

**Right with God**

**Daily Bible Readings  
through Romans**

**by James Philip**

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## WHY STUDY ROMANS?

Why should Christians today study Romans? We might be tempted to ask the question, especially having glanced through the lengthy and often difficult chapters of this letter, with its dense theological language and sometimes complex arguments. Is it really necessary for ordinary Christians? Can't we leave that kind of thing to the theologians, and stick with the 'simple gospel'?

The first thing to recognise is that any such idea of a 'simple gospel' is utterly foreign to the New Testament, and certainly to the apostle Paul. For him there is only one gospel, 'my gospel' (Rom. 2:16; 16:25), which is 'the gospel of God' (1:1; 15:16). And this gospel is so great, so majestic, so wonderful and profound that it transcends completely the boundaries of human comprehension. It is, as Paul frequently exclaims, a gospel of immeasurable and incalculable proportions (11:33 ff.). Its dimensions are not time bound but eternal (Eph. 1:3-10), its scope not earthly but cosmic (Col. 1:15-20), and so far from being 'simple' its message is one of 'unsearchable riches' (Eph. 3:8), an unfathomable mine whose glories will fill the outer reaches of eternity. No, the gospel is not 'simple'. It is vast as eternity.

But we must not think that to view the gospel in these terms removes it from the reaches of the ordinary Christian believer, and places it in the hands of the 'professional' thinkers and scholars. Far from it. This letter was written not to academic theologians, but precisely to ordinary Christian people, many of whom were slaves and 'uneducated', and most of whom were not yet mature believers with deep Scripture knowledge. Why? Because Paul knew that the greatest need of every believer is to grapple with the length and breadth and depth and height of the gospel of grace in all its fullness, to drink it into their soul, and assimilate it into the very warp and woof of their being so that it becomes part of them. And he knew that failure to do so means growth and development in the Christian life must inevitably be stunted and frail, leaving believers easy prey to the pressures of the world, the weakness of flesh and the wiles of the devil.

It is no accident that one of the prominent metaphors in the New Testament for the Christian life is that of warfare. It is a war we are engaged in, and in warfare you cannot fight heavy armour with pitchforks and spades. Our battle is a spiritual battle, against spiritual heavy armour (Eph. 6:10 ff.). We have to be armed! And armour has been given us to enable us to stand in the heat of the battles of life and witness for Christ, armour which clothes us with nothing less than the mighty power of the living God himself. This mighty power is the gospel (Rom. 1:16), and that is why it is incumbent upon us as believers so to wrestle with the message in all its fulness, and with all its implications, until we master it and it masters us. Only thus can we be protected. Only thus can we be fit to fight.

There is a war on. That is why Paul gave this epistle to the slave classes of Rome; and they wrestled with it, imbibed it, grappled with it, mastered it, and allowed it to master them. No doubt they found it deep and stretching and heavy, and at times wished for something 'simpler'. But simple things just do not make warriors. There is no other way for God's people to be transformed into soldiers who will stand truly for Christ as non-conformists to this world, but to know – to really know – this gospel. For to know it is to know and experience the power of the Spirit of God at work; the transforming power that brings to salvation all who believe (1:16), that goes on renewing the inner reaches of the heart and mind in conformity with God's good and perfect will (12:2), and that alone can decisively establish the believer, firmly fixed for all eternity (16:25). The power of God is a transforming power, and the gospel of Romans is a transforming gospel.

## **ITS GOSPEL HAS DECISIVELY TRANSFORMED COUNTLESS LIVES**

The truth of this is everywhere evident in the history of the Christian church. Let me quote a passage from the autobiography of Lesslie Newbigin, a Church of Scotland minister and missionary in Madras, who became part of the United Church of South India, and one of its bishops. He wrote of his early years,

*The years in the SCM had filled my mind with questions to which I did not see the answers. I wanted to find out what I could believe. I decided that the Letter to the Romans was probably the most complete and condensed statement of the Gospel and I therefore spent several months wrestling with the Greek text of Romans, surrounded by half a dozen of the major commentaries. That was a turning point in my theological journey. I began the study as a typical liberal. I ended it with a strong conviction about 'the finished work of Christ', about the centrality and objectivity of the atonement accomplished on Calvary. The decisive agent in this shift was James Denney. His commentary on Romans carried the day as far as I was concerned. Barth I found incomprehensible. C.H. Dodd seemed to have made the Epistle palatable by removing its toughest parts – the parts where I found strong meat. His 'demythologising' of the wrath of God seemed to me effectively to remove the love of God, for if 'wrath' was only an anthropomorphic way of describing the consequences of sin, then 'love' would have to be explained along the same lines. At the end of the exercise I was much more of an evangelical than a liberal.*

That is what a study of this epistle can do to a man! And if this is so, if one of the sharpest and most acute minds of the 20th century can be so decisively influenced and

changed in this way, then here is an epistle to which any seriously thinking company of people should be prepared to expose themselves, in order to discover the real truth of God and His gospel, and to establish a firm and unassailable foundation for a true and living faith. This is how important the Epistle to the Romans is!

## **ITS GOSPEL HAS VITALLY ENERGISED THE CHURCH**

But what was said by Dr Newbigin is nothing new. Martin Luther began his introduction to 'Romans' in 1522 as follows:

*This letter is the principal part of the New Testament and the purest gospel, which surely deserves the honour that a Christian man should not merely know it off by heart word by word, but that he should be occupied with it daily as the daily bread of the soul. For it can never be read too often or too well. And the more it is used, the more delicious it becomes and the better it tastes ...*

It was when men like Martin Luther were gripped by this gospel, and all its profound implications for their own lives and the lives of their fellows in the sixteenth century, that the result was a wonderful re-ignition of life in the church. It brought transformation to the whole continent of Europe! Emil Brunner, in the introduction to his commentary on Romans, says of Luther's statement:

*We must agree with Luther in this: that the Letter to the Romans is fateful in the story of the Christian Church. Throughout the centuries of Christian history, the fate of the Church of Christ has time and time again depended on the understanding and evaluation of the Letter to the Romans. Why is this? Because in this single literary document, what is particular and decisive in the Christian Faith is worked out in the acutest form and presented in a concentrated and constructive manner. Within the entire New Testament, even within the whole Bible, nothing approximates so closely to a theological treatise as this epistle – although it was written as a genuine letter to a definite congregation.*

## **ITS GOSPEL WILL CONTINUALLY TOUCH AND MOULD EVERY BELIEVER**

This is surely a sufficient justification for turning to a study of this epistle, even if we have studied it before – for we are not the same people now as we were when we last read it. We will have doubtless matured considerably over the years and therefore are able to take far

more from a new study than was possible then. Romans has not changed, but we change, and what may have been difficult or even impossible to assimilate or understand in the past, may suddenly become very clear now and prove a source of enrichment and blessing. This is how it frequently is in the study of the Scriptures. This is how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and lives.

Here is another quotation from Brunner, to complete our introductory observations before beginning the study of the text:

*[The Epistle to the Romans] unfolds the fundamental thing about man's misery and God's help, man's vain striving for the goal and God's wisdom and mercy, about God's gift to all who will receive it, and the task arising out of this gift; and it is said in a way that no one else could say it before Paul or since. There is probably no document of human spiritual history where passion of feeling, power of thought and inexorableness of will are so permeated by one another as here. In the face of this volcanic original production in which everything surges red hot out of the depths of the divine mystery of love, the cheap contrast between life and doctrine, theology and piety, passes away. To be sure, Paul, is a theological teacher and thinker; but he is one whom we cannot follow without having our whole life set in motion.*

To be exposed to this is something pretty hazardous indeed! And with these quotations by way of introduction, we now proceed, following a brief outline of the letter, to examine the introductory verses of the first chapter.

## OUTLINE OF PAUL'S REASONING

The subject matter and theme of the epistle is as follows:

1. In a brief **introduction (1:1-15)**, Paul salutes the believers at Rome, introduces himself to them, and indicates his intention and hope of visiting them, and thus his reason for writing to them. He then proceeds to state immediately his **main thesis (1:16, 17)**: 'The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.' Righteousness is therefore the keynote of the epistle.
2. The first major section **(1:18 – 3:20)** is devoted to demonstrating the lost state of mankind. **Righteousness is utterly lacking in man**, whether pagan, moral or religious.
3. The incomparable message of the gospel, however, is that it proclaims a **righteousness for man that has been provided by God**. This is unfolded **(3:21 – 8:39)** as having been

manifested in Christ (3:21-26) and witnessed to by the law and the prophets (4:1-25), and as comprising a fourfold freedom, from wrath (5:1-21), from sin (6:1-23), from the law (7:1-25), and from death (8:1-39).

4. The apostle's next theme is that **righteousness has been refused by the Jews** and he addresses himself to the mysterious problem of how, if the gospel is the power of God for salvation, it should have been rejected by the very people for whom it was first destined (**9:1 – 11:36**).
5. The final section of the epistle (**12:1 – 15:33**) demonstrates how **righteousness is applied** in the lives of those who believe in Christ, and the implications and consequences of the gospel for practical life are enumerated.
6. In the concluding epilogue (**16:1-27**), in which Paul gives a wonderfully rich and illuminating demonstration of the **fruits of the divine righteousness** in the attitude of one man to other believers, he greets the church once more and pronounces upon it an apostolic benediction.



## **I. INTRODUCING THE GOSPEL OF GOD (1:1-17)**

### **FROM PAUL TO ROME 1:1-7**

#### **1:1 PAUL**

We are going to find that there will be occasions in this study when it will be quite feasible, as well as necessary, to look at one verse, or even part of a verse, in considerable detail; and likewise, occasions when a 'block' of a few verses will make us pause so as to see a synopsis of ideas that almost summarise what follows. We see this at the outset of Romans, in this very first verse, where in five single words in the original Greek – Paulos, doulos, kletos, apostolos, aphorismenos – we have a wonderfully comprehensive statement that tells us so much about the nature of the gospel itself. And how much they tell us about this man who became known as 'the apostle to the Gentiles'! The very name given us here – Paulos – is a reminder to us that he is a man to whom something great and decisive has happened. He was Saul of Tarsus, but he became a changed man. Old things passed away for him. This was his apostolic credential, that which gave him the right and authority to write and to preach the gospel. The word – doulos – means 'bond-slave'. In this word, Paul recognises that he is not his own. It speaks of his sense of being under an obligation to Christ that he could never fully discharge. In everything he did, he recognised himself as being Christ's captive, and therefore Christ's bidding was the only possible concern for his life. These two words, at the outset, set the scene for an understanding of the impact that the glorious gospel of the blessed God makes upon us.

#### **1:1 CALLED AND COMMISSIONED**

The next two words, kletos (called) and apostolos (apostle) go together, for Paul was an apostle by vocation, but kletos is used in reference to believers also in 7, and in both cases it is God who calls. This word, as used in the New Testament, always implies that the call has not only been given, but also responded to and obeyed. A Christian is one who has been called of God and who has obeyed the call and come to Christ. Not only so: the calling of God is something that originates in the eternal counsels of God, before all worlds. When a man is called of God, it is the outworking in time of something that has been ordained in eternity. Apostolos means 'a sent one'. In the strict sense it applies only to the twelve apostles, and also a few other New Testament figures. But in a more general sense every Christian is 'sent': he is a messenger, an ambassador of the gospel, committed to bear the glad tidings – although of course not all Christians are called to what we call 'full-time service'. The final word which Paul uses here, aphorismenos means 'separated', set apart for

the gospel. The meaning is well expressed in Paul's striking words in Philippians 3:13 '... one thing I do'. The picture is of a man claimed by God and utterly given over to him for the work of the gospel. This might be suitably paraphrased as 'reserved for the use of the gospel'. That is what the Damascus Road experience meant for him, and what being a Christian implied and involved! We begin to see from this how it was that everything about him told for God. He was so wholly given over to Christ that he could not but be manifest in him. He was 'a living epistle', known and read by everyone.

## **1:2-4 THE GOSPEL DEFINED**

Paul is very precise in the terminology he uses in 2-4 in describing the gospel that he has been commissioned to proclaim. It is 'the gospel of God ... regarding his Son ... Jesus Christ our Lord'. The language here is significant: the gospel is not something that Jesus taught, it was something he did, and the good news consists not in what he taught in his parables or in the Sermon on the Mount, but in what he accomplished on the cross and in his resurrection. RW Dale of Birmingham once said, 'Jesus came not to preach a gospel, but in order that there might be a gospel to preach'. 'Jesus Christ our Lord' is therefore the true object of our faith, and faith in him is faith in what he has done for us. We should notice how Paul anchors this gospel in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament is as much about Christ as the New Testament is, and ought to be understood as that which promises and points forward to him. This is, in fact, the only interpretation which gives any real meaning to the Bible as a whole. We begin to see that everything falls into place when we realise that what the whole Bible is about, from Genesis to Revelation, is Jesus – he who, sharing our common humanity, is descended from David and yet, in the mystery of his person, is at the same time the Son of God, and proved to be so by his resurrection from the dead, proved to be so also by our resurrection from the dead to newness of life in him. Let us never lose sight of the fact that the experimental proof that our gospel is real and true is the difference it makes in the lives of those who are drawn to the Saviour.

## **1:2-4 THE TWOFOLD MESSAGE**

The apostle now says two things about our Lord in 3 and 4, his life 'as to his human nature' and his life 'in resurrection'. There have been a number of different interpretations of these statements, but in the particular context in which they are made, it does seem that the contrast that is presented is between Christ's incarnation and his resurrection, and therefore between the two states of humiliation and exaltation. Christ was 'God manifest in the flesh', i.e. he became man and belonged to our common humanity. As such he was the son of

David, and this is the meaning of the Incarnation. But the significant content of the Incarnation, and that which makes it into a gospel, is atonement and victory; and the other thing that can be said about Christ is that through his resurrection he entered into a new sphere, that of sovereign power, as a Saviour mighty to save. This is the sphere of the Holy Spirit. But to say that he was 'declared' or 'designated' Son of God with power does not mean that he 'became' Son of God only at his resurrection, but rather that the resurrection declared him to be what he truly was – in much the same way as a sovereign who is king by legal right of succession is 'made' king at his coronation. From the beginning Christ was the Son of God, but in the days of his flesh he was the Son of God in weakness and lowliness, being limited in himself until the baptism of his passion was accomplished. By the resurrection, that limitation was removed, and he 'came into his own' as Son of God with power, being 'made head over everything to the church'.

### **1:5-7 GRACE AND APOSTLESHIP**

It is through this Christ that Paul knows he has received 'grace and apostleship' (5), by which he has been commissioned to preach the gospel. 'Grace' is something that he shares with all believers; but 'apostleship' refers to his special calling, concerning which he is in no doubt: he has to proclaim the good news of the gospel to all men and make the offer of salvation in Christ clear and plain to all without reservation. In that proclamation he summons them to 'the obedience that comes from faith'. As Calvin says, 'Faith is properly that by which we obey the gospel'. This, then, is the central issue of the church's proclamation. It is the storming of the resistant citadels of men's souls to bring them into submission to the will and obedience of Christ that constitutes gospel work. The section concludes (7) with a benediction which combines both Greek and Hebrew forms of salutation, 'grace and peace'. 'Grace', says Denney, 'is the love of God spontaneous, beautiful, unearned, at work in Jesus Christ for the salvation of sinful men. Peace is the effect and fruit in man of the reception of grace'. Such is the apostle's introductory greeting to those at Rome who were the recipients of this letter. We have already quoted Brunner's comment about the Epistle as being 'this volcanic original production in which everything surges red hot out of the depths of the Divine mystery of love'.

These are strong words but they certainly do not over-dramatise the impact of the Epistle's message, as the following account makes clear: the conversion to Christ of a man whose life was destined to change the face of Africa, Robert Moffat of Kuruman. Writing of his experience as a young man Moffat tells of how it was with him as he read the Scriptures: he says,

*At length I became uneasy, and then unhappy. The question would sometimes, even when my hands were at work, dart across my mind, What think ye of Christ? which I dared not to answer. A hard struggle followed ... I tried hard to stifle conviction, but I could not help reading much in the Epistles, and especially in the Epistle to the Romans. This I did with an earnestness I tried in vain to subdue ... For many weeks I was miserable ... I turned anon to my Bible, and grasped it, feeling something like a hope that I should not sink with it in my hands. I knew of no one to whom I could unbosom the agony that burned within. I tried to pray fervently, but thought there was a black cloud between me and the throne of God. I tried to hear Jesus saying to my soul, 'Only believe'; but the passages from which I sought comfort only seemed to deepen my wounds ... One evening, while pouring over the Epistle to the Romans, I could not help wondering over a number of passages which I had read many times before. They appeared altogether different. I exclaimed with a heart nearly broken, 'Can it be possible that I have never understood what I have been reading?' turning from one passage to another, each sending a renovation of light into my darkened soul. The Book of God, the precious, undying Bible, seemed to be laid open, and I saw at once what God had done for the sinner, and what was required of the sinner to obtain the Divine favour and the assurance of eternal life. I felt that, being justified by faith, I had peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and that he was made unto me wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*

*Oh to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!*

Please God it may be ours also to hear of similar effects from our reading and study of this tremendous epistle!

## **PAUL AND THE ROMAN CHURCH 1:8-15**

### **1:8 THANKSGIVING**

In these verses of personal introduction, Paul now explains his reasons for writing to the Romans, and expresses his deep desire to visit them. There can be little doubt that at least part of Paul's thanksgiving for them would be that there should have been a church in Rome at all, at the heart and hub of that great empire, for to him this would surely have immense strategic possibilities. And it seems clear that the phrase in 8, 'reported all over the world', indicates that in the apostle's estimation this was at least in some measure being realised. It is

hardly surprising therefore that he would have wanted to write to them and to visit them, since he would certainly want such a fellowship, in such a place, to be all that it could be for Christ. Great cities are places of great potential influence, and this may well explain the haunting desire expressed by him so often in Acts to get to the capital. O for such discernment to see the possibilities for our land today, and to have faith and patience to pray unceasingly for the establishment of Spirit-filled, biblical ministries in strategic centres throughout it! It is rather wonderful to see the warmth of his greetings and his prayer for them, although in fact he had never yet met them. This is surely a testimony to the reality of the doctrine of the communion of the saints, that we should be able to sense the very real bond that the apostle was conscious of existing between them and himself. Not only so: it is also striking, in the history of Acts, to read how remarkably and unexpectedly his prayers to be enabled to visit them in Rome were fulfilled and answered. One has only to read the later chapters of Acts to realise how the prayers which he sought from different fellowships in the ancient world (for example Col. 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 3:1) were abundantly answered: 'and so we came to Rome' (Acts 28:14).

## **1:8 A PASTOR'S HEART**

What has been said above serves to tell us something important about the apostle, which has a bearing on how we are to consider and interpret what he says. What we mean is this: Romans is certainly a massive theological statement, which makes tremendous demands on our minds and our thinking. But having said this, we must also say that it is not an academic treatise, and just as certainly not an intellectual exercise, cerebral in nature, so far as Paul is concerned. For, right at the outset of the epistle, and in these verses before us now, we feel the heartbeat of the man, the pulse of a warm and tender pastoral concern for the Roman believers that reveals his essential humanity. Paul was a great human, and his heart is undoubtedly exposed in all his writings in the New Testament. One thinks, for example, of his words to the Thessalonians:

*We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:7)*

Such was the kind of man who wrote this epistle to the Romans. We have already quoted from the writings of Emil Brunner, one of the most formidable thinkers and theologians of the 20th century, of whom it could be truly said that even to dip into his writings one becomes immediately conscious of the massiveness of his intellect. And yet, hearing him once give a series of lectures in Glasgow University, what came through

unmistakably in hearing the man was the immediate consciousness of a gentle, warm-hearted believer, with a deep pastoral concern, to whom it was a benediction to listen. This is what all of us who occupy the pulpit and preach the Word need to be, and those who hear must pray that always a heart of love will shine through every ministry that claims to be from God.

### **1:9-13 APOSTOLIC INTERCESSION**

A word should be said, before leaving these verses, about Paul's prayer in 9 ff. We have already spoken of his desire to visit Rome, and how his and others' prayers were wonderfully answered in God's good time; but we need to say something about his longing to impart to them some spiritual gift. There are different views held as to the precise meaning of this phrase. Some take it to refer to the imparting of what are called 'charismatic gifts'; others take it in a more general sense of referring it to Paul's ministry of the Word among them. There is not enough evidence to enable us to pronounce upon this conclusively, either way. But it is not so important to decide this, as to understand what Paul is getting at, by comparing phrase with phrase both here in this letter and elsewhere in Scripture. The purpose of this imparting, for example, was that they might be made strong (11), 'to strengthen you' (RSV). This is exactly the word Paul uses at the end of the letter, in Rom. 16:25: 'to him who is able to strengthen you by my gospel'. Between 1:11 and 16:25, therefore, we may well assume that Paul gives the means whereby this is to be fulfilled – his gospel! What if this is the meaning of 'spiritual gift'? One recalls the phrase in 15:29, 'in the full measure of the blessing of Christ'. This can surely only refer to his preaching of that gospel and to the fact that it is through preaching that blessing or benefit is communicated. Whether, therefore, specific spiritual gift or general, it is through his ministry that it would be accomplished. And it is surely not without significance that the apostle goes on to speak in 12 about 'their mutual encouragement in faith'. There is always a ministry by the fellowship of believers as well as to the fellowship. As Calvin says in his comment here '... he did not usurp the position of teacher without a desire also to learn from them, as though he said, "I am anxious to confirm you according to the measure of the grace conferred on me, that your example may also add to the eagerness of my faith, and that we may both thus benefit one another".'

### **1:14-15 GOSPEL OBLIGATIONS**

The importance of what follows in these verses is that they show how one man conceived of the God-given task of bringing men to the obedience of faith. Paul's reading of



the situation is that the gospel places him under an obligation which can never be fully discharged; it puts him in debt to God and to man in a way that makes Christian service a matter of honesty (see 12:1, 'spiritual act of worship') as well as of consecration. He owes it to men – all men, Greek or barbarian – to tell them of Christ. In 15, the phrase 'as much as in me is I am ready to preach the gospel to you' (AV, following the Gk), relates much better than the NIV this great eagerness of Paul to preach at Rome to the sovereign will of God. Moule renders it 'What relates to me' with the emphasis on me, as if to say that the hindrance, whatever it is, is not in him, but around him. 'I, as far as it rests with me, am ready' (Sanday and Headlam). The time for him to preach at Rome rests with God. When it comes, he means, he will be ready. The three 'I am's' in 14-16 – 'I am bound', 'I am eager' ('ready', AV), 'I am not ashamed' – have a wonderful sequence in them. Logically the first is in 16, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel'. This almost 'negative' way of putting it may be spoken of in terms of the literary device called 'litotes' or 'meiosis', which simply means the making of an affirmation by negation of the contrary (cf. Paul's statement that he was 'a citizen of no mean city', meaning a great city, Acts 21:39). In this sense, therefore, Paul is really saying that he is proud of the gospel. All the same, there may be in fact more in this particular form of words than a mere literary device. Two prominent but very different commentators, C.E. Cranfield and D.M. Lloyd-Jones, both point out that there was a very strong probability that Paul was conscious there were believers that might be tempted to be ashamed of the gospel in certain circumstances of stress. One thinks of Simon Peter's being ashamed of his association with Jesus, leading to his denial, and Paul's warning to Timothy against the danger of being ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (2 Tim. 1:8). Cranfield goes so far as to say that the presence of this temptation is a constant feature not just of all Christian preachers but of all Christian life. And who would be disposed to challenge that godly man's view?

## **I:14-15 GOSPEL PASSION**

What was said in the foregoing, however, may not be the deepest thing in this issue. It will be recalled that Paul (Acts 22:18, Gal. 1:16, 17) was withdrawn from the frontline of the church's forward movement and sent off into Arabia, where he was in isolation and obscurity. It was as if our Lord said to him, 'Now is not the time for you to be preaching, you have much hard thinking to do, thrashing out the implications of what has happened to you on the Damascus Road.' And there in Arabia his wonderful mind wrestled and grappled with the implications of the gospel and all that it involved until his whole soul was aflame and burning with its dynamic. And it is not too much to say that Romans was the outcome of this long and painstaking searching of heart. For Romans is his gospel (2:16; 16:25), in the sense that he had made it his own and forged it out of his own profound spiritual experience. And one of the things that became very clear to him was that the gospel placed him under an

inescapable obligation: he was 'bound'. The gospel that lifts the burden of sin from our hearts lays upon us another burden – the burden of a lost world. This is where Paul's third statement – 'I am eager' – assumes such significance. For it represents the conclusion to which his wrestling had led him, and the conviction that had formed in his heart that was inescapable for him. He now was ready, ready to preach at Rome, ready for anything, with a determination and a yearning to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ in the capital of the Roman empire. Unashamed, bound under obligation, ready and eager: we may well ask ourselves whether our experience of the gospel has had the effect on our lives that it had on Paul's.

## **THE THEME OF PAUL'S GOSPEL 1:16-17**

### **1:16 A MESSAGE OF POWER**

We must pause for a while at this great 16th verse, for it introduces us to the subject matter of the whole epistle. The Greek word translated 'power' here is 'dunamis', from which we get our word 'dynamite', and that is literally what Paul is claiming – the gospel of Jesus Christ is dynamite! Its message is power. This does not merely mean it is a message which tells of the power of God – it is the message itself that is the power of God. This is why the emphasis in the New Testament is always on the preaching rather than on the preacher. If the gospel were simply the story of God's power, then the important thing would be the preacher, and his ability to put the story over, his style, eloquence and technique. But since it is itself the power of God, it is the preaching that matters, and preaching consists in letting the message through to speak for itself. And eloquence, style and technique, or, to use Paul's phrase, 'wisdom of words' (1 Cor. 1:17), may precisely hinder the message from getting through, and make the cross of Christ of none effect. A simple illustration will help us here. A man bursts into a crowded gathering shouting 'Fire!' What is it that causes the stampede? Not his personality or his oratory, but simply the message he proclaims. And the greatest orator and the humblest child could have the same effect in such a situation. It is the message that needs to be let loose among men. We should learn from this to trust the living and life-giving power of the gospel. When we introduce it into a discussion, we are introducing not a topic but a dynamic, and we may never fully estimate the effect this will have.

### **1:16 PROVED BY PROCLAIMING**

The statement that the gospel is itself the power of God means, amongst other things, that its proof is dynamical rather than logical: that is to say it is demonstrated, in the last



analysis, not by argument, but by what it does. Of course, the gospel is first of all an appeal to the mind, and Paul's characteristic method was to 'reason' and persuade' (see Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 14, 19; 24:25). But it was a reasoning and explaining of the gospel message as revealed by God in the whole of the Scriptures, not an argument from human reason to prove the biblical texts genuine. We do not need to waste time trying to prove the gospel by such argument, for it is not a theorem, but a power for living, and if there is any demonstration to be done, it had best be the demonstration of the Spirit and of power as the Word of power is unleashed in proclamation. James Denney once said that the preacher's task is not to prove, but to proclaim the gospel:

*not to set out an unanswerable argument (although of course the gospel has a reasoned case), but rather to make an irresistible impression, and to make that impression upon the conscience, the moral nature of man, in such a way that it will be futile for him to protest against it, an impression that subdues and holds him for ever, to manifest the truth, to hold up the truth before men until it tells on the conscience of those that hear it.*

## **1:16 FOR A RICH SALVATION**

The word 'salvation' is used by Paul in a wide and general sense, with several thoughts included in it which together serve to demonstrate what the gospel does for us. First of all, it is the only power on earth that can lift the burden of sin from a man, and give him peace with God. Guilt is the great, inescapable fact of human experience, the towering barrier between man and God. In one form or another it colours the whole of human existence and, whether conscious or unconscious, it dominates the life of man. All attempts to rid oneself of this burden are doomed to failure, and come to shipwreck on the rock of man's past. We are all men and women with a past, and 'God will call the past to account' (Ecc. 3:15). No power on earth can wipe away the grim shadow that dogs our footsteps wherever we go. As Omar Khayyam puts it,

*The moving finger writes, and having writ  
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it*

But Christ lifts that burden: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn. 1:29); 'He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24). In the second place, the gospel is also the only power on earth that can heal lives that have been broken by sin. The glad message of the gospel is that 'by his wounds we have been healed' (1 Pet. 2:24; Isa. 53:5). As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, and men were healed

from the plague when they looked to it, so when the Son of Man was lifted up from the earth, a healing virtue flowed from him.

Such was our Lord's claim in Jn. 3:14; and one readily passes to the next chapter of John, to the story of the woman of Samaria, a broken, burned-out life, sin-scarred and sin-torn. No power on earth could have lifted her, but one day she met the living Christ, and the touch of his loving hand, full of kindness and compassion, mediated to her broken life the healing balm of God, and they said, 'This man really is the Saviour of the world'. In the third place, the gospel is the only power on earth that can bring release from the bondage and tyranny of sin, and therefore lead to, and bring about, a lasting moral transformation of life. For the power of the gospel brings a man out of one world into another. 'Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come' (2 Cor. 5:17). One readily recalls the moving words of the apostle in 1 Cor. 6:9-11, in which he describes the depths of depravity in which he found the Corinthians before their conversion, adding the words 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God'. What a glorious moral and spiritual transformation! Such is the power of God for salvation to everyone that believes.

## **I:16 ALL FROM GOD**

The fact that it is God's power at work in the gospel means that salvation is all from him. It follows therefore that the words 'to everyone who believes' cannot mean that faith is a condition of salvation, for properly speaking faith is the gift of God (cf. Eph. 2:8). But this does not mean that proclaiming the gospel and calling men and women to believe is to no effect, or unnecessary. Far from it, because faith is created by the gospel itself (this is part of the power inherent in the gospel), and imparted to us in the hearing of it (See 10:17). In the preaching of the word a miracle of salvation takes place. God speaks his living word of power through the word proclaimed in preaching, and in so doing calls men and women from death to life. Commanding a crippled man at the pool of Bethesda to 'Rise and walk' (the very thing the man simply could not do), Jesus proclaimed 'a time is coming and has now come when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear shall live' (Jn. 5:25). The dead cannot make themselves live. But the words of Christ are spirit and life (Jn. 6:33), and it is his word, and the voice of the living, risen, exalted Christ, that is heard in the preaching of the gospel of grace (see notes on 10:14). And the voice of power calls 'Live'! The gospel is power because it enables a man to believe. As Nygren says 'When one hears the gospel and is mastered by it, that is faith'.

**1:16b FIRST FOR THE JEW**

That the gospel is 'first for the Jew, then for the Gentile' is something repeatedly stressed by Paul throughout the epistle (3:1; 9:1ff.; 11:16ff.; 15:8, 9). This is important for two reasons. First, because historically the Jews were the specifically chosen people of God through whom the Messiah came. They were thus God's instrument for redemption, carrying the promise and guarding the promised seed until, as Paul says in Gal. 4:6, the time had fully come and 'God sent his son, born under law' (i.e. as a Jew) for the redemption of both Jew and Gentile, 'that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ' (Gal. 3:14). In that sense, as Jesus says in Jn. 4:22, 'salvation is of the Jews'. They were chosen as unique participants in God's unfolding plan of redemption, and as such they shared the matchless privilege of all God's gracious self-revelation under the old covenant, going right back to Abraham to whom the gospel was 'announced in advance' (Gal. 3:8). The Jews had the gospel first: in advance, in promise, in all the Old Testament privileges (cf. 9:4-5).

But secondly, because the messianic gospel can be understood in the first instance logically only against the background of law. Barrett puts it well:

*Only where human achievement in religion had reached its highest point could its absolute negation in the universality of human guilt (3:19ff.) and the freedom of God be proclaimed. Grace could be fully extended only where sin abounded (20), and the exceeding sinfulness of sin could be demonstrated only through the law (7:13).*

The gospel is therefore also for the Jew first in that it makes fullest and most logical sense to the Jew precisely because of his privileged background. Having been 'entrusted with the very words of God' (3:2) the Jews, above all people, knew the meaning of the holiness of God, of the sinfulness of sin, of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, and of the centrality of sacrifice. Unlike the pagan Greeks, or, for that matter, the totally unchurched 21st century 'pagan' today, the Jew had a world view shaped by God's revelation in Scripture. Every part of the law placarded before him the great gulf by which he had fallen short of God's righteous requirement. Every sacrifice reminded him he had to look outside himself for salvation, to throw himself utterly upon God's redeeming grace and mercy, through substitutionary, atoning sacrifice. He knew only too well why he needed the promise, the gospel, the good news of Christ! 'These are the Scriptures that testify about me' said Jesus (Jn. 5:39). Of all the peoples of the earth, the Jews should have been the natural recipients of the Messiah. The great mystery is that 'he came to his own', but that, in large measure at least, 'his own received him not' (Jn. 1:11). This rejection of Christ by the Jews at the present time is of course taken up by Paul in chapters 9 – 11. But throughout the epistle

we shall see him unfolding his gospel with frequent argument addressed historically and logically 'to the Jew first'.

### **1:17 RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED BY GOD**

We need to say something about Paul's words here to avoid any misunderstanding or confusion. In 17 the word 'revealed' is used. But we need to be clear that this is not something about which we can ask the question 'How can I find God?'. This is not the question the gospel addresses, indeed it raises a false and wrong impression. For to ask it implies that we are seeking after him, and that he seems to be hard to find. But this is not in fact the case. Indeed there is ample evidence in this very epistle that men do not seek after God. In 3:11, we have the explicit statement, 'there is no-one ... who seeks God'. The question the gospel addresses is very different: it is 'How can I get right with this God, from whom there is no escape?' The truth is that God is seeking us, in the word of the gospel. It is not we who seek him; it is he who says 'Where are you?' (Gen. 3:9). This is what is portrayed so graphically in Francis Thompson's marvellously profound poem *The Hound of Heaven*, which so movingly underlines the reality and the inexorableness of the Divine search. It is this that is revealed, historically and climactically in the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ – and that is being revealed (the verb is in the present continuous tense) – in the ongoing preaching of that gospel.

### **1:17 GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ACTION**

The reason why the gospel is the power of God for salvation is that the righteousness of God is revealed in it. But what does Paul mean by this, and what is the righteousness of God? Grammatically, it could just mean the intrinsic quality in God of his own judicial righteousness and holiness. But, in the context of Paul's argument, it fits much better as meaning a righteous status that God gives; as the Reformers put it, 'that which he royally bestows' on sinners through faith. But in fact there is more here also. For Paul the idea of activity is prominent, if not decisive, in the whole idea of righteousness. In 3:21ff., where he comes to expound this phrase more fully, he speaks of God as 'the one who justifies' (26), and this word is from the same Greek root which gives us the word righteousness. So, God's righteousness here virtually means 'God's way of justifying the ungodly', his mighty intervention in the human situation to help us, and the resulting status bestowed on the sinner of being declared righteous in relation to God.

This is what has been revealed in the gospel – God doing something, something decisive, unique, once-for-all, something we could never do for ourselves, which brings us

into an entirely new relationship with him. It is significant in this connection that Paul does not speak here of the love of God, and it is not because the gospel reveals that love that Paul is proud of it (the love of God is not even mentioned in the epistle until 5:5). This does not mean, however, that Paul does not count the love of God important. On the contrary: for Paul, it was the divine love that sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. But the message of the gospel itself is of divine righteousness. The righteousness of God is the divine love in action; it is how that love expresses itself in bringing effective help to man in his need. Notice again that Paul will not separate the sovereign, saving action of God from the responsibility to respond to that revelation as it is given in the gospel. As the gospel is the power of God for salvation 'for everyone who believes' (16), so the righteousness it accords is 'by faith from first to last' (17). God's intervention for sinners is mighty, but it demands a response. Dare we trifle with the gospel?

### **1:17 EVIDENCE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The quotation from Habakkuk 2:4, used by Paul to show that his teaching is according to the Scriptures, raises two questions. In the first place, Habakkuk certainly used the words with a meaning related to sanctification. Faithful devotion to God and his commands, in the midst of dangers from enemies without, leads to life and safety – this was the prophet's meaning. But Paul finds in his words the central truth of the gospel, namely justification by faith alone. The principle, however, inherent in Habakkuk's words is just as true applied to justification as it is to sanctification, and indeed must be true first of all of the former before it can be of the latter. For Habakkuk, and all the prophets, faith – absolute trust in God and his word and promises – is at the very heart of any true relationship to God which in turn bears fruit in the response of faithful living. Faith is always, and has always been, the key for righteousness. It is always a matter of faith 'from first to last'. Paul is therefore not wresting the prophet's words to suit his purpose, but going to the heart of them.

Secondly, it is not entirely clear whether 'by faith' refers to 'the righteous' or to 'live'. If it is taken with the former, the translation must be as the RSV gives it, 'He who through faith is righteous, shall live', but if with the latter, the NIV rendering is the correct one. Some commentators, favouring the RSV, think the distinction is one of great importance, others regard the question as merely one of emphasis. On balance, it does seem that the former rendering is to be favoured here as fitting best the immediate context and Paul's train of thought in general. But whichever is followed, the quotation becomes the 'text' on which the exposition of the next eight chapters of the epistle is based, with 'the righteous' and 'by faith' occupying the apostle's attention from 1:18 to 4:25, and 'shall live' from 5:1-8.

## 2. RIGHTEOUSNESS LACKING IN MAN (1:18 – 3:20)

### THE 'BAD' PAGAN 1:18-32

#### 1:18 RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Paul gives in 18 the reason why the revelation of God's righteousness (17) became necessary. It is that his wrath is also revealed against human sin. This is an idea that is foreign to modern man – and to some modern churchmen also – and repulsive to their thinking, but there can be no doubt that it is central not only to Paul's teaching but also to that of the entire New Testament itself. Views such as that of C.H. Dodd, who maintains that there is something impersonal about the wrath of God, and something incapable of being wholly personalised in the development of religious ideas, are effectively demolished by scholars of equal or even greater repute. To say that, 'what is traditionally regarded as our experience of God's anger would be more helpfully regarded as what inevitably happens to us if we behave inappropriately towards a reality of immense power', and to say, 'The live wire doesn't feel angry with us, but if we blunder against it we get a shock,' is bluntly answered by C.S. Lewis, when he says, 'What do you suppose you have gained by substituting the image of a live wire for that of angered majesty? You have shut us all up in despair; for the angry can forgive, and electricity can't.' Brunner goes even further, when he says,

*A theology which uses the language of Christianity can be tested by its attitude towards the biblical doctrine of the wrath of God, whether it means what the words of Scripture say. Where the idea of the wrath of God is ignored, there also will be no understanding of the central conception of the gospel: the uniqueness of the revelation in the Mediator ... So long as we continue to reject the scriptural ideas of divine holiness, of divine wrath, and of divine righteousness in punishment, the process of decay within the Christian church will continue.*

We should notice that Paul speaks of the wrath of God as being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. We need to understand what Paul is indicating in this. Not only is there a parallelism here with 17, but also the clear implication is that the righteousness of God (God's way of justifying the ungodly) and the wrath of God are both alike revealed in the gospel itself. But we need to see the implications of that statement. Where is the righteousness of God seen supremely? In the cross of Christ, in the death that he died: 'Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God'. This is gloriously true; but where was the wrath of God revealed? Precisely there, in the cross of Christ. It was revealed in the cross in what it did to Christ. What did the cry of dereliction uttered by our Lord on the cross mean, when out of the terrible darkness



there rang out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me?' (Matt. 27:46) if not just this, that in that terrible and awesome hour he endured the wrath of God upon a world's sin, when he bore it in his own body on the tree? It was a cry from hell, from God's lost Son, for it was the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men. This means, therefore, that we do not see the deepest meaning of divine wrath either in the disasters and catastrophes that have befallen sinful man throughout history, or in human life and experience. That wrath is truly known only when it is seen in the revelation in Gethsemane and Golgotha. Such is the situation that requires the revelation of the righteousness from God, and Paul deals with it characteristically, in terms of God's attitude to it rather than man's attitude to it.

### **1:18-23 UNGODLINESS AND WICKEDNESS**

In proceeding with Paul's argument, we have to recognise that there are some very major issues to be examined here, which are either implied in what the apostle says or explicitly underlined. For one thing, there is the significant association of ideas between 'ungodliness' and 'wickedness'. Paul does not in fact say explicitly that there is a connection between the two; but it is surely clear that what follows in these verses is an unfolding of wickedness (or unrighteousness, as the AV translates the word *adikian*), while in 24-32 the unrighteousness of men is the subject matter; and it is surely clear also that the one follows the other as night follows day. The perversion of man's relationship with God is what constitutes his ungodliness (this can mean 'without God', as in Eph. 2:12; 'alienated from God', as in Col. 1:21; and 'unlike God', as in this passage). It is this that leads to, and is the cause of, all his wrong relationships with himself and with his fellows – that is to say, his unrighteousness or wickedness. Now, the fact that God can justifiably reveal his wrath against men in this way presupposes a real culpability on their part, and this is what Paul proceeds to affirm. Man is 'without excuse' (20). It is not possible, for example, for men to plead that they could not know God before the revelation of Christ was given in the gospel, for in fact the truth – what can be known of God – had been given them, but they suppressed it by their wickedness. This 'truth' is explained in 20 as his eternal power and divine nature (or Godhead), which is clearly to be seen in the created order. And not only was it clearly to be seen: it was seen by them in this sense, they knew God, but they did not glorify him as God (21). This is the ground of their culpability and inexcusability.

## **I:18-23 NATURAL THEOLOGY**

What has just been said raises a very important issue, that of what may be called 'natural theology'. It is sometimes said that there was a threefold preparatory revelation of God before the revelation given in Christ – in nature, in conscience, and in the law. But we need to emphasise that there can be no thought in Paul's mind that there are other ways of truly knowing God, as well as through the gospel of grace. There is nothing in Paul's teaching either here or elsewhere in his epistles to support such a notion, indeed he expressly repudiates this, as for example in 1 Cor. 1:21 when he says, 'The world through its wisdom did not know God,' and in 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

But, conversely, it would be wrong to say that there is no revelation of God except in Christ. Paul does not deny that God reveals himself in the created order; for his invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things he has made, namely his eternal power and divine nature (20). But there is no contradiction here. Rather, what Paul is doing is to distinguish between the revelation of God's power and divine nature and the revelation that leads to a saving knowledge of him. But he is also indicating that even this revelation of God in creation is something which man in his sin is now incapable of receiving, for sin has blinded him to what is visibly set before his eyes. He has closed his eyes to the truth, and his blindness is therefore a willing blindness. It is this that makes him culpable before God and without excuse. As Calvin puts it,

*The manifestation of God by which his glory is known among his creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is, however, inadequate on account of our blindness. But we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity ... This knowledge of God, therefore, which avails only to prevent man from making excuses, differs greatly from the knowledge that brings salvation.*

## **I:24-32 THE ULTIMATE ISSUE OF SIN**

What follows now in 24-32 gives us some idea of the truly terrifying consequences of sin. 'God gave them over' – twice this is said within a verse or two. What can this mean? Just this: when men are determined to turn from God and embrace sin, he confirms them in their choice, lets them have their own way, and finally leaves them to it. 'My Spirit will not contend with man for ever' (Gen. 6:3). There is nothing left for God to do but leave man alone if he wilfully refuses him. But see what happens. Man takes a far more serious step



than he realises when he cuts himself adrift from God (there is a blinding power in sin!). In fact, he deprives himself of the unseen protection of common grace, and lays himself open to all manner of corruption that he had certainly not reckoned with. It is only too true that sin is something which, when committed, it is no longer in our power to control. The prodigal son certainly rebelled deliberately against his father's authority; but as certainly he could not have intended sinking as low as he did (men never do). Nothing could have been further from his mind. But he did, in fact, end up among the swine. And in the moral sphere, that is what Paul is indicating here. We should note the progression in sin indicated by the mounting intensity in this terrible passage. Sin is no mere negative quantity, or absence of good; there is a positive malignity in it. The movement from emptiness and vanity of mind, pride and foolishness through idolatry to sensuality, dishonourable passions, unnatural vice and complete depravity, is meant to underline this. At first deliberate, it becomes debasing and finally becomes disgusting.

### **1:24-32 THE AWFUL END OF SIN**

This progression is echoed elsewhere in Scripture, as for example, in the epistle to the Hebrews, where neglect of God's salvation (2:3) becomes open rejection of it in 6:4-9, and scorn and contempt in 10:26-29. Another developing pattern may be seen in the fact that in 21-23 the sins mentioned are sins against God, and in 24-27 sins against self, while in 28-32 it is sins against society; and from this we may learn that the rot sets in long before the moral lapse becomes evident. Paul's point in this grim catalogue is not merely to speak of the depravity and degeneration as inviting God's wrath, but particularly to assert that these are in fact the evidence of that wrath upon the heathen world. Hence the phrase 'God gave them over', which occurs for the third time in 28. Now lest we be tempted to assume that Paul is using extreme language, and that he has only certain types of people in mind, we should realise that what we have here is not a description of all human behaviour, but a description of all human nature. We simply deceive ourselves, and do not understand either the word of God or our own hearts if we think we could never descend to this, even in our worst moments. The truth is, the seeds of all these horrifying things, and of more that is not mentioned as well, are in our hearts, and but for the grace of God would come to fruition in our lives. The lesson here, then, is 'know yourself'. When we do, in the light of these verses, we shall marvel all the more at the love that can redeem us and the grace that can keep us from such a state.

