely the original covenant with Abraham and its renewals to Isaac and Jacob, to Moses (Exodus 24:8) and David (2 Samuel 23:5); (4) *“the receiving of the Law”*, that is, the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 4:7); (5) *“the temple worship”* comprising all the regulations for the priesthood and the sacrifices; (6) *“and the promises”* (9:4) particularly those relating to the coming of the Messiah. In addition (7) *“theirs are the patriarchs”* - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the fathers of the twelve tribes, Moses, Joshua, Samuel and David, through all of whom *“is traced the human ancestry of Christ”* (9:5).

The final words of verse 5 are (8) *“who is God over all, for ever praised! Amen”*. Theologians differ concerning the application of the three expressions – *“over all”*, *“God”*, and *“for ever praised”*. Some contend that the three expressions apply to Christ, others maintain that they apply to God, while others again apply *“over all”* to Christ, and the remaining two expressions - *“God”* and *“for ever praised”* to God. There is no difficulty in applying the three expressions to Christ, taking the meaning of *“God”* as ‘a mighty being’, and the other two expressions as also referring to Christ, because God gave Him all power in heaven and earth after His resurrection (Matthew 28:18).

It would seem to the student of Scripture that Israel, given these eight blessings mentioned above, prepared and educated for centuries concerning the coming of the Messiah, would recognise and welcome Him when He finally came. How then can Israel’s privileges be reconciled with her failures? How can her ‘hardening’ (11:25) be explained? Paul next addressed himself to this situation by asking four questions as outlined earlier and responding to them in detail. They are:

1. Has God’s promise failed? (9: 6 to 13);
2. Is God unjust? (9: 14 to 18);
3. Why does God still blame us? (9: 19 to 29).
4. What then shall we say in conclusion? (9: 30 to 33).

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

1. ISRAEL'S FALL (continued)

FOUR IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Question 1: Has God's Promise Failed?

Romans 9: 6 to 13

6. *But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,*
7. *Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called.'*
8. *That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.*
9. *For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.'*
10. *And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac*
11. *(For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),*
12. *It was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.'*
13. *As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'*

Paul stated quite clearly that God's promise had not failed. God had promised to bless Israel, but they had forfeited His blessing through disobedience and unbelief. Israel's failure was its own failure, not in any way due to the failure of God's Word. The Apostle wrote, "*For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel*" (9:16).

There were in fact two Israels, one descended physically from Jacob, who were disobedient and faithless, and those who were of faith and who strove to be obedient to God. God's promise

applied to the latter, who received it by faith. Paul had already made this distinction earlier in his letter between those who were Jews outwardly, whose circumcision was of the flesh, and those who were Jews inwardly, whose circumcision was of the heart and by the Spirit (2: 28 and 29).

He then referred to two well-known Old Testament situations in order to illustrate and establish his point. The first concerned Abraham's family. Just as not all who are descended from Israel (Jacob) are Israel, so not all who are descended from Abraham, that is, his natural offspring are *"Abraham's children"* (Romans 4). *"On the contrary, it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned"* (9:7), and not through Ishmael who did not receive a mention. *"In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring"* (9:8). For this is how the promise was stated; *"At the appointed time I will return, and Israel will have a son"* (9:9; Genesis; 18:10,14).

From Abraham and his two sons Isaac and Ishmael, Paul turned to Isaac and his two sons, Jacob and Esau for his second illustration. He showed that just as God chose Isaac, not Ishmael to receive His promise, so He chose Jacob, not Esau.

God's decision had nothing to do with any eligibility in the boys themselves. Isaac and Ishmael had different mothers, Sarah and Hagar, but Jacob and Esau had the same mother, Rebekah. *"Not only that, but Rebekah's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac"* (9:10), and they were twins. *"Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad"* God had made His decision and revealed it to their mother. This was deliberate on God's part *"in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls – she was told, the older will serve the younger"* (9: 11 and 12).

The meaning of God's purpose in election was made clear by Paul. God's choice of Isaac rather than Ishmael, and Jacob rather than Esau, does not originate with them or with any works they may have done, but in the mind and will of *"him who calls"* (9:12). In support of this explanation, Paul quoted two Scriptures referring to Jacob and Esau. The first was that *"the older will serve the younger"* (9:12; Genesis 25:23), thus placing

Jacob above Esau; and the second was “*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*” (9:13; Malachi 1:2). The second statement comes as a shock to Christians who are told to put off hatred and put on love, so a better understanding should be sought. Theologians offer several suggestions to soften the statement, the best of which seems to be to understand the statement as a Hebrew idiom for preference, bearing in mind that Jesus told us that we cannot be His disciples unless we hate our family (Luke 14:26).

However, a simpler understanding lies in Strong’s definition of ‘hatred’ (Strong’s #3404, Greek *miseo*, to detest, especially to persecute), by extension ‘to love less’. This definition by Dr. Strong seems to make ‘hated’, meaning ‘to love less’, much more readily understandable. In any case, the choice was always God’s; He elected Jacob over Esau, and chose the Israelites as His special people, not the Edomites or any other people of that era.

We should also keep in mind that Esau forfeited his birthright for a meal that Jacob was preparing (Genesis 25:29), and lost his rightful blessing because of Jacob’s deceit, so that human action and responsibility were permitted by God to be combined with His sovereign will. We should also remember that Ishmael and Esau were both circumcised, and therefore in that sense were members of God’s covenant, and were promised lesser blessings. Both accounts illustrate the truth of “*God’s purpose according to election*”. God’s promise did not fail, but was fulfilled in the remnant of Israel that was within, and originally part of national Israel.

Concerning the doctrine of election, we need to remember two truths. The first is that election does not originate with Paul or any of the apostles, but was taught by Jesus Himself. He said, “*I know those I have chosen*”, and “*You did not choose me, but I chose you*”. (John 13:18; 15:16; 6:70). The second truth is that election is a foundation doctrine of Christian worship. God has revealed Himself to us, and has invited His Christian people through the ministry of Jesus Christ, and has offered us and His chosen ones, salvation which Christians can neither earn nor deserve, and which is due entirely to His will, grace, mercy and justification, simply because we Christians believe Him in the appointed way. God alone is worthy to receive from us all praise, honour and glory (Revelation 5:12, 7:10), which we humbly render to Him through our Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Question 2. Is God Unjust?

Romans 9: 14 to 18

14. ***What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!***
15. ***For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.'***
16. ***So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.***
17. ***For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.'***
18. ***Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.***

God's promise has not failed, but has been fulfilled in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants. But what of "God's purpose according to election"? Is it unjust for God to choose some for salvation and pass others by? "*What then shall we say? Is God unjust?*" wrote Paul (9:14). Paul's immediate response is "*Not at all!*" (9:14).

He continued to explain "*For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion*" (9:15). Paul defended God's justice by proclaiming His mercy. This sounds like a non sequitur, meaning that the conclusion does not follow from the arguments put forward ('non sequitur' is Latin for 'it does not follow'). But this is not the case because the basis on which God deals with sinners and offers them salvation is not only justice but mercy. Salvation "*does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy*" (9:16).

After quoting God's words to Moses (9:15; Exodus 33:19), Paul then quoted God's words to Pharaoh (9:17; Exodus 9:16) "*I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth*" (9:17; Exodus 8:10; Ezekiel 6:7,14).

Paul summarised God's words to Moses and Pharaoh in 9:18, *"Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden"*. It is clear in the account in Scripture that Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to humble himself.

Dr. Leon Morris in his work 'The Epistle to the Romans' (1988, page 361) wrote 'Neither here nor anywhere else is God said to harden the heart of anyone who had not first hardened his attitude himself'. There are many references in Scripture on this matter, the main ones being Exodus 4:42; 7:13,14,22; 8:15,19,32; 9:7,17,27,34; 10:3,16; 11:9; 13:15; 14:5.

God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was a judicial act, abandoning him to his own stubbornness, as we read in Exodus 4:24; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4,8,17. The situation is similar to God's wrath against the ungodly by *"giving them over"* to their own depravity, as in Romans 1: 24, 26 and 28.

The same contention between human stubbornness and divine judgment in the hardening of the heart is seen in God's word to Isaiah - *"Make the heart of this people calloused"* - which Jesus applied to His ministry, as also did Paul to his ministry (Isaiah 6:9; Matthew 13:13; Mark 4:11; John 12:39; Acts 28:25).

The lesson Paul was teaching is that God is not unjust. All human beings are sinful and guilty in God's sight (3: 9 and 19), therefore no-one deserves to be saved. If God hardens the hearts of some, that is, allows them to continue in rebellion and come under judgment, He is not being unjust, because that is what their rebelliousness deserves. But if He has compassion on some, He is not being unjust, because He is showing mercy to them.

The wonder is not that some are saved and some are not, but that anyone is saved at all. Everyone deserves nothing from God but judgment, that is, condemnation. If we receive what we deserve, namely judgment, or if we receive what we do not deserve, namely mercy, in neither case is God unjust. If anybody remains unsaved, the fault is theirs, but if anybody is saved, the credit is God's. This is God's doing and *"it is marvellous in our eyes"* (Psalm 118:23).

Question 3. Why Does God Still Blame Us?

Romans 9: 19 to 29

- 19. *You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'***
- 20. *But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'***
- 21. *Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour and another for dishonour?***
- 22. *What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,***
- 23. *And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,***
- 24. *Even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?***
- 25. *As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved.***
- 26. *And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people,' There they shall be called sons of the living God.'***
- 27. *Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, The remnant will be saved.***
- 28. *For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth.'***
- 29. *And as Isaiah said before: 'Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah.'***

Salvation is due entirely to God's will, as Paul said twice in 9:15 and twice again in 9:18. If we do not resist His will, which we try not to do, and indeed could not do because He is all-powerful, "*one of you will say to me, then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?*" (9:19). Paul meant, is it

fair of God to make us accountable to Him when He makes the decisions? Paul then proceeded to make three responses to this question.

The first is that God has the sovereign right over us similar to the right of a potter over his clay (9: 20 and 21). In this first response, Paul asks three counter questions. The questions ask if we know who we are - *"Who are you, O man..."* (9:20), that is, what should be our attitude to the LORD God in our relationship to Him? There is a great gulf between God and a human being, as between an object and the craftsman who formed it, between *"what is formed and him who formed it"* (9:20), and between a lump of clay and the potter who is shaping it (9:21). Do we then think it in order for a human being to talk back to God, or for a work of art to ask the artist why he has made it as he has (8:20), or question the right of the potter to shape the same lump of clay into vessels for different uses (9:21)?

It seems that Paul had in mind two passages in Isaiah. The first is Isaiah 29:16 in which the LORD God rebuked Israel for turning *"things upside down"*, that is, reversing the roles as if the potter had become the pot, and the pot had become the potter. In the second passage in Isaiah 45:3 God pronounced a 'woe' to him who quarrels with his 'Maker', a 'woe' to him who is only a potsherd yet who challenges the potter to explain what he is making.

So what was Paul saying? He was not rebuking someone who in sincerity asks for understanding in matters that he or she may be finding difficult, but rather he was censoring someone who quarrels with God and who talks back to God with disrespect (9:20). Such a person reveals a spirit of rebellion against God, refusing to recognise God's supremacy and holiness and refusing to acknowledge that he or she is a sinner in need of mercy and grace.

But all this is not the end of the matter because human beings are not simply lumps of inert clay. The passage under consideration illustrates the danger of arguing from an analogy. To liken human beings to pottery is to emphasise the disparity between God and humans. But there are other Scriptures which tell us that we have been created in God's image (Genesis 1:26; 9:6), and still bear that image, although it has

become distorted because of the fall and the passage of time in a sinful world. So in the image of God we are rational, responsible, moral and spiritual beings, able to approach God in faith through Jesus Christ, to make requests of Him, and ask His blessing. Paul's emphasis in dealing with his third question is that as the potter has the right to shape his clay into vessels for different purposes, so God has the right to deal with fallen humanity according to His wrath or His mercy, as Paul argued in 9: 10 to 18.

Paul's second response to question three is "*God reveals himself as he is*" (9: 22 and 28). The Apostle continued to demonstrate that God's freedom to show mercy to some and to allow hardening of others is fully compatible with His justice. Verses 22 and 23 of Romans 9 express this theme. Verse 22 speaks of the revelation of God's "*wrath*" and "*power*" to "*the objects of his wrath*", while verse 23 speaks of "*the riches of his glory ... to the objects of his mercy*". Paul indicated that when God acts in accordance with His wrath or mercy, there cannot be any objection in either case.

The structure of each of verses 22 and 23 is the same, but there are also significant differences. Firstly, God is said to have borne "*with great patience the objects of his wrath*" (9:22) instead of dealing with them immediately. There seems to be an implication in these words that God, in delaying His judgment, will give evil-doers time and opportunity to repent, but will make the outcome of His wrath and judgment seem to be more disastrous when it finally comes. This occurred with Pharaoh, and is still so today as we wait for the Lord's appearing to the world (2 Peter 3:3; Romans 2:4). Secondly, although Paul described the objects of God's mercy as those "*whom he prepared in advance for glory*" (9:23), he described the objects of God's wrath simply "*as prepared for destruction*" (9:22), meaning that by their persistent actions, evil-doers have prepared themselves for destruction.

There is a third difference also between verses 22 and 23. It seems that the NIV in its translation is correct when it makes verse 23 dependent on verse 22; "*What if God, choosing to show his wrath ... bore with great patience the objects of his wrath ... What if he did this*" in order "*to make the riches of his glory known..?*" This double question implies that this is in fact what God did, that is, the demonstration of His wrath to the

objects of His wrath was with a view to the revelation of His glory to the objects of His mercy. *"Glory"* really means the final destiny of salvation, in which God's glory will be shown to His chosen believers, who will be the first to be resurrected and changed to spirit beings in the heavenly realm, prior to the general resurrection of the whole human race in God's Kingdom on earth (8:18).

Paul was responding to the question *"Why does God still blame us?"* (9:19). He then gave a third explanation. It is that *"God foretold these things in Scripture"* (9: 24 to 29). Among the objects of God's mercy, prepared in advance for glory (9:23), Paul then included *"even us"*, himself and his readers, *"whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles"* (9:24).

God's dealings with Jews and Gentiles were another example of His *"purpose in election"* (9:11), and such had been clearly foretold in Old Testament Scripture. In verses 25 and 26 Paul quoted two passages from Hosea to explain God's amazing inclusion of the Gentiles; and then in verses 27 to 29 he quoted two passages from Isaiah to explain God's equally amazing reduction of Jewish inclusion to a remnant.

The background to the Hosea texts was Hosea's marriage to his *"adulterous wife"* Gomer, together with their three children whose names symbolised God's judgment on the unfaithful northern kingdom of Israel. God told them to call their second child, a daughter, 'Lo-Ruhamah' meaning 'not loved' because, He said, *"I will no longer show love to the house of Israel"* (Hosea 1:6). God then told them to call their third child, a son, 'Lo-Ammi', meaning 'not my people', because, He added, *"You are not my people, and I am not your God"* (Hosea 1:9). Yet God went on to promise that He would reverse the situation of rejection that was implied in the children's names. The following are the passages quoted by Paul.

"I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one" (Hosea 2:23).

"It will happen that in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people', they would be called 'sons of the living God'" (Hosea 1:10).

In order to understand why Paul chose these texts, we need to remember that in the New Testament some Old Testament prophecies have a threefold fulfilment. The first is immediate and literal (in the history of Israel), the second is in the Gospel Age and spiritual (in Christ and His Church), and the third is in the future and eternal (in God's eternal kingdom).

The prophecies in Hosea speak of God's promise in mercy to overturn a seemingly hopeless situation, to love once again those He had declared unloved, and to welcome again as His people those He had said were not His people. The immediate and literal application was to Israel, in the eighth century BC, who were cast off by God for unbelief and disobedience, but promised a reconciliation and reinstatement.

But Paul showed that God's promise had a further fulfilment in the Gospel Age in the inclusion of the Gentiles. The Gentiles had been *"separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's household"* (Ephesians 2:12-19). The Apostle Peter also applied Hosea's prophecy to the Gentiles (1 Peter 2:10). The inclusion of the Gentiles is a wonderful reversal from disapproval to blessing by God's mercy. The outsiders have been welcomed inside, the aliens have become citizens, and the strangers are now beloved members of God's family.

Paul then turned from Hosea to Isaiah, from the inclusion of the Gentiles to the exclusion of the Jews, apart from a remnant. The historical background to the two texts from Isaiah is once again one of national disobedience and unfaithfulness in the eighth century BC, although such features relate to the southern kingdom of Judah. The *"sinful nation"* had forsaken God and had been punished by an Assyrian invasion, so that the whole country lay desolate with only a few survivors remaining (Isaiah 1:4). But God also promised that Assyria would be punished for its arrogance, and that a believing remnant would return to the LORD (Isaiah 10:12). The name of Isaiah's son, Shear-Jashub, symbolised God's promise, as the name means *"a remnant will return"* (Isaiah 7:3).

The two texts quoted by Paul are these:

“Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved. For the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth with speed and finality” (Isaiah 10:22,23).

“It is just as Isaiah said previously: Unless the Lord Almighty had left us descendants, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:9).

God promised Abraham that the number of Israelites would be like the sand by the sea, and also “as the stars in the sky” (Genesis 22:17; 15:5). But in comparison with the countless number, only a remnant would be saved, as the Apostle indicated in 9:6. Similarly, in 9:29, only a handful of people were spared in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in fact only Lot and his two daughters were spared.

In these two texts, Paul provided Old Testament support for his message. God has called us, he wrote, not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles (9:24). Paul would have been aware of the serious imbalance between the size of the Gentile numbers and the size of the Jewish numbers in the company of believers saved through Jesus’ ministry. The Jewish membership was only a small minority of the whole nation, so small in fact as to constitute not the inclusion of Israel but its exclusion, not its acceptance but its rejection (11;15). Jesus Himself had foretold this situation. He said, “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside” (Matthew 8:11).

Question 4. What Then Shall We Say In Conclusion?

Romans 9: 30 to 33

- 30. *What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;***
- 31. *But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.***

32. ***Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.***
33. ***As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offence, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.'***

This was Paul's fourth and final question, and was addressed to himself. Paul was pondering how it came about that the majority of Israel continued in unbelief while only a minority believed in what God had done for them in sending Jesus Christ. He began with a description, continued with an explanation, and finished with a biblical confirmation.

"The Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith" (9:30).

To describe Gentiles as people not pursuing righteousness is a major understatement. Most Gentiles were, and are, godless and self-centred, lovers of themselves, of money and pleasure rather than lovers of God and holy living (2 Timothy 3:1). Yet they obtained that which they did not pursue. When some heard the good news of justification by faith, they believed and laid hold of it, and were blessed with a measure of God's Holy Spirit. But Israel, on the other hand, *"who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it"* (9:31). The reason that Israel did not attain the righteousness that is by faith, is that they were pursuing an impossible goal, that is, righteousness by means of obeying the Law Covenant, which no-one, other than the Lord Jesus, has ever been able to do.

Paul attributed Israel's failure to its own folly. Israel failed to attain imputed righteousness, that is righteousness not earned, but freely and undeservedly granted by God, because of believers' faith. Israel failed *"because they pursued it not by faith" (9:30) "but as if it were by works" (9:32)*, as though they could earn salvation by their works. So *"they stumbled over the stumbling stone" (9:32)*. Paul's meaning is not in doubt because he used the same imagery in other letters. He called the truth of Christ crucified as a stumbling block to Jews in 1 Corinthians 1:23, and referred to *"the offence of the cross"* in Galatians 5:11.

Why did the Jews stumble over the Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone of the New Covenant? The main reason was, and is, that this fundamental truth undermined their pride and self-righteousness, as it also does to many people today. The Jews thought they could obtain righteousness, or a right standing with God, by obeying the Mosaic Law.

But Paul said, in Galatians 2:21, that *“if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing”*, meaning that if we, or anyone, could gain a righteous standing before God by our own obedience to His Law and all of His requirements, the sacrifice Jesus gave would be superfluous. If we could gain salvation by our own efforts, why did Jesus have to die?

The fact that Christ died for our sins, and the sins of all who ever lived and will live, is proof that we cannot save ourselves. But to make this humiliating confession is to many an unacceptable offence to human pride, so instead of humbling themselves before God many *“stumble over the stumbling-stone”*.

It remained for the great Apostle to provide biblical support for what he had written. He quoted from Isaiah 28:16, *“See, I lay in Zion a stone, the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame”*. In these final words, Paul has inserted two phrases from Isaiah 8:14, *“a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall”*. The stone or rock is of course the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition, Paul quoted Psalm 118:22, *“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner”* (RSV), or *“the head stone of the corner”* (KJV). He said also, *“no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3:11).

So it remains for everyone, either in this age or the next, to decide how to relate to the foundation stone which God has laid down. There are only two possibilities. One is to put our trust in Him as our sure foundation, to accept Him as the basis of our faith and build on that faith to the best of our abilities. The other possibility is to go our own way without regard to God's love and mercy, and so stumble and fall.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

2. ISRAEL'S FAULT **Romans 10:1 to 21**

Introduction

Chapters 9 to 11 of Romans all address the problem of Jewish unbelief. In chapter 9 Paul dealt with God's purpose according to election.

In chapter 10 Paul concentrated on human factors:

- (1) the need for an understanding of the Gospel (5 to 13);
- (2) the proclamation of the Gospel (14 and 15); and
- (3) the response of faith (16 to 21).

(1) Israel's Ignorance Of God's Righteousness

Romans 10: 1 to 13

1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.*
2. *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*
3. *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*
4. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*
5. *For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'*
6. *But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down from above)*
7. *Or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*
8. *But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach):*

9. ***That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***
- 10 ***For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***
11. ***For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.'***
12. ***For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.***
13. ***For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'***

Paul began chapter 10 with a very personal reference to his love and longing for *"them"*. 'They' are not specified in the Greek text, but they are surely the Israelites, and the NIV is correct to identify them in its version.

There are some similarities in the openings of chapters 9 and 10. In both, Paul mentioned his heart's sorrow and anguish because the unbelieving people of Israel were lost (9:2), and his *"heart's desire and prayer to God that they may be saved"* (10:1). J.B. Phillips well expressed the earnestness of the Apostle's cry, *"My brothers, from the bottom of my heart I long and pray to God that Israel may be saved!"*

At the beginning of chapter 9, Paul expressed the impossible wish that he himself might be cursed if that would enable Israel to be spared (9:3); and at the beginning of chapter 10 he expressed an ardent wish and prayer *"that they may be saved"*. Paul's pain was increased by Israel's combination of privilege and favoured treatment (9:4), and his longing was also increased by their combination of zeal and ignorance (10:2).

Paul had no doubt about the Jews' religious sincerity. He wrote that he would *"testify about them that they are zealous for God"*. He knew this from his own experience, because he in his former Jewish life was *"extremely zealous"* in his religion (Galatians 1:14) as evidenced by his persecution of the Church (Galatians 1:13; Philippians 3:6). He was *"just as zealous for God"* as any of his fellow Jews (Acts 22:3), and described his zeal at that time as an *"obsession"* (Acts 26:9).

And so he wrote of the Israelites that *“their zeal is not based on knowledge”* (10:2). Scripture tells us that *“it is not good to have zeal without knowledge”* (Proverbs 19:2).

Sincerity of itself is not good enough, because we may be sincerely mistaken. Zeal without knowledge, commitment without thought or reflection, and enthusiasm without understanding are all characteristic of fanaticism, and fanaticism is dangerous and often destructive.

Having asserted the Jews' ignorance, Paul stated that the Jews *“did not know the righteousness that comes from God”* and *“they did not submit to God's righteousness”* but *“sought to establish their own”* (10:3). The meaning here seems to be that the Jews had neither learnt nor understood the way of salvation, which is that the righteous God graciously grants righteousness to unrighteous but believing people on the basis of their faith in Him through Jesus Christ.

This is *“the righteousness of God”* which is revealed in the Gospel and is received by faith apart from the Law, as Paul wrote earlier in 1:17 and 3:21. The tragic consequence of the Jews' ignorance was that in realising their need to be righteous before God, *“they sought to establish their own”*, and *“they did not submit to God's righteousness”* (10:3).

Committed Christians are well aware that all people are unrighteous, indeed *“there is no-one righteous, not even one”* (3:10).

Christians cannot establish their own righteousness by good works and religious observance because in God's sight *“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). The only way to be righteous in God's sight is to receive the gift of righteousness from Him through faith in Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:9). To attempt to build or establish our own righteousness was called by Paul *“the righteousness that is by the Law”*; while righteousness obtained by faith in God's gift was called *“the righteousness that is by faith”* (10: 5 and 6), imputed by God by his grace.

If Jewish people, or anyone else, are seeking to establish their own righteousness by religious ceremonies and observances and by good works, they have not understood what Paul said

in 10:4 *“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”*. Paul may have meant the ‘end’ (Greek: telos) in the sense of ‘goal’ or ‘completion’, indicating that the Law led to Christ and He fulfilled it. But it seems to me that Paul meant ‘termination’ or ‘conclusion’ because Christ abolished the Law and *“took it away, nailing it to the cross”* (Colossians 2:14). Christ terminated the Law *“so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”*.

In regard to salvation, Christ and the Law are incompatible alternatives. No-one could gain righteousness by observing the Law, because no-one could keep it perfectly, and therefore no-one could gain the life promised in Leviticus 18:5. But anyone who believes in God and comes to Him through Jesus Christ can gain righteousness and salvation as gifts from God.

The Ways Of Righteousness

The Apostle had already stated three clear opposites:

- (a) faith and works (9:32);
- (b) God’s righteousness as a gift to believers, and our own righteousness which we can never achieve (10:3); and
- (c) Christ and the Law (10:4).

Next the Apostle contrasted *“the righteousness that is by the law”* (10:5) with *“the righteousness that is by faith”* (10:6). To make this contrast clear he appealed to Scripture.

On the one hand *“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them”* (10:5; Leviticus 18:5). These words surely mean that the way to salvation and life at the time of Moses was by obedience to the Law. This is how Paul understood the words when he quoted them in Galatians 3:12. But in that context, Paul added, *“Clearly no-one is justified before God by the law”* because no-one could keep it perfectly. The weakness of the Law is our flesh, that is, our own human nature of weakness and frailty (8:3).

Because the Jews disobeyed the Law, their disobedience brought them under a curse (Deuteronomy 27:26), and as long

as they remained disobedient, they remained under that curse. But Christ has redeemed them by becoming a curse for them (Galatians 3:10).

The Jews, and everyone else for that matter, need to believe into the Lord Jesus, and what He has done, and life and salvation will be given to them by God. *“Christ is the end of the law”* (10:4), that is, He has abolished it, so that righteousness is to be found by faith in Him, and not by trying to keep the Law which no Jew could do and no-one is able to do, whether Jew or Gentile.

On the other hand *“the righteousness that is by faith”* (10:6) proclaimed, and still proclaims, an entirely different message. The message was, and is, that salvation is obtainable through Christ and not the Law or any number of good works.

Unlike the Law, under which salvation was impossible, salvation is readily accessible by faith in Christ and His redemptive work. Paul quoted from Deuteronomy 30: 12 and 13; *“Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or Who will descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)”* (10: 6 and 7).

Paul conveyed by these illustrations that there is no need to climb to great heights or descend to great depths in search of Christ, for He has already come and has died and risen to life again, and is readily accessible to anyone and everyone by faith and faith alone.

So what is the positive message of the righteousness of faith? Paul wrote, *“But what does it say? The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming”* (10:8). Paul said that he and the apostles and disciples were proclaiming the Gospel which required a response of faith.

Paul then summarised the Gospel message, making use of the reference to the people’s *“mouth”* and *“heart”* in Deuteronomy 30:14, in this way, *“That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”* (10:9). Thus witness by heart and mouth, inward belief and outward confession, belong together.

Paul continued, *“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved”* (10:10). So that belief and confession must go together, and there is really no effective difference between being *“justified”* and being *“saved”*. Salvation from sin and death is gained by faith, faith which understands and firmly grasps the truth of Jesus as the crucified and resurrected Lord and Saviour. This is the positive message of *“the righteousness that is by faith”*.

But why did Paul refer to Deuteronomy 30: 11 to 14? The only quotation Paul made in 10:8 is *“the word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart”*. Paul did not take the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14 any further, because the Deuteronomy text continues on to say that the word was near *“so that you may obey it”*. Paul continued by saying *“that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming”*. So why did Paul take a verse about the Law which had to be obeyed, and apply it to the Gospel which had to be believed?

We need to consider carefully how Paul used the passage in Deuteronomy. He concentrated on the similarity between Moses’ words and the Gospel message, namely, their easy accessibility. He knew that Moses began part of his speech to the Israelites by telling them that his words were neither *“too difficult”* for them nor *“beyond their reach”*. Moses’ teaching was very near the Israelites, in fact it was actually within them, in their hearts and in their mouths.