## **1:24-32 MAN'S EXTREMITY – GOD'S OPPORTUNITY**

It is a measure of the greatness of the Pauline gospel that it claims to redeem men from such abysmal depths as are described in this passage. Nor is such a claim an idle one. It will be remembered that the apostle wrote to the Romans from the city of Corinth, and Corinth was a byword in the ancient world for debauchery and depravity of living. Paul was not theorising when he described the nature and effects of sin in such terms. He had seen it there in Corinth in all its degradation and low horror. He could well have added, 'This is all true; it is before my very eyes here as I write to you'. But look at what happens when the gospel of the grace of God is thrust into such a situation! This is the place of which God said to Paul in a vision, 'I have many people in this city' (Acts 18:8 ff.). Many people – from such a scene of degradation! This is the glory of the gospel, that it can rescue men from the jaws of hell, and lift them up to share a royal crown. And in writing later to the church in Corinth, Paul in a notable passage (1 Cor. 6:9 ff.) in which he gives a catalogue of sins comparable in character to those he mentioned here, adds, 'And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.' Small wonder that he was so proud of the gospel. He let it loose in the dark cesspool that was Corinth, and behold, men were gloriously and blessedly saved. The message of the cross was foolishness to those who were perishing but to those that were being saved it was Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

## **THE 'GOOD' PAGAN 2:1-16**

### **2:1-4 MANKIND'S CONDEMNATION**

Paul now carries his argument a step further in this new chapter, and turns his attention to another class of reader. The reference to 'judging' in 1 indicates surely that some were listening with approval to Paul's arraignment of the Gentiles in the first chapter, and sitting in judgement on them. There is a difference of opinion as to who 'you' refers to, some thinking it to be the Jew, others that it is the good or respectable pagan. This may have to be left as an open question, but the real heart of the apostle's argument is this (as Denney puts it): 'The sin of the Jews was the same as that of the Gentiles, but their sins were not' – in other words, 'in the actions you do, you are doing the same as the Gentiles are doing, namely sinning against the light.' Now, the principle of condemnation in ch.1 lies in the fact that the Gentile pagans had been unfaithful to that knowledge of the truth they possessed, suppressing the truth by their wickedness: when they knew God they did not glorify him as God. And Paul's point in ch.2 is just that. The Jews also had been unfaithful to the (even greater) light they possessed, in the law and the prophets and in the promises and the

covenants. It was thus that they were condemning themselves – they were doing the same thing in that sense. And, since the revelation they had was so much greater than what had been given to the Gentiles, their condemnation was correspondingly greater too. If, then – so Paul's argument goes – the judgement of God rightly falls on the Gentiles for their failure, by what token do they, the Jews, assume that when they do precisely the same as the Gentiles they will be treated differently? They think to escape the judgement of God – but how? Paul asks this question in relation to what in fact the Jews did say and think and believe. They really expected to be judged by God differently from the Gentiles. This is something that can in fact be verified by an examination of one of the contemporary books of Jewish writings, the Book of Wisdom, in the Apocrypha, where it is clearly indicated that while God judges the heathen in his wrath, he deals with the Jews differently (Wisdom, chs. 11 – 15). There are important implications in this, for today there are certainly those who rest complacently on their background and tradition in the Church and assume as a matter of course that they will therefore be dealt with differently from gross sinners. And Paul disabuses them of this fallacy in no uncertain manner (2,3), as if to say, 'You are in for a rude awakening if that is what you think about your own position.'

## **2:1-4 THE PERIL OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS**

We should note here something of considerable significance. The commentators point out that the apostle's teaching assumes at this point the form of a dialogue, a debate, an argument. Now, when Paul spoke of the Gentiles being without excuse, there was no dialogue with them: they were silent. But when he comes to the Jew – the religious man – it is a different story. Here the arguments begin. The Gentile knows that he is a sinner; but the Jew has no intention of submitting to the indignity of such a verdict, and so he argues. The self-righteous, the respectable, religious man is much more difficult to convince that he needs grace just like the unrighteous man. And the fact that the arguments go on for a long time is very significant. Argument against the Word of God is a great sign of an uncommitted heart. It is true that when many people are confronted by the real and living God through the preaching of the gospel, they are drawn, challenged, arrested, and brought to a point of crisis. They know they must come to terms with this tremendous reality that has confronted them. But instead of submitting to Christ, they turn back, suppressing the truth in their hearts, because they are not prepared to yield themselves to God. It is at this point that the hardening power of sin reveals itself, and they begin to walk the downward road that will ultimately lead to their being given over by God to a base mind, and to improper conduct. It is not so much that his Spirit finally leaves them; but there is ample evidence in the Scriptures that this is an extremely dangerous position to be in. There are examples of this in the New Testament itself. The rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16ff.) and Felix the Governor (Acts 24:22ff.)

are cases in point. Both were brought to the brink of God's blessing of salvation and to the very gates of heaven, but both turned away, instead of coming to terms with the gospel. Well might the apostle say, in Heb. 4:7, 'Today when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' We should not forget, either, that in one confrontation our Lord had with the Pharisees, when they were boasting in their privileges, saying, 'Abraham is our father,' as if to put beyond doubt that they were accepted in God's sight, He said to them, 'You belong to your father, the devil.' (Jn. 8:39, 41, 44) What must they have thought then?

## **2:5-16 PRINCIPLES OF JUDGEMENT**

We look at these verses together as a whole in the first instance, in terms of a series of four principles by which God deals with men – principles of judgement, it could be said. These are as follows: judgement a) according to truth (2); b) according to deeds (6); c) according to impartiality (11); d) according to the gospel (16). There is a great deal in these statements and we will need to leave a full exposition of them until later; but in the meantime, we look at the wonderful words in 4 about, 'the kindness of God leads towards repentance'. In their context these words challenge the Jews about their mistaken notion of being a privileged people; and what Paul says to them very pointedly, even starkly, is that, 'the kindness of God - his forbearance and long-suffering - is not for presuming upon, but for leading you to repentance.' This is a wonderful word, set in such sombre surroundings, and it is some evidence of the central thrust of Paul's ministry and message that he should come out with such a bright jewel of grace and good news as this. It is clear from the context that this is a word spoken originally to the Jews, but it is also a word of wide theological import. And we today share common ground with the Jews in this respect, that we too have received special revelation, as they did, in the gospel. And what is said here of the Jew is a fortiori true of us in this day of grace, for these special privileges that they had are now ours, in that gospel. This should do two things: on the one hand, it will be an illumination to those who have never understood or perhaps even heard, the message of the gospel before. On the other hand, it will be a challenge and a warning to those who, like the Jews, have heard it and paid little heed to it. Above all, it will be the giving of light from God, light to respond to, to follow, to obey, unto eternal life.

## **2:5-16 THE KINDNESS OF GOD**

The Greek word for 'kindness' that Paul uses here in 4 is also used by our Lord in his reference to his 'easy yoke' in Matt. 11:30, in the sense of there being nothing harsh or galling about it; and also in his parabolic words about, 'the old wine of the gospel being

better,' that is, 'mellowed with age'. Christ's 'kindness' is shown graphically in his reception of the penitent woman in Lk. 7:36-50; and in the words of the hymn:

*To those who fall how kind Thou art*

This brings us near to the heart of the word's meaning, for it is kindness to the undeserving that is in view – as Paul points out in another epistle: 'not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit' (Tit. 3:5). Above all, there is one particular reference to the word in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 54:8-10: 'For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back ... though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, Who has compassion on you'. The whole chapter in Isaiah is a moving statement about God's unchangeable covenant. 'Kindness' is a 'covenant' word and it speaks of God fulfilling his covenant promise to mankind. It is God saying to us, 'I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' We sometimes sing

*I wondered what He saw in me  
To suffer such deep agony*

Ah, it was nothing that he saw in us, to make him die on the cross, it was something in him, his kindness, to the undeserving, to those who have blotted their copybook, who have no goodness of their own to plead, and no claims to advance. This is the wonder, and the glory, of the gospel!

## **2:5-16 THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF JUDGEMENT (I)**

The four principles of judgement outlined in these verses have caused a good deal of misgiving among evangelical folk, especially the second, 'judgement by works' (6) – which seems to fly in the face of what they have held fervently about salvation by grace through faith, apart from the works of the law. But when one recalls that it is Paul himself who asserts the primacy of salvation by grace through faith, and that he could hardly be supposed to be contradicting himself, we should surely owe it to him to refuse to believe that he is guilty of double talk here, and realise that there must be some reassuring answer to give to this seeming contradiction. We shall say more of this presently when we come to it, but first of all we look at the first of these principles, judgement based on truth (2). This means that divine judgement squares with the facts. And God is right in so judging. There is no injustice with God. With men, there is always the possibility of errors being made. It has been known for harsh and even severe penalties to be passed without warrant, in British justice, and even

with our safeguarding system of appeal courts, and appeals to The House of Lords, and even to the Sovereign, it is still possible for some injustice to be done. But not with God. He judges according to truth. And very often, it is not only that justice is done, but also that it is seen to be done, by him. One recalls, for example, how God pronounced judgement on Ahab, in 1 Kings 25:35-43, with Ahab agreeing and acquiescing in the divine verdict upon him. It is striking to see that in God's judgement of men he makes them agree with the justice of the case against them. In 3-5 Paul proceeds to apply and amplify what he has stated in 2. Since God judges according to truth in this way, how should any man suppose that any privileged position could exempt him from punishment? That would reflect on the justice of God. There is no escape along this or any other route. The force of this is seen very poignantly in Amos' blistering challenge to Israel, 800 years before Paul wrote: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins' (Amos 3:2). Being known, or chosen, of God does not exempt a man from judgement: it ensures it, when he disobeys the laws of God, despising and presuming upon them.

## **2:5-16 THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF JUDGEMENT (II)**

The second of these principles, given in 6, with what follows it by way of implication (7-10), is open to misunderstanding by modern minds. At first glance what the words seem to be saying is: by trying very earnestly, a man may attain to everlasting life and reward. But this is not only in fact what they seem to be saying, but also what they are in fact saying. This has been a fruitful ground of controversy and misunderstanding in the life of the Church. On the one hand, there are those who try to drive a wedge between Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone and the words of Jesus in, for example, Matt. 25, where he emphasises the centrality of works – 'the cup of cold water in his Name' and 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me'. On the other hand, it is stressed that here in Rom. 2 what Paul says is in agreement with what Jesus says in Matt. 25. Is there therefore a contradiction somewhere in this? Not so. We must recognise that it is perfectly possible to quote both Jesus and Paul on the question of entrance into the kingdom of heaven in such a way that it is conclusively clear that salvation is entirely by the rich, sovereign, unmerited grace of God apart from anything a man can do. Compare, for example, Paul in Eph. 2:8 and Jesus in Jn. 3:7. It is clear that no matter what a man does, however hard he tries, until the sovereign grace of God by the Spirit imparts life to him, that man is lost; he can do nothing to help himself. Re-creation, in the very nature of the case, is something in which a man cannot have any part. But also, it is possible to quote both Jesus and Paul in a very different way, as for example in Matt. 25:31 and Rom. 2:6-10, in both of which man's works are clearly said to be all-important, not faith. What are we to say to this? The simplest solution to this seeming contradiction is to begin with the assumption that neither Jesus nor Paul could



reasonably be held to have contradicted themselves, and that therefore these statements above quoted must be statements made from two different standpoints, about the same basic reality. We shall amplify this in the note that follows.

### **2:5-16 THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF JUDGEMENT (III)**

The truth of the matter is that neither Jesus nor Paul is speaking in these verses from Matt. 25:31 and Rom. 2:6-10 about justification at all, but rather about judgement. We may therefore sum up the issue as follows: When the Bible, in Jesus and Paul alike, speaks of justification by grace through faith, the reference is to the beginning of the Christian life, that act by which we enter into the kingdom of God. But when the Bible, in both Jesus and Paul, speaks of judgement by works, the reference is not to the beginning of the Christian life but to its end. And the existence throughout Christian life of good works is ultimately the only real proof that it ever really began in the first place, through justifying faith. As one commentator puts it, 'The apostle is simply concerned with the great fact that righteousness leads to life and unrighteousness to death. He is dealing with the result, not the process; the goal, not the way.' Another commentator, Godet, one of the greatest of a former generation, says:

*Justification by faith alone applies to the time of entrance into salvation through the free pardon of sin, but not to the time of judgement. When God of free grace receives the sinner at the time of his conversion, he asks nothing of him except faith: but from that moment the believer enters on a wholly new responsibility; God demands from him, as the recipient of grace, the fruits of grace ... The reason is that faith is not the dismal prerogative of being able to sin with impunity; it is, on the contrary, the means of overcoming sin, and acting holily; and if this life-fruit is not produced, it is dead, and will be declared vain.*

It is this consideration that explains Paul's statement elsewhere, in 2 Cor. 5:10, 'We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.'

### **2:5-16 THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF JUDGEMENT (IV)**

The third and fourth principles – judgement according to impartiality (11) and judgement according to the gospel (16) – are less controversial and become reasonably straightforward when once we understand that when the Scriptures speak of justification by

grace through faith, they are speaking of the beginning of Christian life, and of that act by which we enter into the kingdom of God; but when they speak of judgement by works, they are referring not to the beginning of Christian life but to its end. Good works do not, of course, argue in themselves that a man will be justified before God, but their absence from his life does argue that he will not be justified, for faith without works is dead. And it is with the absence of fruit flowing from the privileges the Jews enjoyed that Paul is concerned. They should have shown persistence in doing good (7) as the fruit of a real faith (obedience to the truth), but failed to do so. This was their condemnation. Paul illustrates in 14-16 the cruciality of works, with a reference to the Gentiles, contrasting their doing of the law's requirements with the Jews' mere knowledge of it. This is the all important thing, and the fact that some Gentiles sometimes conformed to the law's requirements, even though they did not have the law in the way the Jews did, proves that the requirement of the law was written in their hearts; i.e. they have an objective witness to what is right and wrong, and if they act contrary to it they too are sinning against light, and therefore responsible before God. Jew and Gentile alike must be brought face to face with Christ and the gospel in the last judgement, 'the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares' (16). The gospel is the only power that can make bad men good, and create new moral integrity. And when men refuse the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, they refuse the only possibility of making good.

## **THE RELIGIOUS MAN 2:17-29**

### **2:17-24 THE FAILURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE JEWS**

It is with this absence of fruit flowing from the privileges the Jews enjoyed that Paul is concerned, and the next part of his indictment of mankind follows in the remainder of the chapter. But before we turn to this, something needs to be said, by way of introduction, about 14 and 15. The AV translates the beginning of 14 as, 'When the Gentiles ...' but there is no 'the' in the Greek, and modern versions correctly omit the word, reading, 'When Gentiles ...'. The point being made is not that what is said refers to all Gentiles, but to some only. In fact what Paul says in 14 could only refer to some Gentiles. Cranfield thinks that Paul means 'Gentile Christians', but this is not likely or feasible: a reference to genuine believers in Christ does not suit Paul's argument here, since he is concluding all under sin, both Jews and Gentiles, and believing Gentiles would not come under such a category. Also, it is not the case that believing Gentiles do not have the law: if they are properly instructed, they do have the law, they are 'en-lawed' to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). John Murray brings out something very clearly in this: if these Gentiles are without the law, how can they be regarded as having sinned, since it is 'by the law' that the knowledge of sin comes, and 'sin is not taken into



account when there is no law' (5:13). The answer is (following Murray) that though the Gentiles are 'without the law' in the sense of specially revealed law – (this was the privilege of the Jews only) – yet they are not entirely without law, for the law is made known to them and brought to bear on them in another way. We shall continue this comment in tomorrow's note.

## **2:17-24 A LAW TO THEMSELVES**

Following upon yesterday's note, we point out that the Gentiles are 'a law to themselves', and 'show the law written in their hearts'. 'Without the law' in one sense, they are 'under the law' in another. The words 'by nature' (14) refer to that which is engraved in their natural constitution. There is a similar kind of emphasis in Jn. 1:9, where John speaks of 'the true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world', which Calvin interprets to mean, 'We know that men have this peculiar excellence which raises them above other animals, that they are endowed with reason and intelligence, and that they carry the distinction between right and wrong engraven on their conscience. There is no man therefore whom some perception of the eternal light does not reach.' And therefore, there is no man of whom it cannot be said that he is 'without excuse'. James Denney, commenting on these same words, says,

*There is a triple proof that Gentiles, who are regarded as not having law, are a law to themselves: (i) the appeal to their conduct: as interpreted by the apostle, their conduct evinces, at least in some, the possession of a law written in the heart; (ii) the action of conscience: it joins its testimony, though it be only an inward one, to the outward testimony borne by their conduct; and (iii) their thoughts: their thoughts bear witness to the existence of a law in them, inasmuch as in their mutual intercourse, their thoughts are busy bringing accusations, or in rarer cases, putting forward defences: i.e. in any case exercising moral functions which imply the recognition of a law.*

If therefore they sin, they are responsible for their sin and liable to judgement just as much as the Jew who has his law, for they are thereby sinning against the law of conscience as, earlier, it was said that the bad pagans sinned against the light of creation, holding down the truth in unrighteousness.

## 2:17-24 THE DEVASTATING BROADSIDE

Paul – in speaking explicitly of, and to, the Jews, applying in particular what he has already said to them in general, and showing that what is true of the Gentiles is just as true of them, in that ungodliness (refusal of light) leads to unrighteousness in their case also – gives us some indication of what he would have been like in the pulpit. What a devastating broadside he launches against the spiritually proud, self-righteous Jew! All the thunder of the prophets of old resounds here as, Nathan-like, he cries, ‘You are the man!’ Look at the nature of the charge he brings against them; this explains his vehemence, for by their failure to obey the light they dishonoured God and caused his holy Name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (23-24). It is significant to note that these charges are the same in principle as those he made in the previous chapter against the Gentiles. There, it was sins against God (1:21-23), against self (1:24-27), and against society (1:28-32); here it is sins against society (21), against self (22), and against God (22b, 23). And what Paul is saying is that, religious background or no religious background, when men turn away from God and refuse his light, unrighteousness is always the result.

## 2:17-24 THE SOLEMN VERDICT OF GOD

What was said at the end of yesterday’s note substantiates Paul’s earlier charge against the Jews, ‘You do the same things’ (1). Some question whether he means these charges against the Jews are to be taken in a literal sense, or in terms of Christ’s radical interpretation of them in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21ff.). His indictment, however, that God’s Name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of their behaviour seems decisive in favour of a literal interpretation, since metaphorical sins such as robbing God (Mal. 3:8ff.) or spiritual adultery (Hos. 2), would scarcely evoke such a reaction from the Gentiles, or even draw their attention, in the way that literal theft, adultery or sacrilege would certainly do. And Paul would hardly risk weakening his case by making charges he could not substantiate. References such as Matt. 23:14, 25; Matt. 27:18; Mark 3:6; Acts 5:17, 40; Acts 7; Acts 13:45; Acts 14:2, 5, 19; Acts 17:5; Acts 18:10; and Acts 19:37 amply reveal the ugliness of the Jewish temper in the context of their religious bigotry, and the lengths to which they often went in their evil ways. C.H. Dodd comments:

*There is evidence enough of the terrible degradation of Jewish morals in the period preceding the destruction of the Temple. Thus we have a discourse from Paul’s younger contemporary, Joachim ben Zakkai, delivered not much more than ten years after the date of this letter, in which he bewails the increase of murder, adultery, sexual vice, commercial and judicial corruption, bitter sectarian strife, and other evils. There is in Paul’s words an added note of bitter*

*indignation – the indignation of the high-minded Jew who moved about the great cities of the pagan world and found the very name of Jew made a byword by the evil ways of its bearers.*

Such is the proof, from the Scriptures and from contemporary records alike, that the Jews, having turned from light, had entered into a darkness as great as that of the Gentiles who did not have the law.

## **2:25-29 NO SHELTER IN SACRAMENTS**

Paul's argument thus far has been designed to show that the Jew's trust in the mere possession of the law and in the privileges of his calling is in vain; these things do not and cannot put him on a different footing with God from the Gentiles. Both alike are judged without partiality by works. But the Jew comes back again with yet another defence – which, he thinks, is a decisive argument in his favour, distinguishing him from the Gentile and placing him in a different category – that of circumcision. Was not this the seal of the covenant God had made with his people, and must not this safeguard them in his sight and ensure their acceptance? But Paul drives him from this refuge also, pointing out that circumcision is not only profitless unless the outward sign is matched by an inward reality, but also nullifies and indeed reverses it (25). How therefore should the Jews think that God would close his eyes to their disobedience, merely on the ground of their having performed the rite? On the contrary, so important is obedience to him that when an uncircumcised Gentile keeps the law, God reckons this as circumcision, and when a circumcised Jew breaks it, as uncircumcision. That this was a deeply ingrained defence in the Jewish heart may be seen in the instinctive resort to it in both John the Baptist's (Matt. 3:9) and Jesus' (Jn. 8:39ff.) teaching. And it is some evidence of the thrust of their teaching (and Paul's) that their instinctive reaction should have been so fierce and resentful. It is understandable of course what a feeling of misgiving and dismay must have assailed them, for the whole fabric of their religious life was being called in question. But it is precisely at this point, and only here -- where discomfiture and even fear grips the heart at the realisation of having been all wrong from the beginning – that hope can dawn.

## **2:25-29 DANGER OF PREOCCUPATION WITH SACRAMENTS**

What was said at the end of yesterday's note constitutes a word in season to all who tend to lay too great an emphasis on outward symbol at the expense of inward character. Substitute baptism and the Lord's supper for circumcision here, and the picture is brought up-to-date. Now, one recognises that there are differences of opinion about the sacraments,

particularly baptism, and for ourselves we are content to agree to differ with those who hold positions other than our own, and respect them if sincerely held. But we do think at the same time that there is a grave danger of becoming too preoccupied with this subject and of giving it a significance far exceeding New Testament warrant. We think with sorrow and grief of the excesses to which we have seen this lead, and indeed the inhumanity it produces in lives that used to be tender and gracious, and the sometimes horrifying exhibition of spiritual pride it encourages, and above all the spiritual deadness in which it results, in individuals and fellowships alike, so far astray does it go from the real heart of the gospel. This statement in 28, 29 on the inwardness of true religion enshrines an important idea for Paul, as is seen later in 7:6 in the contrast between the letter and the spirit, and particularly in 9:6ff., in the discerning of an Israel within Israel. It is also developed in other epistles, as Phil. 3:3, where the true circumcision is spoken of in relation to those 'who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh'. The apostle thus exposes Judaism as he knew it, and had once belonged to it, as a fundamental misunderstanding of the divine revelation that had been given to the Jews. And the Christian faith which he now proclaimed both gave the true interpretation of the Old Testament, and also fulfilled it.

## **ANSWERING BACK 3:1-8**

### **3:1-8 STILL ANSWERING BACK**

Still the questions go on. Not even yet is the Jew silenced, but it is surely clear that his back is to the wall, cornered by Paul's devastating logic. Question after question comes, only to be silenced by the apostle until nothing more can be said. Why is it that men will argue so much? It can only be because they are unwilling to submit to the truth, that is to say, their problem is not so much an intellectual one, but moral. The first two questions here, in 1 and 3, have however a considerable significance, for they touch on the mystery of the Jews' persistent unbelief in face of the coming of the Messiah, and Paul finds it necessary later in the epistle (chs. 9-11) to deal with them much more fully than he does here. At this point he contents himself with the briefest of answers. The great privilege the Jews had was that they had received the oracles of God, God's special revelation of himself in his Word. But this was not something for them to be complacent about, but to be responded to in true obedience. There is nothing automatic about salvation, even though it is by sovereign grace, and unbelief (3) proves not that the Word is of none effect, but that it has been refused. The other questions here, in 5 and 7, Paul dismisses rather than answers, and we should learn from this that in Christian debate there are some questions not worthy of the dignity of an answer, for the good reason that they should never have been asked. We need to beware of allowing insincere men to bog us down with irrelevancies.

### **3:1-8 ECHO OF PAUL'S OWN CONFLICT?**

There may well be an autobiographical note in this passage, indicative of the fierce inward battle Paul himself fought in his pre-Christian days, when he was assailed by the apostolic preaching in Jerusalem, and began to be afraid that this gospel which he detested might after all be true. At all events, the point that is being made here is that Paul's argument in 2:25-29 seems to suggest that one might as well not be a Jew at all, since it seemed, according to Paul, to make no difference. If being a Jew, he seems to be saying, does not of itself guarantee salvation, what special position can the Jews be said to have? To have said (1:16) 'first for the Jew' implies a special position, but now this seems to be contradicted. But to argue in this manner is to show a preoccupation with the privileges rather than the responsibilities of the situation. This, as was pointed out in yesterday's note, is where the Jews made their fundamental mistake. The next objection, in 3, concerns that faithfulness of God, which might seem to be impaired or nullified by Israel's unfaithfulness. The objection implies that if this is so, it would be better to assume, against Paul's reasoning, that since God had covenanted with Israel, they must necessarily all be right with him. But Paul will have none of this: all that the unfaithfulness of the Jews does is to magnify God's faithfulness and emphasise it more clearly. And from this point on, the objections lose their force, becoming logically weaker, until Paul brushes them finally aside, and brings his arraignment of human sin to its conclusion in 9-20.

### **3:1-8 PRIVILEGES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

We could put the argument in these verses in the language of today: 'If being a church member does not of itself guarantee salvation, what is the point of being a church member? If being brought up in a Christian home, or in the fellowship of the church, does not suffice in itself to make us Christians, and put us in the right with God, what is the advantage of these things?' And the answer is: 'The great, the inestimable, advantage is that you have access to the oracles of God. You receive the Book. In your hands is placed the Book that teaches you how to live and how to die. That is the unspeakable advantage that you have over the heathen, who have never heard the good news of the gospel. Light is shining all around you.' But, obviously, the Book has to be read, and understood and obeyed, if it is to be of any use to a man. Being a member of the church, being brought up in a Christian home, and reared within Christian influences – these things do not of themselves make the 'becoming' a Christian any easier, if by that we mean that it is not such a great issue for some as for others; for the human heart is hard and by nature opposed to God everywhere; but it does mean to be brought within the light of revelation, and within the sphere where it is gloriously possible to be saved. That is the unspeakable privilege that the man nurtured amid Christian

influences has over others. And in that situation, to refuse light, and not be converted, when you hold the Book in your hands, the Book that speaks everywhere about salvation, is a very grave responsibility indeed. 'This is the verdict,' says Jesus, that, 'Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light, because their deeds are evil' (Jn. 3:19).

## **THE FINAL VERDICT 3:9-20**

### **3:9-20 THE VERDICT OF SCRIPTURE**

We come in these verses to the conclusion of Paul's argument. It should be noted that there is a problem of interpretation in 9, in the understanding of the words, 'Are we any better?' and a difference of view among the commentators as to what is precisely meant has bedevilled interpretation for long enough, with some preferring the opposite (and just as legitimate) translation, 'Are we worse than they?'. But on balance it is probably more likely that the NIV (following AV) is right. The Jews are asking whether their position is better or different from the Gentiles, and Paul says, 'No, for both Jew and Gentile,' as he proceeds to conclude, 'are alike under sin, and therefore culpable before God.' In point of fact, it does not much matter whichever way we take this, for the conclusion is in any case the same. And the apostle gives 'chapter and verse' for a scriptural corroboration of this, in a series of quotations from the Old Testament. And, lest the Jew should attempt to evade the verdict of their own Scriptures, Paul reminds them that 'whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law' (19) – that is, to the Jews themselves, rather than the Gentiles. This series of Scriptural references is about them, and refers to them, not to someone else. There can be no possibility of their being able to say, 'This does not apply to me, but to the down and outs and such like.' 'Yes,' says Paul, 'it does apply to you;' for 'there is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (23). Such is the verdict that Paul passes on all, Gentile and Jew alike. Now pause for a moment and see where we are. Paul asserts that by the deeds of the law – by doing all we can, and the best we can – no flesh shall be justified in God's sight. As the Westminster Confession puts it, 'We cannot, by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life.' This is a categorical and unmistakeable assertion. 'Then what is to happen to us?' we cry. And this is what Paul wants us to ask. And his answer, 'Apart from the gospel message,' to which he now turns, 'there is only one thing that could possibly happen to us – judgement – for we are guilty before God, and accountable to him.'

### **3:9-20 THE CONCLUSION OF THE ARGUMENT**

Thus, the verdict – inescapable, inexorable and final. Every mouth is silenced, and the whole world held accountable to God (19). The particular emphasis in the words ‘every mouth silenced’ is that there can be no more objections. The verdict is final, and there is nothing more to say. One readily thinks in this connection of the alternative rendering of the well-known words in Isa. 1:18, ‘Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord’ to read as follows: ‘Come, let us bring our reasoning to a close.’ At a criminal trial the judge, before passing sentence, says to the prisoner in the dock, ‘Have you anything to say?’ But there is nothing to say; the pleading is over, and the verdict has been pronounced: ‘Guilty’, and the sentence is duly passed. And – in the spiritual parallel – but for the grace of God there would be for the sinner only eternal loss. But in that awesome moment, God says, not, ‘Depart from me’, but, ‘But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known.’ Here is God’s way of justifying the ungodly, and acquitting the guilty. What, in effect, Paul is saying is simply this: ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’ (Jn. 1:29)



### **3. RIGHTEOUSNESS PROVIDED BY GOD (3:21 – 8:39)**

#### **THE GIFT OF GOD 3:21-31**

##### **3:21-25 THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL**

We come in these verses to the second main section of the epistle, and to the message of the gospel itself, which is the proclamation of the mighty intervention of God to procure salvation for men. We have seen that the apostle has up to this point been concerned with a necessarily preparatory statement on man's total lack of righteousness and the wrath of God that is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men. This, as will be recalled, was Paul's introductory statement in 1:18, following his initial proclamation of the good news of the gospel, in 17; and from 1:18 right through to 3:20 we have studied and examined the case that Paul makes against all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, as being accountable to God. And now in 21ff., he proceeds to proclaim the wonderful news of the gospel, that God has opened up a way whereby man in his accountability to him may be justified and forgiven all his sins, by the free grace of God in Christ. This is the great, the incomparable, and glorious message of divine grace, the good news of the gospel that transforms the whole of human experience. It is the contrast introduced by the coming of Christ into the human situation, which Paul now proceeds to unfold and present in a fulness that beggars description in its detail and its profound theological depth, making it the fullest and most comprehensive presentation of that gospel in the whole of literature. From this point on to 8:39 he takes up his earlier phrase 'the righteousness of God' in a marvellous, comprehensive way. Here is the heart of the gospel: The plight of man – his woe, his need, his guilt, his helplessness, his lostness – is answered and met by the power of God, who has come in the person of his Son to deal with sin, so that it no longer stands, as it once stood, between man and himself.

##### **3:21 THE GOOD NEWS**

This amazing mystery, which constitutes 'the good news of God concerning his Son', is comprehended in the phrase 'a righteousness from God,' which we earlier paraphrased as 'God's way of justifying the ungodly'. And about this, Paul proceeds to say two things: a) it is revealed in Jesus Christ – and this is expounded and amplified in 3:21-31; b) it is testified to by the law and the prophets – and this is expounded and amplified in 4:1-25. We must not miss the significance of this latter statement. For it means that the gospel appears in the Old Testament as well as the New and it is therefore a misunderstanding of the Old Testament to speak of it as a dispensation of the law, whereas the New is one of grace. The real contrast



between the two is not that between law and grace, but that between promise and fulfilment. Two observations may be made at this point. The first is this: the more one sees the unfolding of the logical sequence of Paul's argument and thought, the more one is obliged to admire his methodical presentation of the gospel. Point by point he develops his case, making statement after statement, introducing new themes, touching upon them, only to be taken up later more fully, until the whole work looks almost like an intricate, symphonic structure, with every part contributing to the unity of the whole. How thankful we should be that Paul brought such a dedicated mind and intellect to the writing of this epistle. The breadth and depth of his thought is impressive to a degree. We should recognise that in this study we are in touch with a very great mind indeed. That is the first thing, and the second is this: it will be noticed that in these few brief verses Paul uses great massive theological words and concepts – justification, sacrifice of atonement (which translates a word rendered more accurately in the AV as propitiation) redemption, faith – and that his whole argument is massively doctrinal and theological. This fact calls for some comment, which we will pursue in tomorrow's note.

### **3:21-25 THE NEED FOR TRUE THEOLOGY**

The tendency today is to decry theology, to shrug it off as something abstruse and academic, far removed from the realities of everyday situations. 'What is needed,' we are told, 'is a simple, non-theological, non-technical statement that people can grasp, not some complicated, top-heavy mass of doctrine.' But two things may be said in answer to this. For one thing, we should remember that this epistle was written not to a divinity faculty or a university audience, but to a church substantially composed of converts of a few years' standing at most, and drawn furthermore in considerable measure from the underprivileged and the deprived classes of society. Furthermore, it was written, not from a cloister, but on the mission field, in Corinth, the cesspool of the ancient world, and in the midst of a busy and exacting missionary journey. It was the product of a living ministry and a living testimony, and Paul had seen it at work in the lives of men and women as a transforming power. By this message of Christ crucified and risen, proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, he had seen men called out of darkness into light, and from death to life, and from the power of Satan to God. This message of his – big theological words and all – was something that did things to men. It was the power of God for salvation to them. Let us not be afraid therefore of the big words; let us not be afraid of plumbing the depths of the apostle's thought; let us realise that there are deep wells here, and powers and virtues infinitely worth tapping, in these marvellous statements. We have suffered so long from spiritual malnutrition in the Church of God! It is little wonder that we find it difficult to take the strong meat of the Word. Let us keep at it, and appetite will increase, and ability to assimilate will grow steadily.

### 3:21-25 AMAZING GRACE

Let us look, then, at how Paul introduces his message – with the words ‘But now’! This is the great watershed of grace that makes everything different. Every word of this tremendous passage is weighty and precious. ‘But’ is a word of wide and significant import in Scripture. Grammatically, it is no more than a connecting particle, but what a glorious connection it makes here! For it links the plight of man with the power of God, the degradation and despair of the sinner with the love and compassion of the Saviour, the helplessness of the lost with the strong Name of the Trinity! And it is the special delight of God so to do and to speak that word in the gospel, for our comfort, encouragement and hope. It presents a contrast that Paul is very fond of making, as, for example, in Eph. 2:4: after painting one of the darkest and most terrible pictures of the human predicament, he rings out the word, ‘But God’! Later in the same chapter (Eph. 2:12,13) he adds, ‘At that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the 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’. So also, in Acts 12:5, ‘Peter was kept in prison; *but* the church was earnestly praying to God for him.’ This is what constitutes the gospel: it is because this word has been spoken, and because this word can be spoken, that there is hope and help, and salvation.

### 3:21-25 SALVATION NOW

The word ‘now’ also has a number of meanings and implications. It can be used in a temporal sense – ‘now’ in Paul’s day, ‘now’ at the centre of human history, something has happened, the divine intervention has taken place and a new situation has been created, a new day has dawned; old things have passed away, and all things are become new. As Denney puts it, ‘all time is divided, for Paul, into “now” and “then”’, as he indicates in his speech in Athens (Acts 17:30), ‘In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.’ The cross of Christ, as the hymn says, ‘towers o’er the wrecks of time’, dividing history into two – then and now. This, in turn, becomes the language of true spiritual experience. Men who have been touched with the gospel have a ‘then’ and a ‘now’ in their lives: they remember how it used to be with them, and they know how it is now. And the difference was made, and the change effected, by the coming of the Son of God with grace and power into their lives. But the ‘now’ can be taken in a logical sense also – in the sense of ‘only now’ – after the apostle has thoroughly exposed and condemned man’s unrighteousness. It is only when man has been concluded ‘accountable to God’ that the gospel is really seen to be relevant. Only when it is seen that ‘sin is the wound’ can it be seen that ‘Christ is the cure’. That is to say, this is the point in the argument at which

the exposition of the gospel is seen in its true colour and relevance – after the case against man is seen in all its starkness and seriousness. Indeed, it is only when this point is reached that a man is able really to ‘hear’ what the gospel is saying to him, only then that his ears are opened to hear the word of life. In this sense there is ‘a fulness of the time’ so far as being able to grasp what the gospel is saying to us.

### **3:21-25 ‘NO CONDEMNATION NOW I DREAD’**

But there is also another possible way in which this ‘now’ can be interpreted – now in contrast to the future. Justification, getting right with God, is a present reality, not a future possibility that men might hope for. ‘Whoever believes on the Son has eternal life,’ said Jesus (Jn. 3:36). Justification, as the Catechism says, ‘is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.’ This is an important practical issue. For in an age in which the true nature of the gospel has been so substantially obscured, and its message reduced to little more than a moralistic notion of ‘doing the best you can’, it is become in many quarters virtually unknown for people to be sure of their salvation and acceptance with God – so much so, indeed, that people often ask, ‘How can anyone be sure of acceptance with God until the end of life? We can only hope.’ But this is a denial of the truth of the gospel. A man can know that he has passed from death to life, know that he has been set free from his burden of sin, know that there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus. What is it, then, that Paul speaks of in such glowing wonder? It is the righteousness of God – God’s way of justifying the ungodly, God’s mighty act for our redemption, something we could never do for ourselves. And that this is the true meaning of the phrase is seen in the fact that it answers to man’s chief need, as expressed in 3:19, 20. Guilt is answered by justification, whereby sin is pardoned, and men are acquitted and reinstated. And this stands over against all man’s attempts at self-justification. It is, as Paul says, ‘apart from law’. The law speaks of what is required of man, but this speaks of what God has done for man, in Christ, and which he bestows on him freely – the covering, sheltering, righteousness of God!

### **3:21-25 THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Moreover, Paul goes on, this righteousness is made known (cf. 1:17, revealed). It is not a hidden gospel. When we take this with 25 we see Paul’s meaning; what he is saying is, God’s way of justification was demonstrated when Christ was presented to public view as a sacrifice for sin. Christ crucified – this is the answer to the world’s guilt and sin – not Christ

the teacher, leader, miracle worker, but Christ the suffering Saviour. As the apostle says, 'I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2). Well might John the Baptist cry, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (Jn. 1:29). It is worth noting the words of Martin Luther on the theme unfolded in these verses:

*I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the righteousness of God', because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. Night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.*

### **3:21-25 'CLOTHED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS DIVINE'**

All this, Paul has said, was witnessed by the law and the prophets. The gospel is there in the Old Testament, for those with eyes to see. The irony is that the Jews, concentrating on their law religion, missed what was under their very noses. Nor is it different today. The gospel of salvation is witnessed to in the very warp and woof of the life of the Church, yet so many have failed to understand it. The very hymns we sing – 'Rock of Ages', 'My faith looks up to Thee' – testify to it, yet so many deny it and will have nothing to do with it. Even the vows they take when entering membership of the Church proclaim its truth. Paul's thought is best understood in a proper grasp of the theological concepts underlying the various terms he uses. It is not too much to say that a true estimate of the New Testament gospel depends on a right interpretation of the words righteousness, sacrifice of atonement (propitiation) justification, redemption, and faith. All that is of final importance for the salvation of men is contained in them. Justification, sacrifice of atonement and redemption correspond to the threefold charge that has been brought against man, the sinner. He is guilty before God, and under condemnation, and justification answers his guilt and removes his condemnation. He is under wrath because of his sin, and the costly propitiation in Jesus' blood turns away that wrath and brings him into peace with God. But sin involves more than guilt and wrath, it is a bondage. Man is under sin (9), under its sway and dominion; and the meaning of redemption is that this bondage is broken and man is set free (the root meaning of 'redeem' being 'to release by the payment of a price'). These are great objective truths, towering like mountain

peaks in the revelation of God, and big with blessing for all who will patiently study their meaning. This we shall seek to do in the next few notes.

### **3:21-25 THE GREAT EXCHANGE**

The word 'righteousness' has already figured prominently thus far in the epistle. Here, it is the divine answer to the unrighteousness of men, and is bestowed freely as a gift of grace (this is what it means to be justified) through a redemption which itself rests upon the propitiatory sacrifice made by Christ on the cross, and received by faith alone. As such, this righteousness is not so much a divine attribute as a divine dynamic, God's doing something decisive, that man could never do for himself. The word 'justification' is a legal, or forensic, term from the law court. It has essentially an objective reference, in the same way as the word 'guilt' has. To be guilty before God is not primarily something we feel; guilt means 'this is how matters stand between us and God', whether we feel it to be so or not. In the same way, to be justified is something objective, and outside man altogether, in that it is a proclamation, a declaration made by God concerning man, in which he, as judge of all the earth, pronounces the guilty sinner acquitted, and accepts him as righteous in his sight. It is not something done in man, but something done for man. If it be asked how this impossibility can happen, and man, who has pleaded guilty, be acquitted at the bar of God, the only sufficient answer lies in the substitutionary death of Christ. He is our substitute, in that he stands in for us, in our place, in our predicament, in our guilty state, and takes upon himself all the infinite liabilities due to us because of our sin. Paul gives us two pictures, in Romans, the first of man the sinner (1:18 – 3:30), lacking in righteousness, having fallen short of the glory of God, and under condemnation. The second picture is of another Man, Christ Jesus, the second Adam, who is all that man the sinner is not. In private and in public ministry alike he had the divine approval, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.' It is this 'proper Man' who 'stands in' for us before God; his 'well-pleasing-ness', his acceptability to God, is reckoned to us, imputed to us and counted as if it were ours, in the death of the cross, while in that same death, our unacceptability is reckoned, imputed, to him, and counted as if it were his. In this amazing divine 'exchange' the Lord lays on him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), and clothes us in his perfect righteousness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). The proof that this imputation of righteousness is no mere legal fiction, but that in truth we are accepted as righteous in God's sight, is seen in the fact that the imputation of sin to Christ was certainly no fiction, but a grim and terrible experience, involving the cry of dereliction on the cross.

### 3:21-25 THE AWFUL DEPTH OF HUMAN NEED

Wonderful and glorious as the 'law-court' metaphor in the idea of justification is, it is not sufficient in itself to convey the awesome mystery of Christ's death. There is a sense, indeed, in which by itself it presents a one-sided picture, in this regard, that it simply deals with man's predicament as a guilty sinner. But sin is something more than guilt. Sin is a wrong relationship with God. Sin means that man's original relationship with God has been ruptured, broken, and in any real relationship where real persons are involved, both parties to the relationship are inevitably affected. Not only is there a human predicament (comprehended in the word 'guilt'), there is a divine predicament also, of another kind: divine wrath has been kindled against human sin, and this presents a problem of the greatest magnitude, for which the death of Christ is the alone remedy. And it is here that we see that another kind of picture becomes necessary. For the earlier law-court metaphor does not in itself admit this side of the matter, by its very nature. For the law-court has something formal and almost impersonal about it. The judge on the bench is an impersonal figure – indeed, he requires to be. He is not an interested party in the case. His job is simply to administer justice, and to see that it is administered fairly and impartially. He is not angry with the prisoner, in his official capacity as a judge – although he may be in a personal capacity, as a man – and to him, the prisoner at the bar is simply a case, another case, and the trial is for him all in a day's work. And he can go home in the evening, after the sentence is passed, and forget about the whole thing. But God, the judge of all the earth, cannot do this. He cannot forget. For him, the sin of man is not just another case. He is an interested party in the matter, and he cannot just dismiss it, as an earthly judge dismisses a case from his mind. He is involved. It is not 'all one' to him. He is angry. And it is this Godward side that needs to be dealt with. More of this in tomorrow's note.

### 3:21-25 THE ANGRY GOD

To continue from yesterday's note, what we must recognise is the reality of the divine anger against sin. He cannot brush aside the injury done to his majesty and the insult to the honour of his great Name. Such a situation demands that something should happen, to atone for sin. And whereas justification deals with the manward side of the predicament, here it is the Godward side that needs to be dealt with. Brunner sums this up in the words,

*The atoning sacrifice represents the truth that something must happen, if there is to be peace between God and man, if the communion which has been broken by sin is to be restored. Indeed, there is a further truth behind the shedding of blood in the atoning sacrifice: blood must actually flow, for man has forfeited his life by his rebellion against his Creator and Lord.*



The need is for something – or someone – to come between the sinner and the angry God. And Christ comes in between – this is what ‘mediator’ means – and the blood of mediation shed on the cross effects a reconciliation, in the sense of making God propitious – i.e. well-disposed towards sinful man. This is what ‘propitiation’ (AV) – the word Paul uses here – means (‘sacrifice of atonement’ – NIV). This need not conjure up, as some suppose, the picture of a bloodthirsty vengeful deity demanding appeasement, for it is God himself, in the person of his Son, who makes this propitiation, earnestly dealing with the obstacle on his own side, which constitutes the miracle of grace, and putting away everything that on his side constitutes estrangement.

As Denney says in memorable words,

*The glory of the gospel is that it tells men that God has dealt seriously with these serious things for their removal, that awful as they are he has put them away by an awful demonstration of his love; it tells them that God has made peace at an infinite cost, and that the priceless peace is now freely offered to them.*

### **3:21-25 AMAZING LOVE!**

In the light of what was said at the end of yesterday’s note, is it not awesome to realise that the blood of Christ speaks not only to the sinful and guilty heart of man, so bringing peace to him, but also to the holy heart – nay more, to the very memory, of God, so that he is able to say, ‘Your sins and your iniquities will I remember no more.’ Small wonder that the Scriptures speak of ‘the precious blood of Christ’! But now we turn to the third ‘great word’ in these verses, redemption, which in some respects is the deepest and most wonderful of them all. As already pointed out, its meaning is ‘release by the payment of a price’, and scholars say that it speaks:

- a) of the state of sin out of which men are redeemed, i.e. bondage and slavery. Redemption is the intervention of some outside power for our sakes;
- b) of the price of our redemption by the sacrifice of himself. He is the price;
- c) of the resultant state of the redeemed sinner. It means both the glorious liberty of the children of God and, paradoxically, a new enslavement, to Christ, and it is this in fact that constitutes our freedom.

This last has very considerable implications. To be redeemed is to be set free from sin and brought into a new relationship with Christ; it means to be united with him, and this – to



anticipate the teaching of Rom. 6 – is to be united with him in his death and resurrection. Indeed, Rom. 6 – 8 is nothing more than an exposition of this great word.

### **3:21-25 THE MEANING OF FAITH**

‘Faith’ is the last of the theological words used by Paul in this passage. In his thought and in the New Testament as a whole, faith is never a general attitude to God or Christ. Saving faith is faith in his blood, i.e. faith in what he has done for us in his death on the cross. The word, however, has a twofold usage, and both propositional faith (cf. Heb. 11:6, where faith in God means ‘believing that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him’) and faith as personal trust appear in the New Testament. The two should not be regarded as standing in antithesis to one another, and it is only when the former becomes a substitute for the latter that the danger of error arises. Faith as trust, however, is certainly predominant in Paul’s thinking here, and this corresponds to the characteristic emphasis in the Old Testament, where several Hebrew words are all rendered ‘trust’ in the AV, with the meaning of ‘to roll upon’, in the sense of rolling a burden on another; ‘to stay upon’ with the idea of trusting in the dark; ‘to take refuge in’ and ‘to lean upon’ in helpless weakness. In all these meanings, it is helpless, desperate confidence that is suggested, and this has relevance for what Paul goes on to say in 27ff., about boasting being excluded, for if faith in Christ is a flinging of oneself upon him in desperate, confident despair, there is nothing for man to boast about. But there is another factor to be remembered; faith is also the gift of God (Eph. 2:8), it is given to us to believe (Phil. 1:29), and it ‘comes by hearing’ the gospel word (Rom. 10:17), that is, it is the gospel itself that conveys the virtue by which men believe in Christ. As Nygren puts it (to quote him once again), ‘When one hears the gospel, and is mastered by it, that is faith.’

### **3:25b-26 OLD TESTAMENT WITNESS TO CHRIST**

In an earlier note we said that ‘the righteousness of God’ – God’s way of justifying the ungodly – was first of all made known in Christ and secondly is testified to by the law and the prophets. The first of these he unfolds in 3:21-31, and the second he underlines in 4:1-25. This broad division is clear and well-defined in the text of Romans. Yet, the apostle does in fact touch on the Old Testament part even here in the first section in 3:21-31, and we must pause now to examine an interesting and intriguing statement which he makes in 25, after dealing with the great and seminal words, justification, propitiation (sacrifice of atonement) and redemption, which we have studied separately in the past few notes. Twice, in as many sentences, Paul uses the words ‘to demonstrate his justice’. What construction are we to

place upon this statement? The modern versions (which see) prove helpful here. The important phrase, obscured somewhat in the AV and indeed in some of the other renderings, is 'in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished'. What this refers to and implies is the question of what happened to sin – and sinners – before Christ died in dealing with sin. There is a similar idea and emphasis in Acts 17:30, where Paul says, 'In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.' There is an important issue here, and it is well underlined by the commentators, as we shall see in the following excerpts.

### **3:25b-26 SOME ILLUMINATING QUOTATIONS**

Here is how Handley Moule, the godly Bishop of Durham in his day, expounds Paul's statement:

*Christ was manifested as a propitiation because of his passing by of sins done before: because the fact asked explanation that, while he proclaimed his law, and had not yet revealed his gospel, he did nevertheless bear with sinners, reprieving them, condoning them, in the forbearance of God, in the ages in which he was seen to 'hold back' his wrath.'*

Godet says:

*For four thousand years the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgements, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep; one might even have asked if it existed. Men sinned here below, and yet they lived. They sinned on, and yet reached in safety a hoary old age! Where were the wages of sin? It was this relative impunity which rendered a solemn manifestation of righteousness necessary.*

James Denney writes in similar vein when he says,

*Such had been the curse of Providence, that God, owing to his forbearance in suspending serious dealing with sin, lay under the imputation of being indifferent to it. But the time was now come to remove this imputation, and vindicate the divine character. If it was possible once, it was no longer possible now, to maintain that sin was a thing which God could regard with indifference.*

### **3:25b-26 THE INTERIM SITUATION**

One of the things that can be said about the interpretation given in these quotes is that there was an ‘incompleteness’ in the divine attitude to sin in the Old Testament age, which called for some decisive action on God’s part in the fulness of the time. This requires us to look at the Old Testament at this point in our study, to see how in fact sin was dealt with then, and how divine righteousness – God’s way of justifying the ungodly – is testified to by the law and the prophets, as Paul maintains in 3:21. In so doing, we shall prepare for the fuller treatment of the subject in 4:1-25. We begin, in this almost parenthetical study – ancillary to the epistle’s main theme, although casting much light on the ‘picture’ we are concerned to build up of the gospel in its fulness – by looking first of all at the sublime opening words of the epistle to the Hebrews, ‘God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son’ (AV). This is truly a majestic utterance, on any estimate, and it gives us some sense of the massiveness and magnitude of the gospel as unfolded in Romans. What it speaks of and conveys to us is the idea of differing strands, none complete in themselves, and all pointing beyond themselves, finally culminating in Christ, the eternal and incarnate Word. By implication, this surely tells us that from earliest times there was a conscious search, God-given and God-inspired, for something – thus early hardly articulate or well-formed, but inchoate and more sensed than crystallised – to ease the conscience and give peace to the troubled hearts of men – troubled as they undoubtedly were by the age-long immemorial awareness that all was not well, or as it should be, in human life, conscious as they were of a door at which they always seemed to be knocking and which gave no answer to their quest. But whenever it did become conscious and articulate it crystallised into the age-long question, ‘How can I get right with God?’ – a question to which all easy answers or solutions made shipwreck on the rock of man’s past, for it stands written, ‘God will call the past to account’ (Ecc. 3:15). More needs to be said about this, as we shall see in our next note.

### **3:25b-26 PRIESTLY AND PROPHETIC INSIGHTS**

Taking a panoramic, over-all view of the Old Testament we could say that two great attempts were made at solving this problem, inspired by God, and complementary to one another, and both falling short of their purpose, both ultimately ineffectual – and both pointing forward to Christ, and finding their fulfilment in him. One was the priestly, sacrificial system; the other was the prophetic ministry. We need now to look at these two attempts to answer men’s needs, as unfolded in the Old Testament. No one could fail to be impressed by the elaborately intricate sacrificial system explicated in the Old Testament. Not to spend time on details, we may say that its message may be summed up as follows: sacrifice is the

remedy for sin. 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Heb. 9:22). This theme is notably expounded in the epistle to the Hebrews, which contains such well-known passages as that which refers to Christ making reconciliation for the sins of the people as a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God (2:17). The taint and defilement of sin is removed, and its penalty – the penalty of the broken law – paid by sacrifice. The particular insights afforded by the sacrificial system were these: that remedial action concerning the putting away of sin, namely reconciliation, was something God had to do, something outside man himself, and impossible for man to accomplish, and which man had to identify with. It also recognised that God requires not only correct conduct from his creatures, but also the absolute devotion of man's self. Hence the concept of sacrifice, the giving of that devotion in death.

### **3:25b-26 COUNSELS OF DESPAIR**

The very fact that reconciliation must come from outside and beyond man himself led to the possibility of abuse. And abuse came. The people of God in course of time multiplied sacrifices, but their hearts remained far from him. And so God raised up his prophets against this empty corruption. And the great, supreme note in the prophetic message was ethical, calling for a change of heart: 'What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' (Mic. 6:8). There was no basic contradiction, as some have supposed, between the message of the prophets and the priestly emphasis. Rather, what the prophets proclaimed was the recognition of something the priestly, sacrificial cultus itself implied, but which in its abuse had become obscured. But in this recognition, the prophetic insight goes beyond reconciliation, and asserts that reconciliation can be based only on atonement. What God requires of men, what can satisfy his holy nature – and therefore what alone can atone for sin – is righteousness (Mic. 6:8). This is why Peter can speak of Christ's suffering, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. There are important things for us to learn from all this. The first is that both systems – the priestly and the prophetic alike – point beyond themselves to something else, for both were inadequate interim answers to the problem of sin. Neither was intrinsically effectual. On the one hand, as Hebrews points out, it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins (Heb. 10:4). Something better was needed. On the other hand, the prophetic witness was unable to produce in men what it demanded and required of them, nor was there any possibility of men meeting God's requirement. In the ultimate sense the prophetic message was a counsel of despair. This dilemma is met and solved by Christ. For in him the sacrifice for sin comes from outside man, for he makes reconciliation, as God. On the other hand, in the death he died atonement was made by man, and from man's side, for he stood in our place as man. Not only is there a price to be paid for sin, but also an injury to the majesty of God to be repaired

and Christ paid both in his offering of himself without spot to God. He tasted death for every man – read what has been said into that statement and we will begin to see something of the awesome mystery of the atonement.

### **3:27-31 THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER: BOASTING EXCLUDED**

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with three questions. (a) Boasting (27) is out, for, quite simply, there is nothing for man to boast about in this scheme of salvation, it is God who does everything, including the bestowal of faith upon him. Faith, as was pointed out earlier, is not a condition of salvation, but is simply our response to the word of the gospel, and is given us in that word. The law of faith or, we might say, the true principle or meaning of faith, makes it plain that boasting is out of the question. (b) There can be no question of restricting this salvation to one group only. It is for Jew and Gentile without distinction, and on the same terms. There are not different ways of entering into the kingdom of God, and we must beware of any who, speaking plausibly about the great variety in religious experience, suggest that each man comes in his own way. There is only one way, and only one door. (c) The gospel does not make void the law – indeed it fulfils it. The reason why the Jews thought that Paul's teaching annulled the law was that they themselves had misunderstood the meaning of the law. They thought that the Old Testament taught salvation by works. Paul now proceeds, in chapter 4, to demonstrate how mistaken they were. With reference to the first of these questions, A. Nygren, the Swedish theologian, gives an interesting and suggestive interpretation of the exclusion of boasting by the law of faith, not of works. In saying that the law cannot remove the roots of boasting, he adds, 'It can actually bring our boasting low, but it cannot remove it in principle. As long as it is on the basis of law that one lives, there is always the theoretical possibility that he may henceforth keep the law better. At least hypothetically then, man could look forward to a time when boasting would be justified.' But faith means that even this possibility is excluded, for divine righteousness has been given freely as a gift, without merit or deserving on man's part, and apart from observing the law (28). In the second question, Paul answers by stressing a truth that was axiomatic for the Jew, namely that God is one (Deut. 6:1), and by insisting that he must also be one in the gift of his salvation, both Jew and Gentile are justified on precisely the same grounds (the phrases 'by faith' and 'through faith' are not to be distinguished). 'Law' in 31 should be taken to mean the whole Jewish religion, and this helps us to understand more clearly Paul's assertion that the Christian faith not only does not make the law void, but actually fulfils it. Rightly understood, the Jewish religion points to Christ, and is fulfilled in his gospel.

## **THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM 4:1-25**

### **4:1-8 ABRAHAM'S FAITH**

To understand and appreciate the point that Paul is making in these verses, we need to grasp the fact that he now proceeds to answer a question which, it seems clear, had arisen in the minds of his readers. We should bear in mind the 'format' of the epistle, and that Paul is conducting a discussion with the Jew in his statement of the gospel. This Jew has been fighting a steady, rearguard, defensive action, and has been reeling before the sustained onslaught of the apostle's relentless and devastating logic. And, as he speaks in 3:31 of his gospel establishing the law, the Jew falls back on one last final stand. He says, defiantly and almost triumphantly, 'But what of Abraham? Where does he stand with you, Paul? What are you to say about him? For I am content to stand with father Abraham in this. What was good enough for Abraham is good enough for me.' Now, we should bear in mind that Paul has spoken of the impossibility of any man boasting (3:27) in the light of the glorious truth of justification by faith. This is the connecting link with what he now says in his answer, for – he says – if Abraham had been justified by works as this Jew is obviously assuming that he was – he would have had ground for boasting indeed (4:2). But the very opposite is true, and Paul proceeds to deal with this issue in the chapter before us. In his ongoing argument the apostle has said two things about the righteousness which is by faith – God's way of justifying the ungodly – first of all that it has been made known in Christ (3:21-31), and secondly that it has been testified to by the law and the prophets. To this second point he now turns his attention. And indeed, Paul could have hardly been better pleased. He says, in effect, 'You speak of Abraham and his standing with God; very well, we will deal with that very issue now, since you have brought it up. And I am going to show you that Abraham was justified by faith, not by works, and that his experience proves my doctrine of grace.' Such is the setting of Paul's argument in this chapter.

### **4:1-8 A MODERN EXAMPLE**

The main thrust of this new development – that the righteousness of God, revealed in Christ, is witnessed ('testified to') by the law and the prophets – is an enormously important and significant claim, important for Paul's argument about the gospel, important also for the Jewish objector who has been raising query after query all along the line, and above all important for a right understanding of divine revelation as a whole and of the message of salvation. One recalls a young student – this by way of illustrating the point – being converted during a series of special meetings, who subsequently had a difficult time with her parents, especially her father, when she told them of her newfound joy and peace in Christ.



The basis of her father's reaction – he was a well-known figure in public life – seems to have been that he considered that she had become involved in some newfangled, extremist sect, and this he was not prepared to countenance. It was not that he was irreligious: he was a good, solid, Kirk-going man. What he said to his daughter was, 'I have no time for this kind of thing. I was born and brought up as a good Presbyterian and what was good enough for my forefathers is good enough for me, and should be good enough for you too.' The man could not have been more wrong, for the tradition of his forefathers, the Scottish tradition, is one in which the doctrine of grace is its glory. The man did not realise it, but his reaction against the idea of conversion was false to the whole tradition of his forebears in the Scottish Kirk, as any reading of our history is bound to show. Had he but known it, the man was being untrue to all that his forefathers fervently believed in. That is the measure of modern man's failure to grasp the truths of the gospel of grace, and the measure of how far away from the true gospel our generation has drifted.

#### **4:1-8 'WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY?'**

It is important for us to see the significance of Paul's reply to the question about Abraham. He said – and this is the final court of appeal – not, 'What says Rabbi so-and-so?' or, 'What says the leader of the synagogue?' but, 'What says the Scripture?' If this is a valid appeal for Paul to make, it is still a valid appeal today. The Scriptures are the repository of the divine and authoritative revelation about salvation. A doctrine of salvation can still be tested today by referring to what the Scripture teaches. Well, the context of the quotation Paul makes from Gen. 15:6 makes it clear that so far as Abraham was concerned no works could possibly have been involved, only faith. He rested on the bare promise of God, believing that, as he had said, so it would be. And this is precisely the heart of Paul's teaching. It follows, then, that if Abraham had righteousness 'credited to him', he cannot have worked for it, but received it by faith alone. The word 'credited' is a metaphor from accountancy, and literally means 'put down to one's account', and here 'put down on the credit side'. 'Does not work' in 5 does not, of course, mean that good works are either unimportant or unnecessary; it is not good works as such that are useless or ineffectual, but good works as a ground of hope towards God and as a foundation for salvation.

#### **4:1-8 THE PSALMIST'S TESTIMONY**

Paul confirms his interpretation of Gen. 15:6 by an appeal to another Scripture, Ps. 32. It is as if he said, 'What I am saying about Abraham is surely right because the Scripture says exactly the same through David, and of him, in this Psalm.' Not only so; he illustrates the



meaning of 'credited' in Gen. 15:6 by his reference to the Psalm, where the same word is used. The imputation of righteousness is equated, in the Psalm, with forgiveness (7), and the non-imputation of sin (8) – i.e. forgiveness, in the sense of removal of, and acquittal from, guilt – is equivalent to, or accompanied by, the imputation of righteousness. This is an important consideration in Paul's teaching in general about the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). He does not say here how this twofold imputation takes place; this he has already underlined in 3:21 ff. In the death he died, Christ became the 'divine clearing-house' for sin and guilt, i.e. our sin was imputed to him, put down to his account, and therefore not imputed to us (since it cannot be imputed twice), and his righteousness was imputed to us. And, since the imputation of sin was no mere legal fiction for Christ, but involved him in bearing the curse for us, so the imputation of righteousness is no legal fiction for us either, but a blessed and glorious reality.

#### **4:9-12 THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF CIRCUMCISION**

To glance back for a moment at the series of questions posed in 3:27, it will be seen that, having answered the first, about boasting, and the truth that justification is by faith without the deeds of the law, Paul now takes up the next question: 'Does this justification by faith apply to the circumcision (i.e. the Jews) only?' The blessedness of which David speaks (the objector would say) is surely for Jews, for after all, he (David) was a Jew, and he may be said to have written as a Jew and for Jews. But Paul will not have any of this. He goes back to Abraham again, and shows that David cannot be speaking of something confined to Jews only, for Abraham received this righteousness before he was circumcised – that is, before he became a Jew, through circumcision. It was before that rite was even mentioned that he was justified. The Scripture records in Gen. 15 that Abraham believed God, while his circumcision is recorded to have taken place only in ch. 17. Paul says, circumcision could have had nothing to do with his justification. Circumcision confirmed his justification: it did not confer it. It was simply the seal of the righteousness of faith (11). And so again, the Jews' confidence in the rite of circumcision is rudely shaken. An illustration may help us to understand the real point of sacramental symbols, whether circumcision or its New Testament counterpart, baptism. A wedding ring is a sign and seal of marriage. But it is of no value or significance, unless in fact a marriage has taken place. Anyone can wear a wedding ring, but wearing one does not bring marriage about. It is in fact meaningless unless the ceremony has been performed. Thus also circumcision or baptism may be the sign and seal of grace and salvation, but unless the inward work has been wrought, the outward signs are not only valueless, but misleading and dangerous. This does not mean, however, that they are to be neglected. They have their place, and are appointed by our Lord. It would be a strange wife that did not bother to wear her wedding ring after she was married, would it not?

Refusal to wear it would not alter her married status; but we may well think that it might affect her relationship with her husband!

#### **4:13-17 THE ANTITHESIS OF LAW AND PROMISE**

But there is still another issue to be dealt with. Paul has already shown that Abraham's justification was not by works (1-8), nor by circumcision (9-12), and now he reinforces his arguments in other terms, and shows the impossibility of righteousness being through the law, by setting law and promise in antithesis. If the law had had anything to do with his justification, the promise would have been made of none effect. In fact, however, the law could not have had anything to do with it for the simple reason that it had not yet been given, as Paul points out explicitly when dealing with the same theme in Gal. 3:17, 18. The law came four hundred and thirty years later, and its purpose was not to show a way of justification, but, as Galatians points out, to lock men up until faith be revealed – to be 'in charge' to lead them to Christ, who alone could justify them. Underlying all this is of course the Jews' misunderstanding of the purpose of the law, and Paul hints here (although he is more specific in Galatians) at that purpose. It 'brings wrath', he says in 15, i.e. brings men under condemnation. This is what he himself has been doing in the first three chapters of the epistle, applying the sanctions of the law and bringing home a verdict of 'guilty' upon all men (see 3:19, 20).

(We are prompted to add at this point, as a parenthesis, the three well-known statements made elsewhere by Paul about circumcision:

- i) 'Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, what counts is a new creation' (Gal. 6:15).
- ii) 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love' (Gal. 5:6).
- iii) 'Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.' (1 Cor. 7:19).

These three statements, taken in that order, provide a telling and comprehensive corroboration of Paul's basic thesis in Rom. 4, and indeed a compendium in brief of the message of the gospel – regeneration, faith, the Christian ethic. This, it should be clear, proclaims that salvation is all of God.)

**4:13-17 PROMISE SYNONYMOUS WITH SALVATION**

The promise referred to here (13), that Abraham should be the heir of (should inherit) the world, is a summary, as it were, of the promises made to him on a number of occasions (cf. Gen. 12:2ff.; 13:14ff.; 15:5, 7, 18ff.) and is from Paul's standpoint practically synonymous with salvation in its widest sense. It is essentially, as he has argued, in the nature of a gift from God, and therefore it is quite incongruous to speak of it as contingent in any way on the fulfilment of a law which he has already proved no one can fulfil. The law, far from earning the promise, has on the contrary the effect of bringing wrath (15), for it awakens and stirs up transgression, making it utterly sinful (7:13). This, then, is the opposite of salvation, and therefore law and promise are incompatible and mutually exclusive, and belong to different worlds. In the one world, in which Paul's objections move, law, transgression and wrath operate (the world of 1:18 – 3:20); in the other, that to which Abraham and all true believers with him belong, grace, promise and faith prevail (16). The promise, then, depending not on law but on faith (on man's side) and grace (on God's), not only cannot be confined to those who are within the sphere of the law (i.e. the Jews), but explicitly excludes them, except insofar as they have a faith like Abraham's, and embraces all, Jew and Gentile alike, who do. And this is what the Scripture itself makes clear; this is what the promise 'I have made you a father of many nations' means. Calvin's comment on 14, 15 is very much to the point here:

*What would happen if the salvation of men were based on the observance of the law? Men's consciences would have no certainty, but would be troubled with unceasing disquiet, and at length succumb to despair. The promise itself (of life eternal), the fulfilment of which would depend on an impossibility, would vanish without producing any fruit.*

**4:18-22 THE NATURE OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH**

Having established, then, that Abraham was justified solely by faith, Paul now proceeds to discuss the nature of Abraham's faith. It is easy to see how important this discussion is for us today, as a glance forward to 24 indicates, in the words 'also for us', for we also may have a faith like this, and indeed must have, for there is no other way home to the Father's house than this, through justification by faith alone. It is not without significance, in this discussion of Abraham's faith, that Paul speaks first of the God in whom Abraham believed; it is not so much his faith, as his God, that is important, not faith itself, but faith's object, the faithfulness of the Faithful One. Nor is it faith itself, ultimately and essentially considered, that saves, it is Christ that saves, through faith. The important thing, therefore, is not Abraham's faith, but Abraham's God. And of this God Paul says that he is 'the God that gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not as though they were'. As Wesley says:

*‘He speaks, and listening to His voice  
New life the dead receive’*

Nothing could underline more clearly the element of sovereign grace in the work of justification than this idea of a God who speaks men into newness of life by the word of his power. Once a man sees this, there can be no thought of his thinking that he can be justified by his own works, or by any other thing whatever. Salvation is all of God, and therefore justification is by faith in a God who does everything for men. In 19 the AV reads ‘he considered not his own body now dead’, but the modern translations all omit the ‘not’, following the better manuscripts. In fact, either reading gives good sense. The AV would mean ‘because he did not look on his own incapacity, he became strong and was able to hold fast to God’s promise’ – i.e. in face of God’s promise he ignored the obvious fact of the human impossibility. The alternative reading would mean ‘Abraham did look on his own incapacity, saw the situation as it really was, and yet he did not weaken in faith. He did not close his eyes to the facts, but faced them, and still held to the promise’. The latter is more likely to be Paul’s meaning. Over against the human impossibility, Abraham set the word of promise and said, ‘I believe God.’

#### **4:18-22 A PARALLEL FOR US**

The parallel between Abraham and ourselves is an immensely encouraging one. It is true that Abraham was a giant, the friend of God, the father of the faithful, but the greatest thing about him was not these, but his faith. And it is open to us also to have such a faith. What God did for Abraham he can do for us; and if only the foundation of faith is truly laid he will. This does not mean we will attain to the outstanding heights Abraham attained – we are not all called to near-unique positions as he was – but the elements of faithfulness in his wonderful life, and the quality of fellowship he enjoyed with God, and the rich fruitfulness of his service, may also be ours. If only we give God a chance with our lives, there are almost no limits to what he will make of us, for good and for eternity. What was the heart of that faith? Let us take two phrases from these verses and put them together:

*v.18 ‘just as it had been said to him’*

*v.21 ‘fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised’*

Faith, for Abraham, was faith in the living word of God! He trusted in that living word, banked upon it, acted upon it. And this is the basis, and essence, of faith for us also. Faith is not a general attribute, or an intellectual belief in God as such, but a trusting, a venturing out on, his faithful word, taking him at His word, believing the testimony he gives us in his word concerning his Son Jesus. And what is that testimony? He bears testimony in his word concerning the death and resurrection of his Son. He says that Christ was delivered for our

offences and raised again for our justification. He makes it plain that this is the true ground of our salvation, and that beside this there is no other way. He invites us to rest upon this word of salvation, to rely on it, and trust our eternal destiny to him who died and rose again. And he promises that when we do, we shall be saved. As Paul puts it in Rom. 10:9, 'If you confess with your mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved' – this is the faith that brings life to the dead, for he that believes God's testimony concerning his Son passes from death to life. And it is for us also!

#### **4:23-25 FOR US ALSO!**

Much has been written on the seeming distinction made in 25 between 'delivered over to death for our sins' and 'raised to life for our justification'. The 'for' in both cases translates a Greek word meaning 'because of', and may be taken (a) retrospectively in each case, i.e. with a backward reference ('He was put to death because we had sinned and raised because we were justified'); or (b) prospectively in each case, i.e. with a forward reference ('He was put to death on account of our offences, to make atonement for them, and raised on account of our justification, that it might become an accomplished fact'); or (c) retrospectively in the first and prospectively in the second ('He was put to death because we had sinned, and raised to bring about our justification'). In view of the possibilities of grammatical permutation in this, it may be questioned whether Paul had any such distinction in his mind in what he says here. Some think he may be quoting an early credal statement, and this is possible. However, the fact that elsewhere he associates justification with the death of Christ (5:9) as well as with the resurrection, as here, should make it clear that he has no thought of ascribing one set of consequences to Christ's death, and another to his resurrection. The meaning, therefore, is best taken (with Dodd) as 'he died and rose again in order that we might be delivered from the guilt of our sins'. Denney points out that Paul knew Christ only as the risen one who had died, and who had the virtue of his atoning death ever in him. Faith is faith in a living Saviour who once died; and it is because of the virtue of his death that faith in the risen Lord does justify. And it is just as true for us who believe as it was for Abraham!

## **THE FIRST FREEDOM: FROM WRATH 5:1 - 11**

### **5:1 PEACE WITH GOD!**

With these words we come to the next great section of the epistle, and indeed the next four chapters deal with the tremendous and far-reaching implications of this righteousness of God bestowed on us through faith in Christ. It is not too much to say that they are more important for Christian life than any other part of Scripture. Up to this point in the epistle Paul has been concerned to unfold man's lack of righteousness and the divine provision of righteousness in the gospel: if we think of the epistle to the Romans as an exposition of the words 'The righteous will live by faith', we will realise that up to this point Paul has been concerned to unfold man's lack of righteousness and the divine provision of righteousness in the gospel. Now, at ch. 5 through to ch. 8, the apostle unfolds the words 'will live' – the nature of the new life that is ours in Christ Jesus. 'Justification', as the Shorter Catechism puts it, 'is an act of God's free grace wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone'. In other words, it is something God does, a pronouncement by God upon us, something objective; not something we feel towards God, but something he feels towards us. Likewise, peace with God, which we have through justification, does not refer to peace in the sense of tranquillity of mind or spirit, but rather peace in the sense of the cessation of hostilities. It is the removal of the controversy that sin had aroused between God and us. It is not that we cease to be hostile to God (that comes later), but that he ceases to be hostile to us, because a propitiation has been made in Jesus' blood which has turned away his wrath from us. Sometimes exception is taken to Wesley's words, 'Our God is reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear' as misrepresenting the truth. It is we, they say, who are reconciled to God, not God to us. But extensive study of the words Paul uses in this context establishes it beyond doubt that Wesley was right, and that it is God's hostility towards us, not ours towards him, that Paul has in view here.

### **5:1ff. ACCOMPANIMENTS OF PEACE**

It will be useful at this point in our study to underline in summary form the thrust of this new section, from 5:1 to 8:39 which, as we have already indicated, expounds the nature of the new life that is ours in Christ. One of the commentators gives the helpful suggestion that in turn ch. 5 describes the new life as a life that is free from the wrath of God; that ch. 6 describes it as a life that is free from sin; that ch. 7 describes it as a life that is free from the law; and that ch. 8 describes it as a life that is free from death. It is rather important that we should be able to see that Paul is describing the nature of the new life that is in Christ in four



successive and parallel ‘pictures’ or statements, each of which describing that life from a different standpoint, and each going one step further and deeper, as it were, and adding a new dimension to the thought until the whole picture is completed. It is rather like what used to happen in older printing processes before multicolour printing became commonplace: the first picture gives the primary colour, the second adds another, the third fills in still further, and the fourth adds the completing one, giving fulness to the finished product. To look at the chapters in this way is to save us from the mistake of supposing that each chapter deals with successive stages of Christian experience from which the believer may hopefully graduate to something higher. This would be to falsify Paul’s teaching and lead to endless confusion and produce a caricature of true Christian experience. The apostle’s thrice repeated ‘don’t you know’ (in 6:3, 6:16, and 7:1) surely makes this clear: one is not justified at one point, to be followed at a later stage by union with Christ in his death and resurrection; one cannot be justified at all without being united with Christ.

## **5:1 FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT**

We should note the link between the words ‘also for us’ and ‘for our justification’ in 4:24, 25 and the word ‘we’ here in 5:1. Nothing could illustrate more graphically the truth of Paul’s contention that what was true for Abraham is true for all who will believe. Justification is not a theory or a far-off concept, but something that can happen to us, and needs to happen to us. Indeed, Christ died and rose again in order that it might happen to us. Paul’s words here, ‘we have peace with God’, indicate that we pass from doctrine to experience. This is the point at which men pass from darkness into light and from death to life, the point at which we see that God is not content that his gospel should remain a mere theological subject but that it should invade men’s hearts, to bring them hope and joy and peace and life eternal. Significantly, it is in this chapter (5:5) that the Holy Spirit is mentioned for the first time in the epistle. It is he, who as Lord and giver of life, creates faith in the heart and applies the justification of God in the experience of the believer. It is the gospel itself that makes faith possible and in its proclamation this miracle of grace takes place. Faith, as Paul says later, ‘comes by hearing’. As the Shorter Catechism puts it, the question, ‘How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?’ is answered, ‘We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.’ The next questions and answers in the Catechism serve to complete the picture when they speak of the Spirit ‘applying that redemption to us by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling’ – that calling being the ‘work of God’s Spirit whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.’



## 5:1-4 JUSTIFICATION COVERS THE WHOLE OF LIFE

The first thing that we can gather from these few verses is that the justification of God covers the whole of life, and this is the ultimate ground of our peace and assurance. Peace with God has a primary reference to our past, which has been forever settled in the grace of forgiveness and justification, and can never be held against us again. Access to grace has a primary reference to our present life, and all the supplies of his grace are available for present living in the love of God and in fellowship with him. Rejoicing in hope has a primary reference to our future life, and assures us that the future will be bright beyond all our deserving. Let us look at these in turn. We all have a past. We are all guilty men and women. We look back over life and feel, 'If only we could relive it, if only we could turn the clock back!' But the past cannot be undone.

*The moving finger writes; and having writ,  
Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.*

Guilt dogs us like a shadow all the long day of our lives. As Paul would say, 'The written code (handwriting AV) is against us.' It is because this is so that all merely ethical systems and ways of life make shipwreck on this rock. They cannot deal with the past. Only the mighty intervention of God can deal with the burden of sin, the barrier of guilt that stands between us and God. No power on earth can ease this burden or solve this problem save the gospel of Christ. He alone can absolve us. He is our peace.

## 5:1-4 OUR STANDING IN GRACE

In the second place, as well as our guilty past being dealt with, we have access into our standing in grace. This refers to our present life. The word translated 'access' conveys the idea which we associate with being 'presented at court', but in a far richer and fuller way. A truer picture is that of the Old Testament Tabernacle where the worshipper could draw near to God through the sacrifice offered there (cf. Heb. 10:19ff.) where we may by a new and living way enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. This means that whereas once we were excluded from the presence of God, now we have been admitted once-for-all into fellowship with him, with all that that implies. It is as if we had been brought to the threshold of a glorious treasure-house and told, 'This is the Father's provision for his children, and you are to make full use of it. You will find here more than ever you will need.' Indeed, we may well use the words spoken by the father in the parable in Lk. 15:31, 'My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours.' That is what access means. But still Paul has not

finished. Not only our past and our present, but our future also is included in the blessing of God. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. For the Christian the future is bright with hope. All that has taken place in his experience by the grace of God in the gospel has been with a view to the future. We are chosen in him before the foundation of the world and called to share his eternal glory. Wiping out the past and transforming the present is with a view to preparing us for that eternal glory. To rejoice in hope of the glory of God is to rejoice in the glad assurance that we shall have a part and a place in his everlasting kingdom. Thus, justification covers the whole of life, past, present and future alike. We cannot become 'unjustified' once we are justified, for there is something once-for-all and forever about justification, and nothing can now alter our new status. To use Paul's words in 8:39, 'Nothing (!) will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

#### **5:1-4 'THE BEST IS YET TO BE'**

Not only, however, does the believer rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, he rejoices (the word is the same as in 2) in sufferings also. How can this be, and what does it mean? First of all, it means that through grace, evil has lost the initiative in our lives and can no longer lord it over us. On the contrary, suffering becomes an instrument in God's hands of furthering his purposes in our lives. It is this that makes us 'more than conquerors' in all these things, for anything the devil can do to us – and remember that 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' – is straightway pressed into service for the gospel. In the second place, far from being shaken in our faith by persecution and suffering, our rejoicing is actually founded on them, for suffering produces endurance, and endurance character, and character hope, and thus the rejoicing in hope of the glory of God is strengthened and renewed as the full circle comes round again. Whichever way we choose to take this, the evil one is discomfited and frustrated in his designs, and we are doubly the gainers in the transaction. This raises an interesting point which serves to answer the inevitable questions that Paul's readers must have been asking of him: 'Will this new method of salvation really last? Is it safe for all the varied and complex needs of human life? Is it a foundation sufficiently strong to stand the wear and tear of human needs? Even if it saves at the commencement, will it continue to save in the future? Will it work, and prove workable?' We shall address these questions in tomorrow's note.

#### **5:1-4 SUFFERING PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE**

The questions posed at the end of the previous note are very relevant for us today, for they are the sort of questions that many ask: 'Will I be able to keep it up? Will there be

difficulties to face?' Of course there will, but here is the answer to them. The difficulties are no hazard but actually the foundation of the perseverance of faith. The very things that might cause us to hesitate before committing ourselves to Christ (we do count the cost!) are the things that become in the mercy of God the instruments of confirming and establishing faith in our hearts, making us endure to the end. We should remember what Paul says: 'I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.' The believer is not one who submits to the inevitable, but one who rejoices to know what this process of 'suffering working' will mean. He has a hope that will never be put to shame. We once heard the late Prof. R.A. Finlayson of the Free Church of Scotland speak on these verses and comment on the two ways by which glory is reached: i) justification, peace, access, hope, glory; and ii) suffering, patience, experience, hope, glory. There is no accident in this parallelism, for these represent the objective and subjective realities of the gospel. In i) Paul gives the objective facts of our salvation. This, he means, is the heritage of all who come to Christ. But, as we often put it, they are truths of fact first, before they become truths of experience. And the way in which the truths of fact become truths of experience is precisely through suffering. Indeed, the only way in which we can determine that salvation has 'taken' in any vital sense is the evidence of suffering and what it works in our spirits. For commitment to Christ is not a polite fiction, it means and involves coming out from the world, nailing our colours to the mast, sharing the sufferings and the reproach of Christ, and this always means suffering. This is one reason why the early disciples, with backs bleeding from the scourging they had received, rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name of Christ. The suffering was a seal of the reality of their conversion, their justification, their stand for Christ.

### **5:5-8 'THE MERIDIAN SPLENDOR OF ETERNAL MERCY'**

The reason why the Christian's hope is one that will never disappoint or be put to shame is that God's love is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit. But why should this be regarded as a complete confirmation and vindication of the hope of the gospel? For this reason: God's love was evidenced in the death of Christ, a death that was for sinners, and while they were sinners. If, then, his death had the power to save us from punishment while we were enemies, that was the biggest thing of all, and the rest is easy. It is easy to believe that his risen life will preserve us day by day and bring us safe to glory. It is, to use a simple metaphor, rather like running an obstacle race. The great obstacle Christ had to encounter was the tremendous fact of sin and guilt; and once over that – and he is over it, once for all, in his death and resurrection! – it is a straight, clear run to the finishing post. There is nothing further to hinder. Compared with the mighty obstacle, guilt, which he has overcome, there are no comparable obstacles left for him to encounter in bringing us to glory. The 'love of

God' here refers not to our love for God, but his for us. As an element in salvation our love for him simply does not enter the picture. Furthermore, in speaking of his love, Paul is not thinking of some vague and general benevolence, or even of the providential care which he shows towards men, but of the love that has been revealed in Christ and particularly in his cross, and in the work he accomplished there for our sakes. One of the old Scottish divines once said that the cross was 'the noontide of everlasting love, the meridian splendour of eternal mercy', and how truly he spoke! It is what Christ did on the cross that demonstrates and exhibits the divine love.

### **5:5-8 THE DIVINE ANOINTING**

But is not so much the fact of the love of God as such that is the ground of the believer's assurance, but the love of God applied to our hearts by the Spirit. That is to say, it must become our experience, it must come home to us. Paul's word here, rendered in the AV as 'shed abroad' means 'poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit'. Scholars tell us that it is a word regularly used of the bestowal of the Spirit, as at Pentecost. In other words, this speaks of a personal experience of the love of God in one's heart, a personal appropriation of his salvation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the executor of the Godhead. He it is who effectually applies the work of Christ to the heart of the individual, making it real and personal to him. And when a man is himself brought to the place of justification, when he receives the great reconciliation, when his eyes are opened to see the meaning of the gospel, and he is brought into peace with God, that is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only the Spirit of God who can impart the gift of faith that lays hold of the justifying mercy. Without the Holy Spirit, salvation remains something to hear about, never to experience. It is he who makes it ours. And when the love of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, it is the shining of a great light into our inmost being, giving the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit's office and work, then, to apply the love of God in redemption to the hearts of men. And supremely it is the message of the Cross that is the spearhead of his thrust, so to speak. It is here that the personal application of the redemption of God is made by the Spirit. We could put it this way: the Cross is the 'place' where the great Creator God overshadows the chaos and darkness of human sin, and speaks the mighty word of power that brings forth light and life for the sons of men. It is there that light breaks in on our darkness, there that grace touches our sightless eyes and opens them to see the loveliness of Christ, there that mercy opens our prison door and puts a royal pardon in our hand.

### 5:5-8 'AMAZING LOVE'

Mention of the 'prison door' at the end of yesterday's note is a reminder of the depth and the extremity of man's condition in his sin. In his lost estate man is truly 'without strength' and helpless. 'Ungodly' at the end of 6 further underlines this, as being out of harmony with God, whether in the sense of being separate from him (cf. Eph. 2:3,12), or unlike him (with the image of God defaced by sin) or against him (alienated and enemies in mind (Col. 1:21)). The contrast in 7 between 'righteous' and 'good' serves to highlight an even greater contrast where Paul commends the divine love in Christ (8) as being neither for the righteous nor the good but for sinners, something utterly beyond the scope or possibility of even the highest human love. The word 'demonstrates' in 8 can be taken in different ways. It could be used in the sense of what we mean when we say 'let me commend'. The commendation of the divine love is that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. But the word can also be used in the sense of 'to prove'. The proof of God's love is that Christ died for us. A man might ask, 'How can I, or anyone, know that God cares for me?' Here is the proof: love in action. Proof, not in the sense of assurance by word only, but by action, to deal with our sin. The word has a further meaning also – 'to introduce' – in that the death of Christ is the mighty action of God whereby his love makes its way to us, breaking through all barriers and stopping at nothing in order to reach us in our sin. This would link Paul's words with what one theologian has called the 'movement of eternity for our sakes'. This would serve to explain why God could not wait until the fulness of the time before revealing Christ, but sent anticipatory intimations of his coming down the ages of the Old Testament. The picture is of a God straining, as it were, to break through to the mankind he longed to save. How wonderful!

### 5:9-10 'MUCH MORE!'

Paul's argument in the first half of this chapter centres, as we have seen, on 5, 'the hope that does not disappoint us', and he has been adducing reasons for this statement. Each succeeding verse develops the argument in such terms as 'If this ... is, then much more will this ... be so'. This is the force of the 'much more' in 9, 10. If God did for us what he did while we were yet sinners, and overcame the supreme obstacle to fellowship with him while we were in such a state, then the continuance of his gracious purposes of salvation in us, and their completion, cannot possibly present any intractable difficulty to him. If God was able to do the one, while we were in a state of enmity against him, he is much more able to do the other, now that we are reconciled to him. 'Saved through him' and 'saved by his life' are virtually synonymous terms, and the reference is clearly to Christ's risen life. (His 'life' in the days of his flesh, i.e. his pre-crucifixion life, could have no meaning here – indeed, by itself it

has no meaning, considered as a saving power). What Paul is speaking of is the continuous salvation that the believer experiences through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in his life. It is the idea expressed in different terms in 1 Pet. 1:5, 'shielded by God's power until the coming of (the) salvation', and in Heb. 7:25, 'He is able to save completely those that come to God through him'. This properly brings us to the doctrine of sanctification, which becomes the increasing theme of the next chapters of the epistle.

### **5:9-10 A FORTIORI (HOW MUCH MORE!)**

The truth expressed in 9 is repeated in different, but parallel terms in 10, and 'justification' is virtually equated with 'reconciliation', and 'sinners' with 'enemies'. 'Saved by his life' may be taken in either of two ways. It may correspond to 'raised for our justification' in 4:25, as has been suggested, presenting merely a rhetorical contrast to 'reconciled by the death of his Son', and with no thought of assigning different functions to the death and resurrection of Christ. On the other hand, we must realise that Paul is making an a fortiori contrast ('much more') between what God has done for men while they lay under the divine condemnation and what he can do for them now that they are reconciled. To be 'saved by his life' is more likely therefore to have reference to the continuous salvation that the believer experiences through the power of the Spirit. The meaning would then be, as Denney suggests, 'much more shall the love which wrought so incredibly for us in our extremity carry out our salvation to the end' (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5, Heb. 7:25). 'Life' here can only mean 'the risen life of Christ;' a reference to his pre-crucifixion life and ministry, as we said in yesterday's note, would have no meaning at this point.

### **5:11 CULMINATING POINT OF THE ARGUMENT**

The air of finality and conclusiveness Paul's words have here seems to indicate that he has come to the end of one part of his doctrinal statement and is about to proceed to another. It is the culminating point of the argument in one very real sense, completing the particular part of the picture which has occupied him since 1:16. And at 12 a new consideration is taken up. In the note on 10, it was pointed out that to be 'saved by (in) his life' implies our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. This union is not a theory, but a living reality; it is fellowship, not a mechanical entity. Nor is it a mere means to an end, but an end – the end – in itself, the goal of salvation. This can be brought into relief very simply and comprehensively by setting the two verses, 1:28 and 5:11, alongside one another: 'They did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God' (1:28) – this is the baleful effect of the Fall: man, made in the image of God, made for fellowship with him, made to walk in



friendship and companionship with the Almighty, becomes hopelessly and tragically alienated from him. The magnitude of Christ's saving work is seen best perhaps against that dark backcloth, for it is from that that men are brought, by His cross, to 'rejoice in God' (5:11), the cause of estrangement being removed and all its tragic effects, and a wonderful new possibility of fellowship being created. This is what the message of these chapters has been; this is the point of justification, this the force of propitiation made in his blood, this the content of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The end-result of the gospel of grace in the souls of men is that they should be brought to love the God they used to hate and shun, and to desire and long for his fellowship and love. This is the wonder and glory of grace.