What Moses had said about his teaching, Paul here affirmed about the Gospel. It is neither remote nor difficult of access. Christ has come and given his life, has been raised from death and is immediately accessible by faith. Christians do not need to do anything of their own efforts to gain salvation, because everything necessary has been done. Christ is always accessible, His Gospel is near to everyone. It is in the heart and mouth of every believer. Paul’s emphasis is on the ready and easy accessibility of Christ and His Gospel.

Verses 11 to 13 of chapter 10 extend this teaching of Paul’s. They emphasise that Christ is not only easily accessible, but equally accessible to anyone (10:11) and to everyone (10:13), since *“there is no difference”* (10:12). All three verses refer to Christ and His availability by faith, but each verse describes

differently the nature of faith and how Christ responds to believers. In verse 11 we *“trust in him”* and will *“never be put to shame”*. In verse 12 we *“call on him”* and He *“richly blesses us”*. In verse 13 we call *“on the name of the Lord”* and are *“saved”*.

In verse 11, Paul wrote, *“As the Scripture says, Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame”*. This is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16, following an earlier reference to the same verse in 9:33. The saving faith described as *“trust”* shows that *“belief”* and *“confession”* of verses 9 and 10 are more than acknowledgement of a formula or observance of a ceremony.

In verse 12 Paul wrote, *“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him”*. Paul stated that in Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. For Jesus Christ all distinctions of race, sex and culture are abolished. Jews by birth still remain Jews, Gentiles remain Gentiles, men remain men, and women remain women of course, but the distinctions are irrelevant (Galatians 3:28). We remain sinners, but Christ has redeemed us, and all who call on Him are richly blessed and receive His *“unsearchable riches”* (Ephesians 3:8).

In verse 13 Paul told his readers that *“to call on him”* is to call *“on the name of the Lord”*, to appeal to Him to save us in accordance with Who He is and what He has done for us. *“Everyone”* who calls on Him to save him or her *“will be saved”*. This is a quotation from Joel 2:32, which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost, and transferred the reference from the LORD God to Jesus (Acts 2:21), which is the same as Paul did in this verse. This appeal to Jesus for salvation became so characteristic of Christians that Paul described the whole Christian community as *“those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 1:2).

So what did Paul say is necessary for people to gain salvation? Four contributing factors work together for salvation to be gained.

1. The fact that Jesus Christ came from His existence as a spirit being, became a human being, lived on earth for some thirty-three years, was crucified, raised by God from death and given all power in heaven and earth, and has been and is accessible to everyone by faith.

2. The Gospel, *“the word of faith”* (10:8) which makes Jesus known.

3. Conviction on the part of interested hearers who call on the name of the Lord, combining faith in their hearts and making confession with their lips and mouths.

4. Evangelists who proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour and urge people to put their trust in Him.

Paul continued in the next section to write of the need for Christian evangelists.

(2) The Need For Evangelism

Romans 10: 14 and 15

14. *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

15. *And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’*

In order to establish the need for evangelism, Paul asked four questions in succession.

Question 1: *“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?”* (10:14).

To be saved, sinners must call on the name of the Lord (10:13). Calling on the Lord’s name must mean knowing that Jesus died, was raised, and is Lord of all, subject of course to the Lord God. But before people can reach this state of heart and mind, the facts of Jesus’ atoning death and rulership in heaven, His ready accessibility in response to faith must be known and believed.

Question 2: *“How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”* (10:14)

Just as believing must precede calling on the Lord, so hearing must precede believing in Him. Evangelists who are sincerely proclaiming the true Gospel will be speaking the words that Jesus would have them speak, so that the hearers will in effect be hearing Jesus speaking to them through His messengers or ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20; 13:3).

Question 3: *“How can they hear without someone preaching to them?”* (10:14).

“Preaching” here is from the Greek verb ‘kerysso’ meaning ‘to herald’. In ancient times, before the development of the mass media and communication, the role of the herald was vital. The main way of transmitting news and information was by public proclamation in the city square or marketplace, and such was the way in those early times by which the Gospel was proclaimed by Christian evangelists.

Question 4: *“How can they preach unless they are sent?”* (10:15).

For *“sent”* Paul used the verb ‘apostello’, so he probably had in mind himself as a chosen apostle (1: 1 and 5; 11:13 and Galatians 1:15), as well as his brother apostles because they had been commissioned by Christ Himself (Luke 6:12; Galatians 1:1). There were also *“apostles of the churches”* sent out as missionaries (2 Corinthians 8:23).

The need for proclaimers was confirmed by Paul from Scriptures, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news”* (10:15), also Isaiah 52:7. Those who proclaimed to Israel the good news of release from Babylonian exile were welcomed, so how much more welcome would the preachers of Christ’s Gospel and its release from the Law be?

Paul began this chapter by expressing his longing that the Israelites might be saved (10:1), so he might well have had this in mind when expressing, in chapter 10, the need for evangelism. The next section confirms Paul’s deep concern.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

2. ISRAEL'S FAULT (continued)

(3) The Reasons For Israel's Unbelief

Romans 10:16 to 21

- 16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'LORD, who has believed our report?'***
- 17. *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.***
- 18. *But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.'***
- 19. *But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: 'I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, will move you to anger by a foolish nation.'***
- 20. *But Isaiah is very bold and says: 'I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.'***
- 21. *But to Israel he says: 'All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people.'***

Israel was God's chosen people for centuries until He sent them His Son, the promised Messiah Who died to redeem them from their curse under the Law Covenant, and from sin and death as well.

The people of Israel were the first to have the Gospel message of salvation proclaimed to them exclusively for three and a half years by Christ's chosen apostles and disciples. With such privileges and advantages, how is the unbelief of Israel to be explained?

Paul wrote "*not all the Israelites accepted the good news*" (10:16; NIV), a surprising understatement in view of the facts and in view of what he wrote earlier about "*only the remnant*" (9:27). The section comprising verses 16 to 21

concerns the adverse Jewish response to the Gospel. Although Paul's mission was to the Gentiles, he was concerned in this section of his letter with the people of Israel. The word 'Israelites' is missing from the introductory sentence of 10:1 in the Greek manuscript, but should really be inserted as it is in the NIV text.

Jewish unbelief, as shown by Paul, was foretold by Isaiah in his rhetorical question, "*Lord, who has believed our message?*" (10:16; Isaiah 53:1). Those who received the message, the Israelites, should have believed.

Verse 17 reverts to the argument of verse 14, "*faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*" (NIV), that is, the message proclaimed by Christ's chosen apostles and disciples was as though Christ was proclaiming the message Himself. Such preaching and proclaiming should have led to hearing, and hearing to believing. Why then did Israel not believe? In answer to this difficult question, Paul suggested and rejected two possible explanations in verses 18 and 19, and then provided his own in verses 20 and 21.

Firstly the Apostle asked, "*Did they not hear?*" (10:18). Then he responded immediately, "*Of course they did*" (10:18). As evidence he quoted from Psalm 19:4 "*Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world*". We may be surprised that Paul quoted from Psalm 19, since that Psalm pointed firstly to the universal witness of the heavens to their Creator, and then secondly to the righteous judgments and statutes of the LORD God, rather than the worldwide spread of the Gospel.

Paul knew this, but it seems to me that he was using the words of Psalm 19 symbolically, transferring the eloquent imagery of the global witness of creation to the spread of the Christian Church; that is, he was using the witness of creation as a symbol of the worldwide spread of the Gospel. We may add to this the thought that God wanted the revelation of His glory and power, as displayed in the heavens to be seen by everyone, and He wanted the revelation of His grace and mercy through Jesus Christ to be perceived by and available to everyone.

But how are we to understand that the Gospel has "*gone out into all the earth*" and "*to the ends of the world*"? The statement

appears to be an exaggeration, but an understandable one. Paul said to the Colossians that the Gospel *“has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven”*, so that *consequently “all over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing”* (Colossians 1:23,6).

With these words Paul was referring to the spread of the Gospel to the Jews, so his words may be understood as referring to the Gospel being preached wherever there were Jews; in particular, wherever a Jewish community existed, the Gospel had been preached to them. And so it was that the Jews had heard, and they could not blame not hearing for their unbelief.

Then the Apostle wrote, *“Did Israel not understand?”* (10:19). It is possible for people to hear and not to understand, as Jesus said in His parable of the sower (Matthew 13:19). Paul rejected this explanation of Jewish unbelief by quoting from Moses as his first witness, and secondly from Isaiah, so that the Law and the prophets constituted his two witnesses.

The words of Moses quoted by Paul were, *“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding”* (10:19; Deuteronomy 32:21). The people who are *“not a nation”* and with *“no understanding”* are the Gentiles. These words remind us of Paul’s earlier reference in 9:25 to the Gentiles who were *“not my people”*, when he quoted from Hosea 1:9 and 2:23. God had revealed His intention to make the Israelites both envious of and angry at the ‘no-nation, no-understanding’ Gentiles, because of the blessings He would give them when they believed, blessings that the Israelites would have received if they had believed.

So it came about that the Israelites’ rejection of the Gospel was not caused by their failure to hear it or understand it. Israel’s rejection was without excuse, and Paul clearly accepted this situation. Israel was simply stubborn, the Israelites were wilfully ignorant. They had *“stumbled over the stumbling stone”*, the Lord Jesus Christ (9:32).

In order to verify his explanation of Israel’s rejection of the Gospel, Paul quoted what *“Isaiah boldly says”* in Isaiah 65:1, *“I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to*

those who did not ask for me". Paul did not include the third clause of Isaiah 65:1, but could well have done so; *"To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, Here am I, here am I"*.

The three clauses of Isaiah 65:1 make a complete picture. God had really allowed the situation between Himself and the Gentiles to become reversed. It would be fitting and proper for the Gentiles to seek to approach the LORD God respectfully, as a servant in obedience to his master, saying 'Yes sir, I am here'.

But God in His grace and mercy has acted the other way around. The Gentiles did not want to come to God nor offer their services to Him, but He permitted Himself to be found by them and revealed Himself to them, saying to them *"Here am I"*. This whole situation is surely most gracious of God, Who took the initiative to make Himself known to people who had never thought to look for Him.

But the situation concerning Israel is a different and particularly moving one. *"But concerning Israel he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people"* (Isaiah 65:2) . For the Israelites God did not simply allow Himself to be found, He actually held out His hand to them. He held out His arms to His people and continually held them out *"all day long"*, pleading with them to return to Him.

But He received no response. The Israelites remained a disobedient and obstinate people. Paul's comments, though concise and to the point, indicate how profoundly disappointed and grieved the LORD God must have felt.

Thus Paul concluded this second stage of his consideration and exposition of Israel's unbelief. In the previous chapter, chapter 9, he attributed Israel's unbelief to God's purpose of election in which many were passed by and only a remnant remained, a faithful few within the nation, an Israel within Israel.

In chapter 10, however, Paul attributed Israel's unbelief to its disobedience. Chapter 10 has a large number of Old Testament quotations and allusions. Paul quoted Scripture to confirm or illustrate eight truths:

- (1) The ready accessibility of Christ by faith (10: 6 to 8; Deuteronomy 30:12).
- (2) The promise of salvation to all who believe (10:11; Isaiah 28:16; 10:13; Joel 2:32).
- (3) The need for evangelism (10:15; Isaiah 52:7).
- (4) The adversarial response of Israel (10:16; Isaiah 53:1).
- (5) The world-wide spread of the Gospel (10:18; Psalm 19:4).
- (6) The provoking of Israel by the Gentiles (10:19; Deuteronomy 32:21).
- (7) The initiative of grace by the LORD God (10:20; Isaiah 65:1).
- (8) God's patient dealings with Israel and His profound disappointment and grief over Israel's unbelief (10:21; Isaiah 65:2).

Paul emphasised in chapter 10 the authority of Scripture and the continuing unity of the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. The great Apostle gave his reasons for Israel's disobedience to which he attributed its unbelief, in spite of God sending His Son to them and in spite of them hearing the gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that the Apostle left unsaid the fact that the Israelites were looking for and expecting earthly and physical benefits instead of spiritual deliverance from a Law which no-one could keep and which consequently condemned them to death and placed them under a curse (Galatians 3:10-13). This condemnation by the Law was in addition to their condemnation to death as members of the human race, all of whom are condemned to death because of Adam's original transgression (Romans 3: 9 and 10).

The people of Israel had been taught by their "*blind leaders*" (Matthew 15:14) to look for a physical and political redemption instead of a spiritual redemption from the dominion of sin and death, as foretold by God through their prophets.

Consequently when the Redeemer *"came unto His own, His own received Him not"* (John 1:11), but they despised, rejected and betrayed Him, and clamoured for His death.

This unparalleled crime brought about an entirely different situation from that which had previously existed in regard to the relationship between God and the nation of Israel.

God was not taken by surprise as we all well know, for He had foreseen everything, knowing *"the end from the beginning"* (Isaiah 46:10). All that happened was in strict accordance with *"the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"* (Acts 2:23), for the accomplishment of *"the eternal purpose"* (a plan of the ages; Diaglott) *which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Ephesians 3:11).

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

3. ISRAEL'S FUTURE

Romans 11: 1 to 32

Introductory Comment

Paul began chapters 9 to 11 with the paradox of the Israelites' situation. They were uniquely privileged by God, but remained in stubborn unbelief (9: 1 to 9). Such unbelief was not to be attributed either to unfaithfulness or injustice on God's part (9: 10 to 16), but rather to His "*purpose in election*" (9:11), as well as Israel's stumbling over Christ (9:32), and its stiff-necked rejection of God's repeated entreaties for their obedience (10:21).

Two Questions

Romans 11: 1 to 11

1. *I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.*
2. *God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,*
3. *'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?'*
4. *But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'*
5. *Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*
6. *And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*
7. *What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*

8. ***Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.'***
9. ***And David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them.'***
10. ***Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.'***
11. ***I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.***

In addressing himself to Israel's disobedience, Paul asked two questions to both of which he responded immediately.

Question 1: *"I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means!"* (11:1).

The nation had not been completely abandoned, because a believing remnant remained (11: 1 to 10).

Question 2: *"Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!"* (11:11).

The rejection of the Jews was neither total nor final. That is the theme of chapter 11.

1. Israel's Situation In The Gospel Age (11:1 to 10).

In reference to question one quoted above, the Apostle replied *"God did not reject his people"* (11:2). He may well have had in mind the words of Psalm 94:14, *"The LORD will not reject his people; he will never forsake his inheritance"*; and very likely also the words of Samuel in 1 Samuel 12:22 *"For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people"*. The Apostle did not rely on these statements alone, but introduced four items of evidence in support of his response.

The first item of evidence is personal, *"I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin"* (11:1). The fact that Paul was born a Jew and had been chosen by the risen Christ, was proof that God had not rejected His people, not even Paul who had been a blasphemer and a persecutor of

the early church. He wrote to the Galatians, *"For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ... But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles. ... I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus"* (Galatians 1:13,15,17).

The second item of evidence is theological. Paul has said that God had not rejected His people, the people of His covenant, which He had declared unbreakable in Jeremiah 33:19-26. Paul described the Jews as *"his people, whom he foreknew"* (11:2). God had not entirely rejected His people who were in covenant relationship with Him, but had withdrawn that nation's exclusive privileges which they had enjoyed as His chosen people during the Jewish Age, and He had reserved a remnant, a comparatively small number, to be part of the new Israel, the *"Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16) during the Gospel Age.

The third item of evidence is biblical, referring to the situation during the time of Elijah. After the prophet's victory over the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, he fled into the desert from the threats to his life from Queen Jezebel, and subsequently took refuge in a cave on Mount Horeb. There *"he appealed to God against Israel"* (11:2), saying *"LORD, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars: I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"* (11:3). But God replied to Elijah, telling him he was not the only one left. God said, *"I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal"* (11:4).

Israel's departure from faith was not comprehensive because a faithful remnant still remained. Although a remnant still remained at that time, the prophecy and doctrine of the remnant of Israel at the beginning of the Gospel Age was not proclaimed or developed until the time of Isaiah, approximately a century later than the time of Elijah.

Paul's fourth item of evidence was contemporary to his own time. As in Elijah's day, there was a remnant of seven thousand, in Paul's day *"so too, at the present time there is a remnant"* (11:5). The remnant in Paul's day was probably considerable. It was soon to happen that James told Paul that

there were “*many thousands*” of believing Jews (Acts 21:20). The chief characteristic of this remnant was that it had been “*chosen by grace*” (11:5). It had come into existence according to the election of grace, just as it is God’s gracious purpose according to election. “*Grace*” draws attention to the fact that God called the remnant of Israel into existence, just as He had reserved for Himself the loyal minority in Elijah’s day (11:4).

Grace means undeserved favour, God’s gracious kindness to the undeserving. God’s election, His choice of some people, those who respond to His call, and not others who do not respond to it, is His prerogative. God’s election is “*by grace ... no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace*” (11:6). Paul wished his readers, and all believers including ourselves, to understand that grace excludes works, and God’s initiative excludes anything that we may wish or desire, or consider appropriate.

Paul then said, “*What then?*” He continued to explain the consequences of the remnant theology for his own day and the people of Israel as a whole. “*What Israel sought so earnestly*” (presumably righteousness by observing the law in 9:31) “*it did not obtain*” (the nation as a whole), “*but the elect did*” namely those who were “*chosen by grace*” (11:5) and so justified by faith. “*The others*”, the unbelieving Israelite majority, “*were hardened*” (11:7). There seems little doubt that they were hardened by God, since the next verse says that “*God gave them a spirit of stupor*”.

It seems that a judicial process is meant, that is a ‘retribution’ (11:9), by which God, Who is all-knowing and all-wise, gives people over to their own stubbornness. What this means in practice, Paul indicated by quoting two references from the Old Testament, both of which refer to eyes that cannot see.

The first quotation is a drawing together of Deuteronomy 29:2-4 and Isaiah 29:10. In the Deuteronomy text, Moses told the Israelites that, although they had witnessed God’s wonders, yet He had not given them “*a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear*” (Deuteronomy 29:4). From the text in Isaiah, Paul quoted only the first sentence, telling the Israelites that God had given them “*a spirit of stupor*”, meaning a loss of spiritual awareness in which they persisted until God brought

about a divine judgment against them as a result. Moreover, Paul said that this lack of spiritual awareness continued to afflict Israel at the time that he was writing. *“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”* (11:8).

The second quotation (11:9) is taken from Psalm 69, which portrays a righteous person’s experience of persecution. Jesus applied it to Himself: *“They hated me without a reason”* (John 15:25), therefore making the prophetic words messianic. Other passages in Psalm 69 are also clearly messianic. In the course of the Psalm, the victim of unreasoning and unprovoked opposition prays that God will clear him from blame and bring about just judgment on his enemies.

Paul actually reversed the application, so that instead of Israel being the persecuted, Israel, in her rejection of Christ, had become the persecutor. These are the words of the Psalmist: *“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 for ever”* (Psalm 69:22,23).

The language is not easy to interpret. Their ‘table’ may mean figuratively their pleasures, their social and national privileges, which, over-indulged, could have resulted in their neglect of God and of the strict observances of the Law Covenant, both of which became a stumbling-block to their acceptance and belief in Jesus as their Messiah.

The phrases *“God gave them a spirit of stupor”* and *“eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear”* (11:8) should not be understood as indicating that God purposely caused Israel to have unseeing eyes, unhearing ears and a numbness of spirit, so that they could not believe even if they wanted to. God’s continued pleading with Israel, as outlined in comments on chapter 10, necessitates our understanding that God ‘gave them over’ to their hard-hearted and stiff-necked obstinacy.

“Their backs be bent for ever” may mean that the burden to Israel of their rejection of God’s favours to them, particularly and supremely the sending of His Son to them as their Messiah, will remain with them in the age to come when the

words of Jesus to them will be fulfilled: *“There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out”* (Luke 13:28).

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

3. ISRAEL'S FUTURE (continued)

Preliminary Comment

In the previous comments on chapter 11, it was pointed out that Paul asked two questions. The first question was, "*Did God reject his people?*" The Apostle answered immediately, "*By no means!*" (11:1). Although they have not been rejected, the Israelites, the Jewish people as a whole have been hardened because of their persistent unbelief, as the Scripture declares, "*God gave them a spirit of stupor*" (Isaiah 29:10), or as the NEB renders the clause, "*a numbness of spirit*", as well as "*eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear*" (Deuteronomy 29:4).

That was the case in the Apostle's day, and is still the case now in our day, some two thousand years later. The hardening of heart and numbness of spirit applied to, and still today applies to the majority of the people of Israel. The minority, the remnant of Israel who believed and accepted the gospel message from the Lord Jesus, were and are excluded from this judgment of God, and were referred to by Paul as "*the elect*", who had obtained what they had "*sought so earnestly*", namely "*the righteousness that is by faith*" (9:31); while the majority of the people of Israel failed to obtain that for which they sought because of their unbelief.

It seems relevant to comment here that God's ways of revealing Himself and His truth, and the need for faith on the part of anyone who wishes to come to Him and seek His blessing, which must be done through Jesus Christ, automatically shuts the eyes and ears and clouds the understanding of the great majority of people, because anyone who wishes to come to God must have faith to believe and acknowledge openly that God exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who come to Him in faith through the Lord Jesus, the only Way to come to God (Hebrews 11:6; John 14:6).

2. Will Israel As A Nation Recover? (11:11)

The Apostle then asked his second question. *“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!”*.

The Apostle’s meaning was that Israel would not be totally and irrevocably cast off, and would not be excluded from God’s mercy. Israel’s sin of unbelief opened the way for the Gentiles to be accepted by God and so gain salvation through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, *“because of their”* (that is, Israel’s) *“transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles”* (11:11).

On four occasions, Luke recorded in Acts how the Jews’ rejection of the Gospel led to it being offered to the Gentiles and its acceptance by them. During Paul’s first missionary journey in Antioch in Pisidia, he and Barnabas said to the Jews, *“We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46). During the second and third missionary journeys in Corinth and Ephesus, Paul began his ministry in the synagogues. But when the Jews opposed him and rejected the Gospel, he left them and began his mission to the Gentiles in nearby secular buildings (Acts 14:1; 18:6; 19:8). A fourth example of salvation being preached to the Gentiles after the majority of Jews rejected Paul’s message to them, took place when Paul arrived in Rome (Acts 28:28).

Most of the Jews rejected the Gospel and some of the Gentiles accepted it. The second fact followed the first, as Jesus had predicted (Matthew 8:11; 21:43). God overruled the disobedience of the Israelites for the salvation of the Gentiles.

Paul then said that *“salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious”* (11:11). Certainly in Acts, Luke mentioned a number of times the fact of Jewish envy of the Apostles (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5).

The Apostle meant firstly that the Jews were jealous of the Apostles’ success, their influence on the people, and the large crowds they attracted.

But secondly I think that Paul had in mind a more productive kind of envy, namely, when Jews saw the blessings endowed on believing Gentiles, such as their reconciliation to God and to one another, their forgiveness by God, their love, joy and peace

through the Spirit, they would want such blessings for themselves, and would repent and believe in Jesus in order to obtain them. So in this way, Jews would be provoked to envy and led to conversion and belief in the Lord Jesus as the only way to God (John 14:6). This was Paul's heartfelt wish, but for the nation it did not come about.

The Future For Israel

Romans 11: 12 to 16

- 12. *Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!***
- 13. *For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,***
- 14. *If by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.***
- 15. *For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?***
- 16. *For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.***

Paul then wrote, *"If their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!"* (11:12). With these words the *"much greater riches"* and *"their fullness"* in relation to Israel, Paul did not tell us what he meant, and as a result, some commentators and Bible students have developed and proclaimed a point of view that in the future, the nation of Israel is to be converted to belief in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, and be given a pre-eminent position among the nations of the world, and thus become a channel of blessing to the whole world in the future kingdom of God.

This matter of the reconstitution of the Jewish nation as a nation favoured by God and its alleged position of future supremacy has been discussed at length in the book 'The Hope of Israel', in particular chapter 14, pages 107 to 114. Suffice it to say here that there is no evidence in the New Testament, in particular in the letter to the Romans, to support the following beliefs that are held by many.

1. The reconstitution of the Jewish nation as a nation favoured by God.
2. The re-occupation by the Jewish nation of all the land of Canaan as in the days of Joshua.
3. The raising of the Jewish nation to a position of world supremacy and leadership over other nations in the future kingdom of God.
4. The re-building of the temple and re-institution of the ceremonies and sacrifices that existed under the Law Covenant.

There is nothing in the New Testament to support these suggestions. The Old Testament promises and prophecies concerning Israel have been fulfilled either in past ages or fulfilled in the *"Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16), consisting of a remnant of Israelites and a majority of Gentile believers.

The acceptance of Gentiles by the LORD God disposed of the barrier which had existed for nearly sixteen centuries between Jews and Gentiles. The destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD demonstrated finally that the true and acceptable worship of God was not to be confined to any single or special location, nor to any particular nation or race of people.

The provoking of Israel to emulation, mentioned previously, applied to Israelites individually, in keeping with the Gospel call which applied, and still applies, to individuals to come to Christ, and did not and does not apply nationally to Israel or any other peoples.

Paul's next statement was, *"I am talking to you Gentiles"*, referring surely to the Gentile Christians in the church at Rome, who probably made up the majority in that congregation. He continued, *"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"* (11: 13 and 14). It may seem remarkable to us that the Apostle wished to encourage his own people, meaning the Jews, to come to Christ as a result of envy. At first sight this seems to be an unworthy course of action to be converted to Christ as a consequence of envy.

But this is not the case; because not all envy is stained with selfishness, and envy is not always a grudging discontent or a sin of covetousness. Envy is the desire to have for oneself something possessed by someone else, and whether envy is good or evil depends on the nature of the thing desired and whether one could have any right to its possession. If the thing desired is evil, or if it belongs to someone else and we have no right to it, then the envy is sinful. But if the thing desired is good, and also a blessing from God which He wishes all people to enjoy, then to yearn for it, even to be envious of those who possess it, is not at all unworthy. This kind of desire or envy is right in itself, and to arouse it, as Paul has said, was a real and acceptable motive in his ministry.

Paul's statement that he hoped *"to save some"* of his people seems a rather small expectation (11:14), but it is a realistic one, because, as we have seen, only a remnant, a small proportion of the nation of Israel, have believed in Christ, and this will remain so until the Kingdom of God is established on earth.

Paul was writing to a congregation in Rome that consisted of a majority of Gentiles, and perhaps he felt apologetic because he had so much to say about the Jews. But he made it clear that the two divisions cannot be separated. As a result of the Jewish rejection of the Gospel, his distinctive ministry to the Gentiles had begun, and he showed that arousing the Jews to envy would have a beneficial effect on the largely Gentile world.

Paul continued, *"For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?"* (11:15). The rejection of Christ by the Jewish people as a whole resulted in the offer of reconciliation to the other nations of the world. This reconciliation, the making of peace between God and man, is produced by the Gospel, the good news of Jesus' efficacious sacrifice. The two parties are brought into a condition of friendship by the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

The ministry of the Gospel is described as the *"ministry of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:18), so that believers in the Gospel message, in the finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ, are reconciled to God, thus the former state of enmity is brought to an end (Ephesians 2:11-18).

Paul stated that the fact of a Jew accepting the offered reconciliation and the conditions of salvation from sin and death, could be likened to one restored to life after dying, that is, as though a converted believer was resurrected to life from the death state of sin. *“Life from the dead”* as mentioned by the Apostle in 11:15, has been understood by some commentators and some Bible students as a prophetic reference to the valley of dry bones featured in Ezekiel chapter 37. This remarkable prophetic vision is discussed at some length in ‘The Hope of Israel’ in chapter 12, pages 85 to 89, so only a brief summary will be offered here.

In the light of New Testament explanations, the prophecy of the valley of dry bones has its primary fulfilment in the Gospel being preached to the nation of Israel, and the granting of the Holy Spirit by the LORD to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in God through Him, whether Jew or Gentile.

All prophecies of mercy to the Jewish people as quoted in the New Testament are declared to have their fulfilment in this present Gospel Age, the era of the Holy Spirit. Peter declared that *“all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days”* (Acts 3:24). All promises of future blessing for the Jews apply to the *“Israel of God”* (Galatians 6:16), that is, to God’s spiritual Israel consisting of a remnant of believing Jews combined with a majority of believing Gentiles.

It should be mentioned, however, that the great promises and blessings of the Kingdom of God will eventually be offered to all members of the human race, living or dead. Those who have died in past ages and during this present Gospel Age, will be raised to life again during the kingdom age and be offered the opportunity, if they will believe and obey, to live forever. All the people of fleshly Israel will be among these resurrected ones, and if they then will also believe and obey, they will receive God’s mercy and grace, along with the millions of earth’s other peoples in the times of reconstitution to come.

In continuing his discussion on the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, Paul introduced two metaphors, one taken from the ceremonial life of Israel, and the other from Israel’s agricultural life. Both seem to be intended to support Paul’s confidence in the ultimate acceptance of Israel by God. Both metaphors are expressed as ‘if’ clauses.

The first is *“If the part of the dough offered as first-fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy”* (11:16). It seems that the Apostle was referring to the offering of the first-fruits of a harvest as was done in ancient times (Leviticus 23:1-21; Numbers 15:19-21). He probably meant that when a representative portion is consecrated to God, the whole belongs to Him; so when the first converts to Christ believe, the conversion of the rest can be expected to follow.