## **ADAM AND CHRIST: MANKIND'S SOLIDARITY IN SIN & GRACE 5:12-21**

### **5:12-21 THE ARGUMENT DEEPENS**

The contrast referred to in the previous note between man's predicament in his sin and the miraculous transformation that takes place through the gospel provides the link with what now follows in this section, and Paul proceeds to explain how it is that what Christ has done in his death and resurrection has such a profound, transforming effect on men's lives. In doing so, he unfolds the basic presuppositions on which he has built his argument thus far in the epistle, and indicates that what follows, right up to 8:39, in fact, is not so much a new development unconnected with what has gone before, but rather an explication, on a deeper level, of what he has already said. This is the force of the connecting particle 'therefore' in 12, which is finely and illuminatingly rendered by J.B. Phillips – 'This, then, is what has happened'. The argument runs as follows: all that has been said up to this point about the human predicament must now be understood in terms of the solidarity of mankind in sin. All mankind, Paul has already said, stands under the judgement of God, and now he speaks of sinnerhood in terms of belonging to the old order of existence, of which Adam is the representative head. But the gospel ushers in a new order of existence, of which Christ is the representative head and in which the power of sin is broken and men are justified in the sight of God. Men sin because of their organic connection and relationship with Adam, the head and representative of the old humanity; and they are saved through their connection and relationship with Christ, the head and representative of the new (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22 for a simple statement of the principle involved here). Thus, sin, death, judgement, wrath, are traced to Adam, and justification, forgiveness, redemption are traced to Christ. To be justified by faith is to be no longer 'in Adam', but 'in Christ'. And since Christ is the antitype and counterpart of Adam, as C.K. Barrett points out, 'we can be as sure that we shall share in the



consequences of Christ's acts as that we do already share in the consequences of Adam's. What Christ has done has universal validity.'

## **5:12-21 ADAM AND CHRIST REPRESENTATIVE FIGURES**

Though difficult and complex in structure and in thought, this passage is a key one in the epistle. The main thread of Paul's argument is best seen by reading 12 and 18 together and taking 13-17 (with the AV) as a parenthesis. Taken thus, Paul is seen to be saying, 'As sin came into the world through one man ... so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.' This, then, is the basic thesis: as death came through Adam, so life has now come through Christ. The comparison, and contrast, is between two orders of existence, 'in Adam' and 'in Christ'. Thus far, Paul has described man's predicament 'in Adam': in this old order of existence he is under condemnation. But 'in Christ' he is brought into a new order of existence: he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Col. 1:13). Underlying this teaching is a thought that simply must be grasped before any real understanding is possible, namely that humanity is regarded as a single body under a single head. Adam and Christ are not here regarded simply as historical individuals, and it is not in this capacity that Paul speaks of them; they are representative figures, each standing for the whole race as a single body, the old and the new humanity respectively. When condemnation and death came upon Adam, they came upon him as the representative head of the race, and thus they came upon all men, in him. Conversely, what Christ has done is also a representative work involving, and shared by, all who are in him. The idea of representative figures and the principle involved here is well illustrated in the story of David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17:9, 51), in which it was agreed by both armies that a victory for either warrior would count as a victory for his whole side. Thus, Adam lost his battle, and all his side 'lost' in him; but Christ won, and all his side 'gain the victory' in him.

## **5:12-21 SIN AND DEATH INTEGRALLY RELATED**

Two matters of significance are raised in 12 – one the connection between sin and death, and the other the meaning and significance of what follows in the second part of the verse – for which the modern versions give very different constructions. Neither the NIV nor RSV do justice to Paul's meaning here, and the AV is likewise problematic. What we can say is this: the entrance of death into the world and its consequent universal prevalence was entirely the result of sin. Death, as Paul puts it later (6:23), is the wages of sin, and this is clearly the construction he places on the Garden of Eden story of man's disobedience. Death

is the sacrament of sin, or – to use Brunner’s phrase – the ‘materialised form of guilt’ – and is the evidence of how seriously God regards sin. The second half of the verse however implies that the universal spread of sin to all men is due to the fact that all men sinned. But Paul cannot mean here that because all men have sinned, they share Adam’s fate; if we all became subject to death because of the sins we had committed, the logical inference would be that we would also enter into life because of the righteousness which by some means we might achieve. And this is the exact opposite of what he proceeds to say, namely that it is through the righteousness of Christ, not our own, that we enter into life. Paul’s argument, both here and throughout the passage requires him to mean that all men have sinned in Adam. This is the only thing he could mean, however difficult we may find it to accept. We may even think there is a logical and moral contradiction involved, but we should realise that it is a contradiction borne out by our own personal experience. For in our truest and deepest thoughts about our sin we know both that we are responsible for it, and also that, in some tragic way that we shall never fully understand, it is something we cannot help and over which we do not have final control. Strange, is it not, that our hearts bear testimony to what our minds boggle at?

## **5:12-21 THE UNDERLYING CURRENT**

Something further should perhaps be said about the linguistic problem over the translation of the Greek words ‘*eph ho pantes hemaarton*’ in 12, which the AV renders ‘for that all have sinned’. While it is clear that ‘*eph ho*’ must mean ‘because’ or ‘in view of the fact that’, the context makes it necessary to add the words ‘in him’, making the whole phrase read, ‘because all have sinned in him’. And, paradoxically, the Vulgate rendering ‘in whom’ (‘*in quo*’), though incorrect as a translation of the Greek, is essentially correct as an interpretation of the apostle’s meaning. As Sanday and Headlam comment, ‘There is an undercurrent all through the passage, showing how there was something else at work beside the guilt of individuals. That “something” is the effects of Adam’s Fall. The Fall gave the predisposition to sin; and the Fall linked together sin and death’. The validity of this interpretation is borne out in what Paul says in the verses that follow (13, 14). Paul grants that sin is not taken into account where there is no law – as was the case in the period between Adam and Moses – but sin is still sin, even when law has not convicted men of it, and therefore the consequences of it – i.e. condemnation and death – still become evident. The proof of Paul’s argument here lies in the fact that people died in the period between Adam and Moses, just as Adam died. And they died because they sinned in Adam. Little children die before they can possibly have committed actual transgressions. They do not die because they have sinned but because, in the far deeper sense, they have sinned in Adam; that is, they partake of fallen nature, and belong, in Adam, to a humanity that has come under the curse

and shadow of death. Paul's teaching here is that death reigns as a cruel tyrant over the whole of humanity and, as one commentator puts it, does not ask man whether he will serve him, but rules autocratically over him. But in this grim picture, let us not forget the gleam of light in the last phrase of 14 – our connection with Adam prefigures our connection with Christ, and reminds us that though we die in Adam we may live in him!

### **5:12-21 THREE ILLUSTRATIONS**

It may help us at this point to stand back, as it were, for a moment or two, to see Paul's thinking here in perspective. What he has been saying, in effect, is to answer the question, 'What does it mean to be a Christian, a believer?' and the answer he gives is twofold: i) it means to be justified; and ii) this means being brought into union with Christ in his death and resurrection. And the faith that appropriates the one – justification – also appropriates the other, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, and therefore liberation from the power of sin, in the experience of the risen life of Christ (this is what the apostle has already said in 5:10, saved by his (risen) life). It is in this context that he unfolds basic principles and presuppositions, in 5:12-21. Then, having done so, and in anticipation of what is to come, he proceeds to illustrate these principles in three ways:

- 6:1-14 an illustration from baptism, by which the believer is engrafted into a new stock;
- 6:15-23 an illustration from slavery, by which the believer is enslaved to a new master;
- 7:1-6 an illustration from marriage, by which the believer is married to a new husband.

In looking at the section in this way we are able to see clearly the unfolding of the apostle's argument and to distinguish the basic doctrinal statements from the illustrative material that is given to elucidate them.

### **5:12-21 THE 'MUCH MORE' OF GRACE**

To return, then, to the verses before us, we see from 15-17 that the comparison Paul is making is not 'as it was with the Fall, so is it now with the gift of grace'. The 'not' in 15 and 16 shows this clearly. The important words are 'much more' in 15. The blessing which comes from Christ is incomparably greater than the condemnation which comes from Adam. It is the super-abundant measure, in which our new connection with Christ supersedes and surpasses our old connection with Adam, that is Paul's concern in this whole passage. This is the glory of the gospel, and something that we may well exult in with growing awe and wonder – that we gain infinitely more through our redemption in Christ than ever we would

have had even if we had never fallen into sin. So great is his mercy toward us! If any man be in Christ, he is – not merely restored to what he would have been if he had not sinned, but much more – a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. This excess of grace means that those who were once reigned over by the dark tyrant are not only set free (this would mean the exact equivalent, and would correspond to a return to the ‘status quo’ of the old order), but are themselves made to reign. Christ is concerned not merely to undo the damage done by Adam, and restore the original, but to do something incomparably more wonderful. It is really a new order that he inaugurates in which man attains a destiny not hitherto possible for him. The prodigal son is immeasurably better off on his return to the Father’s house than he was before he left home!

### **5:12-21 THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW**

The reference to the law in 20 answers a query which is implicit in the earlier reference to it in 13. The question that would naturally arise in a Jewish mind, and would be addressed to Paul, is: ‘What is the position of the law in relation to these two orders of existence of which you have been speaking? You pass from one to the other as if they were the only two fundamental realities, but is there not a third order, that of law? Where does the law feature in your scheme of things?’ This is a legitimate query, and one to which Paul must give a satisfactory answer (see earlier notes on 4:13-17). The law, Paul says, ‘came in alongside’ (this is the literal rendering of the Greek) or ‘intruded into the process’ (NEB), i.e., as one commentator puts it, it came in beside what was already in position. It has thus a provisional, even parenthetical, function; subsidiary to the main theme, not central. That function is to make the offence abound. This means (a) to expose sin for what it is, and make it appear utterly sinful (cf. 7:13), and (b) to provoke sin, and bring it out from all the hidden corners where it lurks in the human heart, rousing it from its slumbers like a wild beast from its lair. Paul’s own experience is a good example of this. Who would have thought that the deeply religious scholar from Tarsus could have shown such diabolical bitterness, hatred and frenzy against anyone as he showed against the Christians? But when the law began to work in his heart and conscience it exposed the hidden sin there, and provoked it until it well-nigh overwhelmed him. But this is the important thing – it finally led him to Christ, handed him over, so to speak, to him who made grace abound in his disordered life. There is a seeming contradiction involved in this, however, and we must discuss it further in what follows.

## **5:20-21 THE PROVISIONAL CHARACTER OF THE LAW**

The contradiction in terms lies in the fact that the law seems to have such power to expose and provoke sin, and yet is given by God and is holy, just and good. Why, if the law is intended essentially as a curb and restraint on sin (cf. Gal. 3:19), does it have such a markedly opposite effect? What happens is this: though the initial effect of law seems contrary to the purpose of God, in that it makes the situations worse instead of better, its ultimate effect is to bring men finally to the point where sin may be dealt with and destroyed, viz., at the cross. But grace delays the cure until sin is exposed in all its ugliness and horror. H.G.C. Moule maintains that this is the force of 'entered', which he renders 'came in sideways', i.e. 'as to its relation to our acceptance; as a thing which should indirectly promote it, by not causing but occasioning the blessing'. At the crucial point, then, when sin is at its height, grace intervenes. This is the intervention of which Paul has spoken in 3:21ff. and by which the course of history is once for all changed. Before, there was the reign of sin, but now the reign of grace is begun. This reign is 'through righteousness', i.e. it is made possible and becomes actual through the righteousness of God, which is the central message of the gospel Paul has expounded in these chapters.

## **THE SECOND FREEDOM: FROM SIN 6:1-23**

### **a. First illustration: engrafted into a new humanity 6:1-14**

### **6:1 THE BELIEVER'S UNION WITH CHRIST**

The question with which this new chapter begins, 'Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?' (1) arises from what Paul has just said in 5:20 about grace increasing all the more when sin increases. And Paul's answer to this question is terse and unequivocal: it is the worst possible misunderstanding of the situation for anyone to suggest this. How shall we, he says, that have died to sin live in it any longer? It is a moral, rather than a literal, impossibility that Paul expresses in his answer. Even the Greek he uses indicates his sense of outrage – 'we, being as we are persons who have died to sin' – Paul is clearly asserting that by definition a Christian is one who has died to sin, and therefore no longer continues in it. Moreover, the tense of the verb is aorist, indicating a definite moment in experience, namely at conversion, the point at which we are brought out of Adam and into Christ. There are a number of things we need to note here. For one thing Paul goes on in his argument (in 3)

with the words 'Don't you know?' There is, then, something we need to know in this respect. In point of fact, he asks the same question on two further occasions in this section, at 6:16 and 7:1. This gives us the key as to how to break up the section into three parts. Indeed, it helps us considerably to realise that Paul is giving us a precise pattern, stating first of all his basic thesis in 6:1, 2, that the believer, the justified man, is one who has died to sin and therefore it is a moral impossibility for him to continue in it. Then, having stated his basic thesis, he proceeds to use three illustrations to make his point, in the verses that follow.

## **6:1-2 A NECESSARY IMPLICATION OF JUSTIFICATION**

Before, however, we turn to these illustrations, we had better point out that Paul is now taking the opportunity to expound the basic message of the gospel from another standpoint and in a different light. It is important to realise that this is in fact what he is doing. The subject is still the same, and only the viewpoint is different. There is no thought of expounding something different from the theme of chs. 3 – 5. Rather, he is now making clear what must be held to have been implicit in his doctrine of justification by faith. James Denney says, in this connection,

*Unless there is a necessary connection between justification by faith and the new life, Paul fails to prove that faith establishes the law. The real argument which unites chapters 3, 4 and 5 with chapters 6, 7 and 8, and repels the charge of antinomianism is this: justifying faith, looking to Christ and his death really unites us to him who died and rose again, as the symbolism of baptism shows to every Christian.*

It is not too much to say that no adequate understanding of Paul's teaching is possible until this connection is grasped. There are a number of things we need to note here. For one thing, Paul goes on in his argument (in 3) with the words, 'Don't you know?' There is, then, something we need to know in this respect. In point of fact, he asks the same question on two further occasions in this section, at 6:16 and 7:1. This gives us the key as to how to break up the section into three parts. Indeed, it helps us considerably to realise that Paul is giving us a precise pattern, stating first of all his basic thesis in 6:1, 2, that the believer, the justified man, is one who has died to sin and therefore it is a moral impossibility for him to continue in it. Then, having stated his basic thesis, he proceeds to use three illustrations to make his point, in the verses that follow.



## **6:3-8 THE INDICATIVES OF GRACE**

As we look at the illustrations Paul uses here (3-14), it will be helpful to consider some general comments, in order to give as full understanding of them as possible. We suggest reading as many alternative translations as may be available – RSV, NIV, NEB, J.B. Phillips, Weymouth and others. What we have to understand is the distinction between objective and subjective truth. Objective truth deals with what lies outside and beyond ourselves; subjective truth has to do with our state of heart, our reactions, our feelings. Here, Paul deals with objective facts, things that Christ has done for us, rather than with things we feel or do. This distinction is cardinal for our understanding. We could put it another way, thus: the statements Paul makes are in the indicative, not the imperative, mood. The imperatives come later, in the exhortations to believe, to yield and consecrate ourselves to Christ. But first, it is the facts we are to grasp, then the exhortations based on them. That is the order; and to grasp this means that we shall be saved from a fundamental misunderstanding of Paul's teaching. There are those, for example, who think that the theme of Rom. 6 is: 'You must die to sin'. But it cannot be too strongly emphasised that this is not what Paul is teaching; to say, 'You must die to sin,' is an exhortation, an imperative. Rather, what he is teaching is, 'You have died to sin in the death of Christ'. It is a statement of fact, not something we do, but something God has done, in the death of his Son. We must insist that this is a statement of fact first, before it becomes a truth in our experience (we shall see more of this later in the chapter).

## **6:3-8 DEAD AND BURIED IN CHRIST'S DEATH**

Here, then, are the facts; here is what it means to be a believer. A believer is one who is not only justified by faith but also at the same time baptised into Christ's death, and united with him in that death. Calvin's interpretation is good and helpful here, when he says, 'To imagine that Christ bestows free justification without imparting newness of life shamefully rends Christ asunder. Believers are never reconciled to God without the gift of regeneration.' A true understanding of justification, therefore, must settle the question once and for all. What Paul means is that the faith that in its exercise justifies the sinner also brings him into a living relationship of newness of life in Christ, through his death and resurrection. Baptism, in signifying the believer's faith, illustrates the nature of that faith in terms of death, burial and rising again. (It should be said at this point that Paul is not so much expounding a doctrine of baptism here as using baptism as an illustration and for practical purposes in his argument the reference to it is equivalent to such a phrase as 'our profession of faith in Christ'). It should be noted that six times within these verses does Paul state in different terms the central truth that we died to sin in the death of Christ: in 3 we are 'baptised into his death'; in

4, 'buried with him'; in 5, 'united with him like this in his death'; in 6, 'crucified with him'; in 7, 'dead'; and in 8, 'we died with Christ'. Why does Paul lay so much stress on this? Because (a) it is so important, and (b) so many appear to find it difficult to grasp. He is determined to leave no room for doubt as to what has happened. He can mean only one thing: when he died, we died. This once again, is the 'representative' nature of Christ's death. This, he means, is where God has placed us and this is the truth about us. This, our union with Christ in his death, took place fundamentally on the cross 2000 years ago, and actually when we trusted in him.

### **6:3-8 THE PRISONER SET FREE**

As the argument develops, Paul shows that our entering into newness of life rests on the fact that in sharing Christ's death, our 'old self', 'the man we once were', as the NEB so graphically renders it – was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with that we should no longer be slaves to sin (6). This once again decisively answers the question in 1: continuing in sin is impossible, for that would be the mark of the 'old man', who has been put to death in the death of Christ. This 'old self' is what we were before we became Christians, members of the old order of existence in Adam. Our death with Christ through faith means that we are no longer that, and therefore no longer under the old dominion. The tyranny of sin is broken, and we are set free. The 'body of sin' is the body in which we live, 'viewed as sin's stronghold, medium, vehicle' (H.G.C. Moule). The phrase 'done away with' in 6 does not so much mean 'destroyed' (as in AV) as 'rendered impotent' or 'deprived of its power', rather than 'put out of existence'. Paul's meaning is that the 'body of sin', viewed as the instrument of sin, is permanently disabled, so that sin can no longer use it. This is made clear in 7, where Paul states the general principle involved: 'He that is dead (has died) is freed from sin'. The word translated 'freed' here is elsewhere in the New Testament and in this epistle translated 'justified', and some think that Paul is referring to being set free from the guilt of sin (through justification) rather than from its power. But the context surely requires the thought of deliverance from the power of sin (he has already spoken of the body of sin being deprived of its power); and in any case justification and liberation are too closely associated in Paul's thought to warrant a sharp distinction being made between them. Justification is a liberating power; it is the granting of pardon that sets the prisoner free.

### **6:9-10 OUR RISEN LIFE IN CHRIST**

Further to relate the significance of Christ's death to our position, Paul now stresses that that death was decisive, once-for-all and forever. Consequently death can have no more

dominion over him, he has passed forever beyond its power. But, says Paul, if that is true of him, it is also true of us in him. Death can have no more dominion over us either. And therefore, because in his risen life Christ lives to God, so also we are raised in him to newness of life, a life which we live to God. This is the force of the words ‘in the same way’ in 11. All that is said of Christ is just as true of us, when we are in him, both as to his death and as to his resurrection. It is true that Paul is dealing mainly (though not exclusively) with Christ’s death and our identification with it, rather than with his resurrection. The full discussion of our union with Christ in his resurrection is found in Eph. 2:4-6, and this should be read along with Paul’s teaching here in order to realise the full sweep of his thought (see also Phil. 2:5-11, where the high King of heaven comes down, down to the murky depths, even the death of the cross, then rises to the heights of glory). What we must realise is that at the point where he was made in the likeness of men he laid hold upon sinful human nature, on his way down, so to speak, into these depths, took it into death with him, and through death with him, and up out of death with him, into the glory of resurrection life. Wonder of wonders. Glory to his Name!

#### **6:9-10 ‘NO MORE TO DO WITH SIN’**

We might well pause to ask the question, ‘What is the meaning of the phrase “died to sin”?’ (10). It can hardly be the same as ‘died for sin’ in the sense of bearing sin’s penalty – the different preposition must have some point and meaning – and this is not what Paul has in mind. He is setting in contrast the two phrases ‘to sin’ and ‘to God’. The alternatives in life are ‘living for God’ and ‘living for sin’; and ‘dying to sin’ is the opposite of the latter, and equivalent to the former. When Christ died to sin, he ‘passed into a state in which he had no more to do with sin’ (Alford), i.e. sin ceased to have any further claim upon him. To be sure, his relation as sin-bearer was different to ours, as sinners, but death severs the relation in each case, and the death we die with Christ brings us also into a state in which we have no more to do with sin. In a variety of ways Paul makes it clear, by stating the facts of the situation, that it is a moral impossibility to continue in sin. When what requires to be known (3) about the believer’s position in Christ is known, and adequately understood, the question ‘Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?’ will no longer be asked. What follows in the next verses (11ff.) is a summons to recognise what we are in Christ, and to live accordingly.

## **6:11 RECOGNISING THE FACTS**

Thus far in chapter 6 Paul has been stating facts. Now, in this verse, comes the challenge to faith. If these are the facts, he says, then reckon upon them, recognise them to be facts, step out on them (as Peter stepped out on the water at the command of Christ, reckoning that it would hold him up – that is the same principle). We could put it another way: if these are the facts – i.e. that we have died to sin in the death of Christ, and come alive to God in him – recognise them to be facts, recognise this to be our position in Christ, and act accordingly. From the point of view of Christian experience, this word ‘count yourselves’ is probably the most important phrase in the whole New Testament – everything in the life of victory over sin rests upon it. What Paul is asking of us here is that we must allow God to tell us where he has placed us in the death and rising again of Christ, and to believe him over against all the evidence of our hearts and experience. For it is only when faith fastens on to the facts that the truth becomes a reality in our experience. A simple illustration will help here. When a girl gets married, it is the beginning of a new life for her. What does she do? She goes out assuming that the transaction that has taken place at her wedding service is a valid and real one and she proceeds to act as if she were married. This ‘acting as if’ is no pretence or deceit, it is the expression of her faith in the validity of the marriage service. In the same way, when Paul says, ‘Count yourselves dead to sin,’ he means that we are to live as if we were dead to sin, assuming that what is said about us in Rom. 6 – viz. ‘that we have died to sin in the death of Christ’ – is the plain and simple truth. And there is one sure way of proving this: try it. It works!

## **6:11 NO LONGER ‘WHAT WE ONCE WERE’**

‘In the same way’ refers back to the phrase ‘once for all’ in 10: we must consider ourselves once for all to have died to sin – i.e. at conversion. From that point onwards we are no longer ‘the man we once were’. ‘Count’ is the same word as used in 4:3 of God’s crediting righteousness to Abraham. The faith that counts the guilt of sin to have been put away by the death of the cross (5:1) reckons also that its power is broken through sharing that death. The faith that justifies is a faith that crucifies, and the principle of appropriation is the same in each case: faith considers it to be so, and lives as if it were so. It becomes ‘second nature’ to the believer to live in this way; and this of course is the meaning of the second birth. In this connection, we should realise that although some refer to this as our ‘mystical’ union with Christ, this is not a proper use of the word, if by it we mean that it is something we experience in a sublime and exalted spiritual way. We may often have difficulty in ‘feeling’ that we are in Christ, in the way that we ‘experience’ forgiveness and the peace of heart that ensues. But can it be said that our union with Christ is something we ‘experience’

in this way? The terms 'in Christ' and 'in Adam' are statements of fact, not of feeling. The commentator Nygren points out that when we speak of humanity participating in Adam's sin and death we do not do so in any mystical sense. We do not 'feel' our union with Adam; it is simply a fact that we stand in organic unity with Adam. And it is this fact that explains our sinfulness of life. In the same way, it is our participation in Christ, the last Adam, that explains our newness of life. And Paul is asking us here to recognise the truth about ourselves as believers. When we do, it becomes the basis of our new life, and both its explanation and its dynamic.

### **6:12-14 BE WHAT YOU ARE!**

A series of imperatives now follows, which are best understood as showing how the reckoning of faith (11) works out in practical experience. These imperatives, it should be noted, are based on the indicatives in 1-10 and are possible of fulfilment only because the indicatives are true, for they supply the inspiration and dynamic for the ethical endeavour Paul asks for here. And ethical endeavour is essential; the new life is not automatically ours, but is to be laid hold of and entered into, for this reason, that as believers we are in Christ but we still live in mortal bodies, and the new life we have in him has to be lived out in the sphere of the old order, a sphere in which sin is still a power to be reckoned with, seeking to regain control over us. We must now defend our new position against it, hence the exhortation in 12, 'Do not let sin reign'. The Christian, being set free, is enlisted in the King's army, and committed to battle against the tyrant that formerly held him in thrall. The metaphor is continued in 13 where the word translated 'instruments' generally means 'weapons' in New Testament usage. Formerly, our mortal bodies were taken possession of, in all their various faculties, by sin; but now the enemy has been driven out, and what was once the citadel of sin is to be handed over to God and put at his disposal in his service against the foe. The important phrase in 13 is 'as those who have been brought from death to life' (which NEB finely renders 'as dead men come to life'). This is part of the 'counting' of 11; this is what believers really are. They must therefore think of themselves as such, as Denney puts it, and act accordingly.

### **6:12-14 HOW IT ALL WORKS**

The imperative, 'Do not let sin reign,' (12) may well be taken as a commentary on the word 'count' in 11. This is how a true reckoning on the facts works out in experience. It not only shows the working of faith, but is the proof that faith works. Now, lest there should seem to be a contradiction between what is stressed in these verses as something we must do and

the emphasis in the previous verses in what has been accomplished for us in the death of Christ, we must remember this: we are 'in Christ', but we are also at the same time 'in the flesh', in the sense of belonging still to the old order, and the new life that is ours in him has to be lived out in the sphere of the old life. Therefore, side by side with the truth that we are 'free from sin' and 'dead to sin', there is the other truth that we must 'battle with sin', otherwise sin will regain control of that which it has lost and bring us again into bondage. In what sense, then, can it be said that we are free from sin? In this sense, that sin is deprived of its authority, and subdued ('everything brought under his control' to use Paul's words in Phil. 3:21). The words he uses there are military, describing the action of a commanding officer when he reduces a defaulting NCO to the ranks. This is what happened in the spiritual realm – the 'old man' is reduced to the ranks, deprived of his authority so that he can no longer lord it over us. Christ passes the sentence upon him, and we must see to it that he is now kept in his proper place. 'Therefore do not let sin reign ...'

#### **b. Second illustration: enslaved to a new master 6:15-23**

#### **6:15-18 FACTS, FAITH, EXPERIENCE**

Paul's words in 14 are perhaps best taken as a statement of fact, following as a natural consequence from what has been said. Taken thus, they would then mean: 'If these are the facts (1-10), and if you recognise them to be the facts (11), and dispute sin's right to exercise further power over you (12) by offering yourselves to God as dead men come to life (13), then sin will not be your master.' The addition of the words, 'because you are not under the law, but under grace,' explains why. The power of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56), i.e. it is through the law that sin exercises its power over men. And when men are removed from the sphere of the law, sin can no longer lord it over them. Our chains are fallen off and we are made free. In all this, we may discern a biblical pattern of facts (3-10), faith (11-13), and experience (14). When faith lays hold on the facts, the experience will always be the same. But the fact that believers are not under the law but under grace, as he says here, could also be given a different interpretation, and this is now put (15) as a question almost identical to that in 6:1, in the second of his three illustrations of his basic thesis stated in 6:1, 2, that of being slaves to a new master (15-23). The question is, will doing away with the law (which is God's restraint on sin) mean doing away with morality? If the law is removed, will sin not become rampant? Briefly, Paul's answer is that freedom from the law does not mean freedom from God; the believer is free from sin, not free to sin. This has been the general theme of 1-14, but Paul now goes further, and proceeds to describe the nature of Christian freedom in terms of enslavement to a new master. We shall continue this in the next note.



## **6:15-18 THE NEW MASTER**

The theme of this second illustration is what we are set free for. The fact is, there is no such thing as freedom in vacuo. If it is not freedom for something, it is an illusion. It is like the house in Christ's parable, swept clean but left empty (Matt. 12:43, 45), which becomes an easy prey to evil. There is no thought in Paul's mind of man being set free in an absolute sense to be lord of his own life. The question is, which master he is going to serve, sin or righteousness? He cannot escape from the position of being in service to the one or to the other. This is the meaning of 16: freedom from the one means service to the other, and the service of the one precludes the service of the other. In the Christian, as the Swedish commentator Nygren puts it, the throne from which sin has been removed is never left unoccupied; that place has been taken by righteousness. As Jesus said, 'No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other' (Matt. 6:24). This brings us back again to the basic meaning of the word 'redemption' in 3:24, indicating 'release by the payment of a price', and is a picture out of the slave market. The idea is of a slave changing ownership, being set free from one master and bought into the service of another. A man who is a believer is one who is no longer a slave to sin, but is now a bondslave of Christ, whose service is perfect freedom. A Christian is a slave who has changed masters.

## **6:15-18 OBEYING FROM THE HEART**

How this transaction takes place – how the slaves change hands – is now described in 17, 18. This is a statement of great importance, in that it can also be fitted into the context of 1-14, as showing or illustrating the meaning of faith – or, as 11 says, 'counting' or 'reckoning'. For the one equals the other. This is how it works – the obedience of faith, 'obeying from the heart'. It is worth noting that the work of God unto forgiveness and that unto deliverance from the power of sin belong together, and take place at the same time. Paul is in fact speaking of basic Christianity in these verses: 'You used to be slaves to sin', i.e. in pre-conversion days, but now having become slaves of righteousness you are set free from sin, i.e. in the blessing of conversion. We should translate 17 as 'you obeyed wholeheartedly the form of teaching to which you were entrusted'. What Paul means by 'form of teaching' is that in the preaching of the gospel they were wrought upon by the Word of God. Preaching 'put them on the spot', so to speak, delivering them over to a moment of destiny in their experience, cornering them, locking them up until faith should be revealed (as he puts it in Gal. 3:23). It is always true that preaching confronts men and creates a crisis for them. This is Paul's meaning here. The Word of God came to them – this is the basic, fundamental reality. It is necessary to stress the prior working of the Word and Spirit of God in the work of

conversion, for otherwise we may lay the emphasis too much on the supremacy of our decision to choose Christ. We must always remember what our Lord himself said, 'No man can come to me except the Father draw him.' We are gripped and constrained by the gospel – this is the point, and this is the meaning of faith. Nygren defines faith as follows: 'When one hears the gospel and is mastered by it – that is faith.'

## **6:19-23 GOOD OR BAD FRUIT**

These final verses of the chapter have also a particular significance. In 19 the apostle inserts an apology for speaking 'in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves'. The reference is probably to the whole analogy of slaves and masters, which he is using here (although Barrett thinks it refers to what follows, 19ff.), but a more important question is whether 'weak in your natural selves' has an intellectual or moral reference. Is it a matter of their understanding being but human, with Paul using a homely illustration to make his point? Or, is he emphasising the strength of the believer's new bond with Christ because he knows the very real danger that libertinism presented to his readers? The ethical urgency of Paul's thought throughout makes the latter more likely. At all events, he goes on to speak very plainly about the respective 'yields' of the two contrasting ways. The 'yield' in both cases is the natural and logical response to a position: under the terms of the old slavery, a certain behaviour was expected and required – impurity and greater and greater iniquity; but under the new, it must be righteousness and sanctification. In the one condition, we were dead to righteousness (righteousness did not have a 'look in' with us); in the other we are dead to sin. Paul points to the respective benefits of the two alternatives to clinch his argument in favour of the new servitude. There is an alternative reading of 21 which makes it more graphic: 'What return did you get, then? Things of which you are now ashamed.' This is made more probable by the parallel arrangement in 22 where 'the benefit you reap leads to holiness' corresponds with 'things of which you are now ashamed' (21), and 'its result eternal life' corresponds to 'the result of those things is death'. In each case both the immediate and the ultimate consequences of the course of action are set forth. This is strong evangelistic pleading, making it inescapably clear what is the one right thing to do, as 23 indicates with great solemnity.

## **THE THIRD FREEDOM: FROM THE LAW 7:1-25**

### **c. Third Illustration: bound to a new husband 7:1-6**

#### **7:1-6 THE NEW HUSBAND**

We come in this new chapter to the third illustration that Paul uses in the development of his argument, and of the statement of the believer's basic position, given in 6:1, 2. Paul has been concerned to insist that the believer, in being justified by faith in Christ through the redemption wrought in the cross, is thereby brought into union with Christ in his death and resurrection. The first illustration of this (6:3-14) deals with our incorporation through baptism into the new head of humanity, Christ, the last Adam. The second illustration (6:15-23) speaks of our allegiance to a new master. Now, in the third, (7:1-6) it is marriage to a new husband. In 6:14 Paul has said, 'sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace,' and it was from this statement that the second illustration arose (6:15-23). Now, in using the illustration of marriage, he does two things: a) he throws still further and fruitful light on the main point he is dealing with, i.e. union with Christ in his death and resurrection; and b) he passes to a new argument and presentation of the gospel, in declaring that the believer is set free in Christ, not only from sin, but also from the law. We should note that there is a close resemblance between what is said in ch. 6 about freedom from sin and what is said here about freedom from the law. The terms are almost identical (compare 6:1, 2, 4, 7, 18, 22 with 7:1, 4, 6, 3); the one is clearly a parallel freedom to the other. The questions raised by this idea are dealt with in 7ff.; but in 1-6 here, it is the fact of being free from the law that is stated and illustrated. We shall turn to an examination of these verses before us in the notes that follow.

#### **7:1-6 DYING TO THE LAW**

The point Paul makes here is clear, and his meaning plain. This third illustration continues and amplifies the main thesis that Paul has been propounding, and usefully introduces us to the whole question of the law and its position in the economy of grace. It will be helpful to remind ourselves of the context in which this argument is unfolded. Paul, in 5:12-21, speaks of and implies the existence of two orders, represented by the phrases 'in Adam' and 'in Christ', the old order and the new. Now this division into two orders might seem to simplify the issues overmuch and raise questions. The two orders are mutually exclusive, it is clear, but – and this would be a real point to any Jew listening to Paul's

argument – where does the law come in? For the Jew, the law was an order in itself; and Paul seems just to ignore it. ‘What about the law, Paul?’ he would say. Now, Paul has already on several occasions given interim answers to this question about the law – in 3:31; 5:20, 21 and in 6:14. And now in 7:1-6 he speaks of ‘dying to the law’ in the same way as he speaks of ‘dying to sin’. Is the law sin, then, that you have to die to it? It is to a full discussion of this, with the questions it involves, that Paul now turns in this chapter. One of the obvious questions raised is to ask in what sense we are dead or have died to sin? In what sense does this mean that we are free from sin? When Paul speaks of our old man being crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be done away with, does he mean this in the sense that the body of sin is put out of existence? And does this mean that we are, then, free from sin in the sense of being sinless? Hardly. The words ‘done away with’ mean ‘deprived of its power’. The old nature is, so to speak, put into prison, placed under lock and key, awaiting execution in the morning. But condemned criminals have been known to escape from prison, if the jailers are careless. One teacher illustrated this by a reference to the St. Lawrence River in Canada, when the long freeze-up of winter is broken in principle, once for all, with the coming of spring. The river begins to flow again, but ice-floes still come floating downstream, a hazard to shipping. It is freedom like that that comes to us in Christ.

## **7:1-6 THE TWO MARRIAGES**

The details of this third illustration may be difficult, but its general meaning can hardly be open to doubt. Yet commentators differ widely in their interpretation of it. Some, like C.H. Dodd, have maintained that Paul has gone hopelessly astray in using such an illustration – in such cavalier fashion does he deride one of the most brilliant minds of the ancient world. Sadly, Dodd’s comments in this part of his commentary tell us far more about him than about Paul! Others have advised against interpreting the illustration in too great detail, such as Nygren, and Denney. But patient examination will show that Paul is neither confused nor over-complex. What we need to do is patiently to examine the illustration itself. We should be able to resolve the difficulties, the main one due to the fact that whereas in 2 and 3 it is the husband who dies, and the woman who lives and weds again, in the application (4ff.) the situation is reversed, and now it is the woman (the believer) who dies, not the husband. Yet it is still the woman (the believer) who marries again. The seeming confusion here is resolved when we recognise that the underlying assumption throughout is that Christ’s death was followed by the resurrection, and that ours in him is followed by newness of life. In both the illustration and its application it is death that dissolves the union, in the one the death of the husband, in the other that of the wife. It helps us greatly to realise that Paul is making a simple statement in 1, which he then proceeds to illustrate in 2ff., in which the man, in 1 becomes the woman, in 2. If we start, then, with Christ and work backwards, clarity will

result. The woman's second marriage represents the believer's union with Christ. If therefore the analogy is to hold, the corresponding member of the first marriage must surely be a person also, not an impersonal thing like the law. A flood of light comes if we think of the concept Paul uses in ch. 6 – *ho palaios anthropos*, the old man. This is the first husband to whom we, the essential or true self, the 'ego', is united in and through the Fall. This explains how, in the illustration, the we can die, and yet be free to marry another – the we that dies being the person we once were, i.e. the old man, and the we that marries another being the essential 'self'. It is, as Sanday and Headlam put it, 'the moral death of the Christian to his past' that is in view, and it is this that does away with the law. The rest of the analogy is clear: our 'first' marriage bore evil fruit, for death; our 'second' marriage bears good fruit, to God.

## **7:1-6 TENSION AND CONFLICT**

Several times already, as we have pointed out, Paul has spoken of the function of the law in relation to the gospel, and now he is obliged to give the subject a fuller treatment than has been possible up to this point. And this is how it arises: in 6:1-23 he has said that in Christ we are free from sin, having died to it, and now in 7:1-6 he has used the same language about the law. We are free from it, having died to it also. Is then the law a bad thing, that we need to be set free from it, and die to it? This is the question Paul takes up now. Well, what is the position of the law? In answering this, he brings us to one of the most difficult passages of all, one which has been given many very different interpretations, especially 14-25. As a key to interpretation, we may look back to verses 5 and 6. In 5, Paul speaks of what we were, while in 6 he speaks of what we are. If we now look on to 7-13 and 14-25, we see that in the first of these passages, past tenses are used, and in the second, present tenses. May not this be an indication of how we are to interpret the passages? It is the reference in 5 to sinful passions being aroused by the law that raises once again in an acute form the whole question of the law's place and function in the divine economy, and causes Paul to deal more fully with this subject. But there is something else that must also be unfolded more fully, namely the paradox involved in his teaching in the whole of chapter 6:1 to chapter 7:6. The believer belongs to two worlds: he is 'in Christ' but he is also 'in the flesh' (in the sense that he is still human, and 'in the world'). Because this is so, and he has to live his new life in the midst of the old, sinful order, tension and conflict are inevitable. As to his position in Christ, he is free from sin, but this freedom has to be worked through by the active expression of faith by which he strives to enter into the rest it offers (6:11, 12, 18, 19). This 'fight of faith' is the conflict described in 7:7-25 in relation to the law and its working in the believer's life. To interpret the chapter thus preserves the unity of Paul's thought, and avoids some of the pitfalls in the controversial interpretations sometimes made of his teaching here.

## 7:7-13 THE PLACE OF THE LAW

Before we continue in our exposition, it is worthwhile to include a comment which we have come upon in Leon Morris's commentary on this passage. He says,

*We should be clear that Paul is writing about the law, not trying to answer the questions that modern people ask. This passage is not primarily a piece of personal autobiography or a psychological study of Christian experience. It is a sustained treatment of the place of the law. For the Jew the law was central, and Paul has denied that the Jew was right. He has said that in any case the Jew has broken the law (2:27). He has denied that anyone is justified by the law (3:20). He has argued that the believer is not under the law (6:14) and that he has died to the law (7:4). He has spoken of 'the sinful passions aroused by the law'. Where does that leave the law? Is the Christian to regard it as something evil and discard it? Or is it still God's law? It is with such questions that Paul is concerning himself, and we should not lose sight of where his argument leads, in our anxiety to get answers to questions Paul is not asking. That said, it is still true that our questions are important to us and that Paul's words have some bearing on them. Is he talking about himself or about other people? It is surely impossible to deny that Paul is speaking about himself in what he is saying. In this chapter he keeps on using the first person singular pronoun though he has not done this since the opening of his letter. Now he does so consistently, sometimes using the emphatic pronoun. The emotional content found throughout the passage points to personal involvement.*

This is a salutary corrective that serves to keep our thinking in a balanced perspective as we discuss this passage.

## 7:7-13 THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LAW AND SIN

The tenses of the verbs here suggest, as we have already pointed out, that Paul is looking back to his past. In 5, 6 we have noted a contrast between what we were when controlled by the sinful nature (5) and what we are in Christ (released from the law, 6) – then and now, before and after, past and present. It is surely not without significance that in 7-13 the tenses are past tenses, while in 14-25 the tenses are present tenses – that is, 7-13 speak of what we were when controlled by the sinful nature, while 14-25 speak of what we are when delivered from the law (and both, be it noted, standing in relation to the law). This, it seems to us, is decisive in arriving at a proper understanding of these two sections. In answer, then, to the question, 'Is the law sin?' that we need to be saved from it, Paul answers once again,



‘God forbid! But, for all that there is a connection and I want to show it to you now.’ This, then, is Paul’s purpose, to show the connection between law and sin. The law is not sin; it is spiritual (14), holy, righteous and good (12); of course it is, for, essentially considered, it comes from God. It is God’s law and first of all it is the expression of his character, will and purpose. It is this, first of all, before it becomes mandatory for man as the will of God for his life. Therefore, the primary and proper purpose of the law is to set the will of God on the throne of man’s heart. This is what the law was meant to do, and but for the coming of sin into the world, this is what it would have done. But sin entered, and laid evil hands on the holy law of God, pressing it into its evil service. Sin seized the opportunity afforded by the commandment (8), exercising its control indeed over man by means of the law. This is the extraordinary thing, the paradoxical, mysterious, tragic issue that Paul is concerned about here.

### **7:7-13 HOW THE LAW BECOMES A DESTROYING POWER**

When Paul says in 7, ‘I would not have known what sin was except through the law,’ he means that sin would not have been the power in his life that it had been but for the fact of the law. The law in fact revealed sin as sin, and not only so, it awakened sin where it had formerly been slumbering, arousing it to activity. This is an astonishing transformation: the law, as the expression of God’s will, must surely also be regarded as a curb or restraint on sin (all civil and criminal law is based on the validity of this fact); but instead of curbing and restraining sin, it actually does the opposite, arousing it and aggravating it. How can this be? This is answered in 8: ‘Sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire.’ The phrase ‘seizing the opportunity’ means ‘getting a start’. Used as a military term it is sometimes translated ‘a base of operations’. In a literary sense it means ‘to take a hint’, ‘to adopt a suggestion’. We may therefore take 8 to mean: when the law says, ‘Thou shalt not,’ sin says, ‘That has given me an idea, I will stir up desire for that forbidden thing.’ Sin seizes the opportunity in this way, taking it into its service, so to speak, and using it for its own evil purposes. In this respect, the law becomes a destroying power. But it was not (10) originally intended to be so. Its primary aim was to make men responsive to the will of God by revealing that will, for it is the expression of the character of God. But it becomes a very different thing because of sin, and because sin finds opportunity through it. Thus the law becomes, through sin, something which, in its own nature, it is not, namely, a destroying power, and it is from this that we are set free by Christ in the gospel. Not that something that is ordained of God (the law) is made death to us (13). It is rather that sin makes use of it, and puts it to evil ends. But God in the end turns the tables on sin, for although sin makes use of God’s good law to work evil in us, he also makes use of what sin does in us through the law, to show up sin in all its ugliness and sinfulness (‘through the law

we become conscious of sin', 3:20), thus bringing us to a deeper realisation of our need of the Saviour.

### **7:14-25 THE PARADOX OF 'IN CHRIST' AND 'IN THE FLESH'**

The final section of chapter 7 has proved to be the most controversial in the entire epistle. That it speaks of a profound inner conflict is clear, but very different answers have been given to the question, 'Who is this wretched man in 24?' It is necessary at this point to look at some of the answers that have been given by scholars and commentators, in order to come to any adequate understanding of Paul's teaching here. It will help us if we remember that the theme throughout the chapter is freedom from the law (and we should look again at the quotation from Leon Morris in the Note on 7:7-13), and that Paul is not really addressing himself to the questions that we often ask in seeking to interpret this passage. We should remember that just as Paul's teaching in chapter 6 on freedom from sin has a paradoxical character in that the believer, though free from sin, nevertheless still lives in a mortal body, in which sin is still a power to be reckoned with, so also here in chapter 7, freedom from the law is not freedom from the tensions and battles of the life of the Spirit. We are both 'in Christ' and 'in the control of the sinful nature'. As believers we are under grace, it is true, but we live this life of grace in the sphere where law is still a reality. Our soul is the battlefield of two worlds and the tensions of that conflict are described in these verses. To understand this brings a great deal of light into the situation and will make clear to us that Paul cannot be looking back on his pre-converted days, but describing a present experience. We have already, in an earlier note, pointed out that throughout this final section of the chapter Paul is speaking in the present tense – not looking back on his past but speaking of a present experience. We can hardly think that Paul would simulate this experience and use the present tense simply for dramatic effect!

### **7:14-25 WHO IS THIS 'WRETCHED MAN'?**

There is an even more conclusive argument indicated in 22 in the words, 'I delight in the law of God in my inner being'. What unconverted man could possibly say this? Paul has already said in 18 that nothing good lives in him, that is, in his sinful nature. How then could the 'good thing' of delighting in the law of God in his inner being possibly come from the natural heart? There are those, however, who think that what is referred to here is a believer living 'a defeated life'. This is a fairly general interpretation and one which at first looks plausible, likely and attractive, affording a way out of a difficult impasse, but this seems open to question on two grounds: for one thing, there is the stubborn fact of the present tenses

once again. Paul seems to be speaking of present experience, not of a period of his life as a believer before he learned the secret of spiritual victory. Would he have used the present tense to describe what was surely now in the past, and not rather, 'O wretched man that I was'? And is there any evidence that he was ever in that position? In fact – and this is the other thing – there is no evidence that Paul is thinking of 'defeated experience' in this epistle at all. There is such a thing, of course, as 'defeated experience', but Paul is dealing with the believer in relation to the law and surely the place for the idea of 'defeated experience' to arise would be before ch. 6, an understanding of the teaching of which is generally regarded to be the answer and solution to defeat in the spiritual life. No: the best and safest way of interpretation is to take his words in 24 exactly as they seem to mean, 'What a wretched man I am'. We shall continue this discussion in tomorrow's note.

### **7:14-25 NATURAL TENSIONS FOR A MORTAL BELIEVER**

If we take what was said at the end of the previous note, and interpret the 'wretched man's cry' (7:24) at its face value, things become clearer to us. For, plainly, it must refer to the tension that exists for the believer as being 'in Christ' and also 'in his natural state'; 'set free', and yet subject to the limitations that living in the realm where sin and law are realities brings. It is the fact of the inevitability of conflict in the believer's life – the fight of faith – that Paul is speaking of here. If we look back to 6:11, 12 and 6:18, 19 (which we interpreted in terms of the conflict involved in making a position in Christ our possession in spiritual experience), and in turn look forward to 8:23 ('we groan, as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies', i.e. the conflict between our freedom from the law of sin and death and the undoubted fact that even believers die), that inevitability becomes very evident, with the tension that it entails. And, in precisely the same way, here in 7:14-25 we have the same sort of paradox and tension between our position and our possession of freedom from the law. These things are in exact correspondence in chs. 6, 7 and 8 and we may add the notable passage in Gal. 5:17, 'the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want' – a verse which exactly parallels what Paul says here in 15-19. It is argued, however, against this interpretation, that the words in 14b 'I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin' can hardly refer to normal Christian experience. But the careful choice of language here is illuminating. The Greek word Paul uses here is *sarkinos*, not *sarkikos* and means simply 'in the flesh' (*en sarki*) rather than the accusatory 'carnal minded' which is the meaning of *sarkikos*. It simply means that 'he belongs to a human society which is marked by sin' (Nygren); that he is 'made of flesh and blood, and as such exposed to all the temptations which act through his body' (Sanday and Headlam). It is the mark of his mortality.

## **7:24-25 THE DEFINITIVE INTERPRETATION**

It is not always realised that this is in fact the only possible explanation of the passage if we are to avoid the claim of sinlessness when we think of being made free from sin. If sinlessness is 'out' as a possible interpretation, then what was said in the previous note is the only other practical possibility. It is best therefore to come to terms with what has been said and accept it. For this basic contradiction in Christian experience is further underlined by, and explains, what is said in 15: it is the inability to understand his own actions that leads him finally to cry, 'What a wretched man I am!' The agonising soliloquy in 17ff. is striking and significant, with its twice repeated phrase, 'It is no longer I who do it, but sin living in me ...' (17, 20). Paul can hardly be thought to be making excuses for his sin. Handley Moule comments, 'Not for excuse, but to clear his thought, and direct his hope, he says this to himself, and to us, in his dark hour.' It is his recognition of the fact that there is 'another self' within, a shadow personality in conflict with the true. It may be that Paul has still in mind the marriage illustration used earlier, in 7:1-6. 'The man we once were' (6:6 NEB) was the basic self joined to Adam; but this is no longer the real 'I', but something that being has become through sin. And to recognise that we are 'not ourselves' in our sinnerhood is a necessary step to 'becoming ourselves' in and through Christ. We may contrast the 'no longer I myself ..., but sin ...' in 17, 20 with a contrasting statement in Gal. 2:20, 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.' Both these statements are true of the believer at the same time and they describe the paradox from two different standpoints. Inasmuch as it is 'no longer I, but sin', the believer is a 'wretched man'; inasmuch as it is 'no longer I, but Christ', he is 'more than conqueror' (8:37).

## **7:14-25 FULL DELIVERANCE NOT YET ... BUT!**

We may sum up thus, therefore: To be set free from sin means to be no longer under the dominion of sin: sin is cast down from its throne in the life, but the existence of sin is still a reality. And if there is any sin remaining in one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, it will surely create tension in him, and make him recoil in deepest distress. It is this recoil which 24 expresses so dramatically. And since, despite the 'much more' of grace, which means real liberation, we are not able in this life not to be sinners, and 24 remains the believer's cry to the end, full deliverance is not yet, for we are saved in hope (8:24). It may well be asked whether this does not paint the possibility of Christian life in too sombre colours. Is this all grace can do? But the answer to this is that the tension between flesh and spirit is not an equal tension. The new life imparted to us in Christ is greater, stronger, than the old. This indeed is Paul's whole point in 5:12-21, where the words 'much more' are repeated and emphasised. As believers, even within the limitations of the flesh, we have the first fruits of

the Spirit, and this more than offsets the 'down drag' of the flesh. There are very great possibilities of victory within the experience of the 'groaning' – particular sins, habits, attitudes, that used to cripple and paralyse life, will certainly yield to the power of grace. But when all this is said – and it is not a little thing to say, for 'reigning in life' is not a fiction but a reality – we are still troubled with our old trouble, and it rears its head from time to time, giving us pain and distress until the end. There is a minor motif in the music of the Christian life; but that minor motif is not the final movement of the divine symphony, but leads on to the ultimate, glorious consummation whose sonorous chords and radiant harmonies resolve all tensions and answer every question in a total fulness and completion, and in 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. 4:17 AV).

## **THE FOURTH FREEDOM: FROM DEATH 8:1-39**

### **Life through the Spirit**

#### **8:1-4 LIFE IN THE SPIRIT**

In earlier notes where a new section of the epistle begins, (from 5:1 – 8:39, expounding the nature of the new life that is ours in Christ), it was pointed out that, in turn, ch. 5 describes that new life as a life that is free from the wrath of God; that ch. 6 describes it as a life that is free from sin; that ch. 7 describes it as a life that is free from the law; and that ch. 8 describes it as a life that is free from death. Furthermore, we need to see that the apostle is describing the nature of that new life in Christ in four successive and parallel 'pictures' or statements, each describing it from a different standpoint and going chapter by chapter further and deeper, and adding successively a new dimension to the thought until the whole picture is completed. To look at these four chapters in this way is to save us from the mistake of supposing that they deal with successive stages of Christian experience from which the believer may hopefully graduate to something higher. This would be to falsify Paul's teaching, leading to endless confusion and ultimately a caricature of true Christian experience. The apostle's thrice repeated 'don't you know' (6:3, 6:16, 7:1) surely makes this clear: one is not justified at one point, to be followed at later stages by union with Christ, then deliverance from the law, and so on; one cannot be justified at all, without the other things also being true. Cranfield is right when he says, 'The four initial sub-sections affirm that being justified means being reconciled to God, being sanctified, being free from the law's condemnation, and being indwelt by God's Spirit; and in each case what follows the initial sub-section is a necessary clarification of what has been said in it.'

## **8:1-4 WHAT LIFE IN THE SPIRIT INVOLVES**

One of the immensely valuable and illuminating effects of taking chs. 5 – 8 as being parallel to one another is to give new meaning to the teaching of the three chapters we have already studied (5:1 – 7:25). It is by reading the message of ch. 8 into each of the previous three chapters that makes them a reality. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (8:2) that is the motivating and energising power that brings the believer into a situation in which doctrine is transformed into experience. As Cranfield says, ‘What God’s gift of his Spirit has brought about (2) is nothing less than a beginning of the fulfilment of the divine purpose of Christ’s work, namely, the establishment of God’s law in the life of the believer’ – and indeed putting the law of God on the throne of man’s life. We could put this in another way (again following Cranfield):

Each of the four central chapters (5 – 8) gives a description of the meaning and implication of justification:

- In ch. 5, it means and involves reconciliation, and 12ff. amplifies this;
- In ch. 6, it means and involves sanctification, and 15ff. amplifies this;
- In ch. 7, it means and involves freedom from condemnation of the law, and 7ff. amplifies this;
- In ch. 8, it means and involves life in the Spirit; and 12ff. amplifies this.

And the central affirmation in ch. 8 is that, ‘through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death,’ and that this means the gracious indwelling of the Spirit of life (9). And, just as in each of the three previous chapters, the second half of the chapter serves to explicate the meaning of the first part, clarifying what has been said and saving us from misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what is said in 1-11, and helps us to see in what sense we are made free from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit and life in Christ Jesus.

## **8:1-4 THE AGENT OF LIFE IN THE SPIRIT**

Here, then, is the grand agent of Christian freedom – the Spirit of life. We should note particularly the sphere of this operation – ‘in Christ Jesus’. It is in union with him in his death and resurrection that the liberating power of the Spirit is known. Someone has described this as ‘the supernatural, divine element breaking into human life in the gospel’. We might very profitably, as has already been suggested, read back what is said in 2 into the three illustrations Paul has given us in the last three chapters. It is the Spirit of life that severs us



from the old stock, Adam, and engrafts us into the new, Christ. It is he who liberates from the serfdom and slavery of the old master, sin, and brings us into the service of Christ which is perfect freedom. It is he who slays the old husband, and betroths us to the new, even Christ, the Bridegroom of our souls. This Spirit is the Creator Spirit of Gen. 1:2, 2 Cor. 4:6, and Eph. 2:3, 5. Under the law of sin and death we were dead, but by this Spirit we are brought to life and freedom in Christ. How wonderful! We should note in 1, 2 how closely the ideas of salvation from sin's guilt and salvation from its power are linked together. Condemnation is essentially a word that has to do with guilt, yet 'the law of sin and death' is the tyrant that holds men enthralled and from which they are set free. The fact is, although we necessarily discuss God's dealing with guilt separately from the power of sin, both belong together and flow alike from the cross of Christ. Justification (5:1) with its implication of 'no condemnation' (8:1) embraces both freedom from sin and freedom from the law. The power of sin cannot be broken except by propitiation and expiation, i.e. except by atonement, and Paul cannot but put the two side by side.

#### **8:1-4 WHAT THE LAW WAS POWERLESS TO DO**

What the law was powerless to do has been amply dealt with in ch. 7. Its primary purpose was, as someone has put it, 'to put the will of God on the throne of man's heart and life'. This it failed to do, not through any inherent weakness (for it is in itself divinely given and good), but because it was weak through the flesh. But what the law failed to do God has done, through the incarnation of the Son in mortal flesh. The coming of Christ, and his work on the cross, accomplished the tremendous task of putting the will of God on the throne of man's life, and this was done by 'condemning sin in sinful man', dethroning it from its usurped place in human life. 'Condemn' here does not mean 'disapprove': it is an executive word, and means that sin in the flesh has been sentenced to death (so 6:6) and its power taken away. The phrase 'that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us' amplifies the first part of the verse. This is what God has done and what the law could not do itself. The law could not fulfil its own righteousness in us, or enthrone itself in our hearts, but God has done so in Christ, and this is what life in the Spirit means, as opposed to life in the flesh. For to walk according to the Spirit is to walk in love, and love is the fulfilling of the law.

#### **8:1-4 THE TRUE HUMANITY OF THE SINLESS CHRIST**

There is a major problem of exegesis involved in Paul's use of the phrase in 3 'in the likeness of sinful man', an expression that has caused a great deal of discussion. Leon Morris sums it up usefully by saying:

*On the one hand there are those who emphasise 'sinful man', and consider this expression important if we are to see Jesus as really one of us. Unless this is taken realistically, it is contended, Christ did not really become man, for humanity's flesh is invariably 'sinful flesh'. On the other hand, it is pointed out that unless Christ was sinless he could not be our Saviour; he would need to be saved himself. So our passage is something of a minefield where it is necessary to tread carefully.*

We should appreciate the preciseness of Paul's terminology in this phrase (cf. also Phil. 2:7 for a similar reference). Denney makes the comment that the apostle wishes to indicate not that Christ was not really man, or that his flesh was not really what in us is the 'flesh of sin' (sarx hamartias), but that what for ordinary men is their natural condition, is for this person only an assumed condition. God sent his Son in that nature which in us (but not in him) is identified with sin. Christ actually stood under subjection to the destroying powers but yet, Paul is concerned to maintain Christ's sinlessness and so cannot use the bare phrase 'in sinful flesh', for this would mean that Christ was subject to the power of sin in the same way as we who are sinners. As Nygren says,

*Paul wants to come as close to that as possible without falling into conflict with the sinlessness of Christ. He had reason to choose his words with care. For he here deals with two relationships which seem to be in conflict, but as to neither of which he must go too far: on the one hand the sinlessness of Christ, and on the other hand that Christ was placed under the same conditions and under the same powers as we.*

Denney's comment, 'What for ordinary men is their natural condition is for this person only an assumed condition,' reflects, in our view, the preciseness of Paul's phraseology here.

## **8:5-8 THE JUSTIFIED MAN IS A NEW MAN**

These verses explicate what Paul says in 4b, 'who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.' We need to realise that the words 'fully met in us' (4a) refer to the once-for-all act of justification in which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, by faith, and by which we are placed in an entirely new situation and sphere. It is true that justification is essentially objective, outside of man: but it always, straightway, means a change in him. He is now 'in the Spirit', and he begins to walk according to the Spirit. This is quite categorical for Paul: what he means is that walking according to the Spirit (as he proceeds to make clear in 5-8) is the only conclusive proof or evidence that a man is justified at all. Hence the absolute nature of the contrasts that he makes in these verses between flesh (sinful nature) and spirit. The word 'carnal' (often used in the AV) and 'fleshly' translate the

same Greek word, and refer to the ordinary, natural life of man in his fallen state, and if this be so, the contrast Paul is making is not between the lower part of man's nature and the higher, but between the whole of man's nature, high and low alike, and the new nature he has in Christ. This is an important distinction to observe, for it puts paid to the notion that the Christian faith 'brings out' and encourages a man's 'better self' over against his lower instincts. According to Paul there is no 'better self' there to be brought out. As he says in 7:18, 'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature' – that is, all that is in man by nature, whether the lower passions or the higher 'spiritual' instincts' is under condemnation, and consequently nothing that a man can be or do in and of himself can please God (8). This contrast is so absolute that Paul can use the words 'death' and 'life' to illustrate it. They are two mutually exclusive spheres: we live either in the one or in the other. Our connection with Adam has placed us in the first, and by nature that is where we all are. Consequently something has to happen to us to bring us into the second, and that 'something' is the new birth. We are born of the Spirit into the sphere or realm of the Spirit. Justification, then, implies rebirth, newness of life.

## **8:9-11 WHAT 'BEING A CHRISTIAN' MEANS**

We need to notice Paul's terms here. The 'Spirit of God' is also called the 'Spirit of Christ' in 9, and in 10 the phrase 'Christ in you' is used. For Paul, the terms are obviously interchangeable, and we may sum up his teaching thus: Christ dwells in us by his Spirit, and this means that we are controlled by the Spirit (9). This is what it is to be a Christian, so much so that not to have his Spirit means not to be a Christian, and to be none of his. We see from this that 'being a Christian' implies first of all 'becoming a Christian' by receiving the Spirit (or receiving Christ by his Spirit). Our union with Christ, and the status of the believer as being 'controlled by the Spirit' depend then on the sovereign coming of Christ by his Spirit to live in us ('Spirit of Christ' and 'Spirit of God' are of course synonymous terms). It is this that our Lord refers to in the famous words spoken to Nicodemus, 'the wind blows wherever it pleases ... so it is with everyone born of the Spirit' (Jn. 3:8). It is the sovereignty of God that is at work in the rebirth of the soul, and to this Paul gives massive theological expression in his epistles, such as in 2 Cor. 4:6 and Eph. 2:4-6. These references, taken together with our Lord's words in Jn. 5:24, 25 and Acts 10:44, indicate that the vehicle by which this sovereign power overshadows the souls of men is the word of preaching (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23, 25). It has pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to call and regenerate men.

## **8:9-11 THE BELIEVER'S 'INTERIM' POSITION**

Paul next discusses the consequences of the indwelling of Christ in 10 and 11, but what he says is not easy to interpret. What he seems to mean is that physically we are still subject to death, although we are nonetheless delivered from the law of sin and death – Christians die just as other men do! It is only spiritually meantime that we are made alive. This is the same as saying that the believer's newness of life is still subject to the limitation of being within the fallen natural order, so that a certain reservation must be placed on the absolute distinction between life and death. The believer really passes from death to life, but paradoxically death has still some claim on him, i.e. on his body, but even this residual claim made by death will finally be annulled: the indwelling of the Spirit of God in our hearts is the guarantee that our mortal bodies also will be made alive at the resurrection, for it is the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead, and our union with him, that ensures that our bodies shall finally be raised also. A Christian is therefore one who, truly saved now, nevertheless awaits the full consummation of his redemption at the return of Christ. As Augustine once said, 'the rapture of the saved soul will flow over into the glorified body.' For further emphasis on this subject, and the unfolding of this interim condition see 23-25. Such is the hope that believers have, and it is a hope that lays them under obligation to live as men and women claimed for that destiny. In other words we might well say that Paul's meaning is that in one respect, believers are not yet so complete as might be expected; the body, it cannot be denied, is dead because of sin (subject to the condition of death); what we call death is inevitable for it. But the future is sure. The Spirit, even now, is alive because of righteousness, and the indwelling of the Spirit of God in our spirits is the guarantee that our mortal bodies also will share in the resurrection. The Christian is in Christ free from death: but this is his only in the promise as yet. It is something assured for him in the future. The earnest and guarantee of this lies in the bodily resurrection of Christ, and in the coming day of God, the Spirit will give life to the body. Our mortal bodies, as Paul indicates in 11, shall be given life.

## **8:12-13 INDICATIVES AND IMPERATIVES**

These verses follow naturally as a consequence from what has been said in 10, 11. If what we have said in yesterday's note is true, and what we have been saved for and to, then – as we have already said – we are under obligation to live as men and women claimed for such a destiny. Once again, we have Paul's characteristic pattern of teaching, giving first of all the indicatives and then the imperatives based upon them. In 1-11 he affirms, proclaims; in 12ff. he exhorts. 'This is what has happened to you in Christ by his Spirit,' he says. 'Very well, live as those to whom this has happened. If you have been taken out of the realm of the sinful nature, into the realm of the Spirit, have nothing more to do with the sinful nature. Your

connection with it has been severed once-for-all, and you have therefore no further obligations toward it. On the contrary, your obligations are now elsewhere, to live by the Spirit.' This is the point of what Paul is saying here. If our high destiny is the ultimate resurrection of the body it must surely be clear that our present conduct, while waiting for this to be fulfilled, must be in every way consistent with this, and not belie it in any way. This, however, is where we see that the situation is a paradoxical one, for the believer is very much also 'in the control of the sinful nature' in the sense that the sphere in which his new life – his 'engagement to be the Lord's' – is lived in 'the mortal body', and it is precisely here that the believer has to carry on his battle against the sinful nature and death. It is this constant battle to which Paul makes reference in 1 Cor. 9:27 when he says, 'I beat my body, and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.' It is a daily battle to keep 'the old life' from regaining the initiative in one's experience. It is to this that Paul also refers in Gal. 5:17, where he refers so graphically to the conflict between the sinful nature and the Spirit.

#### **8:14-17 INDICATIVES AND IMPERATIVES (CONT'D)**

It is interesting and impressive to see how Paul having insisted on the imperative duty of putting to death the misdeeds of the body so as to allow the new life we have received to express itself, resorts again to indicatives, and heaps them upon his readers in these verses. It is easy to see what Paul considers all important in the gospel – knowing the truth and, of course, he is right – as Jesus said, 'you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' The apostle had a sublime belief in the dynamic, life-giving power of the truth of God, and he surrounded men with it on all sides. He thus goes on to demonstrate how, from the point of view of the truth of our position in Christ and of our standing in his grace, by the Spirit, it is obligatory for us to battle against sin by putting to death the misdeeds of the body. Verse 14 means, in effect, 'those who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit of God, in putting to death the misdeeds of the body, as opposed to living under the control of the sinful nature, show themselves thereby to be sons of God.' Provided, therefore, we are prepared to be what we are in Christ, i.e. sons of God, we are assured of the Spirit's leading, guiding and help and we will therefore be enabled to put to death the misdeeds of the body and fight the good fight of faith. This is Paul's point: as sons and children of God we are not left alone in the battle: the Spirit is our enabling in this 'striving for the mastery'. This constitutes an 'interim assurance and guarantee' that the high destiny mentioned in 11, and referred to in an earlier note, is real and true, and that we do not hope in vain. It is the guarantee and foretaste of that which is to come. Are we conscious of the Spirit's help, and of his presence in our lives? Then rejoice, for it is the sign that what God has destined us for – to share his eternal glory – is

being wrought in us and into us, and he who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

## **8:14-17 THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION**

In this battle, there are certain facts which are a source of strength and confidence to the believer to assure him of victory. He has a position given him as a son and child of God, and he is indwelt by a Spirit who makes that position a blessed and fruitful reality for him. This introduces us to the biblical doctrine of adoption, described for us very aptly in the words of the Larger Catechism, as, 'an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son, Jesus Christ, whereby all those who are justified are received into the number of his children, have his Name put upon them, the Spirit of his Son given to them, are under his fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the Sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.' It will be noticed that in these verses Paul speaks of both 'children' and 'sons'. Often these two words are synonymous and identical, but when they are used with distinct and different meanings, 'children' refers to our relationship, by virtue of our new birth, to God, while 'sons' refers to position or status, and to the privileges that come to us from this. There are legal privileges involved in being 'sons', and here the thought in Paul's mind is that of 'full-grown children' who are no longer 'minors' but enjoy full family privileges. This sense of privilege is echoed in the phrases Paul uses: no longer 'a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear' but 'you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father"'. What emancipation there is in this contrast, in the consciousness of the Father's love that is implicit in, and indeed at the heart of, such an experience! When one thinks of, and conjures up, the agony and anguish – and the misery as well as the hopelessness – of 'unbelonging' (cf. Eph. 2:12), of being 'the outsider', with the thought of home, and comfort, and love, and peace in there, and you outside, shut out, and with no way in! This is what it means to be without Christ – excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world – ah, what a terrible thing it is to be lost.

## **8:14-17 CHILDREN AND HEIRS**

In the use of the two words 'children' and 'heirs', Paul once again underlines the paradoxical nature of the Christian life, with the present and the future merging with one another. On the one hand, we have as believers received the Spirit of adoption, but on the other hand, we also wait for the adoption (23). An heir is, by definition, one who has not as yet inherited; and for him the best is yet to be. Yet his status even now as an heir carries its



special privileges, and these benefits are very real. A king's son lives in the royal palace even before his accession to the throne. And this is something that is true of the believer's position also; even now he has the Spirit as the guarantee of his inheritance, although as to the future he is, like the heir, only one who has hope. But this 'guarantee' is more than sufficient to offset the pull of the old life, and enable him to know the reality of victory in his daily experience. Living in want or penury is something that is surely alien to the experience of a son of the royal house! Indeed, his whole ethos, as well as his training and discipline, could be said to instil into him what could be called a royal demeanour that is quite unmistakeable. To be the son of a royal house, with all the resources of that house at your disposal, really means royal living. That is where we are, and what we are, as sons and daughters of the King. Well might Peter say, in describing believers, 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God ...' (1 Pet. 2:9).

## **SUFFERING AND GLORY 8:17b-39**

### **8:17b-18 FELLOW HEIRS THROUGH SUFFERING**

We are fellow heirs with Christ, however, only if we are fellow-sufferers with him (17b). This statement has two thoughts, both connected, underlying it: on the one hand, union with Christ – union with him in his death as well as in his resurrection, and this is necessarily reflected in the life of the believer; on the other hand, the believer's paradoxical position in being both free from sin and obliged to battle against it involves him (as already seen in 7:14-25) in suffering. This becomes Paul's theme from this point up to 30. Throughout these verses Paul sets in contrast the sufferings of the present and the glory of the future. Our 'present sufferings' are twofold, including both inward battling with sin and the outward oppositions and persecutions of evil men. Both alike are regarded in the New Testament as suffering with Christ, and they become the experience of the believer when he walks by the Spirit and not according to the sinful nature. Indeed, glory hereafter is conditional upon suffering now, since that suffering is the only real evidence that we are in fact battling against sin and therefore that we have truly turned from it to Christ. But this undoubted fact of suffering in the life of the Christian must not be allowed to get out of perspective, but seen over against the glory that is to be revealed in us, compared with which it is insignificant. This is the 'much more' of 5:9, 10, 15, 17 in different language. Indeed, the glory that is to come is so much more than the suffering that it bears no comparison to it. We are promised a 'hereafter radiant with glory'. It is this that lies behind Paul's triumphant utterance in 37 that we are 'more than conquerors through him who loved us'.

## 8:17B-18 SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

Suffering is integral to Christian experience, Paul is saying here. But we must be careful that we mean what he means by this. It is not suffering as such, in itself, but suffering with Christ, and for Christ's sake, that he is referring to. This needs to be emphasised, for there is some suffering that from this point of view is neutral, and has no kind of application to the subject in hand. We have perpetuated this kind of misunderstanding in the usage we give to the idea of 'taking up the cross'. This does not, in the Bible, mean 'bearing one's misfortunes bravely', although to do so is very commendable. It means dying to sin and self, and living in obedience to Christ (it is sometimes in fact because we do not do this that we have to bear misfortune in the other sense). Peter speaks of suffering 'as a Christian' as opposed to suffering 'as a meddler' (1 Pet. 4:15, 16). If we bring suffering upon ourselves because of our sin, our selfishness or foolishness, we can scarcely think that this will have any spiritual value. The operative idea here is 'sharing'. Calvin comments:

*The inheritance of God is ours, because we have been adopted by his grace as his sons. To remove any doubt, the possession of it has already been conferred on Christ, with whom we are made partakers. But Christ went to that inheritance by the Cross. We therefore must go to it in the same way.*

To put it in another way, suffering and glory were linked together in Christ's experience, and therefore the believer united with him experiences both suffering and glory. Not only so: the suffering and the glory are integrally connected, they do not stand apart, separate from one another. The suffering leads to glory (cf. 5:3, 4); and as Christ's sufferings were the birth pangs of the glory that followed, so also the sufferings of the believer are in fact the travail that leads to the life of glory.

## 8:19-22 THE COMING GLORY

Paul now proceeds to describe the nature of the coming glory that awaits God's people. One gets the clear impression that Paul's thought begins to soar at this point and that the 'reckoning of faith' (18) waxes mighty and does things to his mind, opening up vistas of glory that stagger the thought of man with their very grandeur and magnificence. In the first place he indicates that Christ's redemption is cosmic, involving all creation. When sin entered the world, not man alone, but the whole creation also was involved in death. The effect of this is described as 'frustration' (20) or futility; the whole purpose of creation is held to have been frustrated on account of the fall of man. The connection between man and creation must be assumed to be that creation was the realm intended originally for man's dominion, as Denney rightly points out. And as the sentence on man (Gen. 3:19) was not

hopeless, creation also shares in his hope (20). Hence its eager expectation (19, 20) for man's full redemption, that it also – creation – might 'come into its own'. The underlying implications of this thought are truly staggering. What we may gather from it is that man's redemption will be the signal for the rejuvenation of the whole 'cosmos'. It is as if the purpose for which the 'cosmos' was brought into being has not yet come to pass or been fulfilled. Only when man is redeemed finally will the universe come into its own. As someone has said, 'Account for it as you may, a wail of sorrow pervades the universe. The wind coursing along moans in every tree and mourns round every corner. Go to the seaside, and every wave dies with a groan. Listen to the blackbird: whilst there is unutterable sweetness in his whistle yet underneath all his notes there is an undertone of sadness. There is not a bird in the forest which does not touch a minor key. Hear the bleating of the lamb, and note therein a tremor of sorrow. Ascend up to man, and suffering dominates his history; everything in nature seems abortive; nothing seems to realise its destiny, achieving the full purpose of its creation. When man fell, nature grew sick.'

## **8:23-25 WAITING FOR ADOPTION**

Alongside the 'groaning creation' there is the 'groaning church'. 'We also groan,' says Paul, 'waiting for our adoption.' These words bear witness once again to the inevitable tension in the experience of the Christian (see also 2 Cor. 5:2-4). This tension is seen particularly, as we have seen, in Paul's use of the word 'adoption'. In 15, he says that we have received the Spirit of sonship, whereas here in 23 we are 'waiting for our adoption'. Salvation is ours truly even now, and yet we are saved in hope, and await its full consummation. Even now we are children of God, but as yet only heirs, which means that we have not 'inherited' – that lies in the future. And that which is lacking in our full inheritance is the redemption of our bodies (23). 'This body of death', though destroyed (7:24) in the sense that its tyranny over us is broken, is not yet out of existence, and its presence makes us 'groan', being burdened. Only when we receive our new spiritual body, or as Paul puts it in Phil. 3:21, only when he shall transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body – only then shall the 'groaning' cease and sorrow and sighing flee away. This, he says, is something worth waiting for (26). Indeed it is, especially since in the 'waiting time' we have the 'promise' of our inheritance, and all the comforts and encouragements his presence brings.

## **8:26-27 THE INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT**

Thirdly, there is the groaning of the Spirit, as he makes intercession for the saints, according to the will of God. This is one of the most striking and indeed awesome utterances

the apostle ever made. It brings us into some of the deep mysteries of grace as well as giving the greatest encouragement to believers. Paul has been speaking of the certainty of the glory that follows suffering with Christ, and says that both the groaning of creation (19-22) and the groaning of the church (23-25) bear witness to this. But there is a third witness to the assurance of final, future glory, namely the fact that the Spirit of God is at work in us. If – as is indeed the case – he, the third person of the Trinity, is working in us in the fulfilment of the purposes of God in our lives, then this is proof that our hope is not a delusion but a wonderful reality. ‘In the same way’ (26) may be interpreted in two ways, and either gives rise to lessons of great importance and significance, not indeed contradictory so much as complementary to one another. On the one hand, it may be taken – as many commentators take it – as referring back to the immediately preceding verses about hope. That is to say, just as in the sufferings we are called upon to endure as believers, we are supported, encouraged, strengthened by the hope of glory that is before us, so in like manner we are supported, encouraged, strengthened by the Holy Spirit. He helps us. Now we need to see that this is a statement of fact, not merely a promise. There is no trial or testing, no dark hour of crisis, in which we are ever left alone, and of this we may always be sure. The word translated ‘helps’ in 26 is one occurring only once elsewhere in the New Testament, in the story of Mary and Martha in Lk. 10:40, which speaks of Martha being ‘distracted by all the preparations that had to be made’, and needing help. The force of the word literally gives the meaning of help ‘over against all opposition’. This is the kind of help that the Holy Spirit gives to God’s people.

## **8:26-27 THE GROAN OF DIVINE YEARNING**

On the other hand, ‘in the same way’ in 26 may introduce a third statement similar in meaning to those in 19-22 and 23-25: the creation groans because it awaits the day when it will throw off its bondage, the Church groans, waiting for adoption; both are straitened, pent up in their sinful order, and unable to fulfil their ultimate calling to glorify God. In the same way, and for the same reasons, the Spirit groans because he is straitened in us, unable as yet to do his perfect work in us. These two interpretations are not mutually exclusive: both are valid, and we are surely able to see in our own experience the truth of either interpretation, at different times. The thought that the Spirit of God should be exercised in this way about us is a striking one, whether because of the poverty of our spiritual experience, or our inability to pray aright, or indeed in compassion because of the times when the pressures are such that bewilderment and even darkness assail our souls and words fail us for prayer and we can do no more than groan inarticulately. Handley Moule says, ‘He moves in the tired soul and breathes himself into its thought and his mysterious “groan” of divine yearning mingles with our groan of burden.’ And what are we to say of the statement in Jam. 4:5, which one

translation renders 'The Spirit that dwelleth in us yearns for the entire devotion of our hearts'? Is it not deeply moving to think that he should have such a concern for our highest and best spiritual interests in this way?

### **8:28 'ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD'**

This wonderful statement is so rich and glorious that it is difficult to know where to begin in expounding it. Many of the modern translations of this tremendous verse differ from the AV, for various reasons, but when so careful and meticulous a scholar as Cranfield, having examined and explored all the alternatives, concludes that the AV rendering is almost certainly right we may be content to take it as an accurate translation of what Paul actually said. Calvin thinks that Paul is anticipating an objection here. He has just been saying that the Spirit helps us in our weakness, but the objector might say, 'It does not look very much as if he does', since our afflictions always continue in the same way. And Paul asserts that God does something better than remove the afflictions – he presses them into service: they are part of his sovereign purpose for the saints. There is, however, another connection with what has been said in the previous verses: Paul, in 27, speaks of the Spirit's intercessions for us. He asks according to the will of God. We do not know the best things to ask for our lives because of lack of knowledge and understanding, indeed we often ask what would not be good for us. But the Spirit asks right things for us, not only the good things that make us rejoice, but also the trials. The Spirit's askings and pleadings in fact bring these upon us, because he knows what is best for us. He knows they will be good for those who love God, hence the 'we know' in 28. Exactly. If they have come in answer to the Spirit's pleadings, they must be good. Can we not look back to times of trial, when we asked in perplexity why God had allowed it to happen, and see now that it was the refining fire that purged the dross, and that it came because the Spirit saw it would be for our good?

### **8:28-30 THE ENTIRE ENTERPRISE OF GRACE**

Not only so, in the entire enterprise of grace, from the foreknowledge and predestination of God through calling and justification to glorification, the Holy Spirit is at work for us and in us to conform us to the image of God's Son. This means – and this is what Paul is saying – that the Christian's life must be viewed in the setting of the divine purposes. The 'all things' are therefore bounded and conditioned, controlled and used, by the eternal purposes of God, and pressed into service for him. God is not likely to allow any hitch in his plans. We must then set 28 in the context of the verses that follow it, and here, Paul explains why all things work together for good to those that love God (AV). All that comes to us in our

Christian experience belongs properly to the vast and mysterious movement of divine electing grace and is used by the great executive of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, to whom the counsels of the divine will are committed. And when we realise just how much is involved in the salvation of a soul, and how deeply and mysteriously that salvation is grounded in the counsels of the Trinity, we may well bow in awe and wonder before such a God. Nor must we miss the significance of the fact that in this 'chain' of divine activity in 29 there are no human links. We sometimes say that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, but there are no weak links here where this chain can give way, and it is this that guarantees the ultimate security of the people of God. It is not our hold upon him but his upon us that makes us and keeps us safe. And on this rock we may surely rest!

### **8:28-30 FOREKNOWLEDGE, ELECTION, PREDESTINATION**

The terms Paul uses to describe the divine purposes here are 'technical', but highly important. 'Foreknowledge' does not refer to any foresight on God's part that those chosen will respond to the gospel, or that this is why he chose them (this would make salvation depend on faith, not grace; and since election is unto faith, it cannot depend on faith). Rather, to 'foreknow' is to enter into communion with a view to conferring special favour, while to 'foreordain' determines that this special favour will take the form of sonship in Christ. Foreknowledge, according to the biblical usage of the verb 'to know' (cf. Ps. 1:6, 144:3; Hos. 13:5; Amos 3:2; Matt. 7:23; Jn. 10:27; 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9) implies favour or grace as the eternal beginning of all the other processes of salvation. 'Predestinated' translates a word which is sometimes rendered 'foreordained', and for all practical purposes is the same as 'elected' or 'chosen'; any difference between the two is simply one of emphasis, with 'election' emphasising the persons chosen, and 'predestination' the purpose for which they are chosen. A word should be said here about the doctrine of predestination in view of the fact that it has often been distorted and misunderstood to mean a deterministic, even fatalistic view of life, which stultifies and makes meaningless the whole conception of human responsibility. But this is a perversion of biblical truth, although one understands the very real and justifiable fear that human freedom should be excluded. But the real history of biblical, Calvinist predestination has been very different, for it has proved to be the constant inspiration of free personality and the foundation of a profound moral earnestness. J Anthony Froude once wrote:

*The Calvinists attracted to themselves every man in Europe that hated a lie ... They abhorred, as no body of men ever abhorred, all conscious mendacity, all impurity, all moral wrong of every kind, so far as they could recognise it. Whatever exists at this moment in England and Scotland of conscientious fear*



*of wrongdoing is the remnant of the convictions which were branded by the Calvinists into the people's hearts.*

## **MORE THAN CONQUERORS 8:31-39**

### **8:31-39 THE PREDESTINATION OF GOD AT WORK**

These are verses which defy any merely formal analysis, for they flash and gleam with light and joy and holy fire, forming as they do the climax not only of this great chapter but of the whole epistle up to this point. 'This' in 31 must surely refer to all that Paul has said in his mighty doctrinal argument as well as to the more immediate teaching about the Spirit in the preceding verses. The two, however, stand close together in association in the apostle's mind, the immediate past reference to the predestination of God, and the wider and more general reference to the whole divine intervention. Indeed, the one is the background of the other, for the mighty intervention of God for our sakes in Jesus Christ is the predestination of God at work, setting in motion and bringing to fruition the eternal counsel of the Father's will. We must in fact read both ideas into what Paul says in these verses about God being 'for us', in this sense: 'If God from all eternity, this predestinating God, be for us ...', and also 'If God in Christ has thus revealed and declared himself to be for us, who can be against us?' But what does it mean, that God is for us? Not merely that he is by nature benevolently disposed towards us, but that he has chosen in grace to be for us, and that his intention is confirmed and sealed in what he has done for us in Christ. 'He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.' We are chosen in him, and in that costly sacrifice on the cross that he made for us. In no other way could he be for us or be gracious to us. The love and grace of God are inseparably tied to the work of Christ. Even in eternity, before time was, God's thoughts toward us were thoughts of peace, not of evil, because Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

### **8:31-39 SUMMING UP: THE FOUR QUESTIONS (I)**

The four questions which are posed in 31-35, and the answers given them, sum up the main argument of the first eight chapters of the epistle. Punctuation is a problem here as may be seen in the various modern translations, and different solutions are offered by the commentators, but both the questions and the main drift of Paul's meaning are clear. The first of these, to which we have already referred, relates to what Paul has said in 1:18, where he speaks of the wrath of God being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. Quite simply, this means that because of our sin we have an angry God against us (cf.

Col. 2:14 'the written code that was against us'). It is this that constitutes the seriousness of the predicament for which the gospel is the only answer – not our enmity against God, but his against us. And the heart of the New Testament doctrine of reconciliation is not that we should lay aside our enmity against God but that he, in Christ, has laid aside and put away all that on his part stands between us and peace. James Denney finely says:

*What is it that the wisdom and love of God undertake to deal with, and do deal with, in that marvellous way that constitutes the gospel? Is it man's distrust of God? Is it man's dislike, fear, antipathy, spiritual alienation? Not if we accept the apostle's teaching. The serious thing which makes the gospel necessary, and the putting away of which constitutes the gospel, is God's condemnation of the world and its sin, it is God's wrath, 'revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men'. The putting away of this is reconciliation, and the preaching of this reconciliation is the preaching of the gospel.*

But we must not misinterpret the situation to make it seem as if Christ were placating a vengeful deity at the cost of his life. It is God himself, in Christ, who grapples with this obstacle, this barrier, God himself who bears the brunt of the battle. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. It is Christ's death – and God's action in that death – that puts away all that would put him against us.

### **8:31-39 SUMMING UP: THE FOUR QUESTIONS (II) AND (III)**

The second question, 'Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?' (33) relates to Paul's statement in 3:19 where he tabulates the charges against man in his sin and concludes the whole world held accountable to God. But the divine judge and lawgiver himself justifies us by his grace, and because of what Christ has done for us, the charges against us are dropped. It may be that Paul has in mind the story of the offering up of Isaac (Gen. 22:16), where the association of the ideas of the ultimate in sacrifice and the almost limitless blessing that followed it probably suggests a similar fulness here. The giving of his Son proves how totally God is for us, and how unreservedly he will give us all things. The third question, 'Who is he that condemns?' (34) corresponds to the sentence passed on sin, which is death. But Christ died that death for our sakes; it was our condemnation he bore, and there can be no condemnation for those that are in him. Paul does not rest content with the reference to Christ's death, but couples it with his resurrection, ascension, and intercession. It is the whole of Christ's work, not his death only, that saves men.

**8:31-39 SUMMING UP: THE FOUR QUESTIONS (IV)**

The fourth question, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' (35) underlines the dread implication of the sentence of condemnation – separation from God. Sin separates from God, and its ultimate expression is seen in the cry of dereliction (Matt. 27:46), when Christ endured separation from God for our sin, and bore it fully in order that we might dwell with God forever. The catalogue of adversities in 35b stands in the same relation to 35a as the 'all things' in 32b to the self-giving of God. If sin can no longer separate us from God (and it cannot, since Christ has dealt with it), then certainly no lesser thing can do so. On the one hand, every conceivable power that could be against us is dealt with and conquered in the victory of the cross, and on the other, every conceivable circumstance that might hinder, harm or distress, is prevailed over by the power of that victory, and made to 'work for good' for us. Apart from Christ, 'all things' (32, cf. 28) would be against us, in the sense that they would hurt, distress and discourage our spirits (cf. Gen. 42:36), but now 'all things' are pressed into service. They are 'given' to us in the sense of being our servants. They are 'for us', in the sense in which Paul says in 1 Cor. 3:21-23: 'All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.'

**8:31-39 DEATH WORKS!**

The quotation in 36, from Ps. 44:22, shows that the experiences mentioned in 35 are foretold in Scripture and are the lot of believers in the world, just as the sufferings of Christ are foretold. But these afflictions, far from being a cause of dismay or despair, are the very arena where they experience the glorious victory of Christ. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that who loved us (37), not 'because of' them merely, or 'through' having suffered them, or 'after' having suffered them, but in them. Once again the central paradox of Christian experience is underlined – we face death all day long, yet we are more than conquerors, wretched men that we are (7:24, 25) yet thanking God through Jesus Christ our Lord (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-12). For the sense of 'killed all day long', see 1 Cor. 15:31, 'I die every day'; and 2 Cor. 11:23, 'exposed to deaths again and again'. To say that 'death is at work in us' may be a great mystery, but it is by a very long way the most potent and fruitful thing in all Christian experience, for it is in dying that we live, and in suffering that we triumph. George Matheson's fine hymns, 'O love that wilt not let me go' and 'Make me a captive, Lord' are good illustrations of Paul's theme here, and make it clear, from their words, that he had discovered this great secret. Have we?

### **8:31-39 'THEN' AND 'NOW' FINAL AFFIRMATIONS**

Paul's final affirmation in 38 and 39 of the invincible and eternal security of the people of God affords a glorious climax to the chapter. Having in 35 discounted all earthly contingencies as powerless against the believer, he ends by dismissing all possible spiritual categories likewise. Christ in his victory has been made 'head over everything for the Church', his people; and that victory is ours in him, in whom we triumph over all. In this closing passage of the main doctrinal section of the epistle, Paul completes the contrast he has been implying throughout between 'then' and 'now'. In 5:11, for example, the statement 'we rejoice in God' represents the change wrought in men's hearts by the gospel, for until the gospel comes men do not 'think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God' (1:28). In the same way, the closing verses in this chapter stand in graphic contrast to the grim situation unfolded in Gen. 3, in which we see Adam and Eve, through their sin, excluded from the presence of God. And it is here perhaps, more clearly than anywhere else, that we realise just what it means to say that 'Christ took our place'. We do not, in fact, understand the meaning of that word until we first realise what our place is, as sinners. The forlorn figure standing outside the gates of God, with the sentence of death upon him, a punishment greater than he could bear, is a picture of man the sinner, our picture; and it was there that Christ stood in for us, bearing all the tragic intensity and horror of being 'outside', and 'not belonging', the homelessness, the hopelessness, and the meaninglessness of life – in order that we might 'come home' to the Father's house and be with him forever. This is what lies behind Paul's paean of glorious triumph in 38 and 39. It is, as G.K. Chesterton says, in 'the place where God was homeless' that 'all men are at home'.