Next the Apostle wrote, *“If the root is holy, so are the branches”* (11:16), perhaps meaning that as the Jewish patriarchs were God’s people by covenant, so their descendants belong to God by inclusion in that covenant. By the devotion of the early fathers to God and His word, the nation of Israel was, so to speak, sanctified, or set apart to God’s service, with the promise that the nation would one day be reclaimed and converted, not nationally but individually, in the kingdom of God, as believers in Jesus Christ.

After the metaphor of the ‘root’ and the ‘branches’ in 11:16, the Apostle moved to his allegory of the olive tree.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

3. ISRAEL'S FUTURE (continued)

Introductory Note

What is meant by an allegory? An allegory is the figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another, or a presentation of an abstract or spiritual meaning under concrete or material forms or examples, such as the Israel of God symbolically likened to an olive tree as in Romans 11: 17 to 32. The object of an allegory is to exemplify and make clear some moral or spiritual truth.

Is an allegory the same as an analogy, or a parable or a similitude or a fable? Some brief explanatory comments may be helpful.

An analogy is usually much shorter than an allegory, and is based on a correspondence or partial similarity between the relation of things to one another. For example, if a trivial problem is like a molehill, then behaving as though that problem is of serious concern, is making a mountain out of a molehill.

A parable is a short allegorical story designed to convey some truth or moral lesson; a saying or discourse conveying an intended meaning by a comparison or likeness of things that are comparable or analogous. The Gospels record some forty principal parables spoken by the Lord Jesus during His three-and-a-half year ministry on earth.

A similitude is a short parable or allegory, and consists of a likeness, resemblance or comparison between persons or things that are alike or are counterparts of one another. The Lord Jesus is recorded in the Gospels as having delivered at least twenty similitudes at various times during His earthly ministry.

A fable is a short fictitious narrative in which birds and beasts are made to think, speak and act like humans. The object of a fable is to teach some moral lesson.

All of the above are basically the same and are based on resemblance.

The Allegory Of The Olive Tree

Romans 11: 17 to 24

17. *And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,*
18. *do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.*
19. *You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.'*
20. *Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.*
21. *For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.*
22. *Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*
23. *And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.*
24. *For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?*

The Olive Tree

In contemplating the allegory of the olive tree, we would do well to note the comments made on the subject of allegory by William Tyndale (1490-1536), the heroic martyr who for the first time translated the New Testament and some of the Old Testament into English from the original Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. His translations were so direct and simple, yet also tender, apt and majestic, that they formed the basis of the King James Bible; and that translation which has had such a great influence in the world, owes to William Tyndale much of the dignity, stateliness and overall appeal for which it has been, and still is, so greatly admired.

The following are William Tyndale's comments.

'Allegory proveth nothing, neither can do. For it is not the Scripture, but an ensample or similitude borrowed of (by the) Scripture, to declare a text or a conclusion of the Scripture more expressly, and to root it and grave it in the heart. For a similitude or an ensample doth print a thing much deeper in the wits of a man than doth a plain speaking, and leaveth behind him (it) as it were a thing much deeper in the wits of a man than doth a plain speaking, and leaveth behind him (it) as it were a sting to prick him forward and to awake him withal. Moreover, if I could not prove with an open text that which the allegory doth express, then were the allegory a thing to be jested at, and of no greater value than a tale of Robin Hood.

'We had need to take heed everywhere that we be not beguiled with false allegories, whether they be drawn out of the New Testament or the Old..... Beware of allegories, for there is not a more handsome or apt thing to beguile withal than an allegory, nor a more subtle and pestilent thing in the world to persuade a false matter, than an allegory. And, contrariwise, there is not a better, vehementer, or mightier thing to make a man understand withal, than an allegory. For allegories make a man quick-witted and print (imprint) wisdom in him, and make it to abide where bare words go but in at one ear, and out at the other.'

The great Apostle did not tell us why he chose the olive tree to illustrate his teaching about Jews and Gentiles. It may be because olive trees were cultivated in groves and orchards throughout Palestine in Paul's day; perhaps also because the olive tree was an accepted scriptural symbol of Israel (Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:6).

The olive tree represents the favours of God which on certain conditions pertained to national Israel, not by virtue of their Law Covenant, but by virtue of the fact that the Messiah the Deliverer would be of that nation, and would offer deliverance and blessing to that nation first and before all other nations (Acts 3:26; 13:23).

Thus our Lord's ministry was limited to the *"lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:6), and the subsequent blessing of the Gospel message, beginning at Pentecost, was restricted

for three and a half years to the Jews, during which time preference was given to the Jews, as the Scripture has stated, *"to the Jew first"* (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:26,46; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 9:15).

The root of the olive tree is therefore Jesus Christ (Romans 15: 8 to 12); the trunk of the tree sustained by the root is the favour of God expressed in the promises which are *"in Him, yea, and in Him, Amen"* (2 Corinthians 1:20). The branches are the individual believers who have faith in God through Jesus Christ, and who are therefore sustained by the root, Jesus Christ.

In Romans 11: 1 to 5 the case is so stated as to express the thought that whereas the people of fleshly Israel as a whole were cast away from God's favours, yet the people of God, still called Israel, were not cast away. The Apostle mentioned himself and others who were not cast away as proof of what he was saying. He argued by implication that the remnant of Jews who entered into the favour of the Gospel Age promises were to be considered as belonging to the *"Israel of God"* (Galatians 6:16), the *"spiritual house"* of 1 Peter 2:5, while the majority who had been cast off were not to be considered any longer as belonging to God's Israel.

The same teaching was expressed in Romans 2: 28 and 29, *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly"*. Because of the hardness of heart and the stiff-necked attitude of the majority of Jewish individuals, God's Israel was reduced to a *"remnant"* of Jews, and the remnant that remained were to be considered as belonging to the *"Israel of God"*. As Paul next wrote, the majority of Jews were cast out from God's favour, and Gentiles were invited to replace the cast-off Jews and become members of the true Israel, the Israel of God.

And so it came about that the *"tree"*, deprived of nearly all of its *"branches"*, would require other *"branches"* to take the place of those cut out. To find new *"branches"*, the Lord visited, 'for the first time' (Acts 15:14) the Gentiles, referred to as the *"wild olives"*, to gather *"branches"* to be grafted into the places vacated by the *"branches"* that were cut off. In his description of this process, the Apostle took the opportunity to impress upon the Gentile believers a lesson in humility. He reminded his readers that the original branches were broken off because

of unbelief, and that the newly-grafted branches could retain their position only by the continued exercise of faith. And so he wrote, *“Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root but the root thee”* (Romans 11: 18 to 23; Hebrews 3:19; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 1:5).

The Apostle made it clear that the Gentile believers do not constitute a separate community from Jewish believers. Both have been incorporated into a new Israel, the *“Israel of God”*, the Gentiles being numbered with the sealed ones of the twelve tribes, the *“seal”* being the Holy Spirit (Revelation 7:1-4; Ephesians 1:13). We should bear in mind that the *“remnant”* who came out of national Israel were no longer under the Law Covenant, nor have believing Gentiles been placed under that Covenant.

The Law Covenant could not take away sin, and so was not able to develop the true Israel, because no-one could keep that Covenant perfectly. At best, it could prepare those under it, and it did prepare some (Romans 7: 22 to 24), by their realisation of their condemned condition and their need of One Who could save them and would do so under a New Covenant. The Apostle said to the Galatians (Galatians 3:23,24), *“The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ”*.

The New Covenant, based on the sacrifice of Jesus, enabled believers to gain acceptance according to the gift of the Holy Spirit, and not according to the old Law. Although the old Law was holy and good, yet it was weak through the imperfections of the flesh, and was written in books and on tables of stone and not on people’s hearts and minds (Romans 8: 1 to 4; Hebrews 10:14-23). In relation to the New Covenant, God said, *“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts”* (Hebrews 8:10); and also, *“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”* (Hebrews 8:12).

So from the two groups, the Jewish remnant and the added Gentile believers, the LORD is making a *“new creature”*, that is a called-out company of new individuals, by the processes of the New Covenant; and so it is written, *“In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature”* (Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:12-15).

The great Apostle concluded his allegory and his argument by saying, *“And so all Israel shall be saved”*. The word translated “so” is the Greek word ‘houtos’ (Strong’s #3779), meaning ‘in this way’ or ‘in this manner’, and signifies that *“all Israel”*, a complete spiritual Israel, is to be saved by the selection of Gentile believers in the Lord Jesus to take the places of unbelieving Jews, thus bringing about a new Israel, the *“Israel of God”*, consisting of a minority or remnant of believing Jews combined with a majority of believing Gentiles.

Therefore the Apostle did not mean the Israel of old, but the new Israel, who are *“Israelites indeed”*. The unbelief of the majority of Jews did not frustrate God’s purpose to have His Israel, so after Jesus’ death and resurrection, an entirely new Israel under the terms of an entirely New Covenant came into existence (Romans 11:26). The salvation and deliverance under this New Covenant depend upon the believers’ faith in and acceptance of the Deliverer, Jesus Christ, Who came *“out of Zion”*, and through Whom alone they can receive the forgiveness of sins as foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 58:12,13,19,20; Romans 11: 26 and 27).

Since the New Covenant is the only arrangement that is able to take away sin, every reference to the forgiveness of sins through the blood sacrifice of Christ must be understood as a reference to the New Covenant. Repentance and remission of sins were to be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, thus making it clear that the New Covenant provisions were, are, and will remain applicable to believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews (Luke 24:47; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14,21,22).

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount was the first proclamation of the New Covenant, and showed its advantages over the Old. *“Ye have heard that it was said ... but I say unto you”* (Matthew 5:21,27,31,33,38,43).

Jesus’ sermon also set forth the New Covenant arrangement by which God accepts the thoughts and desires of the heart as though the resultant actions, whether good or bad, were actually performed (Matthew 5:2-12,22,28).

The New Covenant can thus be seen in its proper light, as a God-given arrangement fully able to clear away the curse of

condemnation to death and the disadvantages of sinfulness, and to bring about a character in the believer of righteousness and holiness. All such believers and beneficiaries of the New Covenant provisions are to be given everlasting life by God. In the dispensation of the Gospel, believers, who are known only to the LORD, are to be rewarded in God's kingdom to come with the exalted position of joint-heirship with Christ (Romans 8: 16 and 17), while those who strove to do God's will in former ages will be made "*princes in all the earth*" (Psalm 45:16).

In the future dispensation, the Kingdom Age, all people will be raised to life and all who believe and obey will be, in that righteous new order, endowed with righteousness and everlasting life as human beings on the earth. The difference between the rewards promised to the select faithful of old, the Ancient Worthies, and the millions of resurrected human beings who lived in ignorance of God, is according to God's time and dispensation.

Faith and obedience were exercised by the faithful of old under adverse and often perilous conditions in the hope and promise of an honourable position in the Kingdom of God. Apart from them the millions who lived in ages past would not have been aware, so would not have believed, in God's promises of mercy and blessing to faithful people. This is all the LORD's doing, so we must say, as Eli said to Samuel, "*It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good*" (1 Samuel 3:18).

The New Covenant reveals nothing concerning the plane or realm of existence on which everlasting life under its terms will be granted, and thus it is able to operate for the benefit of both spiritual and earthly classes.

After concluding his message relating to Jews and Gentiles in the form of an allegory, Paul then proceeded to draw his readers' attention to the divine secret, which had remained hidden for centuries.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

3. ISRAEL'S FUTURE (continued)

The Divine Secret

Romans 11: 25 to 32

25. *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*
26. *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;*
27. *For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins.'*
28. *Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.*
29. *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*
30. *For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,*
31. *Even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.*
32. *For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.*

After he finished his allegory of the olive tree, Paul addressed his readers directly as "*brothers*", evidently meaning both Gentile and Jewish members of the Church, as he was about to refer to the future of both groups within the Church. He said, "*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited*" (11:25).

He had already warned them against boasting (11:18) and arrogance (11:20), and then warned them against conceit. Ignorance can be a cause of conceit in the sense of having false and exalted notions of ourselves, which may cause us to

despise and denigrate others, about whom we may know little or nothing, and as a result, consider ourselves superior and become proud and even haughty without warrant or justification.

Knowledge, on the other hand, that is, knowledge correctly derived from God's Word, should make us humble people, grateful to the LORD God and the Lord Jesus Christ for the mercy and grace they have promised us and given to us and all true believers. I think Paul was saying to the Gentile and Jewish members of the Roman congregation that they should understand their equally-shared position as members of God's chosen people. If they understood their position of unity and equality before God because of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28), they would have nothing to be conceited about and nothing to boast about. They should be humble and deeply grateful for God's mercy and grace.

Paul wanted them to know particularly "*this mystery*" which he was to reveal to them (11:25). The word "*mystery*" is a translation of the Greek word 'mysterion' which means something revealed only to the initiated (Strong 3466). But Paul did not use 'mysterion' in this sense, but rather in the sense of something formerly hidden or obscured, that he was to reveal openly for all to know and understand.

In the footnote on Romans 11:25, the NIV provides fifteen Scriptural references to this matter that remained hidden for many centuries. The word 'mysterion' in this context is better understood as 'secret', because the matter was no longer hidden or obscured, but was revealed by Paul for everyone to know and understand, and thus could no longer be called a mystery.

The matter that was hidden for centuries was in fact the Lord Jesus and all He would accomplish, "*in whom are hidden all the treasures and knowledge*" (Colossians 2:2; 4:3). But especially it was, and is, the good news that in Christ, Gentiles are now equal beneficiaries with the Jews of the promises of God, and co-equal members of the divine family (16:25; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3; Colossians 1:26; 3:11). What Paul was about to tell his readers was that the secret to be revealed to them consisted of three truths.

The first was that *“Israel has experienced a hardening in part”* (11:25). Paul had already stated this in 11:7. As was commented previously (9:18), it is God Who ‘hardens’, which is really a judicial process by which He hands people over to their own stubbornness. The *“hardening”* really takes the form of spiritual numbness or insensitivity; the same as the *“veil”* which Paul elsewhere said lies over their hearts and minds (2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:3).

The Apostle stated that the hardening was *“in part”*, meaning that some, the remnant, did not experience it, since they believed in the Lord Jesus. He also said that the hardening was not permanent, and that it would last *“until the full number of the Gentiles has come in”* (11:25). While Israel remains hardened, and continues not to believe in Jesus Christ, the Gospel will be preached throughout the world (Mark 13:10; Revelation 7:9), and more and more Gentiles will hear and respond to it. This state of affairs will continue until the *“full number”* of the Gentiles has been reached. When this occurs, the Apostle has said, *“And so all Israel will be saved”* (11:26).

An explanation of the quotation mentioned above has been offered previously in the comments on the allegory of the olive tree in 11: 17 to 24. *“All Israel”* was declared to be *“the Israel of God”* (Galatians 6:16) and not national Israel, because the people as a whole rejected Christ and the Gospel and were cast off as God’s chosen people.

This means that the unbelieving majority of Jews are in the same situation as the millions of earth’s people who had died in unbelief, and the millions now living who do not believe and will die in unbelief. But unbelievers now and in past ages are not forever lost, because God has promised that all people will be raised to life again in His Kingdom to come, and will then be given the opportunity to believe, if they will, and be saved, that is, mercifully granted eternal life, never to die again.

In connection with salvation, Paul drew together three scriptural texts and made three positive statements arising from them. The first was that *“The deliverer will come from Zion”* (Isaiah 59:20). In Isaiah, this was a reference to the Messiah, to Christ’s first advent. *“Zion”* would mean the heavenly city of God, in which Christ now reigns, and of which His believing followers are citizens although on earth; in contrast to the

present city of Jerusalem (11:25), in which its citizens are in bondage and slavery with no way of escape other than by faith in Jesus Christ and all that He has accomplished.

An alternative understanding of “*Zion*” which is in harmony with the context, is that it denotes the people of God. Zion is one of the hills of Jerusalem on which the city of David was built. The Lord Jesus, the Deliverer, arose from among the Jewish people, God’s chosen people, and He was the One Who was instrumental in the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31 concerning the imputation of righteousness under the terms of the New Covenant.

The second statement that Paul made was that the deliverer “*will turn godlessness away from Jacob*”, which seems to refer to Isaiah 27:9, where Jacob’s guilt would be atoned for and removed. Jacob, who was re-named Israel, would stand for all the people of Israel, living and dead. Paul’s third statement was that the deliverer would establish God’s covenant, which is the New Covenant, the only arrangement by which sins can be forgiven and taken away (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Zechariah 12:10 to 13:1).

When we put these three truths together, we see that Paul was saying that the deliverer would come to bring His people to repentance and forgiveness according to God’s promised covenant. The salvation of Israel for which Paul prayed (10:1), to which he sought to lead his own people by arousing their envy (11:14), which salvation has come to the Gentiles (11:11; 1:16), and which one day will come to all Israel (11:26), is salvation from sin and death through faith in Jesus Christ. The salvation of which Paul wrote was not a national salvation, for nothing was said about either a political deliverance or a return to the promised land for the Jews. Neither was there any hint or implication of any special path of salvation for Jews apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote that there is only one olive tree to which Jewish and Gentile believers both belong. Jewish people “*will be grafted in*” again “*if they do not persist in unbelief*” (11:23). There is no doubt that faith in Jesus Christ is essential for them, and always will be.

Verses 28 to 32 of Romans 11 contain two distinct statements. Both statements focus on unbelieving Israel, referred to as *“they”*, and believing Gentiles, referred to as *“you”*. The statements describe continuing Jewish unbelief, but also indicate reasons for assurance that God has not completely rejected His people (11: 1 and 2), nor has He allowed them to fall beyond recovery (11:11). The reasons for assurance are God’s election (11: 28 and 29) and God’s mercy (11: 30 to 32).

The first reason is that God’s election is irrevocable *“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”* (11:28), *“for God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable”* (11:29). How are we to understand that the Jews are *“enemies”* and also that they are *“loved”* at one and the same time? Verse 28 tells us that the Jews are objects of God’s love and wrath simultaneously. The Jews are enemies of God in the sense that they are under His judgment for their rejection of Jesus Christ and the Gospel. They are enemies, that is alienated because of *“you”* (believing Gentiles), but are also loved because of the patriarchs.

The Jews rejected Jesus and the Gospel. They actively opposed the Gospel, they furiously persecuted the early Christian believers, and did their best to prevent the Gentiles from hearing the Gospel message of salvation. Because of their opposition to and unbelief in God’s purpose in sending Jesus Christ into the world, God is hostile to them.

We must bear in mind, however, that the Jews were the chosen people of God, the descendants of the noble patriarchs, with whom the Law Covenant was made, and to whom the promises were given. In Deuteronomy 10:15 it is written, *“Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today”*.

So then, in relation to God’s election, and for the sake of the patriarchs. God has not completely rejected Israel. Paul said that God’s gifts and His call are irrevocable (11:29). God’s gifts to Israel were listed in 9: 4 and 5, and His call and steadfastness are contained in Numbers 23:19, *“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?”*

There is a future of hope for disobedient Israel, but, as has already been stated in these notes, that future is in the Kingdom of God, when every human being will be raised to life again, and the prospect of life eternal will be offered to every single individual, including formerly disobedient Israelites, on the basis of faith and obedience.

There is no indication in the New Testament nor the Old, that the nation of Israel will be restored as a nation. Salvation to eternal life will be an individual matter for everyone who died in ignorance and unbelief. Israel according to the flesh has been rejected by God, and replaced by a new Israel (Galatians 6:16), consisting of a remnant of believing Jews and a majority of believing Gentiles.

God's mercy is the second reason for assurance that the people of Israel will not be irrevocably lost. God's mercy is shown even to the *disobedient* *"Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience"* (11:30), *"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"* (11:31).

Human disobedience and divine mercy are revealed in the experience of both Gentiles and Jews. The difference, however, is in the timing of His dealing with them, because God has already been merciful to disobedient but repentant Gentiles, but His mercy to disobedient Israel belongs to the future. The Apostle said that you received mercy *"by their disobedience"* (11:30), whereas they will receive mercy *"by your mercy"* (11:31). Paul said that it is because of disobedient Israel that disobedient Gentiles have received mercy, and it is because of this mercy to disobedient Gentiles that disobedient Jews will receive mercy too.

Verse 32 sums up Paul's argument so as to disclose God's overruling purpose and plan. *"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all"*. Disobedience is likened to a prison in which God has bound all human beings so that they have no means of escape except as God's mercy will release them.

This theme has been the whole argument of Paul's letter. In the first three chapters, Paul showed that all human beings are

sinful and guilty without excuse, but from 3:21 onward he revealed the way of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He wrote something similar in Galatians; *"The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin....We were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ.."* (Galatians 3:22 and onwards). Therefore human disobedience is the prison in which everyone is kept, and from which only divine mercy can liberate us and eventually all people who will believe and obey.

Paul continued to argue that there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles either in sinfulness (3: 9 and 22) or in salvation (10:12). He further argued that as they have been together in the prison of disobedience, they will be together in the freedom brought about by God's mercy.

The differences in rewards were not brought into this context by Paul, but committed Christians are well aware of them. The true Gospel Age Church are promised a heavenly inheritance as joint-heirs with the Lord Jesus in the future, (Romans 8:19; Revelation 7:4; 20:4,6), the faithful of old are promised ruling positions as human beings on earth in the age to come (Psalm 45:16), while the millions of Gentiles and Jews who have died and will die in ignorance and unbelief will be brought back to life in the future Kingdom Age (John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15, Revelation 20:12,13) to be invited to believe and obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's rightful King on the throne of David, which is the throne of God, and everyone on doing so will mercifully be granted life everlasting.

JEWS AND GENTILES IN GOD'S PLAN (continued)

4. DOXOLOGY

Romans 11: 33 to 36

- 33. *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!***
- 34. *'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counsellor?'***
- 35. *'Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?'***
- 36. *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.***

For eleven chapters up to verse 32 of the eleventh chapter, Paul had been drawing his readers' attention to the nature and the blessings of the Christian Gospel. He showed how God has revealed His way of making sinners acceptable and right with Himself, how the Lord Jesus died for our sins and the sins of everyone, and was raised to life again for our justification, how we as believers are united with Jesus Christ by faith in His death and resurrection, how the Christian life is to be lived in the Spirit and not under the Law, and how Gentiles and Jews have now become equal in God's sight both now in this Gospel Age and in the age to come.

It seems as though Paul suddenly stopped, paused for breath, so to speak, as he contemplated the ways of God and realised that they are "*past finding out*". He perceived, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, the heights of God's wisdom and knowledge, the depths of His judgments, and the sometimes untraceable paths of His providence. Such experiences are common to deep and humble thinkers. Their minds are unable to cope with the infinite; language becomes inadequate for them, and they are reduced to reverent silence. Profound thinkers and believers in the Lord Jesus, and in God through Him, can only wait for guidance and direction from the LORD God as they continue to walk the narrow way in service through Jesus Christ in accordance with God's mercy and grace.

So, before the great Apostle proceeded to outline the practical implications of the Gospel, He gave expression to the doxology recorded in 11: 33 to 36. The word 'doxology' is derived from the Greek words 'doxa' (praise) and 'logia' (saying or statement), and means a statement, ascription or hymn of praise, glory and honour to God. Paul's praise was derived from Scripture, and is full of Old Testament phraseology.

He began his doxology by exclaiming "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out" (11:33). It seems that there are two ways of understanding Paul's opening sentence. The first way is to place the emphasis on "*depth*", the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Certainly the word "*depth*" is found in Scripture, and is applied to anything profound and beyond understanding, as in Psalm 36:6, "*Thy judgments are a great deep*", and also in 1 Corinthians 2:10, "*The Spirit searcheth the deep things of God*".

This first way of understanding is that Paul was referring to one truth, namely, the riches or wealth of God's wisdom and knowledge. God's wealth or riches probably refers to the rich blessings and mercies extended to sinful human beings by the message of the Gospel, the pardon from the guilt of sin, the reconciliation of sinners to God, the peace of mind brought about by freedom from guilt, and the consequent and eventual salvation from the curse of death. God's "*wisdom*" would be His design and intention to bestow mercy on all who will believe and obey, to save all believers by grace and not by works or deeds, and in the provision in His plan to cater for sinful human beings. God's "*knowledge*" would be His omniscience, His knowledge of everything, including all that will take place in the future.

The second way of understanding is that Paul was referring to two truths, God's riches on the one hand, and God's wisdom and knowledge on the other, as indicated by the RSV rendering, "*the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God*". This second way of understanding is suggested by the parallel in Paul's next statement in which he referred to God's unsearchable "*judgments*" (what He thinks and decides), and to His untraceable "*paths*" (what He does and the directions and destinations He determines). This twofold distinction was

continued throughout Paul's doxology: His riches and wisdom (11:33), His judgments and paths (11:33), both of which derive from His infinite mind or spirit (11:34) and result in His favours which cannot be repaid (11:35).

Paul had already written of God's riches, *"the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience"* (2:4), *"the riches of his glory"* (9:23) and the riches which the Lord Jesus bestows on all who call on him (10:12). In other letters, Paul described God as *"rich in mercy"* (Ephesians 2:4; 1:7), and he referred to Christ's inexhaustible riches in Ephesians 3:8,16; 2 Corinthians 8:9 and Philippians 4:19. We should all appreciate that salvation is a gift from God's riches, and that this gift immeasurably enriches those who are so blest as to receive it.

God's wisdom is hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:2), and was displayed by His sacrifice, although it has appeared and still appears to many human beings as folly (1 Corinthians 1:18), but is revealed in Scripture as His saving purpose (Ephesians 1:8; 3:10). God's wisdom planned salvation, and His providence has made it happen. His providence and wisdom are deep and unfathomable (11:33), His decisions are unsearchable, and His ways past finding out. These words are the New Testament equivalent of Isaiah 55:8,9; *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways my ways, declared the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"*.

To the believer, it is clear that God in His wisdom is fully aware of human wants and needs, and His plan is the exactly-correct scheme that is suited to deliverance of human beings from sin and death and progression to recovery and life, with death being the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26). Who but God could have so ordained events, and exactly foreseen all requirements thousands of years before the circumstances preceding their fulfilment occurred, circumstances that were written and foretold by the inspired prophets of old? The unfathomable nature of God's mind and His ways can be read also in Job 5:9; 11:7; Psalm 139:6; and Isaiah 40:28.

The Apostle then continued in his doxology with two rhetorical questions in verses 34 and 35 of chapter 11:

"Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or Who has been His counsellor?" (11:34).

"Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" (11:35)

The Apostle must have had in mind the words of Isaiah 40:13,14: *"Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counsellor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?"*

The words of Isaiah and Paul convey the impression of the infinite wisdom and knowledge of the Divine mind. No being, spirit or human, could teach Him, or approach Him with a view of offering Him counsel, such as earthly monarchs need and often seek.

The great Apostle had written much to prove that the Gospel was the plan of God, and no matter how difficult it might appear to Jew and Gentile to comprehend its message of salvation and life, they were and are responsible for their action of ignoring, rejecting, or believing the good news that God in His infinite wisdom and knowledge has made known to them.

It is manifest that the Gospel was not made known to every human being during past ages of time, and to this day great numbers of people still have not heard its message of life on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, and Who is also God's Mediator between Himself and human beings.

So in order that the whole human race may hear the Gospel message, God has promised that everyone will hear it in the age to come, and those who will then choose to believe and obey will be given everlasting life; while those who refuse to believe will lose God's gracious offer of life, granted on the basis of faith and obedience. A full discussion of this most gracious future time has been published in the booklet 'The New Era'.

No one can recompense the LORD God for any favour He bestows or has bestowed. If God's mercies and blessings were

granted in that way, then God could be obligated and His gracious benevolence compromised and even nullified. It would be absurd for anyone, spirit or human, to claim that he or she knows God's mind and is able to offer Him advice. It would be equally absurd for anyone to claim that he or she has given God a gift and so put Him in debt or under an obligation.

God's thoughts are unsearchable, beyond question, and His ways inscrutable, cannot be anticipated as the Apostle and the Scriptures clearly tell us. God's revelation and plan of redemption are entirely due to His grace. God's absolute ways are beyond our full comprehension while He continues to perform His works on sea, land and in the air, and indeed throughout the universe (Acts 13:10; Hebrews 3:10; and Psalm 77:19).

Paul next made a theological affirmation, *"For from him and through him and to him are all things"* (11:36), and concluded this section of his letter with a final ascription *"To him be the glory for ever! Amen"* (11:36). Paul wrote that all things proceed from God, continue to exist by reason of His power, and return to Him as it may please Him (Revelation 4:11). God is the creator of all things (1 Corinthians 8:6), and the original source and fountain of every blessing, and therefore has the right to dispose of all and anything as He wishes. The words *"and through him"* signify that by His power *"all things"* continue to be directed and controlled.

The LORD God does not need the assistance of anyone, and indeed never depended upon the aid of anyone in His work of creation, nor in His control of the universe, because He is the Almighty independent Creator and LORD (Job 28:2-11). *"And to him"* seems to indicate that the whole purpose of creation was to promote honour and glory to God, so that the goodness and mercy of His character might be known and appreciated (Revelation 4:11). *"All things"* would encompass the universe, the whole creation of physical worlds and living things; angelic beings, humans and animals; and more particularly the matters about which Paul had been writing concerning the elective purposes of God and the most gracious and merciful plan of salvation and redemption based on Jesus Christ.

It is because all things are from God, through God and to God that the glory must be His alone. Human pride is displeasing to

the LORD (Proverbs 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5), and is exemplified in the thinking and attitude of unbelievers, who repudiate their dependence on God and presume to place human beings in charge of their own destiny, thus arrogating to themselves the glory and honour which belong to God alone.

It is of great importance to note from Romans chapters 1 to 11 that theology (belief about God) and doxology (worship and praise of God) should never be separated. It stands to reason that there can be no doxology without theology. We cannot worship and praise an unknown God. All true worship is a response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Scriptures, and arises from our contemplation and appreciation of Who God is and what He has done. It was the tremendous truths of Romans chapters 1 to 11 that provoked Paul's outburst of praise in 11: 33 to 36.

There should also be no theology without doxology. It is quite inadequate to try to promote a purely academic interest in God. The Almighty Heavenly Father is not an appropriate subject for cool, critical, detached observation and evaluation. The true knowledge of God will always lead to grateful worship, as Paul showed us by example.

Our place, and the place of all true Christian believers, is to bow down in our mind and heart before the LORD God in praise and adoration. Happy will we be as believers if we can see beyond our own individual and personal good, and embrace the thought that God is planning and working towards a grand and noble objective of bringing about a blessing to all nations and all families of the earth in Jesus Christ, the promised seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18, 28:14; Galatians 3:29; 2 Peter 3:13).

God is working towards the good of this planet and humankind in particular, and of His vast universe in general, and knows best how that good can be and will be accomplished (Acts 15:18).

CHRISTIAN TEACHING LEADS TO GODLY BEHAVIOUR

Romans 12:1 to 15:13

Brief Overview

In Romans chapter 12, Paul turned from doctrine to exhortation; that is, from instruction to practical application in Christian life and conduct, from the good news of the Gospel to everyday Christian discipleship.

Paul was particularly concerned to emphasise the desirable behaviour of the community which Jesus brought into existence by His death and resurrection, in particular the regard for the unity and equality of every believer, whether Jew or Gentile, in the true and sincere Church of Jesus Christ.

Paul strove to integrate creed and conduct, and insisted on the practical implications of his teaching. He wrote of the Christian newness in Christ, *“dead to sin but alive to God”* (6:11), but pointed out that holiness did not (and does not) automatically follow in Christian conduct. The requirement of good and proper conduct needed to be stated, and reasons for such declaration needed to be given.

In 12:1 believers were told to offer their bodies to God because of His mercy, to serve one another because believers are one body in Christ (12:5), that is, one organisation with Christ as its head, and not to take revenge because vengeance belongs to God (12:19).

In chapter 13, Paul told believers to submit to earthly governments because their officials are God’s ministers carrying out His authority to punish wrongdoers (13: 1 to 7), and to love their neighbours as themselves because the time of salvation in Christ has come (13: 9 to 14).

In chapter 14 Paul urged brethren not to harm their sisters and brothers in any way because Christ died to be their Saviour (14:15), rose to be their Lord (14:9), and everyone must give account to God (14: 10 to 12). The great doctrine of Christ’s

sacrifice, His resurrection and future judgment and blessings have been linked by Paul to practical, day-to-day Christian behaviour.

Paul's Teaching Followed Jesus' Teaching

The following comparisons show how closely the great Apostle followed the teachings of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus	The Apostle Paul
<p><i>"Bless those who curse you"</i> (Luke 6:28).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"Bless those who curse you. Bless and do not curse ."</i> (Romans 12:14)</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Do not resist an evil person"</i> (Matthew 5:39).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"Do not repay anyone evil for evil"</i> (Romans 12:17).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Blessed are the peace-makers"</i> (Matthew 5:9). <i>"Be at peace with each other"</i> (Mark 9:50).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"Live at peace with everyone"</i> (Romans 12:18; 14:19).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you"</i> (Luke 6:27,35; Matthew 5:44).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"If your enemy is hungry, feed him"</i> (Romans 12:20).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"</i> (Mark 12:14,17).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"Give everyone what you owe; if you owe taxes, pay taxes"</i> (Romans 13:7)</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Love one another"</i> (John 13:34).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"Love one another"</i> (Romans 13:6)</p> <p>~~~~~</p>
<p><i>"Love the LORD your God ... Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments"</i> (Matthew 22:37)</p> <p>~~~~~</p>	<p><i>"He who loves his Fellow-man has fulfilled the Law"</i> (Romans 13:8).</p> <p>~~~~~</p>

The Lord Jesus

"Do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

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*"How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?" (Luke 12:56).*

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*"Do not let him find you sleeping" (Mark 13:26)
"Your redemption is drawing nigh" (Luke 21:28).*

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*"Do not judge or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1).*

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"Alas for the world that such causes of stumbling arise!" (Matthew 18:7).

~~~~~

*What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean'" (Matthew 15:10).*

~~~~~

"Do not worry about what you will eat or drink. ... But seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:25,33).

~~~~~

### **The Apostle Paul**

*"The commandments are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' " (Romans 13:9).*

~~~~~

"Understanding the present time" (Romans 13:11).

~~~~~

*"Wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now" (Romans 13:11)*

~~~~~

"Why do you judge your brother? Let us stop passing judgment on one another" (Romans 14: 10,13).

~~~~~

*"Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block ... in your brother's way" (Romans 14:13).*

~~~~~

No food is unclean in itself ... All food is clean" Romans 14:14,20).

~~~~~

*"The kingdom of God is not ... eating and drinking but ... Righteousness" (Romans 14:17).*

~~~~~

Paul, formerly known as Saul, was not mentioned in the Gospels. The first mention of him is in connection with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7:57,60. It is evident that he was not an observer during Jesus' earthly ministry to hear the gracious words of the Master, or to witness His many and mighty works and miracles. The risen Lord Jesus must have given His chosen Apostle full and clear instructions after his conversion, to prepare him for his commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and to found and establish churches throughout the pagan Roman Empire.

THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

Romans 12: 1 and 2

- 1. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.***
- 2. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

The first words of chapter 12 are, "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers*", emphasising again that the Roman believers, consisting of Gentiles and former Jews, were brothers and sisters together in the family of God. Each and all of them therefore had to show the same commitment to be holy, humble, and loving people of God.

The basis of Paul's appeal is seen in his use of "*therefore*" and by his reference to God's mercy, literally 'mercies', as in the RSV, which is a Hebraism for the many and varied manifestations of God's mercy. Paul had been expounding the mercies of God in all the previous eleven chapters of this letter.

The Gospel is, in fact, God's mercy to undeserving sinners in giving His Son to die for them, in granting them grace and forgiveness and justifying them freely by faith, in sending them His life-giving Spirit and in accepting them as His children. "*Mercy*" is the key word of chapters 9 to 11. Salvation depends "*not ... on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy*" (9:16); and His purpose is "*to make the riches of His glory known to the*

objects of His mercy" (9:23). Furthermore, as the disobedient Gentiles *"have now received mercy"* (11:30), so too would disobedient Israel *"now receive mercy"* (11:31). *"For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all"* (11:32).

Thus it is *"in view of God's mercy"* (12:1) that Paul made his ethical appeal, that is, his appeal to his readers to conduct themselves in accordance with God's righteous standards. God's mercies to undeserving sinners should make us want to respond by living as He wants us to live. In other words, God's grace should not be thought of as permitting or condoning sinfulness, but as being the reason and the basis for our grateful response by behaving and conducting ourselves in ways that will please Him.

Paul's appeal concerns both our bodies and our minds. He wrote, *"I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship"* (12:1). It seems that Paul was using imagery that pertained to sacrifice. He said that we must offer or present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

He may have been thinking of sacrifices under the Law Covenant which had to be unblemished and without defect, and burnt on the altar to create a fragrant aroma pleasing to the LORD, as recorded in Leviticus 1:1 to 10. The *"spiritual act of worship"* of the Christian believer would be the moral equivalent of the sacrifices under the Law. *"Spiritual"* is a translation of the Greek word 'logikos', which could mean either 'reasonable' or 'rational'. If 'reasonable' is the correct meaning, then the offering of ourselves would be the only sensible, logical and appropriate response to God's freely-given mercy. If 'rational' is correct, then it is *"the worship offered by mind and heart"* as in the REB, that is, spiritual worship as opposed to ceremonial procedures, such being *"an act of intelligent worship"* as translated by J.B. Phillips, that is, worship in which our minds are fully engaged.

So, in practical terms, what is meant by this living sacrifice, this rational, spiritual worship? Paul clearly meant the presentation of our bodies to God, not simply in Sunday worship or in Bible studies, but in the home, the office, the school, and in public places.

Paul's reference to our bodies would have come as a shock to some of Paul's Greek readers. Some would have been brought up on Plato's teaching that maintained and regarded the human body as a kind of encumbrance. The body was thought of as a prison in which the human spirit was confined, and from which the Platonic philosophers and followers longed to escape.

Some Christians today seem somewhat disconcerted by Paul's down-to-earth language. Some evangelists stress that we should give our 'hearts' to God rather than our 'bodies'. The REB translators suggest the rendering as "*offer your very selves to him*". But Paul was perfectly clear and wrote that the presentation of our 'bodies' is our 'spiritual' act of worship. Our worship should not be abstract and mystical, but concrete, that is, acts of service performed by our bodies. True Christian discipleship must include the putting to death of our body's misdeeds, as in 8:13, and the positive presentation of its members to God's service.

Paul made it abundantly clear in his comments on human wickedness in 3:13 and onwards, that such wickedness is revealed through our bodies - tongues which practise deceit and lips which spread verbal poison, mouths which are full of cursing and bitterness, feet which are swift to shed blood, and eyes which turn away from God.

So, conversely, Christian sanctification shows itself in the deeds of the body. Christians must offer their bodies not to sin as "*instruments of wickedness*" but to God as "*instruments of righteousness*" (6: 13, 16 and 19). If we, as Christians, obey this instruction we will walk in God's ways, our lips will speak the truth, defend and spread the Gospel, our tongues and lips will bring comfort and encouragement to others; our hands will be held out to those who have been hurt and who have stumbled. Our hands will also perform many helpful tasks such as providing hospitality; to show love and care for those who are lonely and in sorrow; our ears will be ready to listen to the voices of those in affliction or distress, and our eyes will look humbly and patiently towards God.

Paul wrote of the presentation of our bodies to God, as we have seen. But he also wrote of the transformation of our minds. "*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing*

and perfect will” (12:2). These words express Paul’s call to holiness and non-compliance with evil or wrongdoing or apathy, all words which are addressed to the people of God throughout Scripture. Examples in the Old Testament are found in Leviticus 18:3, 2 Kings 17:15 and Ezekiel 11:12. God’s word came to Israel through Moses, “You must not do as they do ... in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. You must obey my laws”.

Another example is to be seen in Jesus’ sermon on the Mount, when He spoke of the false devotion of the Pharisees, saying, *“Do not be like them”* (Matthew 6:8). And so Paul issued instructions to the people of God not to be conformed to the prevailing culture and worldly aspirations, but rather be transformed *“by the renewing of your mind”*. J.B. Phillips interpreted Paul’s words as follows, *“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould your minds from within”*.

The Greek verb translated as *“transform”* is a form of ‘meta-morphoo’. This verb is the same one that is used by Matthew and Mark in their accounts of the transfiguration of Jesus. The accounts in Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9, say that it was Jesus’ skin, face and clothing that shone, but Mark clearly said that Jesus *“was transfigured before them”* (Mark 9:2). A complete change came over Him. His whole body shone and *“became shining, exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them”* (KJV). Jesus’ words at the time implied that His disciples would not be able to understand the vision that they saw until after His resurrection (Mark 9:9).

The change which takes place in the people of God, which is mentioned in 12:2, and also in 2 Corinthians 3:13, is a fundamental transformation of character and conduct, a change from following the standards of the world to taking on the teachings of Christ Himself and becoming conformed to His image.

These two value systems, this world, and God’s will for us, are incompatible. The two standards and aims are so completely different that there should be no possibility of compromise. So how does the transformation take place? How are our minds changed and renewed?

Paul did not tell us how our minds are renewed, but the transformation begins with our decision and determination to obey God through Jesus Christ. Our minds are renewed by a combination of the Holy Spirit in our minds and in our lives, and the effect of the Word of God on our minds and conduct. The change of direction in our lives involves the renewal of our humanity or humanness, which has been tainted and twisted by the fall, including in particular our minds, as we are told in 1 Corinthians 2:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:20; Colossians 3:9 and Titus 3:5.

We need to study the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), which reveals the will of God to and for us (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6). Therefore our moral transformation takes place firstly by the renewing of our minds by the Word and the Spirit of God, so that we are able to understand God's will and desire to do it and be increasingly transformed by it.

God's will embraces all our relationships, as Paul revealed, to God Himself (12: 1 and 2), to ourselves (12: 3 to 8), to one another (12: 9 to 16), to evil-doers and enemies (12: 17 to 21), to the state (13: 1 to 7), to the Law (13: 8 to 10), to Christ's return (13: 11 to 14), and to the less secure members of the Christian community (14 1 to 15:13).

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

GOD'S WILL FOR BELIEVERS

Romans 12: 3 to 16

Miraculous Gifts And Natural Talents

Romans 12: 3 to 8

3. *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.*
4. *For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,*
5. *So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*
6. *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;*
7. *Or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching;*
8. *He who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

Paul wrote about God's mercy and His will and the need to use our bodies in His service along with our transformed minds. He followed these exhortations by telling his readers, including ourselves, to use our transformed minds to be active in evaluating ourselves and such gifts as we might have as individual Christians.

We need to realise who we are, how God may wish to use us, and how we might be so privileged as to be used by God in His plan for the human race in the age to come. In thinking along these lines, we must always remain humble, and our renewed minds must be humble, as Christ was always humble (Philippians 2:5 and onwards).

Paul's introduction to his exhortation to serious Christian thinking and self-evaluation was impressively solemn *"For by the grace given me I say to every one of you"* (12:3). Paul was addressing his Roman readers with his authority as Christ's chosen Apostle. He was appointed by the risen Christ, and he steadfastly attributed his apostleship to God's grace (1:5; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:7).

Paul's message to his readers was *"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment"* (12:3). In thinking of ourselves, we must avoid esteeming ourselves too highly. He may have meant also that we should not esteem ourselves too lowly, though he did not say so. He said we are to develop a *"sober judgment"*, first by reference to our faith, and secondly by reference to such gifts as we might have been given in the natural course of events.

The clause *"in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you"* (12:3), may be understood in two main ways. The Greek word for *"measure"* is 'metron', and could mean either an instrument for measuring, or a measured quantity of something. If Paul meant the latter, then the understanding would be that God has given a varying amount of faith to different Christians. In this connection, Professor Cranfield, in his 'Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans' (volume 2, page 613), argued that 'metron' in the context of Romans 12 means 'a standard by which to measure ourselves', and such standard is the saving faith in Christ crucified, and that indeed only 'Christ himself in whom God's judgment and mercy are revealed' can enable us to measure ourselves soberly.

It seems to me that Professor Cranfield's understanding that the Gospel is the first measure by which we should evaluate ourselves is to be preferred. So the first measure of evaluating ourselves is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the second measure is the gift (or gifts) given to individual Christians.

In order to emphasise what he was saying, Paul drew an analogy between the human body and the Christian community. *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function"* (12:4), (implying his understanding that the different members with their designated functions are necessary for the health and

well-being of the body as a whole), *“so in Christ”*, by our common union with Him, *“we who are many form one body”* (12:5).

Paul’s assertion that believers constitute *“one body in Christ”* would have had very significant implications for the Christian community in Rome, consisting as it did of its combination of Gentiles and Jews. As one body, Paul wrote, *“each member belongs to all the others”* (12:5), meaning that Christians are dependent on one another, and this unity of Christian fellowship is increased by the diversity of the individual gifts. Christians must also recognise that God is the giver of the gifts, and such recognition is indispensable in enabling us to *“form a sober estimate”* (REB) of ourselves.

Paul continued, *“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us”* (12:6). Just as God’s grace made Paul an apostle (12:3), so His grace (charis) has bestowed different gifts (charismata) on the various members of *“Christ’s body”*. Paul proceeded to give his readers a sample of seven gifts, which he urged them to exercise and exemplify for the good of all members.

He divided the gifts into two categories:

- (1) ‘speaking gifts’ (prophesying, teaching and encouraging);
- (2) ‘service gifts’ (serving, contributing, leading and showing mercy).

The Apostle Peter made the same distinction in 1 Peter 4:10,11; *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”*

The first gift (charisma) that Paul mentioned in this context was prophesying, meaning speaking under divine inspiration. In Ephesians 2:20, apostles and prophets are combined as the foundation on which the Church is built (see also Ephesians 3:5). This reference is evidently to the New

Testament founders such as Paul and John who were prophets as well as apostles (1 Corinthians 13:2; Revelation 1:3, 22:7,18).

In two lists of the gifts (charismata) prophets are placed in a secondary position to the apostles, suggesting that some prophetic gifts may have been of less weight or importance than those displayed by the Apostles. This understanding seems to be reinforced by the Scriptures which state that the words of prophets should be “weighed” and “tested” (1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; and 1 John4:1); whereas the words of the apostles were to be believed and obeyed without question, as indicated in 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

Such an understanding is surely in order when we are made aware that prophets often spoke of a local or temporary situation, while the authority of the apostles was universal. So, in the light of these differences, we should understand the restriction Paul placed on the use of the prophetic gift; “*Let him use it in proportion to his faith*” (12:6).

This translation is somewhat misleading because it makes the effect of the words spoken depend on the amount or proportion of the faith of the speaker. In the original, as evidenced by the Diaglott, “*faith*” has the definite article, so that “*the faith*” is meant. The phrase in 12:6 should be translated as “*in agreement with the faith*”, that is, the believer using his or her prophetic gift should make sure that the message given does not in any way contradict or even restrict or modify the Christian faith.

The six remaining gifts are concerned with more day-to-day practical matters. “*If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach*” (12:7). “*Serving*” is the Greek ‘*diakonia*’, which is a word covering a wide variety of ministries. As the Apostle wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:5, “*there are different kinds of service, but the same Lord*”.

In Jerusalem in the early years of the Church, the ministry of the Word by the apostles, and the ministry of serving and waiting on tables by the chosen seven are both called ‘*diakonia*’ (Acts 6:1 and onwards). Whatever ministering gift believers had been given they should use it and continue to use it. Teachers should cultivate their teaching gift and develop

their teaching ministry. Nowadays, miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit no longer apply (1 Corinthians 13:8), but Christians have been born with talents and abilities of one kind or another, and should develop and use such abilities for good in God's service.

Four more gifts were included in 12:8.

1. *"If it is encouraging, let him encourage"*. *"Encourage"* is a translation of the Greek word 'parakaleo', which has a wide range of meanings from encouraging and exhorting to comforting, conciliating or consoling. This gift may be exercised from the pulpit or by the written word, and also most importantly, by offering friendship to the lonely and the dejected, and by giving courage to any who seem to have lost heart. Barnabas, whose name means Son of encouragement (Acts 4:36), may well have had this gift when he sought out and befriended Saul of Tarsus as indicated in Acts 4:36 and 9:26.

2. *"If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously"* (12:8). By these words it seems that Paul meant personal giving to be done 'en haploteti', that is, with generosity, with sincerity, without reluctance or grudging and without ulterior motives.

3. *"If it is leadership, let him govern diligently"* (12:8). It seems from 1 Timothy 3:4,12, and also 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17, that Paul meant leadership both in the home and in the Church.

4. Finally, *"If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"* (12:8). God is a merciful God (12:1) so His people must also be merciful. To show mercy is to care about and if necessary care for those who are in need or distress, whether foreigners, orphans and widows (often mentioned together in the Old Testament), and the handicapped, the sick and the dying. And such mercy is not to be shown reluctantly or grudgingly or in a patronising manner, but cheerfully.

This list of seven spiritual gifts in Romans 12 seems to be not as well known as the two lists in 1 Corinthians 12 (nine gifts in the first list and eight in the second), and the shorter list of five gifts in Ephesians 4:11. All lists agree that the source of the gifts is God and His grace.

In Romans 12, God Himself is mentioned as the source of the gifts, in Ephesians 4 Jesus is mentioned as conferring the gifts, while in 1 Corinthians 12, the Holy Spirit is mentioned as giving the gifts. There should be no doubt or confusion here because God is ultimately responsible, having for a period of time given all power and authority to Jesus (Matthew 28:18), Who, with God's power and authority, has caused and has continued to cause God's Holy Spirit to guide and influence Christian believers.

All three lists emphasise the variety of gifts, but are not, as some have suggested, merely random selections of the gifts. The purpose of the gifts was related to the building up or edifying of the body of Christ, that is, the Church. Ephesians 4:11,12 is the briefest but most explicit of the three lists, while 1 Corinthians 14:12 states that the gifts must be evaluated according to the degree to which they edify the Church. The two lists of 1 Corinthians 12 tend to focus on the supernatural: tongues; prophecy; healing; and miracles; whereas the gifts in Romans 12, apart from prophecy, are general and practical: service; teaching; encouragement; and leadership; and even down-to-earth matters, such as giving money and doing acts of mercy and kindness.

From all of this comes the conclusion that we must be broad in our understanding of spiritual gifts. We today as believers do not possess miraculously conferred capabilities or powers, but we do possess qualities and attributes with which we were born, and which we should use in God's service. Some people are by nature cheerful and encouraging, some are capable seamstresses, some are excellent cooks, some are good artisans, some are excellent gardeners, while others are skilled with accounting and the keeping of records, while others again are able to put words together coherently and some are competent with the exposition of God's word. We should always keep in mind the words of the great Apostle, *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4:19).

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OUR BRETHREN

Love In The Family Of God

Romans 12: 9 to 16

- 9. *Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.***
- 10. *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another;***
- 11. *Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;***
- 12. *Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;***
- 13. *Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.***
- 14. *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.***
- 15. *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.***
- 16. *Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.***

Some commentators have pointed out that Paul's comments in Romans 12 closely resemble his thoughts in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. J.A.T. Robinson in his work 'Wrestling with Romans' writes (page 135), 'The logic is that of 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, from the fact of the body of Christ (12: 4 and 5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27), to the diversity of ministry within it (12: 6 to 8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30), to the absolute and over-riding requirement of love (12: 9 to 21; 1 Corinthians 13)'.

Love (from the Greek, 'agape') is now dominant in what the Apostle wrote. Thus far in Romans all instances of agape have been (1) to the love of God demonstrated by the sacrifice of His Son (5:8), (2) love poured out into our hearts (5:5), and (3) love refusing to let us go (8: 35 and 39). But from chapter 12 Paul concentrated on agape as the basis of Christian discipleship.

Romans chapters 12 to 15 constitute a sustained exhortation to let love govern and dominate all relationships, and pervade every group of Christian brethren. This seems clear from his use of the words *“one another”*, three times in verses 10 and 16, *“brotherly love”* (philadelphia) in verse 10, and *“God’s people”* in verse 13. The Apostle’s comments are not a series of unrelated exhortations, but a succession of imperatives to make up his whole portrayal of love. There seem to be twelve components, or aspects of love.

1. Sincerity. *“Love must be sincere”* (12:9). *“Sincere”* is a translation of ‘anypokritos’ which means literally ‘without hypocrisy’. Hypocrisy is really pretence and insincerity, and cannot be included in the meaning and practice of love. Love and hypocrisy must exclude each other. Pretence cannot have any part of love or be included in love, as pretence was in Judas’s betrayal of Jesus with a kiss, a greeting which should be a token or demonstration of true and sincere love (Luke 22:48).

Sincerity is an essential attribute of a believer, but it must also be combined with truth. Jesus said so in John 4:23,24, *“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is a spirit, and his worshippers must worship the Father in spirit and in truth”*. Sincerity without truth will be to no avail and may even lead to error and disaster, as was the case in medieval times when medical practitioners sincerely believed that patients should be bled in order to be healed, whereas it was often the case that patients needed their blood supply to be maintained to help them regain health. The medical practitioners were sincere, but their sincerity was based on inadequate knowledge and error.

2. Discernment. *“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good”* (12:9). It may come as a surprise that the exhortation to love is followed by the command, *“Hate what is evil”*. But we should not be surprised, because Christian love for God and Jesus should be so strong that it hates and thus rejects everything that is incompatible with the Christian’s love for the Father and the Son. In the original Greek, both verbs are strong. ‘Apostygeo’ (unique in the New Testament) expresses an aversion, an abhorrence and even a *“loathing”* (as in the REB), while the *“clinging”* of love to what is good, (kollao)

expresses a close bonding and strong adherence, likened to that which literal glue has with physical substances and objects. The traditional saying 'Love is blind' should not apply to the Christian. He or she must clearly discern between good and evil, and not be led astray by subtle and persuasive argument to say, do and even think what the Scriptures have told us is morally and spiritually wrong.

3. Affection. *"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love"* (12:10). Paul used two family-related words in this section. *"Be devoted"* is a translation of the Greek word 'philostorgos' which describes our natural affection for our relatives, in particular the love of a parent for his or her child. The second word is 'philadelphia', meaning *"brotherly love"*, denoting the love of brothers and sisters for one another. In doing this, Paul applied these words to the warm and loving affection which should exist between members of the family of God.

4. Honour. *"Honour one another above yourselves"* (12:10). Love in the family of God should be expressed not only in natural affection, but in mutual honour. We should, as in Philippians 2:3, *"esteem others more highly than yourself"* (REB), and perhaps even *"outdo one another in showing honour"* (RSV). The Apostle meant that believers should give to one another the highest honour in Christian love without any grudging or reservations.

5. Enthusiasm. *"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord"* (12:11). Paul gave the Christians in Rome the exhortation not to *"be lazy"* (literal translation) in zeal, but their zeal must be according to knowledge as he had written in 10:2. He exhorted the Romans to be *"aglow with the Spirit"*, as in the RSV and the REB, indicating a disposition of liveliness and enthusiasm. The additional words *"serving the Lord"* were probably intended by Paul as a control or check, so that the believer's enthusiasm would not be unbridled or displayed in such a way as to bring ridicule or scorn upon the Christian Gospel message.

6. Patience. *"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer"* (12:12). With these three of our Christian experiences in life, namely, hope, affliction and prayers to God, the Apostle drew his readers' attention to the Christian

expectation of the Lord's return and the glory to follow, as he wrote in 5:2 and 8:24. But our hope, which brings us joy, also needs patience, because in the meantime, in our Christian walk, we may encounter difficulties and perhaps tribulation, which we must endure with patience, and persevere in prayer for strength and comfort during such times.

7. Generosity. *"Share with God's people who are in need"* (12:13). The Greek word for *"share"* is 'koinoneo', which can mean either to share in people's needs and sufferings, or to share our resources with them. It is a reminder here of the 'koinonia' in the early church in Jerusalem, where the members *"had everything in common"* (Acts 2:44). They sold *"their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need"* (Acts 2:45). In these more recent times, there is not the same necessity to come to the aid of brethren who may be facing starvation and are in desperate straits, but the requirement to share with brethren their spiritual and emotional needs, where necessary or desirable, is always with us. We may also be able to assist overseas brethren with whom we are in contact, when such brethren may be facing severe trials and even persecution, to which we in Australia are thankfully not subject.

8. Hospitality. *"Practise hospitality"* (12:13). Hospitality is an expression of love. It was particularly important in the days of the early Church, when inns were few and far between, and many that existed were often unsafe and undesirable. It was necessary for Christian people to share their homes to believing travellers, and especially needful for Church leaders to do so, as mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8. Nowadays, with the availability of hotels, motels and caravan parks, there is not such a pressing need for brethren to open their homes to brethren from interstate and overseas, though many gladly and willingly do so.

9. Goodwill. *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"* (12:14). With these words, Paul anticipated his further exhortations in verses 17 to 21. 'Blessing' and 'cursing' are opposites, conveying either wishes of good or evil, either health or harm, to those with whom we are in contact. The command to bless those who persecute us is a strong challenge to our Christian love. Paul surely knew that he was

supporting and confirming the teachings of Jesus, Who had told His people to bless those who curse us (Luke 6:28), to pray for them (Luke 6:28; Matthew 5:44), and do good to them (Luke 6:27). Such conduct expresses our positive wishes for our enemies, and turns our wishes into prayer and action, and thus would be pleasing to God.

10. Sympathy. *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn”* (12:15). Our love for brethren helps us to identify with them, to enter into their experiences; be happy for them when they are happy, and share their sorrow, pain and suffering when such may come upon them. We should share brethren’s emotions sympathetically, and exercise solidarity with them in laughter or tears, and in the events of life as they come upon all of us from time to time.