## **4. RIGHTEOUSNESS REFUSED BY ISRAEL (9:1 – 11:36)**

### **THE MYSTERY OF THE JEWS 9:1-5**

#### **9:1-5 PAUL'S GRIEF AT THE UNBELIEF OF ISRAEL**

A new subject is introduced at this point, not – as logically to be expected – a statement of Christian ethics based on the doctrinal affirmations Paul has made in chs. 1 – 8, applying the truths of the gospel (as in truth he does in 12:1ff.), but instead a long excursus on the unbelief of Israel. This has caused some eminent commentators to think that these three chapters are an insertion written by Paul on some other occasion, and having no intrinsic connection with the rest of the Epistle, but made on purely personal grounds, due to the apostle's burning concern for his own people, the Jews. But this, in our view, is a hasty and ill-considered judgement. Not only do the chapters belong properly to the epistle, they belong intrinsically and essentially to it. Indeed they are a necessary part of the apostle's argument. When we look back on the epistle as a whole we see this very clearly, as it unfolds the central theme of righteousness – righteousness lacking in man (1:18 – 3:20); righteousness provided by God (3:21 – 8:39); righteousness refused by Israel (9:1 – 11:36); righteousness applied to life (12:1 – 15:13). Seen thus in outline, chs. 9 – 11 represent simply the next stage of the epistle, a stage like the others that precede and follow it. But more: this section comes inevitably here in that it deals with the next question that requires to be dealt with and that from two points of view: (i) the previous references to the Jews in the earlier parts of the epistle; and (ii) the major question that these references raise. We shall look at these points in tomorrow's note.

#### **9:1-5 THE MYSTERY OF THE JEWS**

Several times in earlier chapters reference has been made to the Jews. The first of these is in 1:16, in the phrase 'first for the Jew ...', a bald statement, without comment or explanation. And we find ourselves asking, 'Why should this be? What does this mean? Here is a loose end that surely needs tying up.' Then, in 3:1ff. we come across this emphasis again: 'What advantage is there in being a Jew?' (1); and 'Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?' (3); and 'Is God unjust in bringing his wrath on us?' (5-8). Now, though he answers these questions 'in loco', he does so in a cursory fashion, and leaves us thinking, 'You will have to go into that more fully yet, Paul'. And of course that is what he means to do, and he does so in chs. 9 – 11. Thus, he does here with the question of the Jews what he has also done with several other themes up to this point – simply touching on them, to take them up fully later. But the major problem that these questions raise is this: Paul has preached a

gospel that is the power of God for salvation, first to the Jew. Yet the Jews as a whole have rejected it. The righteousness of God shown in chs. 1 – 3 to be lacking in man, and in chs. 3 – 8 to be fully provided and offered by God in the gospel, is now seen to have been rejected by Israel. Now, if the gospel is the power of God for salvation, and yet the Jews have rejected it, surely it has failed, or God has been unfaithful to his promises, since they were made, after all, to Israel. Why then, did this uniquely privileged people, who had the oracles of God, and whose were the promises, reject Christ and the gospel? Has God's promise failed, that he made to Israel? Has the gospel failed, and proved of none effect? Has God been unfaithful to his promises? The mystery is summed up in Jn. 1:11, 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.' Why is this? What is the explanation of it? The gospel – power? But not powerful enough to deal with, and save, the Jews? One sees, then, how central and essential this particular section of the epistle is. Without it, Paul's presentation of the gospel would be incomplete. It would leave too many loose ends dangling. He has to take up this question now.

## **9:1-5 THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

This question – the mystery of the Jews' unbelief – is simply one particular aspect of a more general and larger question, which is this: If the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone that believes, if God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son – then why are there those who do not believe, who are not saved? Is the Word of God of none effect? It is no answer to this dilemma simply to say that the gospel is only for those who believe; for the gospel is the power of God for salvation, and it creates the capacity for faith in those to whom it comes: this is what it means to say that the gospel is power. If, then, it is power, why does it not prove to be power from God in some, in those who reject it? Does he withhold his grace in salvation from some and bestow it on others? Where does responsibility lie, in God or in man? And if in God, how are we to reconcile this with the fact that he is said to love the world? And if in man, can it be said that God is made powerless if man chooses not to be saved? This is the wider issue of which the problem of the Jews' unbelief is simply one particular and special aspect. It will be useful at this point to make a brief summary of Paul's teaching about this mystery in chs. 9 – 11, before turning to it in detail, so as to have a general guide to our thinking about it. By way of introduction to this we have to say that the main issue in these chapters is not election (although this comes into them) but the Jews and their relation to the gospel. The place where Paul speaks of election in general terms is in 8:28ff.; what we have here is simply an extension of this and an application of it to a particular situation. Briefly, Paul says three things in these chapters, in his answer to the mystery of the Jews' rejection of the gospel: (i) he asserts the absolute sovereignty of God in the promises given to men; it is he alone who determines to whom



they shall belong, and no man has any rightful claim to them (9:1-29); (ii) he maintains that Israel's rejection is due to her wilfulness in seeking a righteousness of her own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God (9:30 – 10:21); (iii) he teaches that this rejection is not final, but is in fact mysteriously and unaccountably necessary for the fulfilment of the divine purposes, and that finally all Israel shall be saved (11:1-36).

### **9:1-5 UNACCOUNTABLE PERVERSITY AND THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST**

Paul begins this section with an expression of personal sorrow and grief at the tragedy of his people. This is no academic subject to him, but something he feels with the compassion of Christ. The contrast here with the joy of the closing verses in the previous chapter is startling and impressive, but understandable when we recall the passion expressed in 1:8-16. The gospel that lifts the burden of sin from a man lays on him a burden for the lost, a burden under whose obligation he remains forever. It is impossible not to sense, throughout his epistles, Paul's awareness of the eternal issues involved in the gospel, his sense that there is no loss like the loss of a soul. It is this that is upon his heart here as he thinks of his fellow countrymen, the Jews, more especially since they were in their darkened state in face of all the privileges God had bestowed upon them, (4-5). And yet, in spite of their unaccountable perversity in refusing and rejecting Christ, Paul's heart is filled with Christlike compassion toward them, and he is willing to be cut off from Christ (3) if that would bring about their salvation. We may well ask ourselves whether the gospel has begotten such a spirit of Christlike concern in our hearts toward our fellows. Does our joy in the gospel make us sorrow for the souls of those who are lost? We should note the echo, in the apostle's words, of Moses' attitude toward the children of Israel (Exod. 32:32), with this difference: Moses was prepared to perish with Israel if they could not be saved; but Paul was prepared to perish for his kinsmen, the Jews.

### **9:1-5 CONTEMPT FOR IMMEASURABLE PRIVILEGES**

The catalogue of Jewish privileges given in 4-5 serves to underline the tragedy of their unbelief. Theirs was the sonship, conferred upon them at the Exodus (Exod. 4:22); the glory, a reference probably to the manifestations given them in the early days of their history, in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exod. 13:21) and in the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:34); the covenants, made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David – all expressions of the one covenant of grace; the giving of the law, the special revelation that distinguished them from all other nations; the worship, the cultus of the Tabernacle and the Temple; the promises, which spoke of the coming Messiah; the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through whom the

promises were transmitted to posterity, and of whom, so far as human descent goes, (see 1:3-4) the Messiah himself came. With such an illustrious heritage and calling, it was all the more perplexing, mysterious, and painful to Paul that they should now be as they were. The doxology in 5b has been the occasion of great controversy, but the controversy has arisen because of the difficulty of taking the Greek words at their face value, as the AV does, namely that they assert the deity of Christ. Handley Moule says, 'Beyond all fair question, the Greek here (in view of the usual order of words in ascriptions of praise) is certainly best rendered as in AV; had it not been for historical controversy, probably no other rendering would have been suggested.' Having looked at the many differing interpretations and reasonings on this, the question that arises in one's mind is: 'Why do many commentators seem to be unwilling to ascribe deity to Christ?' Why, indeed!

## **THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD 9:6-29**

### **9:6-13 DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IN CALLING MEN**

The question that is concerning Paul is: if the Jews have rejected the gospel, surely the Word of God has failed, or he has been unfaithful to his promises for, after all, they were made to Israel. But this Paul denies, pointing out a distinction within Israel itself. There is a natural Israel and a spiritual Israel, and it is to the latter only that the promise is given. The point he emphasises is God's freedom in bestowing salvation. No man has a right to divine mercy, either on the ground of natural descent (7) or of works (11), and the Jews were not entitled to his blessings simply because they were Jews. In asserting this, Paul points his readers back to the original promise given to Abraham, reminding them that it involved Isaac only, not Ishmael. The natural seed of Abraham (i.e. Ishmael) is not the same as the seed of promise (i.e. Isaac). Nor can it be argued that Isaac was called because he was freeborn while Ishmael was the son of a bondwoman, for the next generation shows precisely the same electing distinction, for of Isaac's two sons, born of the same mother, Jacob, the younger, was chosen rather than the elder, Esau, before either was born; and the only possible human ground of preference, namely priority of birth, is set aside by God, so that Jacob was made heir of the promises. And this happened that the purpose of God might stand according to election, that is, the conferring of the promise is by sovereign grace, and no man is ever entitled to it.

### **9:6-13 NO ONE HAS A CLAIM TO MERCY AS OF RIGHT**

No one has a claim as of right to his mercy, we have said. But this was the very point the Jews were disputing by their attitude. They did, as a matter of fact, claim as of right the mercy of God, on the ground of their being his chosen people. They interpreted their having the covenants and the promises (4-5) as giving them a right to the blessings of God because they were Jews, i.e. it was a claim of heredity that they made. We should remember that this was their claim in the arguments that they had with our Lord in Jn. 8. Paul is saying here, therefore, in effect: in view of the elementary truth that the promise was not made to all Abraham's seed – not to Isaac and Ishmael, but to Isaac and not Ishmael – how can the Jews claim that all Abraham's natural seed are heirs of the promise? Isaac was a child of promise, a child who would never have existed but for the promise. It was not anything in Abraham, but God's promise itself, that determined the true seed. Paul in fact traces the divine election down Israel's history, showing its sovereign character as being entirely consistent with his justice, and with his word and character. There is no arbitrariness and unrighteousness in this with God: he simply acts in accordance with his revealed character, in choosing some rather than others. The apostle's point is that the rejection of the Jews is in entire accord with the rest of Scripture. And man has no authority to call God into account. Who are we to reply against God? And if we realise that, ultimately, there is no answer or explanation for this mystery, we must also realise that there is a point beyond which we simply cannot go: we must stop and bow humbly in worship before God.

### **9:6-13 GOD HAS SOVEREIGN FREEDOM IN SHOWING MERCY**

We must tarry a little longer with these verses, for what we are ultimately faced with in this profound mystery is the fact that although we begin with the statement that Jacob is chosen and Esau rejected, we end with the extraordinary situation that Jacob – Israel – is rejected (through having rejected the gospel) and the Gentiles who were at the first like Esau, left in darkness and rejected, finally inherit the promises. And we find ourselves asking, 'What price now the charge of unfairness on God's part? Is it unfair of God to reject Israel in order to bless the Gentiles?' The more we think of this mystery, the less inclined we shall be to charge God with unrighteousness in any way. The plain truth is that we are out of our depth, and our words should be few, and our thoughts full of reverence and awe! What we have to grasp is that salvation depends on rejection. We must never forget that at the very heart of the gospel there stands a great and terrible rejection: the Son of God went into the outer darkness for our sakes, forsaken of God in the hour that a world's sin was laid on him. Are we to say that it was not fair of God to reject Jesus in order that we might be accepted in him? This is what we would finally be led to say if we were to charge God with unfairness in

choosing Jacob and not Esau. Would it not be wiser to bow humbly before a mystery too deep for us, and that we cannot understand, and trust where we cannot see?

### **9:14-18 DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY ABSOLUTE, BUT NOT ARBITRARY OR CAPRICIOUS**

Paul is stressing the absolute character of the divine sovereignty in his argument. But to speak of its absolute character does not mean that it is arbitrary, as if it were a matter of caprice in God to show mercy or not. And he turns to Scripture for examples of the divine principles, instancing the story of Moses and Israel (Exod. 33:19) to make his point. Israel had sinned by idolatry, and Moses had pleaded for mercy for them. God pardoned the people, but not for anything in them, but for something in himself, because he willed it so. It was unaccountable mercy when in justice he could have, and should have, punished. He retreated into his sovereignty to find a way to pardon: 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy' (15). He reserved absolute liberty in the exercise of mercy. So far, then, from showing an arbitrary, capricious attitude (which is how this passage is sometimes interpreted), the Scripture testifies that God delights in mercy, and that judgement is his 'strange work' (Isa. 28:21). But if God is sovereign in mercy, he is also sovereign in withholding it when he chooses, and this 'strange work' of hardening is seen in the case of Pharaoh (17). Paul does not stop at this point to discuss the relation between Pharaoh's own hardening of his heart and God's hardening of it (cf. Exod. 3 – 11), where the statements that God hardened Pharaoh's heart fall predominantly in the later, not the earlier chapters, indicating that, the sovereignty of God notwithstanding, God judicially hardened a heart that was apparently already hardened against him (cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28). But the whole issue is in his mind as he deals with the next question: 'If man's destiny is solely the result of divine sovereignty, and his hardness of heart a state which God himself causes, why does he find fault with man, and hold him morally responsible for not believing the gospel?' We shall look at Paul's answer to this in tomorrow's note.

### **9:19-21 THE DANGER OF BLASPHEMY**

Paul answers the question posed at the end of yesterday's note by reference to Scripture (20b-21; cf. Isa. 29:16; 45:8-10; Jer. 18:1-6), maintaining that such a question ought not to be asked, because it verges on blasphemy, and intrudes into the secrets of the divine majesty, a thing a man may not do. He does not attempt to reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but simply states that in this debate there is a point beyond which man cannot go. The above references in Isaiah and Jeremiah indicate that this is no mere notion of

the apostle's, but something deeply embedded in the prophetic consciousness as a whole. In view of this, what are we to say about C.H. Dodd's cheap and unworthy contribution to the discussion, when he says, 'The trouble is that man is not a pot; he will ask, "Why did you make me like this?" and he will not be bludgeoned into silence.' Readers of such trivialisation of a serious issue will doubtless form their own conclusions about his competence to interpret Paul here. The context of the apostle's argument aims to emphasise, as Barrett rightly says, the final responsibility of God for what he does in history, just as the potter has final responsibility for what he produces from the clay (see 16). Man has no authority to call God to account. Who is he to answer God back?

### **9:19-21 WHO ARE WE TO QUESTION GOD?**

We pointed out much earlier in our studies in Romans (cf. 3:1-8) that men argue so much because they are unwilling to submit to the truth, and that very often their problem is not an intellectual one but a moral one. We should not forget this in the series of questions either, that we have in this part of ch. 9. To ask such questions and to speak like this is to make ourselves out to be more merciful and loving than God himself, it is like saying, 'I would not do a thing like that.' How awful! Who indeed are we to reply against God? Who do we think we are? We should notice that Paul does not answer the questions that tend to trouble us. He simply indicates that there is a point beyond which finite minds cannot go and ought not to venture. Thus far, and no further – and after that, reverent submission in face of a great mystery. That is the only possible answer. Besides, who speaks of injustice with God? Look what in fact he does do! Even if he had been arbitrary, we could not complain. But he is not. He is love. Consider how he has acted in history! Instead of judging vessels of wrath, he bore long and patiently with them; and instead of limiting his mercy, he extended it to the Gentiles. Why, then, this irreverent solicitude for God, lest he be in the wrong? Do we not trust a friend when he does something that is inexplicable to us (or even arbitrary) without imputing evil to him? Do we not rather say, 'There must be some good explanation of this?' And we say so because we know his character. Why do we not allow God the same benefit of the doubt? Can it be that our cavils arise because we do not really know him very well? Let Rom. 9 stand. Let us not try to water it down. Why should it be wrong just because we cannot understand it? 'Who are you, O man?'

### **9:22-24 THE DIVINE LONG-SUFFERING**

A sober examination of Paul's argument here, and his quotations from Scripture, surely makes it clear that it is the divine long-suffering and mercy, not brash arbitrary judgement

which history proclaims so wonderfully. Indeed, we shall see how these verses now before us prepare us for what the apostle goes on to say in the climactic 11th chapter. There are problems in the text of 23, and translations differ. The NIV and the RSV omit the word 'and' at the beginning of 23, making 23 explain 22, and why God bore with great patience the objects of his wrath. Nygren paraphrases, 'If God, to show his wrath and make known his power, in his long-suffering, had patience with the objects of his wrath which were ready for destruction, so (he also had it) in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of his mercy.' It is best to take this as the sense of the statement, indeed, the NIV does so explicitly, by translating 23 as, 'What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy?' As such, it is parallel to what is said in 17 about Pharaoh. Pharaoh was raised up in order that God might display his power in him, and that his Name might be proclaimed in all the earth; and this is expanded here and applied, by implication, to Israel. Just as, historically, Pharaoh's hardening was made the occasion of the Hebrews' deliverance from bondage, so now in the larger context of world redemption, Israel's hardening becomes the occasion of the accomplishing of Christ's everlasting salvation and its proclamation to all the world. This is the germ thought expanded in ch. 11, and is indeed the central point in chs. 9 – 11. The principle of rejection is integral to the whole concept of salvation; as we have already pointed out, at the heart of the gospel there lies a great and awesome rejection (cf. Isa. 53:3; Matt. 27:46).

## **9:25-29 THE MYSTERY OF REJECTION**

Before we turn to the final part of Paul's argument in this section we should add a further point that belongs properly to yesterday's note. Paul does not say that God makes objects of his wrath prepared for destruction (the phrase is passive), but he does say that he prepared the objects of his mercy for glory. The distinction is important, being analogous to that made by Jesus in Matt. 25:34, 41; between the kingdom prepared for the faithful since the creation of the world and the eternal fire prepared, not for men, but for the devil and his angels. It is significant that he refrains from applying logical categories to the argument and saying, as Calvin was bold to do, (though somewhat inconsistently?) that as eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation is foreordained for others. It is as well not to be wise above that which is written. The remainder of the section consists of quotations from the Old Testament which Paul adduces in support of what he has said in the previous verses. The first two, from Hosea, amplify 24, proving that right from the beginning it was clearly God's purpose to bless, not the Jews only but also the Gentiles. It is certainly a great mystery that the Jews should have been so blind to the meaning of their own Scriptures as to fail to see the purpose of their calling of God so that through them he might make known his grace and love to all mankind. The other two quotations, from Isaiah, refer to his earlier teaching about



the Israel within Israel (6-13), and show that his doctrine of 'the remnant' is not new, but is grounded in Scripture.

## **THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ISRAEL 9:30 – 10:4**

### **9:30 – 10:4 ISRAEL'S WRONG TURNING**

We come with these verses to the beginning of the second part of Paul's threefold answer to the questions raised by the mystery of the Jews' unbelief and rejection. Having in the first part (9:1-29) spoken of an election grounded on grace, which means that the Jews had no claim on God's salvation, chosen people though they were, he next shows that they are excluded, and the Gentiles brought in, not because election arbitrarily excluded the one and admitted the other, but because they did not submit to the righteousness of God which is by faith, whereas the Gentiles did. The Jews had taken the wrong way, and were responsible for having done so. Paul begins this new section by summarising his argument in 9:6-29. The facts are that the Gentiles, who as a whole have not sought after righteousness, have attained it, while the Jews, who did seek after it with great earnestness, have not. That the God of grace should so take pity on those who had no concern for righteousness, breaking into their sin and darkness with the light of the gospel, argues not only a God who saves but one who longs to save; and the failure of the Jews to enter the kingdom in face of this argues an implacable and inexcusable opposition on their part. In fact, their error in the matter was not marginal, as if they had only just missed the way, but total, because they pursued righteousness not by faith, but as if it could only be reached by works, which is a manifest contradiction of the meaning of the law itself. Of their failure, Paul says, 'They stumbled over the stumbling stone' (32, quoted from Isa. 8:14, 28:16). What he means is that the stone on which they stumbled was Christ, and in particular his cross, for the cross is a stumbling-block to all self-righteousness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23ff.), because it calls in question a man's religious standing and tells him he must begin all over again since he is all wrong in the sight of God. The Swedish commentator, Nygren, pertinently says, 'If God has promised to give his gift in the east, and men push westward with might and main, all their striving only carries them further and further away from righteousness.' So Israel have only themselves to blame that they are not saved. They have taken the wrong turning.

### **9:30 – 10:4 THE SCANDAL OF THE CROSS**

The double quotation from Isaiah (32,33) becomes a testimony to the double result of Christ's coming into the world, the fall of some and the rising of others (cf. Lk. 2:34) and a

testimony against all righteousness by law and for righteousness by faith. Israel's tragedy was that what God intended for a refuge and sure foundation had become a rock upon which they had foundered and come to grief (the association of the two prophecies with others such as Ps. 118:22 and Dan. 2:34ff. was common in the early church, as cf. Matt. 21:42; Lk. 20:17, 18; Acts 4:11 and elsewhere in the New Testament). The realisation of this tragedy evokes once more Paul's grief for his kinsmen (cf. 9:1), and he expresses his affectionate desire that even yet they may enter into their true inheritance as the people of God. It is impossible not to feel the tenderness of Paul's pastoral concern for them, as he bears witness to what was good in them. Their zeal for God was unquestioned, but it was not enlightened; they were ignorant of the righteousness that proceeds from God. As already noted, it is a great mystery of history and religion that the Jewish nation should have so misunderstood and misinterpreted their own Scriptures. The New Testament makes clear that the doctrine of righteousness by faith is embedded in the teaching of the Old; but they were blind to it, and had turned it into a religion of works. The witness of the law and the prophets (3:21) had proved ineffectual and remained unheeded. This raises the question, 'Why were they so ignorant?' which Paul answers in 3b. In spiritual life it is never a question of pure ignorance, but ignorance in the face of the truth (cf. 1:18), which is a moral, more than an intellectual, matter. A willing blindness had closed their eyes to the truth (cf. 2 Pet. 3:5) because they would not submit to God's righteousness. For to submit would have meant to surrender, and own that they had been in the wrong, above all on the issue of their own works. This was intolerable to the proud Jews, who would rather not see, than see this. But this is the 'scandal' of the Cross, referred to in 9:32.

### **9:30 – 10:4 THE REAL HEART OF GOSPEL OPPOSITION**

We need to pause a little further at these verses, for the situation they deal with is by no means confined to the Jews of long ago. What has been said about their stumbling at the Cross because the Cross challenged their self-righteousness is so often true today in our contemporary church situation. Indeed, 10:2-3 could be applied to thousands of good, honest Kirk folk who are, in the apostle's words, going about to establish their own righteousness. What we have to face is that there is in our land today a great and widespread ignorance of God's way of salvation. When the question is put, 'What are you depending upon for your acceptance with God?' the stock answer seems so often to be, 'I have always done the best I can; I have tried to help others; I have supported my church, and have worked gladly for it ...'. In other words, many are trusting in what they have done; they have, as Paul says, sought to establish their own righteousness, and trying to 'work their passage' to heaven. Two things must be said about this: a) they are ignorant of God's way of salvation, in Christ; but b) they are also refusing to submit to God's way. And it is certainly true that a great

mass of opposition against a message that insists on conversion as the only way home comes not from the publicans and sinners, but from religious, self-righteous folk who pride themselves on their attainments, and the reason is that the doctrine of 'conversion' strikes at the root of all men's good works, and tells them that they must come empty-handed, and as guilty sinners, to receive pardon and forgiveness through the works of another, even Christ.

### **10:4 'CHRIST THE END OF THE LAW'**

The words of this verse have been given different meanings by the commentators, but the context here must decide Paul's meaning. Taken out of context, in fact, there are two main lines of interpretation that could both be said to be valid as an understanding of the apostle's words. These two main lines of interpretation are as follows:

a) Christ is the end of the law in the sense that the law finds its fulfilment in him. The law 'was put in charge to lead us to Christ', as Paul says in Gal. 3:24 and therefore Christ is the 'goal' of the law, what the law was aiming at and what it leads to, in fulfilment of itself. This is how Handley Moule interprets it. 'Christ', he says, 'is no arbitrary sequel to the law; he stands organically related to it ... the law's goal, its final clause in the plan of redemption is – Christ, unto righteousness, to effect and secure this wonderful acceptance for everyone who believes.' Now all this is true; it is true – and taught elsewhere by Paul – that Christ consummates or fulfils the law, that he is the goal of the Old Testament dispensation and that it was designed to lead to him. But (in my view) this is not Paul's point or intention here. He is not, as for example in Galatians, teaching the organic relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament here, not pointing out the resemblance between the law as such and its fulfilment in Christ. Rather, he is emphasising a contrast – a contrast between two different ways of obtaining righteousness, the one right and the other wrong, the one true, the other false.

b) We must therefore take the other possible meaning of the words, that law as a method or principle of righteousness is done away in Christ (this is not of course to say that law was ever intended as a method or principle of righteousness – rather it was the Jews' perception of it, and indeed misunderstanding of it as a way of salvation that Paul is challenging).

Now, clearly, both a) or b) are possible as interpretations of Paul's words, taken by themselves, but Paul's words in this particular context cannot be interpreted in both these ways. And it is the context that decides in favour of the second interpretation. In fact, the verse is introduced with the word for, as an explanation of v3, which asserts that of the two methods of obtaining righteousness one is right and the other wrong.

## **THE WAY OF SALVATION 10:5-21**

### **10:5-10 RIGHT AND WRONG WAYS OF OBTAINING RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Having established the meaning of 'Christ is the end of the law' in its context in yesterday's note, Paul now proceeds to contrast those two different ways of obtaining righteousness, the right and the wrong, emphasising the superiority, and the rightness, of the way of faith, as opposed to the way of works, quoting in support of this from both Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The first quotation (in 5) is from Lev. 18:5, and Paul's point in quoting it is to show that the condition of obtaining life by law is that of fulfilment of the law, and this is a condition that is impossible because it lays impossible demands on men. No man can fully keep the law, for no man is perfect. Indeed, as James says in his epistle (2:10), 'Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.' One has only to think of the religion of the Pharisees in our Lord's Day to realise how utterly barren of hope a righteousness by the law proved, even at its best, to be, and how far it led them from God. One thinks of Paul's own experience before his conversion, as he describes it in Phil. 3:5ff. – 'as for legalistic righteousness, faultless' – which he ultimately counted loss, when he saw it was the wrong way, the false way, that did not lead him, as he thought and expected, to life. One thinks also of Luther climbing up these steps in Rome, praying on each one of them, to gain merit, with his heart in bondage and in misery, suddenly being illuminated by the words of Romans: 'the just shall live by faith'. No, the only right and safe way to 'acquire merit' in the sight of God is to rest by faith on the merits of another, even Christ.

### **10:5-10 THE TRUE AND ONLY WAY OF SALVATION**

By contrast, however (6), the righteousness which is by faith is neither difficult nor hard to attain; it is accessible and near to all. This is the force of the second quotation in 6-8 from Deut. 30:11-14. The implication is clear: righteousness by faith is found in the law itself (Rom. 3:21, 4:1ff.) and speaks to those who have ears to hear. The personification of this righteousness in 6 is graphic, and suggests that when Moses is heard aright it is the message of righteousness by faith that rings out clearly. The reference in Deuteronomy is certainly to 'the commandment', but this need not, and ought not to be interpreted in a legalistic sense since Moses goes on to set before the people 'life and prosperity, death and destruction!' The emphasis on covenant grace throughout Deuteronomy makes it easy and convincing to interpret Moses evangelically. The phrases, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' and, 'Who will descend into the deep?' (6b-7) are proverbial expressions for the impossible. By quoting them Paul means to say that we need not do the impossible to be saved, only believe in Christ. As Moses said, there was no need to go up to heaven or beyond the sea to bring the

commandment to men because it was near at hand, and it is even truer today that there is no need to go up to heaven to bring down the object of faith and source of righteousness, or descend into the abyss to find him, for in his incarnation Christ has already come down from heaven and by his resurrection is an ever-living, ever-present Saviour. This means that righteousness by faith can no longer be difficult for anyone, for incarnation and resurrection sum up Christ's redeeming work. By it he has drawn near to us (8), and the way of salvation is open to all. It is this way of salvation, accessible and near at hand, that Israel has refused.

### **10:5-10 THE WORD OF FAITH**

The 'word of faith' (8b) is the message of the gospel, and this is described (as to content) in 9. It comes near to men through preaching, i.e. whenever this gospel concerning Christ is preached, (i.e. 'that Jesus is Lord') so near that it lies in the heart and voice of a man to appropriate it (8b), for 'it is with the heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with the mouth that you confess and are saved ...'. This particular formulary is dictated by the reference in Deut. 30:14 to 'in your mouth and in your heart', and the order of the clauses with 'confessing' coming before 'believing' is due to the order of the words 'mouth' and 'heart' in Deuteronomy, no doctrinal significance being intended. The union of heart and mouth is important. The heart is 'the centre of moral being, invariably including feeling and will', and to 'believe with the heart' means to commit oneself wholly in faith and surrender to Christ as he is offered to us in the gospel as Saviour and Lord of life. To 'confess with the mouth' is, so to speak, to 'burn one's boats', to come out into the open and declare one's agreement with what God has declared to be true about Christ and eternal life. And the true joy of salvation is never really known until we do let it be known where we stand. Have we told anyone of the secret belief of our hearts? Have we confessed Christ?

### **10:5-10 THE ONLY TRUE CONFESSION OF FAITH**

Confession of the Lordship of Christ and belief in his resurrection really embrace the gospel, for both ideas are comprehensive in their implication. 'Jesus is Lord' (Kurios Christos) was the confession of the early Church, and this has double significance.

(i) 'Lord' is an Old Testament name for God; and unquestionably the early Church worshipped Christ as God (cf. Jn. 20:28; 1 Pet. 3:15, where the true reading should be, 'Sanctify the Lord – i.e. Christ – as God in your hearts'). This has significance in relation to the atonement. Man cannot atone for sin; atonement is so infinite a task that only God can fulfil it. Yet atonement must be made from man's side, if it is to be real and valid. Only in the God-man is this impasse resolved. A Saviour not truly divine cannot save. It is God in Christ

that reconciles the world to himself. The Godhead of the Son is cardinal therefore in Christian confession.

(ii) The second point in the confession 'Jesus is Lord' is that such confession involves bowing the knee to him as King, giving him the right to reign over the lives of his people (cf. Acts 17:7) ('another King, one Jesus'). This agrees with the heart-belief in the resurrection, in 9b, for it is the resurrection that authenticates his Lordship (see note on 1:3-4). The two clauses should not be aligned with the incarnation and the resurrection (in 6-7): the Lordship of Christ is not associated with the resurrection in the New Testament, but rather with the ascension. Interpretation here should rather be in line with that in 4:25, 'delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.' To confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead are simply two sides of the same reality, the outward and the inward. This holds good for 10 also: no distinction is intended between righteousness and salvation.

### **10:5-10 SALVATION IS BY FAITH – AND FOR ALL**

The significance of 11 and 12 is unmistakeable in relation to the whole passage. This salvation of which Paul speaks is not only by faith alone, but is for all, not only for those near at hand: and if this be so, there is no difference as between Jew and Gentile, either in their sinnerhood (see 3:22-23) or in the method of their salvation (12), for the same Lord is Lord of all (Jew and Gentile alike) and richly blesses all that call upon him. And this is basically why the Gentiles were saved and the Jews were not – for the Gentiles had called on the Name of the Lord, while the Jews had not. In sin and salvation alike, Jew and Gentile stand on the same footing before God. Nor is it different today. To call on the Name of the Lord means to come empty-handed, and receive as helpless sinners the mercy and grace of God through Christ. And this proves too costly for some to contemplate. It is too humbling to admit that we are in the wrong and that nothing we can do can put us in the right with God. But it is a blessed humbling, and one that leads us into rest. Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:3). The quotation with which Paul rounds off his argument here is from Joel 2:32 and Denney comments: "'The Lord" in the original is Jehovah; here manifestly, Christ – a proof of how completely Christ stands in God's place in all that concerns salvation.'

### **10:14-21 CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD**

Invocation of the Name of the Lord leads to salvation (13); yet Israel is not saved. What is the explanation of this mystery? Paul goes over the steps by which men come to



salvation in order to find the answer to this question, and discovers the weak link in the chain so far as Israel is concerned. The gist of the argument in 14 is that God has made it possible for all men to call on the Name of the Lord, by instituting a universal proclamation of the gospel (18). Paul therefore concludes the Jews to be culpable and inexcusable. He puts it as follows: (a) how, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?; (b) how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?; (c) and how can they hear without someone preaching to them?; (d) and how can they preach unless they are sent? Beginning with (d), he works backwards, examining the links of the chain one by one. God did not fail to send preachers (15), appointed and accredited by himself, and these, as has already been stated in 8, did not fail to preach their God-given message, thus proving that (c) is not the weak link in the chain. 16 and 17 are almost parenthetical, anticipating the conclusion of the argument, but they follow logically upon 14 and 15; and 18ff. amplify and complete Paul's case. We continue comment on these verses in tomorrow's note.

### **10:14-21 WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR MESSAGE?**

The preaching of the gospel (15) has not yet met with widespread response, so far as the Jews are concerned, but with disobedience (16); and Paul finds the sad apostolic experience of preaching to an unheeding people echoed in and confirmed by that of the prophets also (Isa. 53:1). He sums up the matter in 17: 'faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ', i.e. by the preaching of Christ. It is the gospel message itself that awakens faith in those who hear. Nor had Israel failed to hear (18), indeed they could not but have heard, with such a universal proclamation (Ps. 19:4), which means that the problem does not lie in (b). As a corollary to this, Paul asks a supplementary question, 'Did Israel not understand the message?' (19) The implication is that if they did not, they of all people ought to have done, for both law (19, Deut. 32:21) and prophets (20, Isa. 65:1) declared it unmistakably. God has spoken so plainly that even the Gentiles understand. This seems to be the implication of both quotations. If ignorant and benighted Gentiles, who never sought after God, have understood the gospel message and found salvation, the failure of a privileged people like Israel (cf. 9:4-5) to enter the kingdom cannot be due to lack of understanding, but to lack of faith, i.e. the will to believe. This, then, is the weak link, and why they are not saved: they have not believed in Christ. This is confirmed by the further quotation from Isa. 65:2, which underlines both the long-suffering patience and passion of the divine love, and their wilful, stubborn disobedience and refusal of his grace.

## THE HIGHER LOGIC OF GRACE 11:1-36

We come now to the third part of Paul's argument in this section of the epistle. It is particularly important for us to remember that chs. 9 – 11 belong together and that their message needs to be taken together in order properly to understand it. The subject, as we have seen, is the mystery of the Jews' rejection of the gospel and their consequent rejection by God. In ch. 9, Paul has said that there is a divine sovereignty at work in election and rejection, a mystery which mortal eyes cannot penetrate, and may not pry into. 'Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?', says the apostle (9:20) to every objection that might be made to this. In ch. 10, Paul lays alongside this mystery something which we can truly understand, and says that, election and predestination notwithstanding, the Jews had only themselves to blame for not obtaining salvation – they would not believe the gospel, and therefore they were not saved. His argument is as follows: the way of salvation is simple, and accessible to all. It has been so proclaimed that all have had the opportunity to learn of it. In spite of this, the Jews as a people have not followed it – not because of ignorance of it, but because of disobedience and rebellion. The question that therefore arises is: is their apostasy and consequent rejection final and absolute?

The logic of what Paul has said thus far (in 9:6 – 10:21) would seem to imply exactly this, but he now unfolds the higher logic of grace. There are two ways of looking at his statements here in this new chapter: either, they express his personal convictions – his intense loyalty to his own people will not suffer him to face the logic of his earlier arguments, but forces him to present a solution to the impasse of his own reasoning; or, he is the inspired mouthpiece of God, and here, as elsewhere, and as authoritatively, he is uttering truths revealed to him by God himself concerning the future of the Jewish people. Denney says, 'How much a revelation of this kind will weigh with the modern reader depends on the extent to which on general grounds he can recognise in Paul an inspired interpreter of Christianity.' Those who, like this writer, hold a biblical doctrine of inspiration cannot dismiss the daring conclusions reached in this chapter as merely personal views which are as likely to be wrong as right. Rather, they will welcome them 'not as the word of men but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.' And in doing so, the surpassing wonder of it all will surely lead them into the same response of heartfelt praise that Paul himself expresses in the marvellous, expansive doxology that closes the chapter.

The apostle therefore adduces three points to show that God has not rejected his people: a) their rejection, even now, is partial, not total (1-10); b) their present rejection is only temporary, not final (11-24); c) their temporary rejection leads to ultimate salvation (25-36).

## **ISRAEL'S REJECTION AT PRESENT IS NOT TOTAL 11:1-10**

### **11:1-6 IS ISRAEL'S REJECTION FINAL AND ABSOLUTE?**

We need to confront, face on, Paul's extraordinary statement in 2, 'God did not reject his people whom he foreknew.' Look at the facts as Paul looked at them – the Jews had everywhere rejected God's grace, had crucified his Son, and persecuted his messengers. And if this was a tremendous mystery to Paul, it is intensified an hundredfold for us, for we can look back in even greater perspective than Paul. And what do we see in this people's history? Four hundred years in Egypt; forty in the wilderness; a long, dark and terrible period of warfare, backsliding and idolatry; a brief gleam of light in the reigns of David and Solomon; a rapid, downward career of growing apostasy, discord and sin, to the time of the Babylonian captivity; seventy years' exile; a long interval of darkness and oppression; the great rejection of the Lord of glory; the frightful sufferings and downfall of Jerusalem; and nineteen centuries of shame, oppression and, above all, unbelief, blindness, hatred to God's dear Son, the only Saviour. Such is 'Israel'. This is the evidence. Is not this proof of their rejection? How can Paul say, 'God did not cast away his people?'

But – and this is an awesome thought – these facts stated may be the very proof that God has not cast away his people. For in spite of all they have passed through, of torment and persecution, the Jews still exist as a distinct people today. And not all the horrors even of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Russia availed to exterminate and destroy this people whom God willed to remain in existence as his people. Look at the great ancient empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, the Medes and Persians, Greece, and Rome – where have they gone? Disappeared! But the Jews, even in their woe, are still in existence as God's people. It is their destiny to be God's people, and consequently even in their rejection of Christ they bear witness to God's gracious and sovereign purposes in the world. They are God's rejected people, not any rejected people, and in a mysterious way beyond understanding (as Paul unfolds later in 15ff.) they are still, in spite of themselves, the instrument of his sovereign purposes of mercy and salvation. This is the great paradox; and indeed it is a great mystery (23) that does not readily 'fit' into any neatly framed system of theology. Yet for Paul it is not a loose end to be tidied away and set aside; it is an absolutely integral part of his whole gospel, and he therefore relentlessly, and passionately, refutes the 'system' that would suggest God has now cast off Israel for ever.

### **11:1-6 EVIDENCE OF HOPE FOR ISRAEL**

What Paul says in 1, 'By no means! I am an Israelite myself ...' may be adduced by him as a proof that God had not rejected his people, for he was a Jew and a Christian, and he

had not been rejected. This is how Calvin, Barrett and others take the words, and if this is followed then the existence of individual Jewish Christians suggests the earlier parallel of a minority of true believers in Elijah's day, when the prophet, faced by widespread apostasy, feared that God had rejected his people since he seemed to be the only faithful Israelite left. Elijah however was wrong, he did not die, and he was not alone, for God had left himself seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. But other commentators, including (Cranfield, Sanday and Headlam, and Denney) see Paul's statement in 1-2 not as proof that Israel is not rejected, but as explaining his vehement reaction to the very idea being considered. Paul, as a Jew, regarded it as unthinkable that God should do such a thing. This is the more likely interpretation of the two, for the first one does not prove the point he is making, since the question here is not whether individual Jews are to be saved, but whether the people are to be rejected as a people.

The application of the story of Elijah is made in 3-5. The rejection of Israel is no more complete and final in Paul's day than in Elijah's: as then, so now there is a remnant, chosen by grace: ('remnant' in the Greek, is cognate with 'reserved for myself' in 4). And the point is that the remnant in Elijah's day were preserved not merely for themselves. In them the future hopes of Israel, and the fulfilment of God's purposes lay. 'However great the mystery seems to us now,' Paul is saying, 'God is still working his purposes out, as he was then, and will continue to do so right up until the consummation and final perfection of his wonderful plan of redemption – which is still in the future.'

Paul adds an aside (Moule calls it 'a characteristic footnote') in 6, reminding his readers of what had been said in 9:11, that election rests on no mere human consideration, but on divine grace alone. The remnant may be thought of either as in existence even then, although hidden from the eyes of men, or as hidden in the counsels of God (cf. Acts 18:10), or both, for both are true.

## **11:7-10 THE FATEFUL COST OF BLINDNESS**

In these verses Paul recapitulates his earlier arguments in chs. 9 and 10. The 'elect' or 'remnant' has obtained the promise (cf. 9:6-13), and the rest are blinded. But this blindness is itself related to something else. The reference to Israel's seeking leads us back to 10:2-3. Their seeking was without knowledge. The hardening, the blinding, is from God, but always as a punishment for sin, i.e. confirming them in an obduracy of heart that was originally not of God, but their own. As Denney puts it, 'First they would not then they could not, believe the gospel.' This Paul substantiates by quotation from the Scriptures (Deut. 29:4, Isa. 29:9-10, Ps. 69:22). The reference to Ps. 69:22 is interesting and significant. Sanday and Headlam make the comment:

*The image is that of men feasting in careless security and overtaken by their enemies, owing to the very prosperity that ought to be their strength. So the Jews, that Law and those Scriptures wherein they trusted are to become the very cause of their fall, and the snare and hunting-net in which they are caught.*

Here, then, in different guise, are Paul's earlier emphases held together: blinded – by election and predestination, or by stubbornness, bringing judicial hardening. What the apostle is underlining is that truth resisted and refused becomes a terrible instrument of hardening in the human heart. It is certainly no accident that Jesus and Paul both quote these fearful words about 'seeing and not perceiving' and 'the spirit of slumber being on the eyes of men' in relation to their ministry of the gospel. The gospel is light, but light refused becomes darkness. Well might the Psalmist warn, 'Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts' (Ps. 95:7-8).

## **REJECTION AND RECONCILIATION 11:11-24**

### **11:11-15 STUMBLING BEYOND RECOVERY?**

The argument of the chapter so far is clear. But there are still questions to ask. What Paul has said covers the minority, the remnant, but what of the great mass of the people of Israel? Are they finished? This is an even bigger question, and he answers it in a dramatic fashion here, saying that their fall is temporary, not final.

This is not something that emerges logically from Paul's earlier arguments but mysterious and indiscernible except by the Spirit. And he proceeds to show that in some strange way beyond human understanding the 'fall' of the Jews proves to be an integral element and factor in the salvation of the world and indeed their own ultimate salvation. We need to understand 11 to mean (as in the NIV), 'Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?' Can this (final) fall be the climax of their marvellous history? Has evil the last word in them, or grace? And Paul indignantly rejects the very idea, enunciating the remarkable equation that the Jews' rejection leads to the salvation of the Gentiles, which in turn will lead, through jealousy, to the salvation of the Jews. It is true of course that the Jews' refusal and rejection led directly to the offer of salvation to the Gentiles, but this is not all that Paul means, as we see from 12 and 15, where he maintains that there is an integral connection between the rejection of the Jews and the blessing of the world. We shall say something further on this mystery in the next note.

## **11:11-15 DESTINY OF JEW AND GENTILE INEXTRICABLY LINKED**

When we said in yesterday's note that there is an integral connection between the rejection of the Jews and the blessing of the world (12) we must not read this as if God's action was contingent on theirs, graciously overruling their objection for another purpose of grace. This is true, but not the deepest truth, for it would then represent God as reduced to mere expediency, which calls in question his omniscience and foreknowledge. The rejection was inevitable, and necessary, because rejection is the principle on which reconciliation is based (15). This is the point made throughout the passage, and the argument is a fortiori: if Israel's rejection means gain for the world, how much more will their restoration mean to the world? How much more it will mean is not stated until 15, nor is reason given here for the assumption that they will be restored (that comes explicitly in 25ff., although it is also implicit in 16ff.). Paul now finds it necessary (13-14) to explain and justify his intense preoccupation with his own countrymen, in a letter addressed to Gentiles by one who called himself an apostle to the Gentiles. It is because the fortunes of the Jews and the Gentiles are inextricably linked together, that his work among the Gentiles has a bearing on the Jews. The more successful it is, the more the Jews will be provoked to jealousy, and thus be saved.