11. Harmony. *“Live in harmony with one another”* (12:16). The literal rendering of the Greek is *“Think the same thing towards one another.”* The REB translates the sentence *“live in agreement with one another”*. The expression is very similar to Paul’s appeal to the Philippians to be *“like-minded”* and *“one in spirit and purpose”* (Philippians 2:2), in which the Apostle pointed out the fundamental place that our minds have in our lives. Christian believers have a renewed mind (12:2), so there should always be the same basic convictions and concerns among groups of Christians. Without these common understandings and aspirations, Christians cannot live or work together in harmony.

12. Humility. *“Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited”* (12:16). Paul wrote in condemnation of pride, and was probably referring in this context to snobbery, a particular manifestation of pride. Snobbish people are obsessed with social status, with the division of society into upper and lower classes, or distinctions of tribe and caste, leading to the class or group of people with whom snobbish people wish to associate. Such an attitude and such conduct are contrary to the teachings of Jesus, who on earth associated freely and naturally with social rejects, and called on His followers to do the same with equal freedom and naturalness. J.B. Phillips expressed this well in his translation, *“Never be condescending, but make real friends with the poor”*.

In this section, Paul gave a comprehensive account of Christian love, as he also did in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is sincere, discerning, affectionate and respectful. It is enthusiastic, patient, generous, hospitable and also benevolent and sympathetic. It is identified by harmony and humility among true and sincere brethren. Christian groups of believers would be happy communities if all loved one another to such an extent as Paul encouraged us to do.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO ENEMIES

Romans 12: 17 to 21

Service, Not Retaliation

Romans 12: 17 to 21

- 17. *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.***
- 18. *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.***
- 19. *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.***
- 20. *Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.'***
- 21. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

When our minds are renewed by God's mercy as a result of our acceptance by faith of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, all our relationships become transformed.

We offer our bodies, our physical and mental abilities in service to God (12: 1 and 2), we develop a sober and balanced self-image (12: 3 to 8), and we love one another in the Christian community (12: 9 to 16).

But we must also serve our enemies (12: 17 to 21). Our enemies have already been mentioned by the Apostle as our persecutors (12:14), and in the context under consideration, they are identified as evildoers (12:17).

In this context, namely, verses 17 to 21 of Romans 12, the matter of how Christian believers should respond to unbelievers is laid down for us. Good and evil are contrasted in this context, and further mentioned in chapter 13, especially verses 3 and 4.

If we combine verse 14 of chapter 12 with verses 17 to 21, we see that four serious negative commands are featured.

- (1) Do not curse (12:14).
- (2) Do not repay anyone evil for evil (12:17).
- (3) Do not take revenge (12:19).
- (4) Do not be overcome by evil (12:21).

These four commands that Paul gave tell us plainly that retaliation and revenge are forbidden to the followers of Jesus Christ. The Lord never retaliated in either word or deed. The Apostle Peter wrote, *“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he trusted himself to him who judges justly”*. (1 Peter 2:23). Our inclination as fallen human beings is to get even with someone who has offended or even harmed us; to respond in kind with similar severity, to return the equivalent of the same coin as we have received. But Jesus set the opposite as an example, and His chosen apostles and disciples told us not to do these things, but instead to imitate Jesus.

There is, however, a place for the punishment of evildoers in the secular law courts, as we will see in the next chapter, Romans 13, in which Paul wrote that the authorities that exist have been established by God (13:1). They are God’s servants *“to bring punishment on the wrongdoer”* (13:4). More detailed discussion on these words of Paul will follow in the comments on chapter 13. In our personal conduct we must not try to even the score by retaliation, that is, by injuring or harming any person or persons who have injured or harmed us. Non-retaliation was an early feature of Christian ethics (1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9), based on the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:39; Luke 6:27), and was (and is) in harmony with Old Testament Scripture (Proverbs 20:22; 24:29).

The Christian code of conduct, however, is not totally negative. Each of Paul’s four negative commands was counter-balanced by a positive instruction: (1) we are not to curse but to bless (12:14); (2) we are not to retaliate but do what is right and live at peace (12: 17 and 18); (3) we are not to take revenge but leave this to God, and in the meantime serve our enemies

(12: 19 and 20); and (4) we must not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (12:21). These four instructions will be considered more closely.

(1) Paul's first command, *"bless and do not curse"* has already been considered in comments on verses 9 to 16, and earlier in this section on chapter 12.

(2) Paul's second command began, *"Do not repay anyone evil for evil"*. Instead we must *"be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"* (12:17). J.B. Phillips translated this sentence as *"See that your public behaviour is above criticism"*. What Paul said is that it is insufficient simply to refrain from evil-doing, we must also be seen to be doing good. Paul also added a further comment on retaliation by writing, *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone"* (12:18). To refuse to pay evil with more evil is to refuse to inflame a quarrel. This is praiseworthy, but it is not enough. We must be positive peacemakers, as Jesus said in Matthew 5:9. But such efforts may not always be successful, which is why the Apostle said, *"if it is possible"* and *"as far as it depends on you"*, because sometimes others may not be willing to live at peace with us, or will lay down specific conditions of peace and reconciliation that are morally and ethically unacceptable to us as Christian believers.

(3) Paul's third command *"Do not take revenge, my friends"* (12:19). To this prohibition, Paul gave two positive counterparts. The first was *"but leave room for God's wrath"*. The Greek sentence translated literally is *"give place to wrath"*, which has led some commentators to think that the wrath refers either to the evildoer or the injured party, that is, we should give in to the evildoer or the injured party, or let the evil pass without taking revenge. But the context says otherwise, *"It is mine to avenge, I will repay, says the Lord"* (12:19). The reference is clearly to God's wrath, about which Paul wrote earlier in 5:9. The RSV renders the clause *"leave it to the wrath of God"*.

The Greek word for *"avenge"* is *'ekdikesis'*, which means 'punishment', and corresponds to the verb used earlier in verse 19, *"do not take revenge"*. The verb *"repay"* (I will repay) is used of God's judgment, as in Deuteronomy 32:35, and also in Matthew 16:27 in which Jesus said that *"the Son of Man ... will reward each person according to what he has done"*.

Jesus' words were prophetic, and refer to the future age when Jesus will be reigning as God's rightful King over all the earth, and will be in complete control with full power and authority given to Him by God (Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Thus Paul's message is clear. He told his readers, including ourselves, that the two activities prohibited to us, namely, retaliation and punishment, belong to God. The judging and repayment of evil are God's prerogatives, not ours. We are to *"leave it to the wrath of God"*, which is expressed for the present through the secular state's administration of justice, because the magistrate or ruler is *"God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer"* (13:4), and which will be finally expressed in the age to come on *"the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed"* (2:5).

The second counterpart to the command not to take revenge was, and is, to serve our enemy. *"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"* (12:20). These words are also stated in Proverbs 25:21. It is also said in the Old Testament that God will *"rain fiery coals"* on the wicked (Psalm 11:6; 140:10). The reference to heaping *"burning coals"* on the enemy's head is symbolic. We are exhorted to love and serve our enemies according to their needs, and to do good to them. The *"coals of fire"* symbolise the effect our actions will have on our enemies, to shame our enemies into repentance and friendship. Our actions which are intended to heal and not to hurt, have the intention to bring about friendship and not to alienate anyone.

The expression *"coals of fire"* probably means that the unexpected response of good instead of evil would have the effect of bringing about shame and a change of attitude, so that the enemy would realise that the believer had no desire to bear malice, and therefore the enemy would experience a sense of apology and reconciliation towards the believer. The LORD God acts on this principle, and designs that His goodness, mercy and grace will lead people to repentance (2:4). In this context we are reminded of Proverbs 15:1, *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"*.

Paul drew an important distinction between our duty as believers to love and serve the evildoer, and the duty of the state's servants as God's agents to bring evildoers to the courts

for trial and possible conviction and punishment. These two duties are not incompatible, and draw our attention to Jesus' trials and His sacrifice. As was said earlier, *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate"*, but *"entrusted himself to him who judges justly"*, in confidence that God's justice will always prevail (1 Peter 2:23; Psalm 37:5).

(4) The fourth command, a contrast of good and evil, was a summary of Paul's whole argument and the climax of chapter 12. *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (12:21).

In all of these four of life's possible situations, we must not remain neutral or detached, or try to look the other way or sit on the fence, we must respond positively. If we curse, repay evil for evil, or take revenge, we will have given in to evil, and been defeated or, as J.B. Phillips said, *"over-powered"* by it. We should refuse to retaliate or *"take the offensive"* (J.B. Phillips), and practise the opposites of revenge. We must bless our persecutors (12:14); we must do good and be seen to be doing good (12:17); we must be active in peacemaking and peacekeeping (12:18); we must leave all judgment to God (12:19); and we must love and serve our enemies with the object of winning them over to a better state of mind and attitude (12:20).

In all of these ways we will *"overcome evil with good"*. To repay evil with evil is to be overcome or overpowered by it; to repay good for evil is to overcome evil with good. To do the latter is the way of the new commandment and the way of love.

Concluding Comments

Within communities or groups of committed Christian believers, any disputes of a serious nature should not arise. But in the event that such should happen, the Apostle's advice to the Corinthian brethren should be followed.

"If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?"

But instead, one brother goes to law against another, and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers” (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).

But if a legal problem or infringement involving a Christian should occur, the Scriptures do not prevent the Christian from invoking the law of the land to seek justice for some legal infringement. We know from 1 Peter 2:14 that this is one of the duties of governments and their appointed magistrates, and such legal action is available for legitimate use by Christians.

The Lord Jesus did not give up His rights as a citizen, nor did Paul when he was unjustly imprisoned, and neither are we required to give up our legal rights (John 18:23; Acts 16:37; 22:23-29; 25:10-12).

The basic purpose of the Apostle’s instructions in 12: 17 to 21 was to forbid Christians from taking vengeance themselves, and on their own behalf, and failing to leave the taking of vengeance to God or His ordained worldly governments. Paul wrote, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord”* (12:19). As was said earlier, these words are a reference to Deuteronomy 32:35, which convey the meaning that it is not right for humans to usurp or try to usurp the place and prerogative of God in exacting vengeance for evil actions.

We can nevertheless be assured of justice although we are not to take vengeance for wrong done to us. If vengeance is necessary, God will exact it, so we can safely leave the matter with Him. We have also the comfort of many promises which tell us that God’s people will in due time be vindicated (Revelation 6:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:6).

The principles laid down in this section (12: 17 to 21) are some of the jewels of the Christian religion. They are not to be found in the general conduct of the world, nor in other religions, but were brought to light by the coming of the gospel message in the person of Jesus Christ.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE Romans 13: 1 to 7

Responsible Citizenship

In chapter 12 Paul made clear our four Christian relationships: to God (12: 1 and 2); to ourselves (12: 3 to 8); to one another (12: 9 to 16); and to our enemies (12: 17 to 21). In chapter 13 Paul expounded three more relationships: to the state, that is, the secular government (13: 1 to 7); to the Law (13: 8 to 10); and to the Lord's return (13: 11 to 14).

The identity of the *"authorities"* (Greek 'exousiai') in 13:1 has given rise to debate among theologians for decades. Some have held that 'exousiai' has a double reference, to the state and the civil powers, and also to angelic beings which stand behind the human powers and work through them. I do not agree, however, that Paul intended 'exousiai' to have this twofold application.

In the first place, it is certainly true that Paul believed in superhuman principalities and powers, and wrote of their overthrow by Christ's sacrifice, but he also wrote of their continuing opposition to God and His people (Ephesians 6:11; Romans 8:37). Being in opposition to God, the angelic powers cannot in any way be supportive of the civil authorities, because God has established the civil authorities *"to bring punishment on the wrongdoer"* (13:4) *"as God's servant"* (13:4), and believers are instructed to submit to them (13:1).

In the second place, although some theologians have attributed Jesus' crucifixion, at least in part, to the influence of angelic powers, the Scriptures do not support such an assertion. Jesus' crucifixion is always attributed to human powers and authorities.

In the third place, the meaning of 'exousiai' must be determined by its context in Romans 13, in which all people are required to submit to these *"authorities"*. Nowhere in the Scriptures are Christian believers said to be under the *"principalities and powers"* mentioned by Paul in Ephesians chapter 6. The

situation for believers is the other way around, because the principalities and powers, that is, supernatural agencies such as the fallen angels, are subject to us because we are allied with Christ, and they are subject to Him (Ephesians 1:10; 2:4; 1 Peter 3:22). Therefore it follows that the expression "*the governing authorities*" in 13:1 refers to the state and its official representatives and not to angelic powers.

Christian conformity to secular authority involves relations between church and state which have continued to be controversial throughout the Gospel Age. Theologians and historians have identified four main models.

1. Erastianism - the state in control of the church (named after Thomas Erastus [1524-83]).
2. Theocracy - the church in control of the state.
3. Constantinianism - a compromise in which the state grants favour to the church, and the church co-operates with the state to retain its power.
4. Partnership - church and state recognise each other's God-given responsibilities and collaborate in a constructive relationship.

The fourth model seems to be the closest to that which Paul had in mind in Romans chapter 13.

Church and state in society have different functions and responsibilities, and Christians have duties to God and the state, as indicated by Jesus' words in Mark 12:17, "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's*". In Romans 13 Paul enlarged on the state's function as decreed by God, and on the responsibility of Christian people in relation to the state's function. Paul did not expound any model or theory of the relations between church and state, and concentrated on personal citizenship.

In Paul's day, there were no Christian authorities as exemplified by church hierarchies that developed later. The authorities were Roman or Jewish, both of which were unfriendly and even hostile to the Christian Church. But Paul wrote of the authorities as having been established by God, Who required Christians to submit to and co-operate with them, and Who still requires us to do so.

Paul would have inherited a tradition from the Old Testament that God is in control of human kingdoms *“and gives them to anyone he wishes”* (Daniel 4:17,25,32), and that by His wisdom *“kings reign ... and princes govern”* (Proverbs 8:15).

Paul may have had in mind the constant disturbances, because of which Emperor Claudius (reigned 41 to 54 AD) *“ordered all the Jews to leave Rome”* (Acts 18:2), and of which Suetonius (75 to 160 AD) wrote, in his ‘Life of Claudius’; disturbances which had happened ‘at the instigation of Chrestus’. We do not know any details of this unrest in Rome, or whether there was open conflict between traditional Jews and Christians, so it would be unwise to speculate about the situation.

The Authority Of The State

Romans 13: 1 to 3

- 1. *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.***
- 2. *Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.***
- 3. *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.***

Paul began this section with a command, *“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities”* (13:1). The reason for this command is that the state’s authority is derived from God, and the Apostle declared this three times:

- (1) *“There is no authority except that which God has established”* (13:1);**
- (2) *“The authorities that exist have been established by God”* (13:1);**
- (3) *“Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted”* (13:2).**

So, as Paul wrote, the state is a divinely-approved institution, and has been allowed to have civil authority, and therefore Christians must not be anarchists or rebels against the state.

Paul's commands have a general application, but we need caution in our response and attitude to them. There were wicked and despotic rulers in New Testament times (such as Herod, Caligula, Nero and Domitian), and there have been and still are evil despots in our times (such as Hitler, Stalin, Amin and Saddam). We surely ought not to think that these tyrants were appointed by God, or that He is responsible for their behaviour, and that their authority must be accepted without any resistance. There is good reason that we ought to understand from Paul's words that in general terms all human authority is derived from God's authority, and we must take care that we behave responsibly and in accordance with our Christian knowledge and consciences. We remember Jesus' words to Pilate, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above"* (John 19:11). Pilate's authority had been delegated to him by God, but he misused his authority to permit Jesus to be crucified in spite of Jesus' innocence.

Paul called for submission to the state, and warned against rebellion, since rebels are setting themselves *"against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves"* (13:2). He continued, *"For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you"* (13:3). This is really a rather idealistic statement, because Paul knew from his experiences that it was not, and is not, always true that rulers punish wrongdoers and commend those who do good.

Paul had experienced some benefits from Roman authorities, but also had to appeal to Caesar because the authorities who put him on trial were not justified in their actions and deliberations (Acts 25:11). So, in reality, in saying that rulers punish wrongdoers and commend those who do good, Paul was stating the desired ideals rather than the human reality.

But it must be acknowledged that Paul laid down the requirement of submission and the warning against rebellion in universal terms. This being the case, these statements of Paul

have often been misapplied by tyrannical and oppressive regimes in support of their demands of unconditional obedience to their despotic governments. The comments of Oscar Cullmann in his work 'The State in the New Testament' (1957, pages 55-57) are particularly appropriate here. 'Few sayings in the New Testament have suffered as much misuse as this one. As soon as Christians, out of loyalty to the gospel of Jesus, offer resistance to a State's totalitarian claim, the representatives of that State, or their collaborationist theological advisers, are accustomed to appeal to this saying of Paul, as if Christians are here commanded to endorse and thus to abet all the crimes of a totalitarian State. But, as the context shows, there can be no question here of an unconditional and uncritical subjection to any and every demand of the State.'

As we read Paul's words in this context, can it be shown that Paul's demand for submission to the state is not absolute? Paul wrote that the authority of rulers is derived from God. But what is the Christian to do if the authorities reverse their duty as given by God and commend those who do evil and punish those who do good? With careful consideration the principle, as exemplified in Scripture, is clear. Christians are to submit up to the point where obedience to the state would necessitate disobedience to God. If the state should demand what God has forbidden, or should forbid what God has commanded, then the Christian's duty is to resist and not submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God. We have Peter's words in support of such resistance and disobedience, "*We must obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). Such action is civil disobedience, that is, disobedience to a human command, because it is contrary to God's command.

There are notable examples of civil disobedience in Scripture. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill newborn boys, they refused to obey. "*The midwives ... feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live*" (Exodus 1:17). When King Nebuchadnezzar commanded that all his subjects had to fall down and worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey (Daniel 3). When King Darius decreed that for thirty days nobody should pray "*to any god or man*" except himself, Daniel refused to obey (Daniel 6). When the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey (Acts 4:18).

In each case, civil disobedience involved great personal risk, perhaps loss of life, but the purpose in each case was to demonstrate submission to God, which took precedence over submission to human commands.

In considering Paul's words, we are in a position to draw comparisons with Revelation 13, which was written by John the Apostle about thirty years after Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans. When John recorded his inspired prophecies, the systematic persecutions had begun under the Roman Emperor Domitian. The authority in Revelation 13 is not the servant of God, but the ally of Satan who has given his authority to the persecuting state, contrary to God's will which God has nevertheless permitted for a limited time.

So in summary, we as Christians are to submit to the state's God-given authority when it functions in accordance with God's commands. But we are to resist and if necessary disobey if or when the state's commands conflict with God's commands.

The Service And Function Of The State

Romans 13: 4 to 7

- 4. *For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practises evil.***
- 5. *Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.***
- 6. *For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.***
- 7. *Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.***

Paul made it clear that the state's authority is given with a view to its service and function. He said three times that the state has authority from God, and now in this context he said, again three times, that the state's service and function are from God. Paul wrote:

- (1) *"For he is God's servant to do you good" (13:4);*
- (2) *"He is God's servant, an agent of wrath, to bring punishment"(13:4);*
- (3) *"The authorities are God's servants"(13:6).*

So, Paul clearly said, the state's authority and its service and function are all given to it by God. In writing about the service and function of the state, Paul used the same word 'diakonoï' that he used elsewhere when writing about the ministers of the Church. 'Diakonia' can have a wider meaning than servants of the Church, such as pastors, teachers, evangelists and administrators. It can also apply to servants of the state, such as legislators, civil servants, magistrates, police and taxation officials, because, as Paul said, they are God's servants to do us good, and bring punishment on evil-doers.

As we reflect on these statements that Paul made, we see that God has entrusted to the state the task of doing good, that is the bringing about of public benefit to the community, and the punishment of anti-social behaviour and wrong-doing. This concern with good and evil is a recurring theme throughout Romans 12 and 13.

Paul had already said to his readers to reject whatever is evil and hold to what is good (12:9), to repay no-one evil for evil but rather be active in doing good (12:17), and not to be overcome with evil but to overcome evil with good (12:21). Then, in this section of his letter, he described the function of the state in relation to good and evil. *"Do what is right, and he will commend you" (13:3). "For he is God's servant to do you good" (13:4). But, on the other hand, "if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (13:4).*

The Apostle Peter said the same in his first letter, *"governors are sent by him (presumably the Emperor at that time) to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right" (1 Peter 2:14).* So the state's functions are basically to promote and commend the doing of good, and to deter and punish the doing of evil.

So, for Christian believers, *"It is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience"* (13:5). By *"conscience"* it seems that the Apostle meant the recognition of the state's God-given function of doing good and rejecting evil, by which principles the Christian strives to live his or her life continually day by day.

The Apostle did not say what kind of sanctions and penalties the state might employ, other than he *"does not bear the sword for nothing"* (13:4). The word for sword is 'machaira' and was used to indicate death in 8:35, and the sword in Paul's day was used as an instrument of execution (Acts 12:2; Revelation 13:10). The sword thus symbolised the power of life and death which secular rulers and authorities had at their disposal. Paul may well have meant that for him, as God's chosen Apostle, the sword was a symbol of capital punishment, as God had said, *"And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God has God made man"* (Genesis 9:5,6). The taking of human life is such a terrible and heinous offence that it surely merits the forfeiture of the murderer's life. The issue of capital punishment does not need to be discussed further in these notes other than to say that God's requirement in Genesis 9:5 and 6 has not been renounced or superseded, and that governments, in rejecting and excluding capital punishment, are disregarding what God has said in His holy word.

When the state punishes evildoers, it functions as *"the servant of God to execute his wrath upon them"* (13:4; RSV). However, what the state does and how it does it, are not matters that are really our concern, other than to say that Christians are not to take matters into their own hands and are not to take revenge, *but "leave room for God's wrath"* (12:19), since justice belongs to Him, and He will punish evil. God's wrath will one day fall on the impenitent (2:5), and its influence can now be seen in the deterioration of the social order (1:18), but for the present and in the meantime, God's wrath is permitted by Him to operate through the processes of law enforcement and the administration of civil justice. The punishment of evil is God's prerogative, and during the present Gospel Age He permits it to be accomplished by the secular courts of law.

In determining our attitude as Christians to the function of the state and the responsibility of the individual, we understand that we are to live in accordance with love rather than justice, instead of justice rather than love.

This is not to set love and justice against each other as if they are opposites or alternatives, because they do not exclude each other. Even in loving and serving our enemies, we should still be concerned about what is right, but must leave such matters to God, as Jesus did (1 Peter 2:23).

The state is authorised to punish evil, but it is also exhorted to promote and reward goodness. The latter function of the state is much neglected today. The state, being impersonal in nature, tends to be better at punishing than rewarding, better at enforcement than encouraging goodness and service. Certainly there are civil awards for outstanding merit in many areas of human endeavour (such as the Nobel Prizes), but many humble citizens, who have made notable contributions to the public good, do not receive recognition or acknowledgement of their achievements. This matter is really somewhat controversial, so discussion of it can be left for a commentary on matters of social welfare and other community issues that should concern Christians.

Paul concluded this section of his letter with a reference to the raising and payment of taxes. He wrote, *"This is also why you pay taxes: the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing"* (13:6). The payment of taxes is treated with reluctance or an impost to be avoided by some, but this should not be the case, because there are services and benefits that the state provides, and these must be paid for. Christians must accept this situation with good grace, and accept this liability to pay taxes without complaint, and give proper regard to the officials and personnel who assess and apply the payments due. The great Apostle wrote, *"Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour"* (13:7). Christians should willingly submit to the state's authority, respect its representatives, pay its taxes, and also pray for its welfare; and encourage it to fulfil its God-appointed function; and, if appropriate, participate in its work of preserving law and order and supporting those in need of help and support.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

LOVE IS THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

Romans 13: 8 to 14

Introductory Comments

This section in Paul's letter is placed between the command to love our enemy (12:20) and the command to love our neighbour (13:9). The section is devoted to the Christian's relationship to the state, and the state's primary concern is justice rather than love.

But, as has been commented previously, justice need not be incompatible with love, because justice can be accomplished by allowing for mercy, which means that in certain circumstances, the full penalty for failure or for wrongdoing may not be enforced, and the guilty party may receive a lighter penalty or even receive no penalty at all. God's love for His believing people is like this.

All people, including ourselves and other Christian people, are in fact sinners and guilty before God, as the Apostle had already said in his letter. This means that everyone is guilty and under sentence of death and no-one can escape. But God's love is such that He has provided the way for all members of the human race to have their guilt and the penalty of death taken away, and this way is through belief in Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made, because God has *"laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6).

This being the case, the penalty of death because of sin has been paid in full by Jesus Christ for everyone. But this most gracious provision by God does not operate automatically, because people, including ourselves, are still sinners and still sinning day by day. So what God has done is to require people to have faith, that is, to believe in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, to repent of their sins and sinful condition, confess this decision, and determine to lead a new life, and God will grant them mercy and grace, justify them and thus consider them righteous and not guilty before Him, and raise them to eternal life.

During this present Gospel Age, only a relatively small number of people have believed in and through Jesus Christ, so it remains for the salvation of the whole human race to be accomplished in the future, when all the dead will be raised to life again, and will have the opportunity in the age to come to believe and so gain eternal life by God's mercy and grace.

We should endeavour to make these blessings known to the world in general, and continue to strive to show love to the brethren and our fellow human beings, as the Apostle wrote in the three verses under consideration (13: 8 to 10), and said so three times. He may well have had in mind Leviticus 19:18, *"Love your neighbour as yourself"*.

Love Is a Debt We Cannot Fully Repay

Love is really a debt that all Christians share and must strive to pay. We are in debt to the unbelieving world to make the Gospel known to its people (1:14); we are in debt to the LORD's Holy Spirit to live a holy life (8:12); and we are in debt to the state to pay our taxes (13:6). The reference to debt marks the transition between verses 7 and 8 in this section. Paul wrote, *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another"* (13:8). We should be conscientious in paying our bills and meeting our taxation obligations, but there is one debt which will always remain outstanding which we never can fully repay, and that is our debt of love to one another and to everyone, even our enemies (12: 17 to 21). I understand that Paul meant that we must love our neighbour as the Scripture commands, even though we will always fail to have and display the love that is required of us, and even though *"that perpetual debt of love"* (J.B. Phillips) will remain.

Love Is The Fulfilment Of The Law

Romans 13: 8 to 10

8. *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*
9. *For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery', 'You shall not murder', 'You shall not steal', 'You shall not bear false witness', 'You shall not covet', and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.*

10. Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Paul continued in this section of chapter 13 with these words, *“for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law”* (13:8). Therefore, if we love our neighbour, we may be said to have fulfilled the Law, even though we are unable to pay our debt of love fully and sufficiently.

It is a fact that the Lord Jesus by His sacrifice has taken away the Mosaic Law, as we are told in Colossians 2:14, and in comprehensive detail in Hebrews chapters 8, 9 and 10. So why should we concern ourselves about fulfilling the Law? The Law was important to Paul because he was raised and taught to believe it and live by it, and was *“accordingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”* (Galatians 1:14), and was *“breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord”* (Acts 9:1), and as a result *“beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it”* (Galatians 1:13), as he wrote, and as it was written about him.

Some early Christians believed that the Law was still in force, as we read in Acts 15 and Galatians 2, but the New Testament Scriptures consistently affirm that the Law was abolished and no longer applied to believing Christians (2 Corinthians 3:13; Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:13-17).

However, some Christian people today believe that the Law is still in force and that we must obey it, while some believe that the Mosaic Law was divided into two parts, namely moral and ceremonial, and that the moral law, consisting of the ten commandments, still remains to be obeyed, while the ceremonial law, consisting of all the sacrifices, ritual and ceremonial requirements was the part of the Law to be blotted out and abolished and *“nailed to his cross”*.

Undoubtedly some of the commandments of the Mosaic Law referred to morals, and some commandments referred to ceremonials, but the division of the Law into two parts is an innovation of some Christians, and cannot be justified by reference to Scripture. No such division was intimated when the Law was given, and the Lord Jesus regarded the Law as one united Covenant.

In His Sermon on the Mount He set all commandments of the old Law aside, and gave superior commands to replace them (Matthew 5:21,27,31,33,38,43). Certainly the Law Covenant was *“holy, righteous and good”* (Romans 7:12), but it could never bring about life and salvation, because no-one (other than the Lord Jesus) could obey it fully and completely, and so gain the life that was promised (Leviticus 18:5).

Sinners, which includes every human being except the Lord Jesus, could never attain righteousness under the Law, for had that been possible for righteousness to be attained under the Law, the death of Christ would have been in vain (Galatians 2:21; Romans 8: 3 and 4). It was necessary for Christ, the sinless One, to die so that the Law Covenant, which was truly a hindrance and an obstacle, and *“contrary to us”*, might be removed to make way for the new law, the New Covenant, (Hebrews 10:9) under which everyone who believes, both now and in the age to come, might be reconciled and gain eternal life. A fuller discussion of these matters can be found in the booklet ‘Sabbath Observance’.

God has done for us that which we could never do by ourselves in that Christ has taken away God’s exclusive dealings with the nation of Israel, and taken away the bondage of the Mosaic Law, and has established a new arrangement, the New Covenant, by means of which all people may come to Him through Jesus Christ by faith, and live according to love, love of God and love of our fellow human beings.

In 13:8 Paul wrote that love of one’s fellow human beings is fulfilment of the Law. I consider that Paul wrote this to make clear to his readers that they will fulfil the Law if they have love for their fellow human beings, because in fact no-one has to fulfil any requirements of the Mosaic Law any more because it has been abolished, and has been superseded and replaced by the Christian commitment of love.

Paul wrote in considerable detail in this context by quoting the prohibitions of the Law; *“Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal and do not covet”* (13:9). The command *“Do not bear false witness”*, as in the KJV, is omitted by the most ancient manuscripts, but there seems no good reason why Paul left it out. Paul added, *“and whatever other commandment there may be”* and followed this by declaring that all of them

“are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbour as yourself” as Jesus had said previously (Matthew 22:39), and Paul had also written in Galatians 5:14.

Paul said that *“love does no harm to its neighbour”* (13:10), meaning that love should always strive to serve our neighbour’s highest good, a more positive policy than the negative commands of the Law, which were quoted by Paul.

The Greek word ‘agape’ means seeking the benefit of the other party. We will do this if we love our neighbours as we do ourselves, that is, we will always seek our neighbours’ good rather than ignoring them, or in failing to help them when help may be needed. We will not be able to do this perfectly, but we must continue to try to do this and so fulfil our debt to our love for God and our fellow human beings, and by doing so we are told that God will be merciful to us and extend to us His unmerited favour.

Our Relationship To The Time We Live In

Romans 13: 11 to 14

- 11. *And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.***
- 12. *The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.***
- 13. *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.***
- 14. *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.***

The Apostle began this section with the words, *“And do this”*, referring, in all probability, to the command to love our neighbour (13: 8 to 10), and to his instructions to submit to the state and pay our taxes (13: 1 to 7). Paul’s purpose in 13: 11 to 14 seems to have been to lay a foundation now and in the future for Christian conduct. He urged his readers to realise what the time was, and is, and for them and us, to live in keeping with this realisation.

The Bible teaches that there are three dispensations or world orders since creation, namely:

1. The former Antediluvian Age;
2. The present order of things consisting of the Patriarchal Age, the Jewish Age and the present Gospel Age; and
3. The future Kingdom Age.

Paul referred to *“the present time”* meaning the time in God’s plan when *“the hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber”* (13:11). He continued that this is so *“because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”* (13:11). Salvation here is surely a comprehensive term, including in it our justification, our sanctification and our future glorification.

Our future and full salvation seem to be what the Apostle had in mind in chapter 8, verses 21 to 24, glory and final adoption as God’s children. The fulfilment of our inheritance is nearer now than *“when we were converted”* (J.B. Phillips). *“The night is nearly over, the day is almost here”* (13:12) wrote the Apostle. *“The day”* surely means the time when Christ returns, so what did Paul have in mind, considering that nearly two thousand years have passed since he wrote those words?

It is unlikely that Paul meant that the end of this order of things was about to take place, because he would have known that Jesus said He did not know this time (Mark 13:32), the apostles said the same (1 Thessalonians 5:1; Acts 1:6), and the apostles also knew that worldwide evangelisation had to take place (Mark 13:10); and the great apostasy had to arise first (2 Thessalonians 2:1). The apostles knew that the Kingdom of God was proclaimed by Jesus and it began with Him; they were witnesses to His death and resurrection; His ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit *“shed forth”* to be available to all people.

These had all taken place, or had begun to take place, and they knew that there was nothing else of major significance on God’s calendar before the Lord Jesus’ return. So Paul wrote that we were (and now are still) living in *“the last days”* (Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 10:11). So in this sense, Christ is coming *“soon”* (16:20; Revelation 22:7,12,20), and our task is to remain watchful because we do not know the time (Mark 13:35) when the Lord will fulfil his promise to return (John 14:3).

What Should Be Appropriate To The Time?

Paul wrote that Christians should understand the time, and that we must behave in accordance with our understanding. He issued three appeals. The first two were expressed in the first person plural, so that he included himself; *“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness”*, *“Let us behave decently”* whereas the third appeal was expressed in the second person plural and was directed specifically to his readers; *“Rather clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ”*. All three appeals are double sentences containing positive and negative aspects of each appeal.

The first appeal features the metaphor of night and day, darkness and light. It concerns what we should put on, that is, how we should be clothed. *“So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light”* (13:12). The metaphor tells us that we must wake up, get up and get dressed. We must remove our night clothes, *“the deeds of darkness”* and put on suitable attire as servants and soldiers of Christ, *“the armour of light”*, for the Christian's life is not one of inactivity, but a spiritual battle to be won by faith and appropriate action.

Paul then proceeded from appropriate attire to appropriate behaviour. He wrote, *“Let us behave decently as in the daytime”* that is, in view of all around us, and refuse to do the things some people do under cover of darkness, *“not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy”* (13:13). The Christian must always exercise self-control in the areas of drink, sex and social relationships.

Paul's third appeal set before his readers the contrast, and the choice between the Lord Jesus or our fallen, self-centred nature. *“Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature”* (13:14). Paul said to the Galatians that those who are *“in Christ”* *“have clothed”* themselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27). Here in Romans, Paul said that clothing ourselves with Christ is something we must keep on doing. Paul meant that Christians must put on and wear, that is, actively display the characteristics of His teaching and example; *“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”* (Colossians 3:12).

But, as we are all aware, our fallen self-centred nature is still with us. It has not been eradicated and is still present, tempting and urging us to gratify its desires. Our instruction is not to gratify its desires, but rather “*not to think about how to*” do so, not to make any “*provision*” (RSV) for them, and be ruthless in repudiating them and putting them to death (8:13), crucifying them as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:24.

We strive to fulfil these instructions because we know by faith that the Lord Jesus will one day appear to the world, and establish God’s kingdom with Himself as God’s rightful King on David’s throne for ever, and our striving identifies us with His regal purpose.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

THE WEAK AND THE STRONG

Romans 14: 1 to 15:13

Chapters 12 and 13 of Romans emphasise the Christian's responsibility of love - to our enemies (12: 9, 14 and 17) -and to our fellow human beings; our brethren and also unbelievers (13:8).

The Christian's Relationship To Both Groups: The Weak And The Strong

Paul continued to expound at some length what it means for believers to "*walk according to love*" (14:15). His discussion concerns the relations between two groups in the Christian Church at Rome which he called "*the weak*" and "*the strong*". "*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak*" (15:1).

The weakness of which Paul wrote was not a weakness of will nor of character, but a weakness of faith (14:1), that is, indecision and lack of understanding concerning the liberty of conscience that is available and permissible to the faith of a believing Christian. The Apostle did not mean a Christian brother or sister susceptible to temptation and easily overcome by the world's enticements and allurements, and easily led astray by weakness of the flesh. He meant weakness in the confidence a Christian should have in the extent to which faith allows him or her to act or not act in the course of life's decision-making.

Can we know who were the weak and the strong in the brethren in Rome to whom Paul was writing? Commentators on Paul's letter have suggested four differing understandings concerning the identities of the weak and strong groups.

The most satisfactory understanding seems to me to be that the weak brethren were Jewish converts, because of their continuing commitment, albeit in all sincerity and

conscientiousness, to Jewish regulations concerning diet and observance of feasts and days. They would have maintained and kept the Old Testament laws about food and would have eaten only items declared clean (14: 14 and 20), that is, prohibited from the Jewish diet. They would have insisted that their meat was kosher, that is, that the animal was killed and prepared for consumption in the prescribed way, and failing assurance of this, they would have abstained from meat altogether at feasts and gatherings. They would have observed the Sabbath and all the Jewish festivals.

We understand, of course, that the Lord Jesus' sacrifice has freed everyone, including the most conscientious Jews, from all commands and requirements of the Old Testament Law. Paul understood and explained this best of any of Jesus' disciples and apostles, but his attitude to the weak was conciliatory, and he would not permit the strong to despise, condemn or in any way damage those who were weak and not fully enlightened in their conscientious exercise of faithful Christian living. Paul's conciliatory attitude was in keeping with the decree of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6-32), which was to restrain the strong and protect the consciences of the weak.

The Council clearly stated that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, which was the central theological issue at that time, yet tacitly gave Jewish Christians freedom to continue their ceremonial practices. The Council also asked Gentile Christians to abstain in certain circumstances from practices which would offend Jewish Christian consciences, the Council requesting Gentile Christians, for example, to avoid meat offered to idols and meat that was not kosher (Acts 15:19,27). The Apostle evidently followed these guidelines and made concessions in his own ministry, as we see in Acts 16:3; 21:20; Galatians 6:12; and 1 Corinthians 9:20.

This understanding of the situation described in Romans 14:1 to 15:7, and Paul's purpose in exhorting the conservative Jewish Christians and the more liberal Gentile Christians to fellowship and worship in unity together, prepares us for his eloquent words to come, especially in 15: 5 to 13. The two groups were not clearly identified, so there would surely have been some overlap. Some of the converted Jews in Rome would have been accustomed to the traditions of Judaism and would have continued to follow some or even many of them, whereas some

of them, like Paul, had developed an educated conscience and had rejoiced in their freedom in Christ. Paul certainly believed the position of the strong in faith to be correct (14: 14 and 20), and wrote always from the viewpoint of the strong, associating himself with the strong as evidenced by his words, *"We who are strong"* (15:1).

We should keep in mind that some of the Jews in Rome felt obliged to observe characteristic and distinctive Jewish customs such as dietary requirements and keeping the Sabbath. Items of diet had always distinguished the Jews from other nations and peoples, as in the case of Daniel in Daniel 1:3 and onwards. The eating of unclean food and violation of the Sabbath ranked together as the two chief features of covenant disloyalty, while strictness in both matters was then of fundamental importance in maintaining covenant faithfulness.

While the above issues were true for Jews generally and for many of the Jewish Christians of Rome, Paul insisted and made clear that questions of diet and the observance of days were non-essential matters. He wrote, *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking"* (14:17); and *"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food"* (14:20). He wrote earlier in 14: 5 and 6, *"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord"*. He also wrote to the Colossians, *"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ"* (Colossians 2:16,17).

In matters of non-essentials, such as those mentioned above, Paul did not insist on obedience to his words, nor even did he insist on agreement, as he did in his earlier chapters on the way and means of salvation. The issues mentioned in the paragraph above were, and are, *"disputable matters"* (NIV), *"doubtful points"* (NEB), *"opinions"* (RSV), issues on which it was not necessary for all Christians to agree. The lesson for us today is how we should handle conscientious differences in matters on which the Scripture is silent or equivocal, in such a way as to prevent them from disrupting Christian fellowship.

We should also take notice that in this passage Paul has blended important and fundamental theological teachings and beliefs with some relatively mundane matters. He associated and combined such matters as eating and drinking, and the observance of days and ceremonies, with the fundamental truths of the crucifixion, the resurrection, the promised return of Jesus, and the final judgment of the human race.

In the long section from 14:1 to 15:13, Paul laid down the basic principles of acceptance in Christian worship and fellowship. *“Accept him whose faith is weak”* he said first of all, *“without passing judgment on disputable matters”* (14:1).

Following this positive instruction, the Apostle proceeded to expound three negative consequences of his positive instruction. He told his readers :

- (1) that they must neither despise nor condemn the weak (14: 2 to 13);
- (2) that they must neither offend nor destroy ('ruin' as in the Diaglott) them (14: 13 to 23); and
- (3) that they must not please themselves, but follow Christ's unselfish example (15: 1 to 4).

To conclude this section, Paul called upon Jews and Gentiles to unite in love and fellowship in their worship of God (15: 5 to 13).

These instructions will now be considered in detail.

Paul's Positive Instruction

Romans 14:1

- 1. *Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.***

Paul's positive instruction consisted of two parts.

The first was *“Accept him whose faith is weak”* (14:1). The brethren in question were immature and lacking in Christian instruction, and, as Paul's argument made clear, were really mistaken in some of their beliefs. But Paul said they were not

to be ignored nor reproached, nor even at first corrected, but were to be received into Christian fellowship. The Greek word for “accept” is ‘proslambano’ and means more than simply tolerate or grudgingly agree to the presence of the weaker brethren, but means to welcome into the fellowship and into the hearts of the Christian brethren, and implies the warmth and kindness of genuine affection. The same word was used by Paul in his letter to Philemon when he told him to give Onesimus the same welcome that he would give to him, the Apostle (Philemon 17). The word was used again of the folk in Malta in their welcome to the shipwrecked company as they struggled ashore (Acts 28:2), and was also said of the Lord Jesus in His future welcome to His people in heaven (John 14:3).

An important lesson for us is that the welcome we are exhorted to give to any persons who may come to our worship services must be based on faith. Some Christian groups contend that we should welcome everybody with no conditions imposed or questions asked, because God’s love to the human race is unconditional. Certainly it is true that God’s love is unconditional, but His acceptance of people is not unconditional because acceptance by God depends on repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We need to keep this in mind when we consider the Apostle’s instruction to accept the weak (14:1) since “*God has accepted him*” (14:13), and to accept one another “*just as Christ accepted us*” (15:7).

The second part of Paul’s positive instruction was that acceptance of weaker brethren was to take place “*without passing judgment on disputable matters*” (14:1). What Paul meant was that the weak brethren must be received with a warm and genuine welcome “*without debate over his misgivings*” (REB), or “*not for the purpose of getting into quarrels about opinions*” (Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon, 1958).

We should learn from this that our worship services should not feature dogmatic argumentation, but rather calm discussion with respect for understandings and opinions with which we may disagree. In addition, brethren expressing opinions with which we disagree or find unacceptable, should not be targeted or verbally attacked and subjected to persistent negative comments which may cause resentment and discouragement.

Calm discussion should be about the subject matter, not about the people involved in the discussion.

The Negative Consequences Of Paul's Instruction

There are three main consequences . They are:

- (1) Do not despise or condemn the weak person (14: 2 to 13);
- (2) Do not offend or destroy the weak person (14: 13 to 23);
- (3) Do not please yourselves (15: 1 to 13).

(1) Do not despise or condemn the weak person

Romans 14: 2 to 13

2. *For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.*
3. *Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.*
4. *Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.*
5. *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.*
6. *He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.*
7. *For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.*
8. *For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*
9. *For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.*
10. *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

11. ***For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'***
12. ***So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.***
13. ***Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.***

Paul based his exhortation on four truths:

- (a) Accept him into your fellowship because God has accepted him (14: 2 and 3).

Paul chose dietary matters as his first instance or example of how the weak and the strong, that is, those who feel obligated and restricted in comparison to those who recognise freedom in Christ, should co-operate and behave towards one another. *"One man's faith allows him to eat everything"*, being liberated by Christ from restrictions about food, *"but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables"* (14:2).

Presumably, the one who eats only vegetables does so to ensure that he does not eat non-kosher meat. So how are these Christians to regard one another? Paul wrote, *"The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him"* (14:3).

The lesson for us is, if brethren we know, or strangers coming into our fellowship, believe in Jesus Christ and come to God through Him, we must not reject or condemn them. Who are we to reject a person whom God has accepted?

- (b) Accept him because *"Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living"* (14: 4 to 9).

Paul continued his instructions by saying that if it is inappropriate to reject someone whom God has accepted, it is also inappropriate to interfere in the relationship between a master and his servant. Paul wrote, *"Who are you to judge someone else's servant?"* (14:4). We have no business trying to come between a fellow Christian and Christ, or to make

judgments that only Christ and God can make, because *“To his own master he stands or falls”* (14:4). Another believer is not responsible to us, and we are in no way responsible for him or her.

Paul continued, *“And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand”* (14:4). If the Lord accepts him or her, who are we to make adverse judgments about such persons who have come to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul next moved on to his second instance or example of relations between the strong and the weak believers. His argument was concerned with the observance of days, probably Jewish festivals, feasts or fasts, as he mentioned in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16. He wrote, *“One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike”* (4:5). His advice was, *“Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind”* (4:5).

Paul thus left the decisions to individual believers, and clearly implied that each believer should carefully consider the matter or matters in question and reach a firm decision. When this has been done, the believer must act in harmony with his or her decision as part of Christian discipleship. *“He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord”* (14:6). He or she does so *“in honour of the Lord”* (RSV, J.B. Phillips) with the intention of pleasing the LORD and bringing honour to Him.

The same would be true of the one who believes every day alike, although Paul did not say so here. Instead, he reverted to the matter of eating meat and added the important necessity of thanksgiving. *“He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God”* (14:6).

In writing this, Paul set down two principles, namely, believers must do everything in their lives as to the LORD, and in everything give thanks to Him. He said the same in 1 Corinthians 10:30,31 and 1 Timothy 4:3,4. As believers, we receive gifts and blessings from God for which we give thanks to Him and endeavour to serve Him in our lives as best we are able.

Involvement of the Lord in our lives should apply to every situation. *“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone”* (14:7). *“If we live (that is, ‘while we live’) we live to the Lord; and if we die (that is, ‘when we die’) we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord”* (14:8) Paul was saying that everything we have and are belongs to God and the Lord Jesus, and so we must strive always to live to the honour and glory of the Father and the Son.

He said in further support of his statements, *“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living”* (14:9). Because Jesus is our Lord, we must live for Him, and because He is also the Lord of our fellow Christians, we must respect their relationship to Him and not presume to make judgments which belong only to the Lord.

(c) Accept him because he is your brother (14:10).

Paul somewhat suddenly posed two direct questions in the second person, *“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?”* (14:10).

Despising and judging our fellow Christians are unacceptable attitudes because God has accepted them, and Christ is their Lord and ours, and so we are related to one another by the strongest possible ties, the ties of belonging to the family of God. We should always bear this in mind and behave towards brethren with generosity of mind and tenderness of heart.

(d) Accept him because *“we will all stand before God’s judgment seat”* (14: 10 to 13).

We should not judge because we ourselves are being judged by the Lord (1 Peter 4:17). We remember, too, the words of our Lord Jesus, *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged”* (Matthew 7:1). The Lord Jesus was not telling us to suspend our critical faculties, because He told His hearers to *“watch out for false prophets”* (Matthew 7:15). What Jesus meant was not criticism, but judging in the sense of passing judgment or condemning. We must not do this because God is the judge and we are not. We must not presume to intrude on or take to ourselves the prerogatives of the LORD God.

In support of what he was writing, Paul quoted from Isaiah 45:23; *“as surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God”* (14:11).

Paul continued, *“So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God”* (14:12). God is judging us now, as we are told in 1 Peter 4:17 and we are doing our best to obey Him through Jesus Christ, so I am confident that in our lives and in our continuing response to His mercy and grace, we are giving account to Him by asking forgiveness daily for our failures and shortcomings in the light of our freedom from guilt by God’s merciful and gracious justification of us as His children by faith. Therefore, because God is the judge, and His faithful believers are all being judged by Him, *“let us stop passing judgment on one another”* (14:13), because if we find ourselves judging others we will be usurping God’s prerogative and authority, and surely will be bringing judgment upon ourselves.

CHRISTIAN TEACHING (continued)

THE WEAK AND THE STRONG (continued)

Negative Consequences (continued)

Revision

Previously, Paul's instructions concerning fellowship of weak and strong brethren were noted as one positive instruction consisting of two parts, and three negative consequences of that positive instruction. The negative consequences are:

- (1) Do not despise or condemn the weak person (14: 2 to 13);
- (2) Do not offend or destroy the weak person (14: 13 to 23);
- (3) Do not please yourselves (15: 1 to 13).

The first negative consequence was discussed in the previous paper under four sub-headings:

- (a) Accept a believer into your fellowship because God has accepted him (14:2,3);
- (b) Accept a believer because *"Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living"* (14:4-9);
- (c) Accept a believer because he is your brother (14:10);
- (d) Accept a believer because we will all stand before God's judgment seat (14:10-13).

The consequences (2) and (3) mentioned above will be discussed next.

(2) Do not offend or destroy the weak person

Romans 14: 13 to 23

13. *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.*
14. *I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*
15. *Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*
16. *Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;*
17. *For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*
18. *For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.*
19. *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*
20. *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offence.*
21. *It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.*
22. *Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.*
23. *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*

In his instructions concerning the relationship of the weak to the strong in faith, Paul's emphasis throughout this entire context was on the Christian responsibility of the strong towards the weak. The strong should not despise or condemn the weak, nor cause them to stumble nor destroy them. The word "destroy" seems very harsh, but further consideration will be left for now and will receive further comments and explanations in the following two theological subdivisions to follow.

Paul wrote, instead of passing judgment on one another, *“make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in your brother’s way”* (14:13). The NEB renders this passage, *“Let us therefore cease judging one another, but rather make this simple judgment”*. The judgment or decision believers are to make is to avoid putting either a hindrance or a snare in our brother’s path which would cause him to stumble and perhaps fall. Paul then continued by setting out two theological foundations for his instructions.

- (a) Welcome him because he is your brother for whom Christ died (14: 14 to 16).

Paul next explained in personal terms the dilemma which faces the strong. The dilemma consisted of two truths which seem to be in conflict with each other. The first truth was *“as one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself”* (14:14), as Paul also wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:1-5). Paul did not say he was quoting the Lord Jesus’ words, but he must have been well aware of the Lord Jesus’ controversy with the Pharisees over the clean and the unclean (Mark 7:14-23), and also of the risen Lord’s vision to Peter not to call unclean what God had declared to be clean (Acts 10:15,28).

The second truth was *“if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean”* (14:14). The reference was to ceremonial or cultural issues, and not to moral issues because Paul was quite explicit that some of our moral failings - our thoughts, words and deeds - are in themselves evil.

The dilemma facing the strong is that some foods may be regarded as both clean and unclean at the same time. On the one hand, the strong are convinced that all foods are clean, while on the other hand, the weak may be unsure or are convinced that they are not. So how should the strong behave when these two matters of conscience are in conflict?

Paul’s response was clear. Although he shared with the strong that their views were correct because the Lord Jesus endorsed them, he wrote that the strong were not to impose their views on the weak. Not only that, but the strong were to defer to the weak brother’s conscience and not violate it or cause him to violate it.

The Apostle said, *"If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love"* (14:15). He wrote the same to the Corinthians, telling them that wounding a weak brother's conscience was a *"sin against Christ"* (1 Corinthians 8:9-13), truly a most serious matter. He continued, *"Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died"* (14:15).

But what did Paul mean by *"destroy"*? What kind of destruction did Paul have in mind? Surely he could not have meant eternal destruction, because that is the prerogative of the LORD God, and Him alone (Mark 10:28). The context, speaking as it does of Christian brethren, demands a meaning much less severe than final and eternal destruction. The original Greek word 'apollymi' has a wide range of meanings from 'killing' to 'spoiling', so it may reasonably be concluded that Paul's warning to the strong was, that if they misled the weak and caused them to act against their consciences, they would seriously damage the Christian discipleship of the weak. He wrote, *"Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil"* (14:16), meaning: do not flaunt the liberty you have found in Christ to result in what would be to the detriment of the weak brethren.

(b) Welcome him because the kingdom of God is more important than food (14: 17 to 21).

The first great truth which bolsters and supports Paul's instruction to the strong for restraint is the sacrifice of Christ. Jesus was, and is strongest in faith; human beings are weak in faith, or even faithless.

The second great truth for restraint on the part of the strong is the kingdom of God. The teaching of the kingdom of God did not receive the same emphasis in Paul's teaching as it did in the teaching of Jesus, but it nevertheless occupied a prominent place (Acts 14:22; 17:7; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13). Paul's argument was, if the strong brethren insisted on their liberty in Christ to eat whatever they wanted to, they were overestimating the importance of diet, a relatively minor matter in Christian behaviour, and underestimating the importance of the kingdom of God, a central matter in the life of a Christian. Paul wrote, *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (14:17).

Paul surely meant that righteousness was to be understood as justification by faith in and through the Lord Jesus, peace as reconciliation to God and acceptance by Him, and joy as rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, as he also said in 5:2. The Holy Spirit was, and continues to be, the pledge and foretaste of our *“adoption as sons”* and our redemption to a new realm of life, as the Apostle wrote in 8:23.

The reason for the greater significance of the kingdom is that *“anyone who serves Christ in this way”*, who seeks God’s kingdom first, as Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, and acknowledges that food and drink are secondary matters, *“is pleasing to God and approved by men”* (14:18).

Verses 19 to 21 of chapter 14 repeat the same teaching relating to the significance of balance and proportion between what is essential in the Christian life and what is of minor importance and not essential. The verses contain three exhortations.

(i) *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification”* (14:19). *“Peace”* is again reconciliation to God and acceptance by Him, while *“edification”* is the building up of one another in Christ. This is the positive goal towards which all brethren should have been seeking at that time in Rome, and also in all Christian assemblies everywhere at all times.

(ii) *“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food”* (14:20). The *“work of God”* could mean the individual weak brother, but in the context the meaning is more probably the integrity of whole Christian communities wherever the assemblies might be. The word translated *“destroy”* is a different word from the one that Paul used in 14:15. The Greek word is *‘katalyo’*, and means to tear down or throw down, and is often used to refer to buildings.

The Christian responsibility is to build up (14:19), not to tear down (14:20), and in particular the fellowship must not be torn down *“for the sake of food”*. In the Greek sentence, the clause referring to food comes first and J.B. Phillips has *“for the sake of a plate of meat”* we are not to wreck God’s work.

(iii) Paul asked the brethren, meaning the strong ones, are you really prepared to distress a brother *“because of what you*

eat" (14:15), to damage him spiritually *"by your eating"* (14:15), to regard your *"eating and drinking"* above God's kingdom (14:17), and to tear down God's work *"for the sake of food"* (14:20)? Paul gave this message to the Corinthian brethren also in 1 Corinthians 8:8. Paul was telling the Roman brethren that they needed to give up insisting on their liberties in Christ for the sake of the welfare of the weak brethren, and put the example of Christ and the kingdom of God first.

Paul next contrasted two kinds of behaviour, the 'wrong' and the 'right'. He wrote, *"All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble"* (14:20). This being the case, *"It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall"* (14:21). Paul made it clear that he agreed with the view of the strong, but he also made it clear that it would be wrong for the strong to use their liberty to harm the weak. He said that it would be good for the strong to eat no meat and drink no wine if such were necessary for the welfare of the weak.

Paul concluded his argument in 14: 22 and 23 by drawing a distinction between private conviction and public behaviour. He wrote, *"Whatever you believe about these things, keep between yourself and God"* (14:22). He meant that the strong were not to put forward their views dogmatically and were not to seek to impose them on others, but rather to keep those views to themselves.

Paul wrote about public behaviour from two standpoints, that of the strong and that of the weak. He said, *"Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves"* (14:22). *"But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that does not come from faith is sin"* (14:23).

In saying these things, Paul drew attention to the significance of our consciences. Our consciences are not infallible, but as Christians, our consciences should be sufficiently well grounded and informed to regard them as a safe guide, and we should not act against them. To go against our consciences is to act against our Christian conviction, and is therefore disobedience by us. It seems to me that implicit in Paul's exhortation is that we should keep our consciences educated by reference to the Scriptures as we travel the Christian road.

(3) Do not please yourselves

Romans 15: 1 to 13

1. *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*
2. *Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification.*
3. *For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.'*
4. *For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*
5. *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,*
6. *that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
7. *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*
8. *Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers,*
9. *and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: 'For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.'*
10. *10. And again he says: 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!'*
11. *11. And again: 'Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!'*
12. *And again, Isaiah says: 'There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope.'*
13. *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

This is the third negative consequence of Paul's positive instruction to accept the weaker brother.

He urged the strong brethren not to despise or judge the weaker brethren (14: 2 to 13), not to distress or harm them (14: 13 to 23), and then he told the strong brethren not to please themselves (15: 1 to 13).

Paul began by saying “*We who are strong*” (15:1), thus identifying himself with the strong brethren. He continued by explaining the Christian responsibility of the strong towards the weak, and what the strong ought to do. He wrote that the strong “*ought to bear with the failings of the weak*” (15:1). The word for “*failings*” means ‘weaknesses’, while the Greek verb ‘bastazo’ means in the context to ‘support’. So what Paul was saying is that the strong brethren should not simply tolerate or endure the presence of the weak brethren, but should support and encourage them.

He continued immediately by saying that we who are strong ought “*not to please ourselves*” (15:1). Paul understood that it is natural to our fallen human nature to be selfish and to put our self-seeking desires first and foremost, so he told his readers that the strong should not give priority to their desires and understandings with no concern for the effect this might have on the weaker brethren. The consciences of the weaker brethren had to be acknowledged and respected.