## **11:11-15 A FOUNTAIN FOR SIN AND IMPURITY**

Even to say, however that the Jews' fall was essential, and that God arranged events in this way because he needed a rejected people through whose instrumentality he could fulfil his sovereign purposes in salvation does not do justice to the whole truth either, in that it calls in question the reality of the Jews' own responsibility in the matter of their rejection (which Paul has already stressed in ch.10). The fact is, this is a truth that eludes our finite, human understanding, and in the last analysis we must be content to 'let God be God', and not cavil at what is beyond our ability to grasp. We must proceed tentatively and with necessary humility in seeking to penetrate the mystery. We may find a parallel in the story of the gospel itself and the fact of Judas Iscariot. 'The Son of Man must be betrayed,' said Jesus, 'but woe to that man who betrays him.' There had to be a Judas, yes, but he was a free agent; God overruled his infamy and used it for his own purposes, yes – but is there not deep mystery here? The analogy of Judas is a very apt and apposite one, for there is in fact an integral connection between him and our Lord. They are both part of the same mystery of divine, sovereign grace and redemption. There is a connecting link in fact between the Jews' rejection and the rejection of the Son of God, on the cross. Consider how our Lord died: he was taken by the hands of wicked men and nailed to the cruel cross, the hands of Jews, in their hatred against him and their refusal of him as their Messiah. But this is what brought



about salvation! Men did their worst to him, spitting upon him, mocking him, crowning him with thorns. But God brought, out of man's worst, man's salvation.

*The very spear that pierced his side  
Drew forth the blood to save.*

Men – the Jews – silenced these blessed lips that 'spoke as no one ever spoke' and closed his holy eyes in death; but in their doing so God opened a fountain for sin and impurity! (Zech. 13:1). This is the principle at work in the mystery of the Jews' rejection. Christ suffered as he did because, in bearing the world's sin, he was rejected and forsaken of God. And this rejection is the world's salvation.

### **11:11-15 THE JEWS – 'GOD'S SIGNPOSTS' IN THE WORLD**

Following immediately upon the end of yesterday's note we may point out that Paul says, in effect: 'It is so also with the Jews: the Jews' rejection is the world's salvation'. As Paul puts it here, 'If their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fulness bring!' What awesome mystery is this? Paul elsewhere says, 'God reconciled us to himself through Christ' (2 Cor. 5:19), and Paul uses the same word here of the Jews that is properly true only of our Lord's cross and passion. What can this mean? We could hardly have a more dramatic or mysterious fulfilment of our Lord's own words in Jn. 4:22, 'Salvation is from the Jews.' We should remember in this connection the hint that Paul gives of this in 9:23 (see relevant note) where he states the reason why God endured the objects of his wrath. It is through Israel's hardness and her having become the object of his wrath that God brings mercy and blessing upon men, and the gospel has gone forth into the world. And in precisely the same way, it is because Jesus became 'an object of his wrath' for our sakes, becoming a curse for us, that salvation is come to the world. In this integral link between Jesus and the Jews – and we cannot separate them in the drama of salvation – we also at the same time see God's gifts and his call to be irrevocable, and that he refuses to let his people go, even in their rejection of him and his of them, and that he is determined, whether they will or no, to make them his instrument of revelation to the world, to be a light to lighten the Gentiles. He makes them the objects of his mercy to the world, through being objects of his wrath. What mystery, high and wonderful, is here! Paul speaks, however, not only of Israel's loss but also of their 'fulness', and associates this with 'life from the dead', that is to say, the restoration of Israel after her long centuries in the wilderness will proclaim that God's purposes in the world are now completed. 'Life from the dead' refers, in this connection, to resurrection, and Paul seems to mean that the restoration of Israel will be the signal for the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth. The conversion of the Jews will be associated with, and will lead to, the

return of Christ. We see thus, that the Jews, even in their rejection of Christ, are still instruments of God's purposes in the world. Someone has called them 'God's signposts' indicating the divine activity in the world. 'Watch the Jews,' cries the apostle over the centuries; 'all that happens to them has divine significance'. Have we eyes to discern 'the signs of the times?'

## **11:11-15 THE SYNAGOGUE 'SHADOW-PICTURE' OF THE CHURCH**

There is a sense in which the most we can do here is to speak in enigmas; in mysteries; with, at the most, hints and shadows of ideas flitting across our minds to suggest the unspeakable or describe the indescribable. We mention two thoughts, however, from the theologians, which illumine even a little these mighty depths. On the one hand, Karl Barth, in his book *Dogmatics in Outline*, says:

*Alongside the Church there is still a synagogue, existing upon the denial of Jesus Christ and on a powerless continuation of Israelite history, which entered upon fullness long ago. But we have to remember that if it is God's will – and the apostle Paul stood in puzzlement before this question – that this separated Israel still exists, we can only see the synagogue as the shadow-picture of the Church, which accompanies it through the centuries, and, whether the Jews are aware of it or not, actually and really participates in the witness of God's revelation in the world. The good vine is not dried up. For that God planted it and what God has done to it and given to it, is the decisive thing; and it is made manifest in Jesus Christ, the man out of Israel.*

On the other hand, T.F. Torrance suggests that the idea of the scapegoat in the Levitical ordinance of the Day of Atonement affords a shadow of the double part played by the Jews and Jesus in the bearing of the sin of the world (Lev. 16:5ff.). Israel is the 'scapegoat' that wanders in the wilderness (Lev. 16:22) – it remained alive while the other was sacrificed on the altar – and together they represented atonement for sin and reconciliation with God. (Israel's sufferings over the centuries being a 'reflection' of Christ's once-for-all sufferings on the cross).

## **11:16-24 THE 'OLIVE TREE' ILLUSTRATION**

In the illustration of the olive tree in these verses Paul gives another proof that the Jews cannot be finally rejected. The figure of the 'first fruit' is taken from the Old Testament pattern of sacrifices, and refers to the portion of the kneaded lump of dough which was offered as a

heave-offering to the Lord, and so sanctified for use the rest of it (Num. 15:19-21). Here the 'first fruit' stands for Abraham and the patriarchs – the idea being that, the first-fruit of the nation being holy, the rest of the nation would be sanctified by them. Similarly with the root and the branches (16). The 'olive tree' is a figure for the church of God from its first institution at the beginning of God's dealings with his people, and we see from what Paul says here that the New Testament church is not something different or distinct from the Old Testament church, but simply a new growth on the original body. Paul warns the Gentiles, who have been grafted in, against boastfulness and complacency. To be complacent, as the Jews once were, saying, 'We are the people of God,' is fatal. We must rather as Christians be all the more eager to make our calling and election sure. It will not do, he means, to quote the Scriptures which assert that once a man is saved he cannot finally be lost or plucked from God's hand, for Jesus said, 'he who stands firm to the end will be saved,' and it is 'standing firm to the end' that is the only real proof that our 'decision of faith' has been a real work of the Spirit, and not simply an emotional extravagance. It was precisely this sort of complacency in the Jews that led to their rejection. 'Be warned,' says Paul, and strive to 'continue in his kindness'.

### **11:16-24 'GRAFTING' – CONTRARY TO NATURE**

The principle referred to in the 'olive tree' illustration is expounded and applied in 17-24, starting from the reference to 'root and branches' in 16. The illustration of the graft which he uses here is, as has been pointed out, horticulturally inaccurate. It is always the cultivated branch that is grafted into the wild stock, not vice versa. But Paul is not confused, as some think. On the contrary, his argument depends on the unusualness of the illustration. His point is that what has happened to the Gentiles in being grafted into the olive tree is contrary to nature (24). And if the Gentiles were thus grafted in contrary to nature, two things follow: (i) they can be cut out again, and (ii) the original branches which, after all, belong to the tree, can be grafted in again. And the operative factor in each case is faith. The first lesson, then, is humility. The Gentiles have nothing to boast about, for all they have they owe to the stock into which they have been grafted. Paul is thus warning them against the very sin of which the Jews themselves had been guilty and which had contributed to their downfall. And the second lesson is one of hope for Israel. If God had power to graft wild branches into the olive tree, how much more will he be able to graft in again the branches which have been cut off, which belong to the olive tree, restoring them to their original place. If the unnatural task, full of difficulty as it was in conception, proved possible, surely the easier task, the natural one of grafting the proper branches into the tree, is more possible!

## **THE UNSEARCHABLE JUDGEMENTS OF GOD | 1:25-36**

### **11:25-27 JEW AND GENTILE BOTH GRAFTED INTO THE SAME TREE**

Before we turn to the message of these verses, it should be pointed out that in Paul's thinking 'the olive tree' is the church of God looked at as one continuous body, and the root or stock is that from which Jews and Christians both alike receive their nourishment and strength – viz. the patriarchs, for whose faith Israel was originally chosen. The branches are the members of the church, Jews, the original branches, and Gentiles, the grafts from the wild olive. Throughout, the tree remains. It is not uprooted to make way for the planting of a new tree; it is simply that new branches are grafted into it; and these new branches become the inheritors of all the privileges of the Jewish church (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10). The Christian church has its roots, therefore in the Old Testament, in God's choice of the fathers. Believers are the true seed of Abraham, and the Christian church is therefore the continuation of God's Old Testament people, existing in the one and in the other solely by his goodness and grace. Here, in 25-27, Paul again states the mystery which has preoccupied him throughout this chapter, especially in 12 and 15. The operative word is 'until' (25). When the full number of the Gentiles has come in – that is, not when the Gentile world is converted, for that will never be, but rather when the role of God's elect is made up, and he has called out a people for his Name – the blindness will be taken away from Israel and a final restoration will take place. That is to say, when the 'rejection' is no longer needed in the purpose of God for the world's redemption, when it has fulfilled its role in the divine intention, Israel will again be gathered to her God and shall be saved (28). Oh, dear Paul, how it must have rejoiced your heart to have received this wonderful revelation about the future of your kinsmen! Small wonder that your spirit begins to soar to the heights of praise and exultation at the end of the chapter. It is something to fill you with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Pet. 1:8).

### **11:25-27 'ALL ISRAEL' WILL BE SAVED**

Paul's meaning in 25 should perhaps be taken to be that it is not so much after the Gentiles are gathered in as that it is in association with their final ingathering that Israel's blindness will be healed. When the tide of blessing is flowing at its flood in the last days (cf. Joel 2:28ff.), then Israel will be provoked to jealousy (cf. 'Do not pass me by') and the blindness will fall from their eyes. And this will be the signal for the end – life from the dead. The words 'all Israel will be saved' do not refer to a 'spiritual' Israel (as Calvin suggests), nor a 'remnant', but Israel as a whole, as a nation – not necessarily, indeed, including every individual Israelite, nor every Israelite down history either, for this would make nonsense of everything the Bible teaches. It is an historical Israel, that exists at the end as a nation, that

Paul has in view. When we say that God brought Israel into the promised land, it was the generation of Israel that was alive then, not the generation also that died in the wilderness. And salvation for them is to be engrafted into the olive tree again, by faith, i.e. justified by faith and brought into the body of Christ through the new covenant (27). And so all Israel will be saved, a truth which Paul finds supported by the testimony of the Scriptures themselves (Isa. 59:20, 27:9; Jer. 31:33). Paul adds to his statement concerning Israel's final salvation a series of striking paradoxes in the verses which follow and this will be our theme in tomorrow's note.

### **11:28-32 THE ULTIMATE SALVATION OF ISRAEL**

The striking paradoxes in Paul's argument at this point, mentioned at the close of yesterday's reading, serve to underline the wonder of God's dealings with his people. They are both 'enemies' and beloved by God (28) at one and the same time; as regards the gospel they are enemies, because they have refused it; but this hostility cannot destroy God's love for them, nor – even more important – his election of them, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Thus, as Gentiles have received mercy through the Jews' disobedience (30), so at the last they in turn will receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to the Gentiles (31). Denney makes the comment:

*The past unbelief of the Gentiles and the mercy they presently enjoy, the present unbelief of the Jews and the mercy they are destined to enjoy in the future – these things not only correspond to each other, but they are interwoven with each other; they are parts of a system which God controls, and in which every element conditions and is conditioned by all the rest.*

The paradox is complete: the Jews' unbelief leads, through the salvation of the Gentiles, to their own salvation! And God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he might have mercy on them all (the first 'all' in 32 refers to Jews and Gentiles; the second 'all' has the meaning of 'all without distinction' rather than 'all without exception' (so F.F. Bruce)). There is no thought here of any doctrine of universalism, and to read this into Paul's words is, as Denney says, 'simply to desert the ground on which the apostle is standing'. Mercy through unbelief! Well might the apostle burst into doxology! What is there left but praise and adoration in face of such mystery and in the presence of such a God?

## **11:33-36 THE GLORIOUS DOXOLOGY**

The glorious doxology in these verses concluding the chapter, and indeed the subject matter of the whole section beginning at 9:1, may be regarded as looking back on the whole exposition of the gospel from 1:16 onwards, although Paul is primarily referring to the great mystery of God's providential dealings with the Jew and Gentile. These are the words of a man who has been given a glimpse into the divine plan and purpose for the universe, and who has seen through the apparent confusion and chaos of the world into its real meaning. Here is one of the finest and keenest minds in the ancient world, who thought so deeply and so honestly, and felt so truly the mystery of things, that he could have been a great agnostic, simply because he would never have been prepared to accept an easy, facile interpretation of life – and he has seen a conscious purpose in the universe transcending human thought – a mystery in light, not in darkness – and it draws forth from him a doxology of praise and worship. This is very wonderful, and it reminds us that there are two attitudes to mystery. Paul is conscious that he is out of his depth; God's ways are past finding out, as Deut. 29:29 reminds us, 'the secret things belong to the Lord our God.' But to see, only in part, only a fraction, a glimpse, is to be set at rest, for this is the key that resolves all conflict and leads to peace. The word 'depth' in 33 means what is immeasurable, incalculable – the eternal imponderable of the gospel – and applies to each of the three words that follow, 'riches', 'wisdom' and 'knowledge'. For 'riches' see 2:4, 9:23, 10:12. For 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' see Col. 2:3. 'Judgements' and 'paths' are practically synonymous here, as are also 'unsearchable' and 'beyond tracing out'. For the thought, see Isa. 55:8-9. Confirmation of 33 is found in Isa. 40:13, a passage which exalts the solitary majesty of God in the counsels of his perfect will (cf. Deut. 29:29).

## **11:33-36 'O GOD, HOW GREAT THOU ART!'**

The second quotation in these verses, in 35, is from Job 41:11, and shows that God acts in sovereign grace: man can do nothing to merit salvation. The reference is therefore to the main theme of the epistle, which has preoccupied him throughout (cf. 3:20). This is summed up in 36. Neither does God need anything that man could give him (cf. Acts 17:25) nor can man possibly give him anything in payment for salvation. The meaning is that the spiritual gifts of God are so rich that none can make any return for them, nor does God need any recompense for what he gives. We have nothing that we did not receive; we are utterly dependent on God. This is proved in 36 by what Paul now says: 'From him and through him and to him are all things,' which the NEB in an inspired rendering translates as, 'Source, Guide and Goal of all that is.' He, therefore, and he alone, is worthy to receive glory forever. Denney considers that the 'all things' in 36 refers not to the universe as such (although what



the apostle says here is true of the universe) but rather to the universe of grace, which is revealed in the gospel for Jew and Gentile alike. One thinks readily of John Henry Newman's words,

*O loving wisdom of our God,  
When all was sin and shame,  
A second Adam to the fight,  
And to the rescue came*

which sets the mystery and tragedy of mankind – and the unutterable sadness and pathos of the fall of man, as he receives the inconsolable wound that robs him of his humanity and reduces him to a mirthless parody of what God intended him to be – over against the incomparable message of grace in the promised coming of the Saviour. Sin brought darkness into the world; but it also brought the Saviour. This is the wonder and mystery of the divine grace, that turns darkness into light. We may well pray,

*O blessed Saviour God, how great thou art! The secret things belong to you, and we are glad that you allow your glory to flash out from time to time, to blind us with its very brightness and show us the folly of supposing that our puny intellects could ever probe the mysteries of your love. Low at thy feet we offer you the humble adoration of our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## **5. RIGHTEOUSNESS APPLIED IN LIFE (12:1 – 15:33)**

### **THE BASIS OF THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC 12:1-2**

#### **12:1-2 LIVING SACRIFICES**

We come with these verses to the final section of the epistle which shows what it means in practical terms for the righteousness of God, provided by him and manifested in Christ's atoning work, to be worked out in the believer's life by the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul describes in considerable detail the response that the gospel of the grace of God is meant to elicit from those who hear and obey its message. To say that this section (12:1 – 15:33) gives a statement of the Christian ethic is true, but it is important to see (a) that the ethic is based from beginning to end on the doctrinal position that has been expounded in the previous chapters, and grows directly out of it; and (b) that what the apostle now goes on to say is simply an expansion and elaboration of statements made earlier about the ethical obligations of the believer's new position in Christ. The imperatives, for example, stated or implied in 6:4, 11, 13, 19 and 8:4, 12, 13, give the real key to the interpretation of the section, for Paul will now show what it is to 'live a new life', or – in other words – what it is to have faith, for to believe the gospel is to be brought to the obedience of faith. Paul begins the section by making a general statement in 1-2, which may be taken as basic to all that follows, the fountainhead, so to speak, of all Christian behaviour. In the remainder of the section we are shown this Christian ethic in its outworking in relation (i) to everyday living (12:3-21); (ii) to civil responsibilities (13:1-14); and (iii) to special problems (14:1 – 15:13).

#### **12:1-2 INVITATION AND CHALLENGE**

The ground of this great appeal which Paul makes here is 'God's mercy', all that has been unfolded thus far in the epistle – justification, union with Christ, life in the Spirit. It is because of all that God has done for us in Christ that Paul urges us in this way. His words may be taken both as an invitation and a challenge. As to invitation, Paul has been displaying for 11 chapters the glories of the gospel, and now he invites his readers to participate in these provisions, partake of them and enter into their fulness. It is, in effect, an appeal to 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps. 34:8). It is as if a poor orphan child of the streets could creep up to the window of a big house and with wistful eyes gaze in at the wonder and magic of a glorious Christmas party, enjoying all the thrill of it in a second-hand sort of way – and then suddenly being invited in to share it. It is wonderful to look in, but so much more wonderful to go in! For 11 chapters we have been looking in, and now Paul invites us to enter. And the way in is through consecration – we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. As to

challenge, we have already noted that there are decisive moral obligations involved in the gospel. God in Christ has dealt with the terrifying problem of human sin, and now he requires us to have done with it. It is like the words of Jesus to the woman taken in adultery, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.' We said, however, that the way in was through consecration: but a word must be said about the meaning of this word 'consecration'. What Paul is really saying is this: 'As you have been justified by Christ, and put in a new relation to God, I exhort you to live in accordance with that relation' (Sanday and Headlam). In other words Paul, having expounded to us what God has done for us in Christ and what he has made us, and where he has placed us, in him, says, 'Now, be what you are. Be what God has made you.' If we think back to the central passage in 3:21ff., in which Paul makes fundamental statements about the gospel in the words he uses – sacrifice of atonement (propitiation, AV), justification, redemption, faith – here in ch. 12 he is dealing with faith, which, we may say, is what makes the whole thing work. And it is in the response of faith that we make, and in the obedience we offer to the summons of the gospel, that we are set free from sin, and experience the liberating power of the Spirit in our lives and his endowment for service.

## **12:1-2 CONSECRATION AND FAITH ARE ONE**

It will surely be seen from what is said at the end of yesterday's note that we are brought to the inescapable conclusion that consecration and faith are one and the same thing, simultaneous and indeed identical, in that no conversion ever really takes place that does not imply and involve true consecration to Christ. One does not give part of one's allegiance to Christ at conversion, in saving faith, and then at a later stage make a more complete surrender to him in consecration. One does not enter the kingdom at all except on terms of unconditional surrender. That is what conversion means. To repent means to die to sin, and without repentance there is no true conversion. But thus to die is to indicate a clean and total break with the past. It is a living sacrifice! Consecration is thus the beginning, not the goal, of Christian life. To those who disagree with this interpretation and understanding of Paul's teaching, and maintain that in their experience true consecration has taken place subsequent to conversion, we have to say that they are making the mistake of interpreting the teaching of Scripture in the light of their experience, instead of beginning with the Scriptures and interpreting their experience in the light of what Scripture says. When they get that order right, they will begin to see that they have slipped away from their original consecration at conversion, and require to be brought to a new consecration, in effect, a re-consecration. And to say this means not an advance, but a return, to 'the blessedness that once they knew when first they saw the Lord'. So much becomes plain when we begin with the Scriptures and interpret all our experience in the light of them.

## **12:1-2 FAITH IS A TOTAL THING**

The other thing that requires to be said here – and it is of course implicit in the apostle's words – is that faith is a total thing in its very conception. This is surely made clear by the terms in which Paul makes this exhortation, 'Offer your bodies as living sacrifices.' This is seen supremely in the fact that it is Christ himself who summons us to faith in the word of the gospel, and the witness of the New Testament is that Jesus is Lord and King. Paul preached the kingship of Christ (cf. Acts 17:7). We are told in Phil. 2:9ff. that every knee shall bow to him and every tongue confess that he is Lord. We do not hear the gospel aright unless we hear in it the command of a King. There is a sense in which, in the presentation of the truths of Rom. 1 – 11, the central reality is the Lordship and Kingship of Christ through his passion and victory on the Cross. And it says this to us, 'Do you acknowledge this Lordship and Kingship of Christ? Then bow the knee to him and crown him Lord of all.' This is what faith means: to bow the knee, to own his Lordship, to be mastered by the living Christ. It is this total quality that is seen in the lives of the saints in the Scriptures – 'Abraham, when he was called to go out ... obeyed'; 'Moses ... did as the Lord commanded'; Paul said to King Agrippa, 'I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.' Two things emerge from these considerations. The first is obligation. This response is a matter of honesty. To see the meaning of the cross and still withhold this kind of obedience and surrender is an impeachment of our moral sincerity and integrity. For the cross tells us we have no right to be alive at all, and that the life we live is a life we owe to God. The second is the constraint of love. It is 'the least we can do', because Jesus Christ is not a theory or a philosophy, but the lover of our souls. He yearns for the entire devotion of our hearts. When Mary broke the box of spikenard in her anointing of Jesus, it all went out; none could be kept back. It was a true expression of her heart's devotion. And when we have listened to the gospel, understood it, and been stirred by it, gripped by it, this is the only possible response to it. We enthrone the Saviour in our hearts, and crown him Lord of all.

## **12:1-2 FAITH MEANS OBEDIENCE**

The thrust of Paul's words in 2 is very graphic and decisive: it is very similar to the thought expressed in Rom. 6:17, where Paul speaks of 'having wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching'. The idea there is that the teaching to which we are committed will shape our lives into a certain pattern, the pattern of the new order. The fact is, there are two powers, or forces, competing for our allegiance – the world and God, the old order and the new, and it is possible, even as Christians so to let the world fashion us, by breathing its atmosphere, being influenced by its standards, conditioned by its policies, that we become gradually and insensibly conformed to it. The other possibility is to be transformed by the renewing of our

minds. It is interesting and significant to note that the world – the old order – appeals to the senses, and it is along this line that it gains its influence over us (cf. Gen. 3:6, ‘when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it’). But the new order makes its appeal not to the senses but to the mind. It is the renewal of the mind that leads to moral transformation of life. Moral transformation by means of what we think! Do we realise what a revolutionary conception this is and how basic to Paul’s theology? We should not forget that when Paul was converted on the Damascus Road he was sent away into the silence and solitude of Arabia to think through what had happened to him. And it was as he did so that his mind was gripped and thrilled and mastered by the truth of God in the gospel. To give one’s mind to the consideration of that gospel, so to think of where God has placed us in Christ and let the very wonder of it grip the soul – this is how lives are transformed, and motivated and energised for the service of Christ.

## **12:1-2 THE GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL OF GOD**

There is one further point we must underline before going on. The last part of 2 speaks of ‘the good, pleasing and perfect will of God’. There are two things to be said about this. First of all, consecration to God expressed by spiritual non-conformity, and transformation by the renewing of the mind, leads to a knowledge of God’s will. This is a verse of the first importance in relation to the matter of divine guidance in the spiritual life. This is in fact the proper setting for an understanding of that guidance, and that in two respects. For one thing, very often the reason why we are unsure of the Lord’s leading in our lives is that we have not consecrated ourselves to God by offering our bodies as living sacrifices. There is nothing like yielding to God for clearing the mind and making issues plain. The Psalmist says, ‘in your light we see light’ (Ps. 36:9). For another thing, this verse tells us how to know the divine will: we are to know it by the renewing of our minds, by sanctified thinking. One thinks one’s way into the knowledge of God’s will for our lives. It is not always realised that before conversion one’s usual way of determining what is best for us is by thinking things through. After conversion, the mind is not set aside, but rather its activity is enhanced because it is now sanctified. God’s ideal creation is a man with a mind that naturally discerns the divine will. It is safe to say that a large number of wrong decisions are made, and the Spirit of God blamed for a great number of them, because Christians abdicate the God-given and Spirit-sanctified functions of their minds in favour of non-rational processes of guidance. Guidance is by the Word, yes, but the Word absorbed into the spiritual lifestream in such a way that the mind is made crystal clear and made able to think properly. The second thing to be said is that Paul’s words could be fairly translated, ‘... that you may prove that the will of God is good, pleasing and perfect.’ The meaning would then be that we prove, when we consecrate

ourselves to God, that his will – which from the outside may seem to be something to shrink from in dread and fear – is something so glorious and wonderful and liberating that it can only be described as life abundant. We prove, in fact, that life, not death, is the goal of sacrifice. It is a measure of our fallenness as sinners that we view with such misgiving the thought of a life in the centre of God's will. 'O taste and see that the Lord (and his will) is good.'

## **THE BODY AND ITS MEMBERS 12:3-8**

### **12:3-8 CONSECRATION DETHRONES SELF**

We are now able to proceed to what the apostle says in the remainder of this chapter. The mention of the words 'with sober judgement' in 3 prompts us to think of Paul's familiar utterance in Tit. 2:12 and the exhortation to 'live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age', for this is an apt description of how Paul is thinking in the entire chapter. 'Sober judgement' refers to a right attitude to oneself; 'upright' to a right attitude to others; and 'godly' to a right attitude to God. The last of these three ideas he has in effect unfolded in 12:1-2; 'sober living' is the theme in 3-8; while 'right living' is dealt with in 9-21. This is how we may conveniently study the remainder of the chapter. The renewal of the mind, then, as expressed in 2, leads to right thinking about oneself. This is what Paul means when he speaks of thinking soberly. One does not need to read very far into these verses (3-8) to realise that Paul is underlining the grace of humility. This is so: indeed, one commentator says, 'Humility is the immediate effect of self-surrender to God,' but it is important that we see the relation of this subject to the context in which it stands. It will be noticed that 3 begins with the word, 'for'. This means that what Paul says here follows directly from what he has just been saying about proving the good and pleasing and perfect will of God, the implication being that consecration to God, resulting in a transformation by the renewing of the mind brings to us a true assessment of ourselves, and brings us into our proper place in relation to the fellowship of the body of Christ. Conformity to the world makes this an impossibility, for it is of the essence of the old order that we put ourselves first and think of ourselves first, whereas in the new order self is dethroned in the life of consecration, and we are put in our proper place. Thus, the grace of humility is set in the context of the church as the body of Christ. And the conduct of the believer is to be determined by the fact that he is in Christ.



## 12:3-8 MEMBERSHIP OF THE BODY

To be in Christ means to be a member of his body, and therefore to stand in a certain relation to other believers. This means that the believer is never able to 'go it alone' in any sense of that term. We are, in Christ, members of one another (we should remember that the word 'saints' is always used in the plural in the New Testament, never alone). This can be put in another way. To be reconciled to God (which is what 'in Christ' means) implies and involves being reconciled to one another, i.e. being in harmony with one another. A body in which 'members in particular' (as the AV calls them) are lacking in co-ordination, is a sick body needing medical, and even surgical, attention. It is this kind of harmony that Paul is concerned about here, and it is in this context that he advocates humility. And, of course, humility will be an inevitable result when the real situation is appreciated, for to be truly consecrated to Christ will mean to take our proper place 'in the body,' and this will inevitably mean harmony. This serves to bring new insights into the whole concept of humility; for it should be clear in what we have said that humility does not come by trying to be humble: it is rather the fruit of something else. One cannot in fact produce humility by conscious effort, in this sense, and when we do try, we produce a counterfeit, for true humility is self-forgetfulness, and as long as we are consciously trying to produce it we are not forgetting ourselves. What the evening hymn says about the wonders of creation is just as true in spiritual life:

*And man, the marvel seeing,  
Forgets his selfish being,  
For joy of beauty not his own.*

Self-belittlement, self-deprecation, is not humility, but can in fact be an inverted form of pride, immortalised in Dickens' famous character, Uriah Heep ('I'm a very 'umble man'). No; what Paul has in mind here is having a realistic estimate of oneself – not too high, for that is wrong and bad; but also not too low, for that is just as unrealistic. Reality is the keynote, and 'being real' is a constituent element in humility.

## 12:3-8 'DOWN TO EARTH' CONSECRATION

Unreality, however, can take many forms in the spiritual life. J.B. Phillips' rendering of 3 makes the point well: 'Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all.' Paul is, of course, thinking of the unfortunate and sometimes tragic results this can have within the fellowship. But there is a great problem here for personal life also. Nothing is likely to cause so much trouble in personal experience as persisting in holding unrealistic

estimates of oneself, and refusing to face up to God-given limitations. Very often, it is the relentless drive of an inferiority complex that expresses itself in high and exalted ideas of one's own importance out of all proportion to reality. The problem of inferiority complex is more closely allied to self-centredness than most of us would like to believe, and although many factors of upbringing and environment may have combined to produce it we must recognise the root of the problem for what it is. This is why, ultimately, the gospel is the only true spiritual psychology, for no less a power can break the tyranny of self in the human heart. That is why, here, Paul shows that the grace of humility is a first fruit of true consecration. A true surrender to Christ shrinks our inflated 'ego' to its proper size in relation to him and to our fellows, and imparts reality to our lives. And it is always better to be real, even if 'being real' means being quite small, than to be an inflated, but unreal, creature. A 'real' person may be quite ordinary (how unwilling we are to be just that!), but at least he is solid reality and cannot be made smaller than he is (even when people try to pull him down a peg or two); but a man with exaggerated ideas of his own importance is living in a dream world of unreality from which he is liable to be rudely awakened at any moment. It needs only one pinprick to burst a balloon! This, then, is what consecration is about. Practical, isn't it?

## **12:3-8 'MEMBERS IN PARTICULAR'**

The whole point, Paul means, is that we are all different from one another, and meant to be so, in function and in service. And because this is so, there can be no question of superiority or inferiority. We all have different duties and we must be intent on doing to the best of our ability what God has given us to do. The gifts that men have (and none is without) are gifts, and not to be taken pride in, or used for personal advancement, but for the good of the body, the church. And since this is so, it is both useless and dangerous for one member to covet another's place or gift, for in so doing he is both trespassing beyond bounds, and at the same time neglecting his own. To see things in this light is to come to a true assessment of one's personal importance, and therefore to think with sober judgement. We all have our part to play, and only a part: the most richly endowed member is still only one member, not the whole body. Not even he can 'go it alone'. It is only in fellowship with others that true destiny is achieved. We cannot 'be ourselves' by ourselves, and true consecration (cf. 12:1), since it involves not only being 'in Christ' but also membership in his body, involves both a right relation to God and a right relation to other believers. We are individually members one of another, and therefore dependent on one another, and need one another, which is another argument for sober thinking and humility. And if God has appointed us not only a small, but also unobtrusive, part, then we must content ourselves with it, and realise that only in glad acceptance of it will true happiness and peace – and wholeness – ever be found. After all, we

cannot be more useful to God than he chooses to make us. We might well remember in this connection the wise words spoken by Jeremiah to his servant of old: 'Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not.' (Jer. 45:5)

### **12:3-8 MEMBERS NOT EQUAL, BUT DIFFERENT**

The fact that the members of the body are all different in function necessarily means that each is indispensable to the other, and therefore dependent on the other. Men are equal in their relation to God, and therefore in dignity. But they are unlike in their individuality, and therefore in their function in the world, and in the church, if they are believers. And because in this latter sense they are not equal, but different, they are therefore dependent on one another, and need one another. If men were essentially equal, they would be essentially independent of one another, every one being complete in himself. And this idea would lead to the dissolution of the whole concept of communal life which is of the essence of the Christian faith. It would make fellowship impossible. We should notice this, then: consecration (12:1) and dependence go together; and the more consecrated, the more dependent on one another we will be, and the more in harmony with one another in the body, because the fact of our inequality and difference will be seen. In this connection it is significant to realise that in the story of the Fall of man in Gen. 3, the essence of sin is described in terms of the desire on man's part to become independent of God, his creator, and independent of his fellows. 'You will be like God, knowing good and evil' was the bait that Satan dangled before Adam and Eve. If, then, this is sin, salvation is a return to dependence on God and on one another. Consecration is the surrender of that independence of God that is the root of sin, and, paradoxically, this surrender brings true freedom to our experience. We become ourselves only in this way. As G.K. Chesterton once said, 'We become taller when we bow.' This is why a man who is content to fill, let us say, a lowly station in life can live a far richer and fuller life than a man who in restless activity is desperately trying to be something or someone he was never meant to be; for two things are wrong with him: he is attempting to usurp a place that is not for him, and that way always leads to frustration and unfulfilment; and he is also missing the very function and purpose God intended for him. How needful it is for us to get wise to ourselves, and to the real motives that control and direct our lives!

### **12:3-8 NO 'SQUARE PEGS IN ROUND HOLES'**

Paul instances a number of examples of spiritual gifts in 6ff., giving one more evidence of the remarkable variety and richness in a true understanding of the church as the

body of Christ. 'Grace' in 6 refers to enduement for service, not to the work of salvation or sanctification. Every Christian is called to sanctification but not all to prophecy or ministry. It is service that Paul has in mind here. The important thing is to find out what we should be doing, and to do it with all our might. If we are tempted to think that it is difficult sometimes to know what the Lord's will for us is, we should remember what is said in 12:2, viz., that when we offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God we prove what is his good and pleasing and perfect will for our lives. Often, the reason why we are not sure about his will is that we are not where we should be in terms of consecration. To want his will with all our hearts is a prerequisite of getting to know it. And if in the secret of our hearts we have already decided what we want the Lord's will to be, it will not be surprising if we have difficulty here, for we shall have closed our hearts to his leading in favour of our own personal inclinations. This is the attitude that lands square pegs in round holes. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

## **WALKING IN LOVE 12:9-21**

### **12:9-13 LET LOVE BE GENUINE**

We come with these verses to the third part of Paul's trilogy referred to in an earlier note, from Tit. 2:12. Having discussed 'godly' (1-2), and 'sober' (3-8), we now come to 'righteous' (9-21), one's relationship with our fellows. There is, in fact, a sub-division within 9-21, with 9-13 referring to love within the fellowship/love for the brethren, and 14-21 love in the world, for those who are not believers. We look first of all, then, at the first of these sections, dealing with love for the brethren. The RSV translates 9 as, 'Let love be genuine', but the Greek that Paul uses could well be rendered, 'without hypocrisy', and this, along with the AV's 'dissimulation', may give us a valuable lead, for one basic element in true love is trustworthiness. If you love, you will be trusted, for love always proves itself loyal and true, and will never let people down – and surely the Christian church is the one place on earth where we should be able to trust one another's love and not get sore hearts through others' unfaithfulness and callousness. Another characteristic of love is its warmth, and when warmth is lacking, love is simulated and unreal. The AV translation of 10, 'kindly affectioned one to another,' is eloquent here in the quality it gives to that love ('kindly' derives from the word 'kin' and refers to affection among one's kin. We are, as Christians, brothers and sisters in the family of God.). The similarities here to the 'love' chapter in 1 Cor. 13 are very marked. Paul might even be saying 'I will show you the most excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31). Brunner suggests as a title for the section, 'What genuine love does and does not do.'

## **12:9-13 NOT WEARY IN WELL-DOING**

‘Never lacking in zeal’ in 11 does not refer to our daily work so much as to our daily walk. It has the same idea behind it as the words, ‘Do not be weary in well doing.’ This is a very penetrating thought. It is so easy at the beginning of any piece of service to give oneself unreservedly to it, but the real test is whether we are going on as faithfully when the initial enthusiasm has passed. What people do not always realise is that there is a psychological stimulus as well as a spiritual impulse when something new starts, and when there are those who presently fall by the wayside, it simply indicates that they were originally moved by psychological rather than spiritual considerations. We need, in any case, to be able to distinguish between real spiritual drive and psychological drive in Christian service. The latter is so often the product of unresolved tensions and problems in the personality. ‘Keep your spiritual fervour,’ in the same way does not mean stirring up a false enthusiasm (the Lord hates strange fire) but, ‘maintaining the spiritual glow.’ It was said of Mallory and Irvine, the climbers lost on Everest, that, ‘when last seen they were still climbing.’ That is exactly what Paul is speaking about here.

## **12:9-13 ‘WITH SALVATION’S WALLS SURROUNDED’**

The ‘position’ Paul gives to affliction in 12, wedged between ‘hope’ and ‘prayer’, reminds us of John Newton’s words:

*With salvation’s walls surrounded,  
thou may’st smile at all thy foes.*

Over against any affliction we have the solid fact of our hope in Christ (as has already been mentioned in 8:18) and on the other hand we have the present help of continuing in prayer. Thus, hedged in, affliction is kept strictly in its place, and made to do duty as an instrument of grace in the hand of God. This needs to be stressed because both prayer and the hope of glory are regarded by the unspiritual as impractical fancies. It is easy to dismiss people as being so heavenly-minded that they are no earthly use; but we should remember what so often does in fact happen when trouble and sorrow come. It is precisely the so-called impractical, heavenly-minded people who are able to draw on hidden resources of strength and comfort in their time of need. It is the unspiritual worldling who is the one who goes to pieces in time of crisis because he has nothing unseen to hold on to in the extremities of life. That this is a sorrowful reality many a minister would testify. It is life’s darkest hours that prove how practical a thing it is to have a hope to rejoice in.

## 12:9-13 THE VULNERABILITY OF LOVE

The theme throughout these verses is our attitude to others, and the real point of consecration is that we should be sufficiently detached from ourselves and our own problems and concerns to be able to give ourselves substantially to others, as 13 clearly implies. The reason we often fall down here is due not so much to positive heartlessness or callousness on our part, but simply because 'we never thought of it'. And the reason why we did not think of it was because we were so engrossed in ourselves that there was no time to think of others. It is a great thing to have 'a heart at leisure from itself'. But there is something more: the costliness of real love lies supremely in that it involves a heart in pain and hurt.

*To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.*

## 12:14-18 EXHORTATION AND WARNING

Paul is echoing in these verses parts of our Lord's own teaching (cf. Matt. 5:44, Lk. 6:28; 1 Cor. 4:12-13). In 15 we have more than a general exhortation; there is a warning also against the sin of envy. It is easier to weep with another in misfortune than to rejoice when he is honoured. The early father, Chrysostom, says that the latter, 'requires a noble soul, so as not only to keep from envying, but even to feel pleasure with the person who is in esteem.' 'Live in harmony with one another' (16) becomes impossible when the next injunction, 'do not be proud' – which includes both snobbishness and vaunting ambition – takes over. Indeed, such an attitude opens the door to many ugly things as 17a indicates. The words, 'be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody,' is rendered in the RSV, 'take thought for what is noble,' which underlines our royal calling and position as children of God. There are some attitudes which should be beneath an honourable man's attitude and lifestyle, as 18 suggests: living at peace with everyone is not optional for the Christian. He must not be the one to break the peace.



## **12:19-21 LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE**

What is said in 19 follows upon the injunction to 'live at peace with everyone'. If strife is kindled by another, his attitude must not dictate ours. Revenge is not our prerogative but God's, and he alone can exercise it in perfect righteousness and justice. The reference to wrath and leaving room to God's wrath does not mean that we should meekly submit to human wrath (although this is taught elsewhere in Scripture and is in fact consonant with the general teaching of the passage) but that we should leave the righting of wrong to God. The quotation is from Deut. 32:35 (cf. Heb. 10:30). Paul concludes the section and chapter by quoting from Prov. 25:21ff., whose words exemplify, by contrast with the vengeful spirit of 17, 19a, 'the more excellent way' (cf. 1 Cor 12:31). The 'burning coals' mean 'the burning pangs of shame' (Augustine) which the enemy will experience. Calvin comments:

*His mind will be torn in one of two ways. Either he will be softened by kindness, or if he is so ferocious that nothing will assuage him, he will be stung and tormented by the testimony of his conscience, which will feel itself overwhelmed by our kindness.*

To resort to retaliation and revenge is to admit defeat and be overcome by evil (21). Victory lies in the opposite direction by doing good. The power of well doing as a corrective to evil is much greater than we have generally realised, not least in our own lives, let alone in the lives of others. Are we not often so preoccupied with avoiding sin (which is negative) that doing good (which is positive) is only given a minor role. Many people are much too engrossed with their sins and their problems, and this, if they but knew it, is what makes them so dull. To reverse this process will bring a sparkle to their lives.

## **CIVIL RESPONSIBILITIES 13:1-7**

### **13:1-4 THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL AUTHORITY (I)**

This new subject matter is not as disconnected with what precedes it as may first appear, and Denney can hardly be right in saying, 'There is not a word to indicate how the transition is made' from the one to the other; for as has already been indicated (see on 12:1-2). Paul is intent on applying the basic Christian ethic to different aspects of the believer's experience as he lives out his new life in the old order. This is sufficient to establish the connection, for the old order is the one in which the civil authority operates and the Christian's attitude to it must be made clear. Hence the application of the Christian ethic (12:1-2) is next applied to the 'governing authorities that have been established by God'. There is a more immediate connection also: this new subject is really prepared for in

12:17-19, where 'taking the law into one's own hands' is expressly forbidden, the case being taken to higher authority, that is to God. The reference in 12:18 to live at peace with everyone also provides a link with the thought of the passage here (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2 for a cognate theme). The setting of the section is also significant: on the one hand it is placed between two powerful emphases on the supremacy of love (12:9-21 and 13:8-10), and on the other, in the light of the coming day of Christ (13:11-14). It is against this twofold background that Paul's teaching must be understood. The relation of the believer to civil authority (1) as set forth here must be regarded as one special aspect of his relation to law in general (see on 7:7-25). In Christ the believer is free from the law, but this does not give him liberty to ignore its sanctions, or transgress it with impunity. That this applies equally to civil law and to the governing authorities Paul makes clear here.

### **13:1-4 THE CHRISTIAN AND CIVIL AUTHORITY (II)**

We need to see the Christian's relationship to civil authority in the context of the basic doctrinal position stated by Paul in chs. 1 – 8. He has taught that the Christian is a new creature, a member of the new order, having been rescued and delivered from the kingdom of darkness. Has he, then, nothing to do with the old order? That is the question. And Paul teaches, as we have seen, that the new life has to be lived out under the old order, and subject to its legislation. Therefore, obedience to lawfully constituted authority is a Christian duty, not only because it is desirable to have law and order in society but also because law and order have been instituted by God, and rulers ordained by him. The function of law (and of governing authorities) is initially to exercise a restraint upon lawlessness and disorder, and to prevent eruptions of evil in society (3). If a Christian disregards or disobeys the lawful authority, this is therefore tantamount to disregarding or disobeying God himself. Not only so: if governments are ordained by God, and not merely expedients instituted by men, then Christians ought to be politically-minded, and to shoulder their due responsibility for the welfare of society. The fact that as Christians we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth does not entitle us to contract out of our duty of being our brother's keeper; even if he may never let us care for his soul, his bodily needs have a claim upon us, on the grounds of common humanity. Being 'saved out of this world' is supposed to make us more, not less, human than we were before. The fact is, we are citizens of two worlds as Christians and we have responsibilities in both. We must see to it that we fulfil them with integrity of purpose.