Paul then wrote that “*each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up*” (15:2). The Scripture commands love for our neighbour (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:9). Loving conduct towards our neighbour should not be confused with pleasing men, which is condemned by Scripture (Galatians 1:10; Colossians 3:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Pleasing men means to flatter people to gain their approval, and behave in ways that would appeal to unbelieving people and make them want to join in worldly behaviour that would be incompatible with good and loving Christian conduct. Perhaps that is why Paul added the words “*for his good, to build him up*”, in line with the “*mutual edification*” that he had written in 14:19. “*Edification*” means ‘building up’, and is in opposition to ‘tearing down’ or ‘demolition’. The building up of the weak would help them to continue to learn and strengthen their consciences in the light of the liberty to be found in following the Lord Jesus Christ.

After writing these instructions and exhortations, Paul gave them the spiritual foundation in God through Jesus Christ. He had mentioned the Lord Jesus in almost every verse of Romans 15: 1 to 13. There are at least four reasons given by Paul for his instructions.

1. Because Christ did not please himself (15: 3 and 4)

Instead of pleasing Himself, Jesus gave Himself in the service of His Father and of the human race. Jesus had been sent to earth from the heavenly realm by His Father, but *“did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant”* (Philippians 2:6,7). He *“emptied himself”* (RSV) of His glory, then *“humbled himself”* to serve and became *“obedient to death - even death on a cross”* (Philippians 2:8). Jesus did all of this instead of pleasing Himself.

But instead of dwelling on Jesus' extraordinary selflessness and humility, Paul immediately referred to Psalm 69, a Psalm which vividly describes the unjust and unreasonable sufferings of a righteous man, and which was quoted of Christ four times in the New Testament. Paul quoted from verse 9 of Psalm 69, *“as it is written: the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me”* (15:3); meaning that Christ completely identified Himself with His Father, so that the insults directed towards God fell upon Him.

Paul's quotation from Psalm 69 and its fulfilment in Christ led him to digress briefly about the nature and purpose of Old Testament Scripture. *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope”* (15:4). From Paul's quotation it is in order to derive five truths about God's written word.

God's purposes in Scripture

The first truth is the Scripture's contemporary intention, that is, that the Scriptures were intended for those to whom and for whom they were *“written in the past”*. But the Apostle stated that they were *“written to teach us”* also (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The second truth is the inclusive value of the Scriptures. Paul quoted only half a verse from one Psalm, yet he said that everything written in the past was for us. Obviously not

everything was, and is, of equal value. Jesus Himself spoke of *“the more important matters of the law”* (Matthew 23:23).

Thirdly, the focus of the Scriptures is continually on Christ. Paul's quotation and application of Psalm 69 is a further example of the risen Christ's explanation to His disciples of *“what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The fourth truth is the practical purpose of Scripture. It is able to make us *“wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15). It can also bring us encouragement and endurance so that *“we might have hope”* (15:4) for future glory.

The fifth truth is the divine message of Scripture. It is God Himself Who speaks to His people through what He has caused to be written. God is, in fact and in human terms, both author and editor of the Holy Scriptures.

2. Because Christ is the way to unity in worship (15: 5 and 6)

Paul's words in 15: 5 and 6 are really a prayer; *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*.

Paul evidently did not expect the Roman brethren to agree about everything, since he had urged the weak and the strong brethren to accept one another in spite of disagreement about non-essential matters. He had established the importance to have unity of mind about essentials of the Christian faith. By saying *“as you follow Christ Jesus”* (15:5), Paul surely meant that Christian unity is unity in Christ, so that the more they (and we also) agree with Jesus, the more they (and we) will agree with one another. The purpose of this unity of mind is the united worship and glorification of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Because Christ accepted you (15:7)

Paul's long dissertation about the strong and the weak (14:2 to 15:6) was placed between two exhortations; *“Accept him”* (14:1) and *“Accept one another”* (15:7). The first exhortation urged the church to accept the weaker brethren, while the second exhorted all church members to accept one

another. The weak brother was to be accepted *“for God has accepted him”* (15:3), and the church members were to accept one another *“just as Christ accepted you”* (15:7). We should keep in mind that Christ’s acceptance of us was, and is, *“in order to bring praise to God”* (15:7), so the credit for God’s acceptance of us is due to God Himself Who, through Jesus Christ, and only through Him, took the initiative to reconcile us to Himself and also to one another.

4. Because Christ became a servant (15: 8 to 13)

In verse 8 Paul moved from his exhortations concerning the unity of the weak and the strong in Christ to the unity of Jews and Gentiles also in Christ. The unity was with a view to worship *“so that”* they *“may glorify God”* together for His mercy. The NIV rendering of 15: 8 and 9 is, *“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs”*, and secondly to include the Gentiles.

Christ’s ministry to the Jews was *“on behalf of God’s truth”* to demonstrate God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises, while His ministry to the Gentiles was to declare to them God’s mercy which they did not deserve. As a consequence, Christ’s ministry to Israel was in faithfulness to the nation which God had promised; and to the Gentiles, Christ’s ministry was to bring to them the knowledge of God’s mercy which they had not sought and had not deserved, yet had received.

Paul was bringing to the notice of the Roman brethren that then, at that time in history, Jews and Gentiles were together in the Messianic community, the Gospel Age Church, and supported his exposition with four quotations from the Old Testament. All four quotations refer both to the Gentiles and to the worship of God. In the first quotation, David, King of Israel, announced his intention to praise God among the Gentiles. *“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name”* (Psalm 18:49; 2 Samuel 22:50). Paul did not make clear whether the nations were to join with David in praise and the singing of hymns, or simply be witnesses to David’s worship of God.

But in the second quotation, the nations were definitely participants. Moses was represented as inviting the nations to rejoice with God’s people, the Jews, *“Again it says, Rejoice*

Gentiles, with his people" (Deuteronomy 32:43). In the third quotation, the Psalmist addressed all nations directly and exhorted them to praise God. *"And again, Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples"*. (Psalm 117:1).

In the fourth reference, Paul quoted from Isaiah who foretold the coming of the Messiah as a descendant of David, the son of Jesse, Who would rule over the nations and bring hope and certainty to all Gentiles as well as Jews, *"And again, Isaiah says, the Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him"* (Isaiah 11:10).

So we see that Paul chose one quotation from the Law, one from the Prophets, and two from the Writings, which constitute the three main divisions of the Old Testament.

Paul concluded this long section of his letter with a further prayer in addition to the prayer already mentioned in verse 5. He wrote, *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him"* (15:13).

The filling with joy and peace, already mentioned in 14:17 will be achieved by faith *"as you trust in him"*, and this filling will result in an overflowing, *"so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit"* (15:13). The principal aim of Paul's earlier prayer in 14:17 was unity with a view to combined worship, while the principal aim of Paul's second prayer in 15:13 was hope. He expressed his prayerful wish that *"the God of hope"* would cause his readers to *"overflow with hope"*.

Hope always looks to the future, so it seems that the Apostle had in mind the future kingdom of God, which Jews and Gentiles in Christ, by God's mercy and grace, will together inherit. Joy, that quiet delight in God's promises; peace that passes our understanding; faith, the conviction of glory to come, and hope, the expectation of God's kingdom of righteousness are essential Christian qualities. And if the hope is to be overflowing it will be so because God's Holy Spirit makes it possible as a consequence of faith, joy and peace in the Christian's life.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE

Romans 15:14 to 16:27

Revision

As we think about the previous section (14:1 to 15:13), in which the Apostle told us how the strong should regard the weak, and how they should work together as Christian believers, we should have noticed how the Apostle gave substance to his exhortations with clear and indisputable theological statements.

A total of six such statements were noted, three of which seem to stand out. The three statements relate to the sacrifice, the resurrection and the judgment of believers by God and the Lord Jesus; bearing in mind that; until the final judgment at the close of the Kingdom Age has been made of Satan and those of his followers who remain unrepentant; and also of any resurrected human beings who have not accepted God's righteous Kingdom ruled over by His rightful King, Jesus Christ, God has committed all judgment to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22).

The first statement was that Christ died to be our Saviour. Because of Christ, God has accepted the weaker brother (14: 1 and 3), and Christ has accepted us (15:7), so we must accept one another, and not speak or act in any way that would be to the detriment of any brother or sister whom Christ died to save.

The second statement was that Christ rose to be our Lord (14:9), so all of His people are His servants and whether weak or strong are accountable to Him (14:6).

In the third place Paul wrote, *"For we will all stand before God's judgment seat"* (14:10), and also *"each of us will give an account of himself to God"* (14:12). In view of 1 Peter 4:17, the judgment of the Christian believer is a process that continues throughout the believer's life. Peter wrote, *"For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the Gospel of God?"*

From Peter's words it is reasonable to understand that God's judgment will not consist of a great court where people will appear one by one to be questioned and be asked to give an account of themselves. It follows rather that believers now, and all people in the age to come, will be judged by God and the Lord Jesus according to their responses to God's law of love and the holy Scriptures.

Such judgment will not consist of some kind of court procedure, such as occurs in contemporary society, but will be a continuing assessment of the responses made by people to a righteous world order, conducted over a period of one thousand years (Revelation 20:2-7). As we are not given details of how the world's people will be taught and educated, and have God's requirements explained to them, it would be unwise to speculate on the means used to guide earth's resurrected millions to understand how they will be able to gain eternal life.

As we strive to understand Paul's instructions regarding the relationships between the strong and the weak, we may think that the circumstances about which Paul wrote seem remote from the situation in our day. We have the written word, which the Romans in Paul's day did not have, so we have, as it were, our manual of instructions, and need only to refer to them for direction and advice.

This is true, of course, but we need to remember that some people come to Christ with beliefs and practices which they find difficult or nearly impossible to renounce. It may be that some believing people think it wrong to drink an alcoholic beverage, and are offended by believers who do it. Others again may wish to set aside a day for study and meditation, and will not be dissuaded from doing so.

Another example might be continuing to observe certain times and days such as the forty days of Lent and the observance of saints' days. We may contend that the Christian is not instructed or required to follow such practices, but there are some to whom such matters as these are important, and they wish to follow them. The Apostle's words of instruction and advice still apply, so we must pay heed to them and not give offence by dogmatic or insensitive criticism.

There are two principles that Paul developed which apply to all groups of believers at all times.

The first principle is faith. Everything must be done “*from faith*” as he wrote in 14:23. He also wrote “*each one should be fully convinced in his own mind*” (14:5). As a result, we in our day need to continue our study of the Word so that we become and remain strong in faith and in Christian liberty.

The second principle is love. Everything must be done according to love (14:15). We need to remember that our fellow Christians are sisters and brothers for whom Christ died, so that we honour them and do not despise them. We strive to serve them and in doing so we have respect to their consciences.

In fundamentals, faith is primary, and we must not allow love to cause us to deny essential faith. In non-fundamentals, however, love is primary. Faith develops our consciences, love respects the consciences of others. Faith leads to liberty, while love controls the exercise of liberty. Amongst believers, faith in essentials should bring about unity, liberty allows believers to differ in understanding and practice of non-essentials, while love governs the conduct and relationship of believers at all times.

The Conclusion To Paul’s Letter

The Apostle had finished his great exposition of chapters 1 to 11, and his great exhortation of chapters 12 to 15:13. With his two prayers of 15: 5 and 13, his readers may have thought that he was about to end his letter. But he had not yet finished.

He intended to take up again the matter of his relationship to the Roman church, which he mentioned at the beginning of his letter in chapter 1, verses 8 to 13. He wanted to confide in the Roman brethren about his God-given ministry, explaining to them why he had not visited them, and his plan to come soon, and then continue on to Jerusalem and from there to Spain.

The great Apostle wrote very personally, maintaining a directness with his ‘I - you’ relationship to them, calling them “*my brethren*” in 15:14, and revealing to them the past, present and future of his ministry, asking them for their prayers for him, and sending them many greetings.

THE NATURE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY

Romans 15: 14 to 22

14. *Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*
15. *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God,*
16. *That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*
17. *Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.*
18. *For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient*
19. *In mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*
20. *And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,*
21. *But as it is written: 'To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand.'*
22. *For this reason I also have been much hindered from coming to you.*

Paul began this section of his letter by expressing confidence in his readers. He wrote, *"I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another"* (15:14). Since he had such confidence in them, why did he write, as he did, to them? He gave two reasons.

Firstly, he said, *"I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again"* (15:15). The apostles placed great importance on reminding their hearers and readers of the basis of the Gospel message and the need to

hold fast to it (Romans 6:17; 1 Corinthians 15:1; Philippians 3:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:13; 3:14; Hebrews 2:1; 2 Peter 1:12; 3:1; 1 John 2:21; Jude 3).

Secondly he said, *“I have written, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles”* (15: 15 and 16). Paul had a unique ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles, and had already referred to this three times in his letter (1:5; 11:13; and 12:3). Paul had not founded the church in Rome, but he had the God-given authority, as well as the experience of his Jewish ancestry, to teach all members, whether Jews or Gentiles, who belonged to the Roman congregation. So, for the next seven verses, Paul explained the nature of his ministry, and drew his readers’ attention to three important features of it.

1. Paul’s Ministry Was A Priestly Ministry (15: 15 to 17)

Paul called himself a *“minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit”* (15:16).

In describing his ministry in priestly terms, Paul used language that was quite clear, as Greek scholars have pointed out. The Greek word ‘leitourgōs’ usually referred to a public servant, as in 13:6, but in the Bible, the noun and its related verb ‘leitourgeo’, were used ‘exclusively of religious and ritual services’ as stated in Walter Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. In the New Testament, the words were applied to the Jewish priesthood (Hebrews 10:11), and to Jesus our great High Priest (Hebrews 8:2). The verb ‘leitourgeo’ means to serve as a priest, especially in relation to the temple sacrifices. Paul continued the imagery with his reference to *“an offering acceptable to God”* (‘euprosdaktos’ used of sacrifices as in 1 Peter 2:5) and *“sanctified by the Holy Spirit”*, meaning ‘set apart and holy’ as in Exodus 29:33. The words Paul used had priestly and sacrificial associations.

So what was Paul saying? He was saying that he regarded his work as a priestly ministry because he was able to offer his Gentile converts as a living sacrifice to God. He did not mean that he made it possible for his converts to offer themselves to God, he meant that it was he who presented them to God. We

remember in this context that Gentiles were forbidden to enter the Temple at Jerusalem, and on no account were they permitted to share in the sacrifices offered to God, but through the Gospel, they themselves had become a holy and acceptable offering to God.

Paul's priestly ministry as the Apostle to the Gentiles was unique, but he stated an important principle for all believers. Believers who evangelise and carry out kind and helpful duties and deeds to and for others are really performing priestly duties, because they are witnessing by their actions and words to the effect that the Scriptures have had in their lives. Believers who conduct themselves in this way are uniting the two major roles of the Christian life, namely, worship and witness. If by such witness, a person is brought to Christ, or perhaps more than one may be brought to Christ, then it may be said that the believer has brought an offering (or offerings) to God. Paul said of his ministry *"Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God"* (15:17).

2. Paul's Ministry Was A Ministry Of Power (15: 18 and 19)

"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit" (15: 18 and 19). The repetition of the Greek word 'dynamis' (power) justifies calling Paul's ministry 'a ministry of power'. Paul made reference to five features of his ministry.

The first feature was leading *"the Gentiles to obey God"*. Paul said two words 'eis hypakoe' meaning 'with a view to obedience'. He used the same words in 1:5 and 16:26, where the meaning in context is *"unto obedience of faith among all the Gentiles"*. But in 15: 18 and 19, the translation is *"unto obedience of the Gentiles"*. It seems surprising that in 15:18 Paul omitted reference to faith, because it was always his purpose to bring people to faith in Christ, as in 1:16. But his emphasis was on obedience, which is the consequence of sincere faith, and a necessary component of Christian discipleship.

In the second feature, Paul refused to refer to his own exploits. He referred only to *"what Christ has accomplished through me"*. He did say in 1 Corinthians 3:9 and 2 Corinthians 6:1 that he

was one of *“God’s fellow-workers”*, but in this context in Romans he preferred to be thought of as Christ’s agent, so that Christ worked not as much with him as through him. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul wrote, *“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us”*. He continued in 15:17 by writing *“Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God”*.

The words in 15:17 continue *“by what I have said and done”* meaning literally *“by word and deed”*. The combination of words and deeds is the third feature of Paul’s ministry of power. This combination of the verbal and the visual amounts to a recognition that people learn by seeing and hearing. Jesus’ earthly ministry is the best example of this combination, and after His ascension into heaven He continued *“to do and to teach”* (Acts 1:1), through His chosen apostles and disciples. The ‘works’ of the Lord Jesus and His apostles do not necessarily mean only miracles, because Jesus took a child in His arms and blessed the children who were brought to Him, and two of the early church’s policies were a life in common with, and care for the needy and disadvantaged.

Fourthly, Christ’s ministry through Paul was *“by the power of signs and miracles”*. *“Signs”* indicated the significance of supernatural acts in drawing attention to the fulfilment of God’s promises or purposes, while *“miracles”* demonstrated God’s power over nature and the so-called laws of nature. In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul wrote, *“The things that mark an apostle -signs, wonders and miracles”*. The inclusion here of *“wonders”* indicated the effect of supernatural acts on the people who saw and heard them and expressed their wonder and amazement at the things they saw and heard. Such signs and miracles have not been in evidence since the days of the apostles, because they were intended to authenticate the unique ministry of the apostles in those early days, as can be seen in many places in the book of Acts and in Hebrews 2:4. Nowadays we have the written word to tell us what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, and how we may gain salvation and eternal life.

In the fifth place, Paul’s ministry was also *“through the power of the Spirit”*. Certainly the ‘signs and miracles’ mentioned above

would have been accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit, so the Apostle must have had something else in mind when he added the words *“through the power of the Spirit”* to what he had just written. It seems reasonable to think that Paul had in mind the Word of God (spoken and written by inspiration) which is God’s *“sword”* (Ephesians 6:17). The Word of God instructs believers to witness to others about God’s mercy and grace, and declares that Jesus is the only way by which to approach God and be reconciled to Him, and it is by God’s Holy Word explaining that salvation and freedom from sin can be gained by repentance, faith, and commitment, without any need for payment of money or resort to any ecclesiastical power or priesthood.

3. Paul’s Ministry Was A Pioneering Ministry (15: 19 to 22)

Paul continued by writing about what Christ had accomplished through him, namely *“from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ”* (15:19). This statement was Paul’s modest summary of ten years of strenuous toil, including his three missionary journeys. The expression *“all the way around”* indicates the extent of his journeys from Jerusalem north to Antioch in Syria, then further north and west through the provinces of Asia Minor (now Turkey), and across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia. From there Paul would have travelled south to Achaia, then east across the Aegean Sea again, and via Ephesus back to Antioch and Jerusalem.

Two questions now arise:

- (i) Did not Paul begin from Antioch rather than Jerusalem?
- (ii) Did Paul ever evangelise Illyricum?

(i) Paul’s first missionary journey was indeed launched from Antioch (Acts 13:1), but the Christian mission began in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47, Acts 1:8), and Paul certainly preached in Jerusalem, but mainly to Jews (Acts 9:26). So it may be said that Paul’s ministry did in fact begin at Jerusalem.

(ii) Illyricum is situated on the western Adriatic coast of Macedonia, and corresponds to Albania and the southern part of former Yugoslavia today. Luke, however, gave no account of Paul ever visiting Illyricum, but left room for such a visit because there is a gap in his account of some two years

between Paul's leaving for Ephesus and setting off for Jerusalem (Acts 20:1 and onwards). While in Macedonia at that time Paul may well have walked to Illyricum or at least to its border.

Paul's claim to have *"fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ"* does not mean that Paul had, as it were, saturated the whole area with the Gospel. What he did was to evangelise the populous and influential cities, founded churches, then left to others the spread of the Gospel to surrounding towns and villages. Paul carried out the pioneering work of preaching and establishing churches, which was his special apostolic commission.

Paul continued, *"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation"* (15:20). Paul made it quite clear that Christ calls different disciples to different tasks, and gives them different talents to carry out the tasks.

Paul's own calling as the Apostle to the Gentiles was to pioneer the evangelisation of the Gentile world, and then to leave to converted believers the pastoral care of the churches he founded. He used two metaphors derived from agriculture and architecture to illustrate this division or apportioning of labour.

He wrote of his work in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:6 *"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow"*. He wrote also in 1 Corinthians 3:10, *"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it"*. In keeping with this policy, Paul evangelised only *"where Christ was not known"* and avoided *"building on someone else's foundation"* (15:20). *"Rather"* he wrote, *"as it is written: Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand"* (Isaiah 52:15). Paul applied this Scripture to validate his policy of evangelising, then leaving the development and pastoral care of the new believers to other committed and faithful converts.

Paul saw this prophecy as fulfilled in Christ, the Servant mentioned in this prophecy of Isaiah, the true Servant who would *"sprinkle many nations"*. Paul was proclaiming this true Servant, Jesus Christ, to the Gentiles, and bringing them to live by faith in Jesus and God through Him by his evangelising work.

Paul concluded *"This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you"* (15:22). In the first chapter, Paul wrote that he had *"many times"* planned to visit them, but had *"been prevented"* (1:13). Here he told the Roman brethren what had prevented him. It was his mission and his pioneer evangelism that had so occupied him that he was unable to come to them. But, as he was about to explain, he would visit them, but would only be *"passing through"* (15:24) on his way to Spain to continue his evangelising work in that country, where Christ was not known.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued)

PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS **Romans 15: 23 to 33**

Brief Overview

Paul had explained to the Roman Church his special apostolic ministry, and then looked to the future and revealed to the Roman brethren his travel plans.

Firstly he intended to sail from Corinth to Jerusalem and take with him the collection of money which he had for some time been organising.

Secondly he intended to travel from Jerusalem to Rome but would be only "*passing through*" (15:24), and would not stay with them for more than a short time.

Thirdly, he would travel from Rome to Spain to continue his evangelising work "*where Christ was not known*" (15:20). We should not fail to take into account the extent of the commitment Paul was making.

If he were to make all of these journeys by ship, the first would be at least 800 miles (1,290 kilometres), the second 1500 miles (2,315 kilometres) and the third 700 miles (1,125 kilometres), making a total of some 3,000 miles (4,730 kilometres).

If he were to travel some of the way by land rather than by sea, the total distance would be considerably greater. In modern times, such distances could be quickly covered by aeroplane, motor vehicle or ship, but in Paul's day, the perils and hazards of travelling such distances by walking, even assisted by a donkey, camel or some beast of burden, which Paul never mentioned, would be very daunting, to say the least.

But Paul announced his intentions, without even a hint of any apprehensions or reservations of his intended missionary activities.

Paul's Plan To Visit Rome

Romans 15: 23 and 24

23. ***But now no longer having a place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come to you,***
24. ***Whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while.***

The time had come for Paul's long-awaited and long-postponed visit. A combination of three factors had made it possible. In the first place, his missionary work in the Eastern Mediterranean had been completed. He wrote, "*But now, there is no more place for me to work in these regions*" (15:23). Paul's statement may seem surprising because there must have been many areas in which the Gospel had not been preached, and great numbers of people who had not had the opportunity to be converted.

But we must read these words of Paul in 15:23 in the light of his policy as he explained it in 15:20. What Paul meant was that his pioneering ministry in Greece and surrounding areas had been done, and the follow-up work had to be delegated to others.

In the second place Paul wrote, "*I have been longing for many years to see you*" (15:23). He had already said in 1:11 "*I long to see you*". It was Paul's sincere and ardent desire over "*many years*", and this desire had not been weakened or quenched by all the hindrances and frustrations that Paul had encountered and endured.

In the third place, Paul saw that his visit to them would be a stepping-stone to Spain, as he said, "*I plan to do so when I go to Spain*" (15:24). He also said "*I hope to visit you ... and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while*" (15:24). The verb "*assist*" in verse 24 is translated from the Greek 'propampo', which is defined in 'A Greek English Lexicon' originally by Walter Bauer, as 'to help on one's journey with food, money, by arranging for companions, means of travel and the like'.

So the assistance meant more than good wishes and prayers. It involved supplying the traveller or travellers with provisions and money, as in Titus 3:13 and 3 John 6. It could also have meant providing an escort to accompany travellers at least part of the way as in Acts 20:38 and 21: 5. Perhaps Paul also had in mind that the Roman brethren would continue to support him as other Churches had already done (Philippians 4:14).

Paul's Plan To Visit Jerusalem

Romans 15: 25 to 27

- 25. *But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.***
- 26. *For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.***
- 27. *It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.***

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there” (15:25). Paul's purpose in visiting Jerusalem was to serve the saints there, the brethren who consisted of the Jewish Christian community. He explained his intention to the brethren in Rome by telling them of the collection made for the Jerusalem saints (15:26) and the significance of the collection (15:27).

Paul wrote: *“For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem”* (15:26). Paul did not explain why the saints in Jerusalem came to be in poverty. It may have been that the *“severe famine”* predicted by Agabus (Acts 11:27) had brought about need and want to the people of Jerusalem, including the saints.

The straitened circumstances of the Jerusalem brethren may also have been caused by the economic sharing of the early church members as recorded in Acts 2:44 and 4:32. Church members sold their possessions and distributed the proceeds to all who were in need, which surely could have led to restricted economic circumstances, because the money would have been

spent without the means and assets remaining available to gain further income. Paul wrote that the Macedonian and Achaian Christians *“were pleased to make a contribution”* for the poor in Jerusalem. The word *“contribution”* is a translation of the Greek word ‘koinonia’, meaning a ‘common share’, which the Greek Christians *“were pleased”* to give.

Paul attached great significance to this freewill offering, which may be seen from the references he made to it in his letters (Romans 15:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1; and especially 2 Corinthians 8 and 9), and the zeal with which he promoted it. Added to his effort and zeal in initiating and promoting the freewill offering, he made the extraordinary decision to add nearly 2,000 miles (3,220 kilometres) to his journey by visiting Jerusalem and presenting the offering himself. So instead of sailing directly west from Corinth to Rome and then to Spain, he resolved to travel first in the opposite direction to Jerusalem, then turn about to go to Rome.

The significance of the offering was of course to bring temporal and material benefit to the Jerusalem believers, as they must have been in serious need, but was also a practical demonstration of Christian love and unity in Christ. In addition, the gift was also a response to a spiritual debt which Christians owe to Jews, as Paul wrote: *“They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews’ spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings”* (15:27).

Paul explained the nature of this spiritual debt in chapter 11. He wrote that *“salvation has come to the Gentiles”* (11: 18 to 20). The Gentiles must always remember that they have inherited great blessings from the unbelieving Jewish nation, to which they have neither claim nor title. The Gentiles were, figuratively, a wild olive tree, but have by faith been grafted into God’s own olive tree, and so now share in the life-giving nourishment from the root of God’s true olive tree (11:17).

Some theologians maintain that Gentiles are greatly in debt to the Jews for the great blessings of salvation that they, the Gentiles, now enjoy. I do not see it in quite this way. The debt we owe is not to the Jews, but to the LORD God, Who has seen fit to call Gentiles to share and participate in the great blessings He has offered to all people who will come to Him by faith

through Jesus Christ. The great blessings originally offered to Israel were lost by the nation because of disobedience and unbelief and the rejection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Whom God sent to them. But God was determined to have His special people, His Israel, and directed that His special people would be people who come to Him through Jesus Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles.

Gentile Christians owe to believing Jews, love, unity and fellowship in Christ as "*fellow-heirs*" in God's plan of salvation. But Gentile Christians owe to God the blessings and salvation they have received by faith; gracious gifts they have neither deserved nor could ever earn; gifts graciously and mercifully bestowed by God.

Paul's Plan To Visit Spain

Romans 15: 28 and 29

- 28. *Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.***
- 29. *But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.***

Paul had explained the facts and significance of the offering he had in his possession to the saints in Jerusalem, and was looking forward to its presentation, after which he intended to undertake the long westward journey to Spain after visiting Rome. He wrote, "*So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this fruit, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way*" (15:28).

Some two years previously, Paul told the Corinthians that he was hoping to "*preach the gospel in the regions beyond you*" (2 Corinthians 10:16). Perhaps even then Paul might have hoped to take the Gospel to Spain. We know from the Old Testament that in the centuries before Christ's earthly ministry, the Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon had traded with Spain, their "*ships of Tarshish*" having traded with Tartassus, the Aramaic form of Tarshish (1 Kings 14:22). Tarshish (or Tartassus) was a city in the south of Spain.

The Phoenicians also established colonies in Spain. By the time of Caesar Augustus, the whole Iberian peninsula had been conquered by the Romans, and many Roman colonies had been established there. Perhaps Paul was hoping eventually to preach the Gospel in these regions.

We cannot know for certain whether Paul reached Spain and took the Gospel to the people there. It may be that Paul was released from his imprisonment in Rome, where the conclusion of the record in the book of Acts leaves him, and that he resumed his missionary travels and visited Spain before being re-arrested, imprisoned and finally put to death during the persecutions under Nero.

But, as Paul prepared for his visit to Rome, he seemed full of assurance. *"I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ"* (15:29). Paul's confidence was not in himself but in Christ. He asked the Romans for their prayers because he knew his weaknesses and vulnerability, but he also knew the blessings of the risen Christ.

Paul's Request For Prayer

Romans 15: 30 to 33

- 30. *Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,***
- 31. *That I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,***
- 32. *That I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.***
- 33. *Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.***

"I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (15:30). Earlier in his letter. Paul told the Roman Christians that he was praying for them (1:9), and here asked them to pray for him. Both he and they, he said, were brothers in the family of God. He appealed to them *"by our Lord Jesus Christ"*, and *"by the love of the Spirit"*, such love being evidenced by the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as in Galatians 5:22.

Paul did not specify what he meant by his “*struggle*”, so it may be that he was thinking of struggling with the principalities and powers of darkness that he mentioned in Ephesians 6:12.

He may also have been thinking of the personal struggle we all have with ourselves, in which we strive to conform our thoughts and conduct to the will of God (Colossians 2:1; 4:12).

Why did Paul ask the Roman brethren for their prayers?

His request concerned his visits to Jerusalem and to Rome. Concerning Jerusalem, Paul mentioned two subjects for their prayers, subjects relating to unbelievers and believers.

The first of the two subjects concerned the opposition of unbelievers; “*Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea*” (15:31). Paul had many enemies among the unbelieving Jews, who would take steps to accuse him before the authorities and bring about his death if they could. He knew he was in danger, and said, “*I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 21:13). Nevertheless he asked the Romans to join him in prayer for protection and deliverance from his opponents.

The second subject mentioned by Paul related to believers, the Jewish Christian community. He wrote, “*Pray ... that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there*” (15:31).

He was aware and perhaps apprehensive that it might be difficult for the Jerusalem saints to accept the offering he was bringing.

Firstly in a general sense that all of us find it hard to accept gifts which may place us in debt or obligation to others, but secondly in the sense that in accepting the offering from Paul, Jewish Christian leaders might be seen to endorse Paul's gospel and his alleged disregard of Jewish customs and traditions. If his offering were to be rejected, such rejection could cause a rift between Jewish and Gentile Christians to grow and widen, and seriously harm the unity of Jewish-Gentile fellowship in the body of Christ. So Paul asked the Romans to pray that the Jerusalem believers would accept the gift and that unbelievers would not be able to prevent the giving or the receiving of it.

Paul next requested prayer for his visit to Rome. The two visits to Jerusalem and Rome are closely connected. If his visit to Jerusalem succeeded, then his visit to Rome would be possible and successful. So he asked the Romans to pray that he might be protected and his gift accepted in Jerusalem, *“so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed”* (15:32).

Paul’s reference to the will of God in relation to prayer is very significant. He prayed earlier that *“now at last by God’s will the way may be opened”* for him to come to Rome (1:10). His prayer included the words *“by God’s will”*, which is a clear reminder to us that we should always make our requests known to God and include the words that signify we ask only according to His will, and always also we must ask through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of our prayers is not to ask God to do as we would like Him to do, rather to ask, as best we can, according to His will, as in 1 John 5:14 and James 4:2,3. Every prayer we make should include the condition *“Your will be done”* (Matthew 6:10), meaning, if our request is in accordance with God’s will.

But how are we to pray, or in other words, how do we know what to pray for, because the Apostle said, *“We do not know what we ought to pray for”* (8:26)?

It seems that we must distinguish between God’s general will for His people now (and all people eventually), that everyone must believe, develop self-control, and become like Christ in behaviour. So we pray for God’s help and His Spirit now as we walk the Christian way, and we pray for the whole human race when we pray ‘Thy kingdom come’, the time when God’s will is to be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

But God’s particular will for us is not revealed in Scripture, so that we must pray for guidance and add such words as ‘if the LORD will’. The Lord Jesus did this in Gethsemane, *“Not my will, but yours be done”* (Luke 22:42), and Paul did it twice in his letter to the Romans, so we should do it too. This approach to the LORD God reveals a proper humility, as expressed in James 4:14,15.

So what happened to Paul's three prayers? They were:

- (a) that he might be rescued from unbelievers in Jerusalem;
- (b) that his gift would be accepted; and
- (c) that he would succeed in reaching Rome.

(a) The first prayer was answered by a variety of events and circumstances. He was arrested, tried and imprisoned in Jerusalem, but he was delivered three times from hostile crowds (Acts 21:30; 22:22; and 23:10), once from flogging (Acts 22:25), and once from a plot to kill him (Acts 23:12).

(b) We do not know for certain that Paul's gift to the Jerusalem saints was accepted. Luke did not refer to it in Acts, although he knew about it because he recorded Paul's statement before Felix that he (Paul) had come to Jerusalem *"to bring my people gifts for the poor"* (Acts 24:17). The likely eventuality was that the gift was accepted, hopefully with all good grace.

(c) Paul's third prayer that he would reach Rome was indeed answered, as Jesus had promised (Acts 23:11), but was answered in ways that Paul had not expected, in that he reached Rome after some three years, but as a prisoner, and after an almost fatal shipwreck.

Paul ended this part of his letter with a third benedictory prayer, *"The God of peace be with you all. Amen"* (15:33). The prayer suggested that Paul was deeply mindful of Gentile-Jewish unity, as he prayed that the God of peace might be with all of them, that is, all of the Jewish and Gentile believers together.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued)

A COMMENDATION AND MANY GREETINGS

Romans 16: 1 to 16

A Commendation

Romans 16: 1 and 2

- 1. *I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,***
- 2. *That you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.***

It seems likely that Phoebe was given the responsibility of taking Paul's letter with her to Rome, as it appears that some business matters made it necessary for Phoebe to travel to Rome.

Paul's letter was, among other very significant matters, a letter of commendation which would introduce Phoebe to the Christians in Rome. Such letters were quite common in the ancient world, as being necessary to protect people from pretenders and deceivers, and were mentioned a number of times in the New Testament (Acts 18:27; 2 Corinthians 3:1). Paul referred to Phoebe as "*our sister*", and acknowledged her as "*a servant of the church in Cenchrea*". Cenchrea was the eastern port of Corinth situated at the head of the Saronic Gulf.

Phoebe was evidently a deaconess, as the office of deacon (Greek diakonos) already existed in the early church (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,11). Paul wrote that she had "*been a great help to many people, including me*" (16:2). Phoebe was probably given the task of visiting and helping the Christian women believers, and attending them in sickness and times of need and assurance.

It was a great honour for Phoebe to be so favourably mentioned in the great Apostle's letter as one who assisted him in time of

need. In all probability Phoebe was a woman of some means, who used her money and assets to support the church and the Apostle. Paul made favourable mention of other womenfolk who had laboured with him in his ministry of the Gospel, as he did in Philippians 4:3.

Many Greetings

Romans 16: 3 to 16

3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
4. Who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.
5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ.
6. Greet Mary, who laboured much for us.
7. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.
8. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord.
9. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved.
10. Greet Apelles, approved in Christ. Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.
11. Greet Herodion, my countryman. Greet those who are of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.
12. Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have laboured in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord.
13. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.
14. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren who are with them.
15. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.
16. Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.

“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house” (16: 3 to 5).

This devoted Jewish couple were much beloved by Paul, and there is evidence that they had placed themselves in considerable danger by giving Paul hospitality at their home in Corinth after they had been compelled to leave Italy by order of the Emperor Claudius in 49 AD (Acts 18:1-3). Priscilla and Aquila had evidently dedicated their home to the LORD, and both Paul and Apollos had partaken of their hospitality, as we read in Acts 18:26. Such hospitable action would mean that Priscilla and Aquila would be at risk of persecution by the Jews.

It is also recorded that while Priscilla and Aquila lived for a time at Ephesus, they continued to have a church meeting at their house (1 Corinthians 16:19). It would seem that when the Apostle wrote his letter to the Roman Church, the couple had returned to Rome after the death of Claudius in 54 AD, and the repealing of the order that expelled all Jews from that city, and that they were members of the Church to which Paul addressed his letter.

The greeting to *“the church that meets at their house”* tells us that Church meetings were being held at the home of Priscilla and Aquila. In Paul’s day, Christians did not have specially appointed halls or premises for meetings, so were obliged to meet in the homes of Church members.

“Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia” (16:5). Nothing is known of this believer, except that he was well regarded by Paul as the first convert to respond to Paul’s preaching in Asia, as that is the province recorded in the most ancient manuscripts, rather than ‘Achaia’ as appears in the King James version. The Apostle evidently looked upon Epenetus to be offered to the Lord as the first one to accept the Gospel in Asia.

“Greet Mary, who worked very hard for you” (16:6). There is no further information available concerning this lady other than Paul’s commendation of her for assisting him and other converted Christians in preaching and spreading the Gospel.

“Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was” (16:7).

It is possible that these two were family relations of Paul, but it seems more likely that they were his ‘kinsmen’, because he applied the term ‘kinsmen’ to all Jews in 9:3. It appears that the two greeted by Paul were a married couple. Commentators are agreed on this, but we were not so told by Paul. Paul did, however, tell us four facts about Andronicus and Junias. They were his kinsfolk, that is, Jewish people; they had at some stage been his fellow prisoners (2 Corinthians 11:23) and were converted before he was, and they were *“outstanding among the apostles”*. This latter description surely means *“the apostles of the churches”* (2 Corinthians 8:23), that is, they were outstanding missionaries but not members of the twelve apostles chosen by the Lord Jesus.

“Greet Ampliatus, whom I love in the Lord” (16:8). “Greet Urbanus, our fellow-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys” (16:9). “Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus” (16:10). “Greet Herodion, my relative. Greet those in the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord” (16:11).

Nothing is known of the disciples named in 16: 8 to 11 other than what Paul mentioned in these verses.

“Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord” (16:12).

These two ladies may have been sisters, perhaps twin sisters, which may reasonably be assumed from the similarity of their names. Paul commended them for their devotion and willingness to assist in the work connected with the Lord’s cause and service in spreading and confirming the Gospel message. They may well have been deaconesses who gave freely and generously of their time and labours for the Gospel and their fellow-believers.

It is interesting to note that the name Tryphena is inscribed in a list which may be seen in the catacombs at Sebastiano near Rome containing the names of members of ‘Caesar’s household’, mentioned in Philippians 4:22. It is a fact that no interments were made in the catacombs after 410 AD.

“Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard for the Lord” (16:12).

Persis probably worked diligently with Tryphena and Tryphosa in assisting and supporting the spread and establishment of the Gospel message.

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too” (16:3).

Rufus may well have been the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried Jesus’ cross to Golgotha. Mark, whose gospel, according to tradition, is thought to have been written in Rome, is the only evangelist who mentioned that Simon’s sons were Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). The Apostle described Rufus as *“chosen”*, meaning ‘elect’. There is no reason given why Paul so described Rufus, because all the Lord’s true believers are chosen or elect (1 Peter 1:2; Colossians 3:12; Titus 1:1; Matthew 24:24,31). Rufus’s mother, to be mentioned so gratefully by Paul, must have given the Apostle many motherly kindnesses and attention at some period in the Apostle’s missionary activities.

“Greet Asyncritus, Phlegan, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them” (16:14). “Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them” (16:15).

There are no details available concerning these saints, or sanctified ones, who were members of the Church members at Rome to whom Paul wrote.

Paul concluded his greetings by writing, *“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings” (16:16).*

Paul mentioned kissing as a form of greeting in 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:26. Kissing as a means or manner of greeting has been a practice in many countries for centuries. For Christian believers, the word ‘holy’ describes the kind of kiss which believers should practise, so that in greetings there should be only friendliness and sincerity. Kissing is not generally the practice between men and women in western countries, other than between committed believers

or family members. A firm, sincere handshake is the more usual greeting between friends and acquaintances.

“All the churches of Christ” would probably be the churches or congregations of Greece and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), most of which the Apostle had founded.

So, as we have seen, Paul sent greetings to twenty-six brethren, twenty-four of whom he named, and added some appreciative personal references about many of them. We may wonder how Paul could have known so many believers in Rome, a city which he had not visited. It seems that travel in the days of the early Church was more frequent than many of us realise.

Aquila and Priscilla are an example of the travel undertaken by many in those times. The New Testament references tell us that Aquila came from Pontus on the southern shores of the Black Sea, that he and Priscilla lived in Italy until the Roman Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome in 49 AD, that they then moved to Corinth where Paul met with them and stayed with them, and that they travelled with him to Ephesus, where they in all probability *“risked their lives for him”* (16:4). Subsequently it seems likely that after Claudius’s death in 54 AD, they returned to Rome, where they received Paul’s greeting (Acts 18:1,26; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Probably also a number of Jewish and Jewish Christian refugees from Rome met Paul during their time of exile, and returned to Rome after Claudius’s death, when the new Emperor Nero invited the Jews to return to Rome.

As we read the names and greetings to the Christian people of Rome, we cannot fail to be impressed by the diversity and also the unity of the Roman brethren at that time.

The Diversity Of The Church At Rome

The Roman Christians were diverse in race, rank and gender. As for race, we know that the Church in Rome had both Jewish and Gentile members. Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish Christians, as were Paul’s relatives Andronicus and Junias (16:7) and Herodion (16:11). The word ‘relatives’ (Greek ‘syngeneis’) would most likely mean Paul’s ‘kinsfolk’ or ‘those of his own race’ as in 9:3. Most of the others in Paul’s list were Gentiles.

We cannot be sure of the rank or social status of Paul's Roman friends. Historical inscriptions tell us that Ampliatus (16:8), Urbanus (16:9), Hermes (16:14), Philologus and Julia (16:15) were common names for slaves. Some could have been freed from slavery, while some had connections with people of distinction.

Some commentators consider it likely that Aristobulus (16:10) was the grandson of Herod the Great and friend of the Emperor Claudius, and that Narcissus (16:11) was a rich and powerful freedman who had a great influence on Claudius. These prominent people probably were not Christians, but their households had remained in existence and there were converted Christians in them. It appears likely that some who were greeted in the Apostle's letter were members of the imperial household (Philippians 4:22).

A most interesting and instructive aspect of church diversity in Rome is that of gender. Nine out of the twenty-six persons greeted were women. They are Priscilla (16:3), Mary (16:6), Junias (16:7), Tryphena and Tryphosa, who may have been twin sisters, and Persis (16:12), Rufus's mother (16:13), Julia and Nereus's sister (16:15). Evidently Paul thought highly of all of them, and singled out four (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis), as having 'worked hard', but did not give any details of the nature of the hard work that they did.

The prominent place occupied by women in Paul's sincere greetings reveals to us that he was not the male chauvinist that some have thought he was. Among the women whom Paul greeted were seven who worked in the Lord's service. Priscilla was one of Paul's 'fellow-workers', Junias was a well-known missionary, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis were all named as having worked in the Lord, while Phoebe, who was probably a deaconess, received a special commendation from the Apostle.

We should note that none of the womenfolk commended and praised by the Apostle was called a presbyter or elder in the Church. Perhaps that was Paul's intention, but we should not argue that Paul did not approve of women elders in view of his failure to say so in this context, because an argument from lack of evidence, Paul's silence, is inadmissible.

The Unity Of The Church At Rome

In spite of the diversity of race, rank and gender, the Roman Church experienced a unity which overcame and transcended the differences of its members.

We remember that the Apostle wrote *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). Four times Paul described his friends as being *"in Christ"* (16:3,7,9,10), and five times as *"in the Lord"* (16: 8,11,12 and 13).

Twice he used the family terms of *"sister"* and *"brother"* (16:1,14). He also called believers as *"beloved"* or *"my beloved"* (16:5,8,9,12), and mentioned two experiences which strengthen unity: *"fellow-workers"* (16: 3 and 9) and *"fellow-sufferers"* (16:4,7).

How was the Roman Church's unity made clear to observers and outsiders? We are told that the early Church congregations met in homes or premises where they could assemble and worship. Paul referred to such gatherings in 16:5,10,11,14,15 and 23; and also in 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 2.

Luke also referred to believers meeting together in Acts 12:12. It seems from all accounts that the early believers met together *"with one heart and mouth ... to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (15:6). There is no record of any segregated meeting places or any segregation of the early believers in their worship together.

Paul concluded his list of greetings to individual believers with two general messages.

The first was to *"greet one another with a holy kiss"* (16:16), as was mentioned earlier. Suffice it to say that both Peter and Paul insisted on this (1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). J.B. Phillips has (for those of us who live in the West) 'Give one another a hearty handshake all round for my sake'.

Paul's second general message was *"All the churches of Christ send greetings"* (16:16). Paul was surely writing representatively. He was about to set off for Jerusalem with

those appointed by the Churches to carry and deliver the offering of money for the poor in that city. All those involved had assembled in Corinth before setting out for Jerusalem. Luke told us that the company included delegates from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, Lystra and Ephesus (Acts 20:4); so Paul sent greetings to the Roman Church from all the Churches represented by the delegates in Corinth.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AND SERVICE (continued)

WARNINGS, MESSAGES AND CLOSING DOXOLOGY **Romans 16: 17 to 27**

Paul's Warnings

Romans 16: 17 to 20

17. *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*
18. *For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*
19. *For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil.*
20. *And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

Paul turned somewhat abruptly from greetings to warnings, the warnings being so severe that at first sight the change may seem to be inconsistent with his gentle handling of weak brethren in earlier sections of his letter. But Paul's change in tone is understandable because there were some outsiders coming among the Roman brethren, who were threatening to cause divisions, and undermining the unity of the Roman congregation.

Paul did not say who they were, but they were contradicting apostolic teaching and disrupting the peace and unity of the brethren in Rome. They were very likely to have been judaising teachers or gnostics or both, but whoever they were, they were serving themselves instead of Christ (16:18).

Paul began his warnings by saying "*I urge you brothers*" (16:17) and made appeals concerning vigilance, separation and discernment. He wrote, "*Watch out for those who cause*

divisions and put obstacles in your way, that are contrary to the teaching you have learned" (16:17). Paul urged the Roman brethren to be on their guard against those who caused divisions and put obstacles or distractions or stumbling blocks in the path of the brethren, because such distractions contradicted the teaching of the Apostle.

What Paul said was that there was (and still is) a doctrinal and ethical standard which the Romans had to follow. That standard is laid down for us in the New Testament, and we must always remain vigilant to preserve our unity by observing and maintaining our doctrinal and ethical standards.

In the second place, Paul urged separation from those who advocate departure from apostolic teaching. *"Keep away from them"* he wrote. *"For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites"* (16:18), that is, their own wishes and desires. Those people desired to draw followers after them, perhaps wishing to become leaders of a religious group which would bring prestige and power over other people. J.B. Phillips called them 'utterly self-centred'. Paul said of such self-indulgent people, *"their god is their stomach"* (Philippians 3:19).

"By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (16:18). Such teachers had (and still have) the tendency to impress themselves on unsuspecting people, particularly believers who themselves are not of a character to be perceptive and therefore are without suspicions of the intentions of the teachers who flatter them in order to trap and ensnare them into the teachers' way of thinking.

Thirdly, Paul urged the Romans to grow in discernment. It seems he was pleased with them, as he wrote, *"Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you"* (16:19). He pointed out that there are two kinds of obedience, unquestioning or uncritical, and discerning or thoughtful.

Paul exhorted them to develop the second or better kind: *"But I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil"* (16:19). To be wise in regard to good is to recognise it, love it and follow it; but to be innocent about what is evil is to be guileless and unsophisticated, and to avoid any

tendency or experience of evil desires and actions. J.B. Phillips captured Paul's exhortation well - *"I want to see you experts in good, and not even beginners in evil"*.

From Paul's words we may derive three tests to apply to doctrines and ethics:

1. Does the teaching agree with Scripture? (Biblical);
2. Does the teaching glorify the Lord Jesus? (Theological);
3. Does the teaching promote goodness? (Moral).

In verse 20 of chapter 16, Paul added an assurance to his words of warning. He wanted the Romans to know that there is no doubt about the ultimate outcome, the triumph of good over evil. *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"*. Satan has already been decisively defeated by the Lord Jesus in His complete rejection of Satan's temptations (Matthew 4:1-11) and His deliverance of the human race from sin and death, but Satan has not yet conceded defeat.

The above statement appears to be a reference to the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 that the woman's offspring would crush Satan's head. The woman's offspring, also translated as *"the seed of the woman"*, which seed is the Lord Jesus Christ, would, as God has promised, crush Satan's head, that is, destroy him. The name "Satan" signifies accuser, a calumniator, and he is described as *"the god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4), *"the prince of the power of the air"* (Ephesians 2:2) because of his opposition to God and his adverse influences on the welfare and destiny of the human race.

Paul obviously connected with Satan any people who sought to produce factions or divisions in the Church. Eventually, as prophecy shows, Satan and all who support him and follow him will be entirely frustrated by God in all their purposes and machinations, and will be completely destroyed. Believers should be aware that for the time being *"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve"* (2 Corinthians 11:14,15). Satan's eventual destruction is foretold in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10.

We know that God has given the Lord Jesus *“all power in heaven and earth”* (Matthew 28:18) in fulfilment of the Psalmist’s prophetic words, *“You made him ruler over the works of your hands, you put everything under his feet”* (Psalm 8:6). We as Bible students believe these words, so how do we respond to people who ask: Why then is there so much trouble, suffering and corruption in the world? A detailed response would require a longer discussion than can be offered here, so only some brief comments will be made.

Jesus is reigning over heaven and earth, but His ultimate universal dominion is incomplete because His enemies have not yet been made His footstool, as prophesied in Psalm 110 and in the many applications to Christ of those words in the New Testament. The books of Daniel and the Revelation contain prophecies of events and developments during the Gospel Age and beyond, but, as we are all aware, the appearance of the Lord Jesus to the human race has not yet taken place, so we wait patiently for His appearance to the world, which will announce the overthrow of this present evil order of things, and the setting up of the Kingdom of God. All of these events, however, will occur at God’s appointed time.

In the meantime, the Roman brethren continued, and all Christian believers should also continue along the narrow way with victories over Satan from time to time (James 4:7), in the knowledge that eventually he and all who follow him will be destroyed for ever. The victories over Satan would be impossible without the grace and mercy of God, so Paul wrote, *“The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you”* (16:20).

Paul’s Messages

Romans 16: 21 to 24

- 21. Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.**
- 22. I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.**
- 23. Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.**
- 24. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**

Having sent personal greetings to twenty-six members of the Roman congregation, Paul then sent messages from eight people who were with him at Corinth.

He began with one well-known name followed by three unknown believers: *“Timothy my fellow-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives”* (16:21). For about eight years, Timothy had been Paul's constant travelling companion, and had undertaken several special missions at Paul's request. Paul evidently had a warm and close affection for Timothy, and wrote of him as *“my son whom I love”* (1 Corinthians 4:17), and *“my true son in the faith”* (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul and Timothy were in Corinth, from which city Paul was about to set off for Jerusalem with the offering from the Greek churches (Acts 20:4).

Paul next wrote of three of his 'relatives', that is, his fellow countrymen, as mentioned earlier. Lucius was evidently a native of Cyrene (modern Tripoli), and was referred to in Acts 13:1 as a prophet and teacher at Antioch. Jason was probably the same Christian who befriended Paul at Thessalonica as recorded in Acts 17:5-9. He risked his life for Paul's sake during a sedition in that city. Sosipater may have been the Sopater referred to in Acts 20:4 where it is stated that he belonged to Berea or Macedonia, and accompanied Paul from Greece to Troas.

At this juncture, Paul allowed his scribe, to whom he had been dictating his letter, to send his own greeting. *“I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord”* (16:22). Other than being Paul's amanuensis, nothing more is known about Tertius.

Then followed a message from Paul's host in Corinth. *“Gaius whose hospitality I and the whole church enjoy, sends you his greetings”* (16:23). Several men called Gaius appear in the New Testament, for Gaius was a common name. It seems most likely that this man was the Corinthian whom Paul himself had baptised (1 Corinthians 1:14).

Gaius was evidently a man of some substance in Corinth, and had freely offered his house and hospitality to Christian people, and probably also for the worship of God. Gaius was held in

such high regard by the Church that the Apostle John wrote a personal letter to him (3 John 1).

Two more people completed the series of messages from Corinth. *“Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works (the city treasurer - RSV), and our brother Quartus send you their greetings”* (16:23).

Erastus was mentioned as having been sent by Paul with Timothy into Macedonia from Asia (Acts 19:22). Later Erastus was said to have had his home in Corinth, the city in which he lived (2 Timothy 4:20). He must have been highly regarded to have occupied the office of treasurer in the civil government, a position which was highly esteemed in those early times.

Of Quartus nothing is known save that he was a brother, a fellow-Christian in the Church at Corinth.

We should note that verse 24 in the King James Version is omitted from the most ancient manuscripts.

Paul's Closing Doxology

Romans 16: 25 to 27

- 25. *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began***
- 26. *But now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith –***
- 27. *To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.***

Paul's doxology was an eloquent and fitting conclusion to his letter. It consists of four parts concentrating on:

- (1) The power of God,
- (2) The Gospel of Christ,
- (3) The revelation of the secret of the Gospel being made available to all nations, and
- (4) The praise of God's wisdom.

(1) The power of God

"Now to him who is able (the Greek has 'dynamis', meaning 'power') to establish you..." This, according to scholars, is an accurate translation of the Greek, but J.B. Phillips preferred to begin with a noun: *"Glory be to him who is able"*. So it is that Romans begins and ends with reference to the power of God through the Gospel (1:16). If the Gospel is God's power to save, it is also God's power to establish. The Greek word 'sterizo' (to establish) is a term applied to nurturing new converts and strengthening young Churches. Luke used a cognate of this verb 'episterizo' to write of Paul and his fellow-missionaries, who purposefully revisited the Churches they had founded in order to establish them more firmly (Acts 14:21; 15:41; 18:23). Paul also used the verb in his letters with the object of making Christian believers firm, stable and strong in faith, holiness, and courage against persecution (Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:21; Colossians 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:2,13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 3:7).

So Paul emphasised the ability of God to establish the Church of Gentiles and former Jews in Rome, and to strengthen them in truth, holiness and unity.

(2) The Gospel of Christ

Paul wrote that God *"is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past"* (16:25), *"but now revealed"* (16:26).

The Greek sentence has three co-ordinate clauses:

- (a) according to my gospel;
- (b) according to the proclamation of Jesus Christ; and
- (c) according to the revelation of the mystery.

(a) Paul said *"my gospel"* because the Gospel had been revealed and entrusted to him by God.

(b) Paul's Gospel was essentially a proclamation of Jesus Christ. God's power to establish the Church was also part of Paul's Gospel and proclamation.

(c) The third co-ordinate clause, *"according to the revelation of the mystery"* stated the fact that Paul's Gospel is revealed truth. "Mystery" is better rendered 'secret' because it is truth 'hidden

for long ages past, but now revealed'. Paul did not explain this secret fully in his letter, but he did so in other letters. God's secret, hitherto concealed but now revealed, is Jesus Christ, *"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* (Colossians 2:2,3), and especially Christ for the Gentiles and in them (Colossians 1:27), so that Gentiles now have an equal share with believing Israelites in God's promise (Ephesians 3:6; 6:19). Future glory is part of the secret, the time when God will bring all things together under one Head, Christ (Ephesians 1:9). Thus it is that the mystery or secret began, has continued, and will end in Christ.

One of the most important aspects of the proclamation of Jesus Christ was that the middle or dividing wall of partition which separated Jews and Gentiles had been broken down, so that the two groups had become equally important, and the Gentiles have been given the opportunity to become fellow-heirs and to partake of the privileges, reserved for the remnant of Israel, on equal terms (Ephesians 2:11-22).

(3) The revelation of the secret of the Gospel for all nations

As has been said, the secret is Jesus Christ and His Gospel, which has revealed that Gentiles who accept the Gospel are considered on the same terms in God's sight as believing Jews, and that believers in the New Covenant, both Jews and Gentiles, are accepted into the exclusive high calling invitation of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). These truths were hidden during all the ages until revealed by the inspired word proclaimed by the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 3:2-6).

The Jewish Scriptures contained prophecies concerning God's purposes and intentions, most or all of which were not understood until their meaning was revealed and made clear by the Apostle, who explained them and demonstrated their fulfilment in Christ. The determination and good pleasure of God not to restrict the Gospel to Israel, but to give all nations the opportunity of salvation had finally been disclosed and no longer hidden in silence.

Salvation from sin and death is not found by being a member of any religious meeting or organization. It is found by personal faith, conviction and confession by each believer individually and personally, and a life of sanctification which follows initial repentance and belief.

(4) The praise of God's wisdom

Paul concluded *"to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen"* (16:27).

The Apostle used the word 'wise' in relation to the LORD God probably to emphasise the wisdom of God in devising the plan of redemption and salvation which is now, and will be in the age to come, available to everyone who could never earn or deserve what God has freely given.

God's plan is wise because it is the only way to deal with the human mind and heart, and the only way to renew the human spirit, justify the sinner and declare him or her not guilty and therefore righteous in God's sight.

God's plan, which is based on his grace and mercy, produces sanctification or setting apart from disobedient and sinful ways to serve God in faith and repentance, and provides the instruction and guidance necessary to live as a believer in and through Jesus Christ, and to gain salvation and eternal life and happiness.

All must be done through Christ, *"the power and wisdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:24), that is, by reason of and due to the mission and work performed and completed by the Lord Jesus; and through Him now as our great Mediator and High Priest, *"Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"* (Hebrews 12:2).



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