### 13:1-4 THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE AND THE LAW

The following passage is taken from Brunner's Dogmatics in a chapter entitled 'The Commandment of Love and the Law' which serves to underline and clarify the issue that Paul is dealing with in this chapter:

*In the midst of his discussion about agape, Paul turns to the question of how the Christian should relate himself to the world institution which today we call the state. And now follows Rom. 13:1-7, the astonishing and at first glance extraordinary discussion, which culminates in the statement that this power, the (Roman) state, is the ordinance of God and that its officials are the servants of God. Now the state does precisely what the Christians, the members of the ekklesia, are not permitted to do; it avenges evil, it punishes. For this power which is so opposed to the nature of agape is 'God's ordinance' 'to thee for good'. For the ekklesia, too, like all human life, needs this ordinance, for otherwise there would be chaos. Now this has nothing at all to do with agape-teaching, this is simply the world – the world in which even the Christian lives. But he must not oppose this secular ordinance or even despise it. Rather must he regard it as God's ordinance, to which he owes obedience, and whose officials he should honour as 'God's servants' ... (The state is) the very epitome of everything that is secular, which as such stands over against Christ, and is different from the Church and stands in antagonism to it! This antagonism is most clearly seen in the fact that force is a characteristic of the ordinance of the state, the hard brutal power of compulsion and retribution – the sword. There has never been a state that was able to dispense with the sword, to do without the power of weapons, whether of the police or the military forces. Without this it would cease to be a state. And yet this state is 'the minister of God to thee for good' ... (Here) Paul limits himself to one thing: 'By this example you Christians see that you are in fact in the world, and I say to you that in the first place you should respect the powers of this world and adapt yourselves to them. Although by doing so you enter into an entirely different sphere – you emerge from your ekklesia-brotherhood into the world – you do not thereby cease to be under the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ and his agape. And in this way you must understand the commandment of love, that it has validity even in the world and the realm of its laws, but as the motive power of your action and not as itself a law.*

### **13:1-4 THE JEWS' KNOWN RESENTMENT OF IMPERIAL DOMINATION**

What Paul may have in mind in embarking on this discussion is the known fact that the Jews as a race deeply resented imperial domination; many of them believed, on the strength of Deut. 17:15, that to submit to a Gentile king was a transgression of God's command and they needed little pretext to make them withhold payment of taxes and tribute to Rome (cf. Matt. 22:15-22 where our Lord's answer to the Pharisees, 'give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's,' is clearly the basis of Paul's teaching here). The Christians at first were regarded by the Romans as simply a sect of the Jews and they may in fact have been tempted to share this Jewish sentiment, and regard themselves as no longer under subjection to any worldly power. If such a spirit prevailed in the church at Rome, it is easy to understand Paul's concern to establish general Christian principles in the matter for their guidance. The reference in 7 to taxes and revenue seems to confirm that this is in view. 'To do you good' in 4 has the sense of 'to promote what is good for you'. It is not that the established powers directly serve men: they serve God, being his instruments, but in maintaining law and order for God (whether consciously or not) they work for the good of those over whom they rule. By the same token, however, they become a source of fear to wrongdoers, for they express and execute the divine displeasure against them. 'Bearing the sword' is almost a technical term symbolising the authority invested in magistrates to impose sentence on the wrongdoers.

### **13:5-7 MAGISTERIAL AUTHORITY DIVINELY INSTITUTED**

Two reasons are adduced (5) from what has been said in 1-4 for the Christian's obedience to the authorities: one is external and pragmatic, lest he incur the punishment of God (through the action of the magistrate) if he does not obey; the other inward, namely, that he recognises magisterial authority as divinely instituted, and therefore to be obeyed as a matter of conscience. Paul illustrates this in 6: it is on account of our moral duty to obey rulers that we pay taxes. It is no arbitrary decision that lays such a demand upon us: it is God's prescribed way of maintaining order and well-being in society (this is the thought implied in Christ's words, 'Give to Caesar' – it is a matter of duty and moral obligation). Laws are generally framed by the authorities for the public good, and to violate them from private and purely selfish considerations is not a course open to the believer, who, by definition, is one who has died to self (6:6). There must therefore be a due fulfilment of all legitimate obligations (7), taxes (paid by a subject nation to its overlord), revenue (indirect taxes paid for the support of civil government), respect (in the sense of awe or reverence due to those in authority over us), and honour, since to treat them with less than honour would be to dishonour God who appointed them.

### **13:5-7 BUT WHAT OF EVIL RULERS?**

History has shown that Paul's teaching here has given rise to great difficulties, particularly in the question of the Christian's attitude to evil rulers. It is true that when Paul wrote, the savage persecution of Nero had not yet begun, but it would be far from the mark to suppose that his teaching was merely prudential, and that in harsher circumstances it would have been different. Paul is writing theologically, and the Reformers followed him here, as Reinhold Niebuhr comments, 'in giving government and the principle of order an absolute preference over rebellion and political chaos,' but (Niebuhr continues), 'this tended to ally the Christian church too uncritically with the centres of power in political life, and tempted it to forget that government is frequently the primary source of injustice and oppression.' It was for this reason that Calvin's later attitude was to emphasise the importance of placing rulers under the judgement of God also, and regarding them as instruments of God for checking individual sin. Peter's assertion in Acts 5:29, 'We must obey God rather than men,' has force here, and underlines the issue of conscience raised in 5. If it is not possible to submit for the sake of conscience, then obeying God is not only more important, but infinitely more important.

### **THE LAW OF LOVE AND LIGHT 13:8-14**

#### **13:8-14 THE 'COMING DAY' WILL RIGHT ALL WRONGS**

But it is important for us to see that submission to the governing authorities and the whole concept of authority duly appointed, is set in the light of, and over against, the coming day of God: 'the night is nearly over; the day is almost here' (12). What is meant by this is that Paul is telling us that we must view all the seeming injustices and wrongs of this life in relation to 'the Day when all wrong shall stand revealed' and right vindicated. It is the emphasis made in 12:12, 'joyful in hope, patient in affliction.' Indignity, injustice, persecution – all these are bearable, and can be borne by the believer because they will only last 'till he come'. The Day is coming when all wrong will be put right: look to that Day, says Paul. This is not, however, so fatalistic and acquiescent as it at first seems. The fact that nothing but the second coming will effectively set the world to rights and bring everlasting peace does not absolve us from the duty of seeking to make it as peaceable a place as possible to live in, in the meantime. But that same fact should – and this is the important thing – enable us to view such issues as from time to time vex the spirit of believers in their proper perspective. It is not, for example, the most important thing in the world that justice should be established in society, if in the process the realities of the world to come are going to be forgotten. And this of course is the danger. We become this-worldly, not in a derogatory

sense, but deeply earnest for the rights of men. We become indeed so this-worldly that the faith we profess is only seriously considered by many because of its social implications. We have, as a whole, forgotten that this world is not the most important reality for men; and because we have forgotten it, the whole emphasis is upon making the most of this life, improving conditions of living in society – laudable in itself certainly, but with a terrifically fatal potential, in that men's preparation for the world to come is so often discounted and neglected. We shall consider this further in tomorrow's note.

### **13:8-14 ARE 'GREEN' ISSUES MORE IMPORTANT THAN 'ETERNAL'?**

It is of course possible to lay the kind of emphasis on 'getting people saved' that sits lightly and indifferently to men's social needs, and this is wrong. But it is also wrong, and much more wrong, to neglect the soul for the body. Jesus said, 'What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?' This needs to be related to some of the burning social issues of the day. 'Green' issues are becoming more and more prominent, global warming, conservation issues, third world debt, and suchlike – these are all important, critical issues, but to make these and other things everything in the Christian message is both foolish and dangerous. It is true that men of good will want to do all in their power to resolve them. But when they are solved, or even if they are never solved, and the whole earth blighted and made barren, there will still remain the question of heaven and hell, and it will still be necessary to ask the question, 'Where will you spend eternity?' And in a day when so much of the emphasis is thrown upon making the most of this life – as J.B. Phillips says in his Preface to Letters to Young Churches '... even Christianity is only seriously considered in many quarters because of its social implications' – it is more than disquieting that the reality of this eternal dimension in the gospel – which makes it a gospel – is so substantially discounted. It is not always realised that what are called 'the social implications of the gospel' flow from the gospel itself, and that when the true dimensions of the gospel become obscured, everything else becomes subject to the 'law of diminishing returns'. When social concern becomes severed from its true roots, is it surprising that it should ultimately wither and die?

### **13:14 THE 'OVERPLUS' OF LOVE**

The change from the subject of submission to the governing authorities to wider and more general matters does not mean that what Paul now says in 8ff. has no application to the earlier theme. The fact that the verses dealing with the governing powers are placed between two passages dealing with Christian love (12:9-21 and 13:8-14) is a strong indication that this



spirit of love is relevant to the whole discussion of the Christian's attitude to authority. We are not only to be careful to give all due submission to the authorities, and thus 'obey the rules', but also to go the second mile, for there is to be the 'overplus' of love in all human relationships, and this applies just as much in relation to the state as to individuals. What is required is more than law-abiding citizenship, in the sense of paying taxes and tribute; there must also be an infusion of a spirit of love into society. This means that the attitude that must characterise us in our relationship to the state is to be one shot through and through with love (this is one of the meanings of our Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law ...'). There is to be the overplus of love in all our human relationships. It is more than a question of being a law-abiding citizen, paying taxes and such like, but one of infusing society with the spirit of love. One has only to consider that, for example, if industry had more in it of the family spirit of love it would be a very much better and healthier thing both for management and for labour. For this would lay an immediate embargo on certain kinds of behaviour, and bring about better relations all round. 'Love does no harm to its neighbour.' (13:10)

### **13:8-14 THE OBLIGATION TO 'LOVE'**

The obligation to love is something which in its very nature can never be fully discharged. A continual debt is involved, since in Christ we owe ourselves to men and this is a debt that can therefore never be discharged. This may be referred back to 12:1 as being 'our spiritual act of service' in face of the mercies of the gospel. To love is an inescapable duty laid on us by that gospel, and this is the only real, as well as the only adequate, evidence of true consecration. Yet, paradoxically (8), to love is to fulfil the law, and therefore increasingly to pay the debt we owe. The commandments quoted in 9 are those of the second table of the Law, concerning duty toward our neighbour. Paul reiterates our Lord's teaching in summing up their message in the words of Lev. 19:18 (cf. Matt. 22:37-40), thereby interpreting their true spirit. The point of these and all other commandments is to lay a restraint on harming others in any way; no one who loves another will do him ill, whether by murder, adultery, theft, false witness or covetousness. 'Where love is, the things which the law forbids do not occur,' says Nygren, and he adds, by way of explaining the relation of love and law, 'Not by fulfilment of law is the law fulfilled, but by life "in Christ" and "in love".' Paul has not thought here, of course, of any doctrine of justification by loving; love is not a way of salvation, but the expressed response that faith makes to the mercies of God in Christ. 'The law of love is the ethical channel through which the new life in Christ flows.' (Barrett)

### **13:8-14 PRESSURES ONLY 'TILL HE COME'**

The chapter ends with an appeal for decent behaviour based on the imminence of the coming day of the Lord. Denney takes this to refer to the exhortation to mutual love as the fulfilling of the law, but while this is right there is a wider reference also to the question of submission to authority (1-7). Paul has already spoken of being joyful in hope and patient in affliction (12:12) and he now explains why the Christian, even though oppressed and persecuted by evil rulers, can endure affliction with patience and even detachment. He can do so because he views all the injustices and wrongs of this life in relation to the day when all wrong shall stand revealed. However great the pressures, they will last only 'until he comes'; they are therefore bearable, and even in the midst of them he can rejoice (cf. 5:3; 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). The summons to love, however (8), is no less urgent in the light of the day of God, and demands constant vigilance and watchfulness, since sin still seeks to regain control of what it has lost, and draw the believer back again into the old tyranny. This would mean being conformed to this world (12:2) instead of allowing the new order to control and determine his life. The metaphor in 12 depicts the believer standing on the frontier between the two worlds of darkness and light. The age of darkness and night has almost run its course, and the signs of the new dawning are evident, as it casts its light upon his life. This is the incentive to put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Paul speaks of 'armour' rather than 'deeds' of light as if to emphasise the battle involved both in keeping spiritually awake and in loving.

### **13:8-14 THE PRICE OF FREEDOM – ETERNAL VIGILANCE**

Behaving decently (13) (that is, conduct suitable to the daytime), corresponds to putting on the armour of light (12), and is described first negatively in 13b, then positively in 14. 'As in the daytime' may be taken simply as a contrast to 'the night' and 'darkness' (12), or possibly with reference to the new age, as if that day were already here. The works of darkness mentioned in 13 – orgies and drunkenness and such like – sins of self-indulgence and self-will – are marks of the old order and the antithesis of love (9-10). It should be noted that in speaking of the two ways in these verses it is not holiness that Paul sets over against orgies and drunkenness, but Christ. This is important. It is possible, after all, to be too preoccupied with holiness, in the wrong way, and this can lead to a rather forbidding, unattractive kind of sanctification which repels rather than appeals. The word 'decently' (13) means 'with grace', and speaks of the need for attractive, Christlike living, and this is possible only when the beauty of the Lord is upon us. To make holiness rather than Christ one's preoccupation and aim is to have missed the real point of Paul's teaching here and elsewhere. Christ is our holiness (1 Cor. 1:30), and he, not holiness, must be our life. 'Putting

on the armour of light' and 'clothing yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ' are synonymous phrases explaining each other. The Christian puts on Christ in conversion or rebirth (symbolised by baptism, 6:3; Gal. 3:27) once for all, in the sense that 'he identifies himself, by faith, with Christ in his death and resurrection' (Denney). But this is accompanied by a progressive ethical transformation, 'a clothing of the soul in the moral disposition and habits of Christ' (Gifford), which can also be described as clothing oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole Christian life is a putting off the old self and putting on the new (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10); and the relevance of Paul's synonym, the armour of light, is seen in the warning with which he concludes the paragraph. There is no point at which the flesh and its desires no longer constitute a danger to the believer. The 'night life' of the old order, as Brunner graphically calls it, must be constantly guarded and fought against. Here, as everywhere else in the Christian life, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance.

## **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY 14:1-12**

### **14:1-4 THE STRONG AND THE WEAK**

The theme of this new section continues the discussion of Christian consecration that was stated in summary form in 12:1-2, and applied first of all to relationships within the church (12:3-8), and in the world (12:9-21), and then to civil relationships (13:1-14). Now it is brought to bear upon, and applied to, the problems arising between those whom Paul calls 'the strong' and 'the weak'. The fact that this is a substantial and lengthy discussion (extending to 15:13) surely makes it clear that the apostle is dealing with particular rather than general issues. Those who are familiar with commentaries on the epistle will be aware that there has been a great deal of discussion among the commentators as to who these parties were and also the purpose Paul had in dealing with the matter at such length. There has been wide and extensive debate on both these issues, and in view of this it is unwise to be either naive or simplistic in one's assertions on the one hand, or over dogmatic in one's interpretations on the other. When so distinguished a scholar as Cranfield cautions against assuming that the nature of the problem dealt with here is obvious, and indicates that there are at least six interpretations (with variations within them) that require to be considered, we need to be careful lest we make facile judgements about them that have failed to appreciate the complexity of the situation. Perhaps it would be easier to determine what is not in view than what is: the issue was not between true believers and a group of legalists who wished to make Jewish rites and customs an essential condition of salvation, for in 1-12 Paul advocates tolerance of 'the weak' by 'the strong', whereas when the purity of the gospel and the believer's freedom from the law were at stake, he was both intolerant and inflexible (cf. Gal. 2:5). At the same time, however, it is clear from 15:7-13 that the dispute between the weak

and the strong was very much connected with tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians. It is therefore likely that 'the strong' were Gentile believers who had grasped and were exulting in the freedom of the gospel, and that 'the weak' were Jewish believers (or those under Jewish influence) who had scruples about certain matters, observing strict regulations for religious reasons, from an inadequate appreciation of Christian liberty.

#### **14:1-4 HOW TO SOLVE DOUBTFUL ISSUES**

Paul's attitude to the weak brother is clear at the outset: he is to be welcomed for himself as one for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 8:11), and not as an opportunity for the strong to browbeat him and 'put him right'. 'Disputable matters' (1) is translated in NEB as 'without attempting to settle doubtful points', and by Barrett as 'not simply for discussion of his scruples'. The Greek reads 'not to pass judgement on his doubts' (i.e. his anxious thoughts about various matters of scruple). The tendency clearly was for the strong to be contemptuous of such attitudes, and this Paul sharply rebukes. The weakness is not of course a moral one, but refers to lack of spiritual breadth and perception. Paul states both views in 2, and gives his advice in 3ff. The strong must not despise the weak for abstaining from meat, and the weak must not be censorious of the strong for eating it. These are natural temptations in each case, and must be resisted. To do either is to pass judgement (4), and this is not permitted, since men are answerable to God, not to their fellows, for their actions. The emphasis, however, in 3b and 4 is on the weak believer: it is he who is being warned particularly about judging (the strong believer's tendency to contempt is firmly dealt with later), for Paul is evidently aware of the danger lest the whole fellowship be held to ransom by the scruples of the weak, in a form of moral and spiritual blackmail. As Denney says, 'It is easy to lapse from scrupulousness about one's own conduct into Pharisaism about that of others.' To obviate this, Paul reminds the weak that God has welcomed the strong, and his stand for freedom will be vindicated by him who is able to keep him in the midst of the temptations to abuse that true freedom brings.

#### **14:5-7 OBSERVANCE OF 'DAYS'**

Paul takes up another example here, the religious observance of days. This may be a separate issue – i.e. those who abstained from meats also observed special days as holy; or, it may mean that among those who had scruples about eating meat some abstained habitually, and others only on certain holy days. It does not matter to the argument which is held. It has been assumed that observance of the Sabbath or the Lord's Day is in view here, but there is insufficient ground for the assumption. Denney thinks it improbable, adding however that

‘the principle on which the apostle argues defines the Christian attitude to both’ (see Gal. 4:10-11; Col. 2:16-17 for a similar emphasis). There is no basis here for an anti-sabbatarian position, and we must in any case distinguish between legalistic sabbatarianism and a true honouring of the Lord’s Day. Paul does not pass judgement on either viewpoint but rather insists that each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. This is not a ‘carte blanche’ entitling a man to come to his own conclusions in the matter, but an appeal to think things through and form his convictions ‘in Christ’, and in relation to the principle laid down in 12:1. The first and indispensable necessity in resolving and answering the question, ‘Is there anything wrong in this for me?’ is a true consecration to Christ. In this light, the question then becomes, ‘Is this compatible with consecration, is it the kind of thing a consecrated Christian would be doing?’ We continue this discussion in tomorrow’s note.

### **14:5-7 NEED TO THINK THINGS THROUGH**

We may say that 5b is the first basic principle Paul gives us for our guidance, and it is an appeal to think things through (again as so often in this section of the epistle, the emphasis is on mind). Conduct must be based on rational conviction arrived at through the exercise of the sanctified and consecrated mind, not on prejudice and taboos. We are not to adopt a line of conduct merely because other people practise it. There are ‘do’s and don’ts’ in Christian life that are much more a matter of prejudice than of clear, thought-out conviction, and they need reinstatement in the light of Paul’s teaching here. It is particularly easy, in this sphere, to be wise above that which is written, and to fall into the error of the Pharisees and make the Word of God void by the accumulation of tradition. The all-important consideration is the will of the Lord, since the believer’s life is not his own, but belongs to him. This is the meaning of 7, and is the principle underlying the statements in 6. The phrase ‘to the Lord’ is very significant in this connection. All our behaviour and activities must be related to him, and if anything cannot be shared with him, it cannot be right to do. This has sometimes been put in the form of a question, ‘Is this something that Jesus would like?’ or, ‘Could we take him with us in this?’. But this is not quite so simple as it sounds, for some might answer in the affirmative, and some in the negative. It is clear, then, that it is really a question of knowing him intimately enough to know his mind on these matters – which brings us back again to 12:1-2. We may think that the Lord could have no objection to such and such, but in fact the real test is whether by our participation in the thing the intimacy of his fellowship is withdrawn from us, and the warmth of his smile fades. There are those who have never been intimate enough with him to experience this, but those who have know that it is something which does happen when we overstep the bounds of his good and perfect will. In the light of this does it not become clearer than ever that everything depends on knowing him in ever closer fellowship? The nearer to him we live, the more sensitively aware we shall be of what

pleases or displeases him, and the less likely therefore to be in doubt about doubtful questions.

#### **14:5-7 NO CUT AND DRIED ANSWERS**

It will be useful at this point to pause to see the way in which Paul approaches these questions. There are those who really prefer to have a set of definite precepts to guide them in all doubtful matters, to be told specifically that this is right and that is wrong, and that is an end of it. They want the Christian life, and they want Christian conduct, to be cut and dried. They want to be told what to do and what not to do. But we must see that this is precisely not what Paul does here, in answer to these questions. He refuses to give cut and dried answers which believers could take and apply as an outward pattern of behaviour – and for two reasons: first of all, his concern is with inward reality, not outward conformity; for the adoption of an outward pattern could easily have little bearing on the conditions of the heart. Remember the Pharisees! And secondly, an outward pattern of behaviour can so easily lapse into legalism. To declare outright that Christians must abstain from meats would simply be to concede the victory to legalism; and to say the opposite, that they should without misgiving eat meats, would be just the same. This would reduce the meaning of being a Christian to following certain outward usages, to eat or not to eat. And this Paul precisely denies, as we see in 17: ‘The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ And how wise Paul is in this, for it is a real danger in Christian life to fall into such a legalistic perversion of the faith. And so, what Paul does here is to enunciate certain broad principles for the guidance of believers, and leaves them to work them out for themselves by hard, honest-to-goodness thinking.

#### **14:8-12 IMPLICATIONS OF CONSECRATION**

Paul now amplifies what he has said in the foregoing verses, and underlines the implications of consecration, which means to ‘be the Lord’s’, to belong utterly to him in life or in death and in all else. What we need to realise is that Christ’s death and resurrection impose an absolute Lordship upon us, so that we are never in the position of being able to do as we please. This is echoed elsewhere in Scripture in the idea that life is a stewardship rather than our owning it as a personal possession. We have not properly understood the gospel if we do not realise that in its claim upon us we are under obligation to please Christ alone. There is an elemental simplicity in this, and one which should make basic attitudes clear and plain. It is only when we try to please ourselves or others as well as the Lord that life becomes complicated. And if it should be thought that such one-track loyalty and devotion is



too restrictive, we must remember the wonderful Christian paradox expressed so aptly in George Matheson's lines

*My will is not my own  
Till Thou hast made it Thine*

It is only when we are captive to his Word and will that we attain real freedom. We may be sure that when our sole desire is to please him we will in no wise be the losers for it. After all, it is not to a philosophy or to an abstraction that we are called to give our homage, but to a lover. We need not be afraid!

### **14:8-12 ANSWERABLE TO GOD**

The fact that believers belong to God (cf. the 'master-servant' relationship in 4) and are therefore answerable to him for their actions, not to one another, and that we shall all alike be called to give an account of our stewardship before God's judgement seat (10), makes both the censoriousness of the weak and the contempt of the strong impermissible. How we live our Christian lives is something for which we shall be answerable to God not to men, hence the importance of being fully persuaded in our own minds about any course of action or any attitude to others. The entire biblical witness insists on reminding us of this solemn reality that lies ahead of each one of us (cf. Isa. 45:23). Jesus himself tells us that men shall give account of every careless word that they have spoken (Matt. 12:36), and if careless words come in for reckoning, how much more the harsh, censorious words or the clever, contemptuous words, used by the weak and the strong in judging each other, words which we so easily forget after they are uttered, but which often leave a permanent scar on the hearts they have wounded. How careful we should be! Paul thus lifts the whole question to the highest level, relating it to the will of God as the paramount consideration, and to the reality of judgement. In this solemn light it is important to hold reasoned convictions, and to respect these in others when they are not our own. There must be mutual tolerance and forbearance, and where there are differences of opinion sincerely held we must agree to differ, thus keeping 'the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Eph. 4:3).

### **CHRISTIAN LOVE 14:13-23**

#### **4:13-15 FREE – BUT NOT TO PLEASE OURSELVES**

The argument now advances to another stage, and Paul insists that the only judgement believers ought to make is to decide never to put a stumbling block in your brother's way

(13). In 7, he has said that none of us lives to himself alone, and now the question of the influence one man's conduct may have on another is dealt with. The burden here falls on the strong: by lack of consideration for the weak, the strong may hinder them in their spiritual life. Paul has already spoken at length about Christian liberty (cf. chs. 6 – 8, *passim*), and presupposes this in what he says of the strong in 14:1-12. Now he shows how that liberty is to be expressed in a particular situation. We are set free, not to please ourselves, but to please God; and this may well mean that, on occasion, liberty for the Christian will be conditioned and limited by the law of love. This is the theme of the second half of the chapter. Once again, the question of food is the illustration. In this Paul states his own position clearly: he stands with the strong in his persuasion that 'no food is unclean in itself' (14). But this must not be misconstrued to mean, 'Nothing is good or ill but thinking makes it so.' Paul is not referring to moral issues: in that realm things are objectively right or wrong in themselves, whether we think them so or not. It is non-ethical matters, such as food, drink, or days, that he has in mind, and here he echoes Christ's teaching in Mk. 7:14ff. (cf. also Acts 10:9-16). The weak believer, however, may regard food as unclean: for him therefore it is unclean, and to eat it would violate and defile his conscience, even though it is not unclean in itself. By the same token, he will be distressed if he sees the strong believer, who has no such scruples, eating it (15). For the latter to do so, however, would no longer be acting in love, and he must not take the risk of destroying the weak believer for whom Christ died. It cannot be harmless and he ought not to allow himself the liberty of doing it. The question therefore is not, 'Is there any harm in it for me?' but, 'If I do it, is it likely to harm him?' And if there is any likelihood of that, I dare not do it, for doing it would no longer be acting in love.

#### **14:16-18 LAW OF LIBERTY AND LAW OF LOVE**

There are some very profound thoughts here. We can discern two laws operating in the life of the Christian, the law of liberty and the law of love. In Christ, as we have already seen in our studies, we are set free, and that freedom is total. Augustine expressed the philosophy of Christian living in the well-known words, 'Love God and do as you like.' In theory, that is exactly the Christian position, and the freedom it gives is very comprehensive. But in practice, it works out differently, for this reason: we may have grasped the essence of biblical teaching about the glorious liberty of the children of God and realised that this brings a wonderful emancipation to our lives. But the other Christian, the weaker brother, may not have understood or grasped this as fully. He is still concerned about food and days, and our attitude toward these things disturbs him. Now, says Paul, the law of liberty so far as you are concerned, must be limited for his sake, by the law of love ('what you consider good' in 16 means 'your Christian liberty', and it is justly censurable if it lacks love and rides roughshod

over others), and since the weak are ever with us, we are rarely as free in practice as we are in theory.

#### **14:16-18 'EXPULSIVE POWER OF A NEW AFFECTION'**

If the strong are tempted to cavil at what was said at the end of yesterday's note, and say, 'Why should our liberty be curtailed by these foolish scruples?', Paul answers, 'Are you going to make an issue of this? If you react so sharply to the suggestion that you should abstain from food for the weaker brother's sake, perhaps you are not so free as you think you are. Remember, the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.' This is a great word in 17. Christianity is never a matter of 'do's or don'ts', either for the strong or for the weak believer. There are, of course, 'do's and don'ts' in Christian life, but they are incidental, not central, and must not be given a central place. If they are, the real dynamic of the faith is lost. The reason why a Christian shows marked changes in his habits is not that he is conforming to a series of 'do's and don'ts', but that a new kind of life has gripped him. As Dr Thomas Chalmers once put it, it is 'the expulsive power of a new affection' that makes the difference.

#### **14:19-23 CHRISTIANITY OF THE HEART, NOT OF EXTERNALS**

It has been debated whether righteousness and peace (17) are to be taken as elsewhere in the epistle, describing the believer's objective relation to God (cf. 5:1) or as ethical terms denoting the fruit of the Spirit. Denney is surely right in saying that, 'Paul did not thus distinguish ethical and religious'; and that the ethical 'is secured by the religious, and by it alone'. The simple point made, however, is that the kingdom of God (here practically synonymous with 'Christianity') is not a matter of mere externals, but of the heart. It is when this is recognised (this is the force of 'in this way' in 18) and acted upon that our service is pleasing to God and approved by men. Christian liberty must therefore have an eye to what makes for peace in the fellowship and will lead to building up the common life of the fellowship (19). This, with 20a, which repeats the warning of 15b, means that the strong believer must, before exercising liberty to eat as he will, consider how his action may affect the peace of the church and its highest welfare. 20b repeats the conviction stated in 14 that all food is clean, but warns the strong that not all eating is good (so Denney): it is wrong when it causes others to fall (either by grieving their consciences or by tempting them to indulge in something their consciences disapprove of (23)). Thus Paul can make it a rule for the strong believer that he must neither eat meat, drink wine, nor do anything else that will

cause his brother to fall (21). Abstinence for the sake of others is a fulfilment of the law of love, and is more important than the expression of liberty.

#### **14:19-23 SAFEGUARD AGAINST PARALYSIS**

The practical safeguard against the paralysis that could result from impossible limitations imposed on Christian freedom by the scruples of the weak is represented by what is said in 22: the strong believer's faith is best kept between himself and God, and not exercised needlessly before the weak to disturb their faith. The liberty of the strong is fullest when they are not involved with, or are in view of, the weaker brother, but on their own with God. Paul turns again in 23 to the weaker brother. In contrast to 22b, the man with doubts, who eats without the full approval of his conscience, is condemned because his action does not spring from faith. This is not merely subjective: it is the condemnation of God also. He not only contracts a sense of guilt, he incurs guilt in God's sight, as the phrase 'everything that does not come from faith is sin' makes clear (23b). Paul envisages the possibility that the weak believer may be prevailed upon by the example of his strong brother to act without the full consent of his conscience, and against his better judgement; and since this would be the opposite of being 'fully convinced in his own mind' (5) and therefore contrary to the basic principle of Christian ethics (12:1-2), it would be sin for him to do so. Conscience even when not fully enlightened, cannot be violated with impunity. The Christian, then, is committed to live by faith and in faith, and may not commit himself to any action out of character with that commitment. And when both weak and strong seek to live on this high plain, harmony on a much deeper level than was possible before will result and, paradoxically, both love and liberty will increase.

#### **THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST 15:1-6**

##### **15:1-6 'WE ... OUGHT ... NOT ... TO ... PLEASE ... OURSELVES'**

Paul has made it clear that the exercise of Christian liberty is limited considerably by the law of love. The principle underlying this teaching, everywhere implicit in ch. 14, is now explicitly stated in 1, 'We ought not to please ourselves.' This is the answer to any possible objection of the strong against Paul's uncompromising demand for the curtailment of their liberty for the sake of the weak. To insist on their full liberty would make Paul wonder whether they were as free as they supposed, for the freedom Christ gives is not that of self-assertion but of self-sacrifice, and this is indicated by the word translated 'bear', which means both 'to bear with', in the sense of putting up with or enduring, and also 'to bear' in

the sense of sharing a load. The strong must both endure the burden of irritating and limiting restrictions, and also try to help the weak in their weaknesses. Living to God (cf. 6:10-11) involves dying to self and living for our neighbour's highest good (2). The supreme example in this is Christ. He was the only truly free man, and he chose not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. This is the highest freedom, and to understand it is the fundamental issue not only in this matter but in the whole of Christian life and experience. It explains Paul's phrase 'living sacrifices' in 12:1, and indicates in categorical terms the nature of the response that the gospel seeks to elicit from us. This is the meaning of faith, biblically considered: it lies on the other side of a death (to self) that we must die.

### **15:1-6 CHRIST'S EXAMPLE WITNESSED TO IN THE PSALMS**

It is striking that Paul quotes from the Old Testament rather than from any gospel tradition in instancing Christ's self-denying love. It is absurd to infer from this that the apostle had no knowledge of Christ's earthly life: rather, he found in the words of Ps. 69:9 an apt summary of all our Lord came to be and to do. F.F. Bruce maintains that the words of the Psalm 'imply that Jesus endured reproach and insult for his faithfulness to God which he might have avoided by choosing an easier path'. He put the will of God first, rather than self-regarding considerations, even when it meant obedience to death (Phil. 2:8) and all the sufferings of the cross. This is the example for the believer's life: even when bearing with the failings of the weak involves making very real sacrifices in personal liberty, they must be made in the spirit of Christ, for love's sake. Paul justifies his use of the Old Testament quotation (4) by reminding his readers that what was written in the past was written to teach us. This truth is based on the unity of the Scriptures; as Dodd says, 'There is nothing of permanent religious value in the Old Testament which has not an application to Christ, and through him, to Christians'. His example in not pleasing himself, with all that it cost him, is therefore upheld by the Scriptures in general and becomes mandatory for us. We must follow the course mapped out for us in them, as he did.

### **15:1-6 SCRIPTURE DECISIVE IN FORMING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER**

The Greek text in 4 reads, 'through the patience (endurance) and through the comfort (encouragement) of the Scriptures': both qualities are imparted to the lives of believers, thus giving them hope (cf. 5:3-4). The RSV words 'steadfastness' and 'encouragement' are better than the AV and NIV in that they indicate how difficult it can be to live the self-sacrificing life of 'not pleasing ourselves'. In this connection one commentator reminds us 'how difficult it sometimes is to act towards weaker brethren in a spirit of love. Our Christian character is

seldom so severely tried as when we are put to inconvenience by the spiritual childishness of members of the church.’ Paul sums up his teaching in a prayer for unity and harmony between strong and weak (5). The steadfastness and encouragement needed for this come from God, through the Scriptures. This is an important point in Paul’s thought. What he is advocating is the scriptural view of life: to be steeped in the teaching of the Scriptures, their sanctions and demands, their riches and resources – this is the way to that true and continuing selflessness that makes harmony possible and unites the hearts of believers to praise and glorify God (6). The Scriptures are decisive in the formation of true Christian character – not because they have any magical property, but because we meet with the living God in them, and he himself is the fountainhead of all endurance and encouragement.

## **CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD 15:7-13**

### **15:7 GOD’S FORBEARANCE A PATTERN TO FOLLOW**

It must in fact be God’s patience and forbearance with us in Christ (7) that provides the pattern for our attitude to one another. If we remember how patient and long-suffering God has been with us, we shall find it less difficult to mortify the exasperation we feel toward those fellow Christians we find it difficult to get on with because of their scruples. The exhortation here to ‘accept one another’ forms a bridge between 1-6 and 7-13, where Paul widens his perspective from the special case of the weak and the strong to the more general division between Jew and Gentile. On the one hand, what he says in 7 rounds off the entire argument unfolded in 14:1 – 15:6 (it will be noted that the same word ‘accept’ (7) is also used in 14:1). If Christ has accepted (‘welcomed’ in RSV) both the strong and the weak, they are surely bound to accept one another and live in harmony. On the other hand, Paul applies this principle to the wider matter of relations between the Jews and the Gentiles, with which the earlier issue seems certainly to have been connected. The argument is the same in both cases. The reconciliation that Christ has effected in his cross and resurrection has reconciled men not only to God but also to one another. It will be helpful to read Paul’s exposition of this theme in Eph. 2:11ff., where he fully discusses issues only implicit here, and where he speaks of the barrier of hostility between Jew and Gentile having been destroyed through the death that Jesus died, with nothing now keeping them apart.

### **15:8-13 ‘FIRST FOR THE JEW, THEN FOR THE GENTILE’**

We look first of all at Paul’s teaching in 8-9, that, ‘Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth,’ and that for two purposes: a) to confirm the promises made to



the patriarchs, and b) that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy. What does Paul mean by this? He means that Jesus was sent as a minister to the Jews, to the circumcised. And in fact, that ministry was, in the days of his flesh, confined to the Jews. But it was thus confined to the Jews, and his atoning death accomplished among the Jews, in order that its blessing and power might extend to the whole world. This is the force of what he says in 8 and 9. He has a double object in saying this:

*He writes to remind the Gentiles that it is through the Jews that they are called (into the kingdom of God); and to remind the Jews that the aim and purpose of their existence is the calling of the Gentiles. The Gentiles must remember that Christ became a Jew to save them; the Jew that Christ came among them in order that all the families of the earth might be blessed: both must realise that the aim of the whole is to proclaim God's glory.*

Handley Moule puts it this way: 'The Jew is reminded that the promise of salvation, given wholly through him, was not given wholly for him, but for all nations of men.' This is of course easily provable. The story of Abraham, beginning in Gen. 11:27, tells how he received the promise from God. This was the beginning of the Jews' history. But prior to that, and long before it, God had given the promise of redemption to mankind, in Gen. 3:15. The call of Abraham (and therefore the Jews) was only the way in which God chose to implement that promise to mankind. More of this in tomorrow's note.

### **15:8-13 'COVENANT MERCY AND FREE MERCY'**

The distinction therefore between Jew and Gentile stands not in the fact of salvation, which both were to share alike and together in the kingdom of God, but only in the manner in which they received that gracious gift. Both alike are welcomed by God in Christ; both alike have the same access by one Spirit to the Father. The difference lies in this: that the Jew was welcomed in connection with the promises made to his forefathers, thereby proving God's faithfulness to his Word; while the Gentiles were welcomed, not on account of any covenant position, but because of the abundant and free mercy of God. This is the contrast made in 8-9 between 'the patriarchs' and 'the Gentiles'. The conversion of the Jews magnifies the faithfulness of God; the conversion of the Gentiles magnifies his mercy. In connection with this distinction is the manner of their welcome (but no distinction in the fact of it). It may be recalled in our study of the meaning of the word 'redemption' in 3:24, that we spoke of the Old Testament roots of this word, and of the two different Hebrew words used, *goel* and *padah*, the first indicating that redemption is wrought by a kinsman, who acts out of a blood-tie or a covenant bond, while the second stresses the sheer unaccountable grace by which redemption is accomplished – the free mercy of God, rather than the covenant mercy

which applies to the Jews. But these are simply two aspects of the same thing. It is the free mercy of God that led to the covenanting of that mercy to the Jews, so that through them the whole world might know the everlasting mercy of God revealed in Christ.

### **15:8-13 DIFFERENCES MUST NOT BECOME DIVISIONS**

Paul is at pains to establish all this from the Scriptures, and his purpose in doing so is to emphasise that the Gentiles, having been all the time in the mind of God for blessing are on the same footing as the Jews, that the two are made one in Christ and therefore should accept and welcome one another since Christ has welcomed both alike. Four passages from the Old Testament are used in support of this position in 9-12 – Ps. 18:49; Deut. 32:43; Ps. 117:1; Isa. 11:10. Griffith Thomas makes the comment,

*If God himself, who separated Israel from all other nations, has in the Gospel cancelled this distinction as a dividing force, surely his children may follow his example and refuse to allow differences to become divisions. More especially must this be so if for centuries beforehand such an union was contemplated by God himself.*

Paul brings the whole discussion to a close with a brief prayer in which he brings all the disunity between them to the throne of grace, and echoes not only some earlier thoughts in the foregoing discussion (cf. 14:17 and 15:4-6), but also the great key words of the epistle. The reference to hope is suggested by the last word in 12. The prayer gives the antidote to the problem: the more they experience joy and peace in believing, the less they would be likely to be sidetracked and disturbed by unworthy division. As always in the New Testament (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 3:21ff., Col. 3:4-5; 1 Jn. 3:3) the Christian hope is held forth as the strongest incentive to ethical endeavour.

### **GOING ON TOGETHER FOR THE GOSPEL 15:14-33**

#### **15:14-16 THE BLESSING OF THE GOD OF HOPE**

With the prayer in 13 Paul concludes both the discussion of the problems of the weak and the strong, and the main argument and substance of the epistle. What remains takes the form of an extended epilogue in which he justifies his writing of Romans (15:14-21), discusses his future plans (15:22-33), and sends greetings from himself and his companions to various believers in Rome (16:1-23, with a warning against false teachers interjected in 17-20), and a final doxology (16:25-27). In the face of all he has said, Paul hastens to assure

the believers at Rome of his confidence in their goodness and knowledge and their ability to instruct one another (14). He is concerned lest his words might imply otherwise. It is not that they do not know these things, but no believer can know them deeply enough not to need repeated reminders of them (cf. Phil. 3:1; 1 Jn. 2:13). This is the function of God's appointed teachers, and Paul justifies his boldness on this ground. Knowledge (in the sense of discernment which grasps the fundamental issues of the gospel), goodness of heart (making them willing to apply the limitations of love to their liberty in Christ), competence to instruct one another in a spirit of unity and forbearance, are the very fruits which ought to appear in lives consecrated to God (cf. 12:1-2); and Paul will spare no effort to make them abound more and more. What a shining through of the pastor's heart is this!

### **15:14-16 'PLEASING OURSELVES – OR PLEASING HIM'**

We should notice the sequence in 14 – goodness, knowledge (in the sense of discernment), instructing. Both goodness and discernment should be there before instructing (admonishing, AV) is begun. We are all more keen to instruct others than to grow in goodness and discernment. Indeed the truly good and discerning Christian is much less prone to instruct (admonish) than might be supposed. That is why, when the instruction does come, it is worth listening to and accepting as from the Lord. On the other hand, the man who is always 'putting other people right' not only becomes a source of irritation to the fellowship, but reveals to the truly discerning a basic spiritual disharmony in his life, that needs to be resolved before true development towards maturity is possible. The offering up of the Gentiles to God (16) has a priestly connotation, but the words do not support a sacerdotal conception of the ministry, for Paul's 'priesthood' is that of offering up to God on his altar the Gentiles as the fruits of his preaching. His concern is so to proclaim the gospel to them that they, being brought to the obedience of faith, will offer themselves to God as living sacrifices. The thought of sacrifice is never very far off in Paul's mind. When our lives are a living sacrifice to God, our work and our service are likewise acceptable to him as the expression of the worship and love of our hearts. With him everything was for the glory of God, and the watchword of his life was ever 'to please him'. As he puts it in Col. 1:18, 'so that in everything he might have the supremacy'. Life becomes very simple – as we are sure it became for Paul – when it is seen ultimately to consist of only two possibilities – 'pleasing ourselves' (15:1) or 'pleasing him' (2 Tim. 2:4).

## 15:14-21 NEED FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING

T.H.L. Parker, in his fine book on Calvin's teaching, *The Oracles of God*, underlines the Reformer's insistence on the continuing need for believers to sit under the Word and receive instruction. He says:

*None may object that he finds the standard too high for him, for God it is who has commanded him to be perfect. None may think that he has advanced beyond the necessity of hearing preaching because he is able to interpret the Bible for himself. No doubt if preaching were merely a man giving spiritual advice to his religious inferiors, then the spiritually advanced would no longer need this help; but since in preaching, God himself speaks to men, no one may say that he knows sufficient or is sanctified beyond need of help from God. We see that the most learned have need to be taught, the most upright and the most righteous have need to be admonished. If God has already put us on the good road and bestowed upon us the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must not think that preaching is now unnecessary for us, for we must be led right up to the end, since our perfection is not in this world.*

Some commentators, such as Sanday and Headlam, see here a hint concerning Paul's aim in the epistle. Paul, they think, realises the power this church could be for the instruction of others in the faith, and therefore concentrates on giving it all he can impart to it, to make it all it could be for God. This may well be true; and it certainly underlines one thing beyond all controversy: it is only a church with these 'resurrection' graces established in it that will be able (to use Paul's words in Eph. 4:12-16) to lead to the increase of the body and its growth into maturity.

## 15:14-21 'PRAISE AS INNER HEALTH MADE AUDIBLE'

The implications of what Paul says in 14 about the evidences of genuine grace in his readers are very considerable. It is true that Paul has said some very frank and often blunt things to them in the epistle but this is far removed from a carping, critical spirit characteristic of those who conceive it as their mission in life to 'put other people right'. C.S. Lewis in *Reflections on the Psalms* says:

*I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected man, even if luxuriously brought*

*up and widely experienced in good cookery, could praise a very modest meal: the dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all. Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.*

## **15:17-21 PERFECT HUMILITY DISPENSES WITH MODESTY**

Paul's testimony in these verses to the reality of his work in the gospel is remarkable indeed (17ff.) but it is strange that there are those who think he would have been better to have left others to pass such a verdict on his work and not do it himself, strange also that they feel he lays himself open to the charge of having 'a swelled head'. But Paul was not under any illusion that he has done the work himself. He 'glories in Christ Jesus'; it is 'Christ who has accomplished' through him '... by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit'. Furthermore – and it is very important to understand this aright – when a man is utterly intent upon pleasing Christ, there is no room for vanity. As C.S. Lewis puts it elsewhere, 'Perfect humility dispenses with modesty'; it can stand telling the truth without being corrupted in the telling. And we would be unwise to assume that no man can attain to such a place of self-deliverance that he can speak naturally and simply of his magnificent achievements without being proud and vain. Many people, it is true, speak a great deal about themselves because they are self-centred, but, as G.K. Chesterton once pointed out, 'some people speak about themselves because they are not self-centred.' If we do not see a profound spiritual truth in this, we will certainly misunderstand Paul here.

## **15:17-21 THE WHOLE WILL OF GOD**

There is a dual meaning in 18: Paul is emphasising both that it is Christ's work, not his, and also that it has been done through him, not through someone else. This is the ground of his pride in it, and the explanation of his boldness in writing to the church at Rome: he is the apostle to the Gentiles! The power and extent of his ministry are described in 19 (cf. 1 Cor. 2:4): 'Signs and miracles' are the words generally used in the New Testament to describe the miraculous, the latter describing the work itself, the former its significance. Paul maintains that he has covered the whole ground from Jerusalem to Illyricum in preaching the gospel. This hardly means either that he had preached to every person within these bounds, or literally preached in every place, but rather that he had established churches in strategic places from which the gospel sounded forth to the surrounding region (cf. Acts 19:10). 'Fully' refers not merely to faithful preaching: Paul preached a whole gospel ('the whole will of God' (Acts 20:27)) as he reasoned with men out of the Scriptures (Acts 17:2). His ambition to

preach only where Christ was not known (20) derives not from rivalry or any self-regarding motive, but from his commission as an apostle to establish new churches rather than build up those already existing; but this cannot be taken as necessarily the rule for all preachers of the gospel, as Paul himself makes clear in 1 Cor. 3:7, 10: he finds justification and support for this pattern of missionary work (20-21) in Isa. 52:15.

### **15:22-24 'IN LABOURS MORE ABUNDANT'**

Paul's concern to establish new churches throughout the ancient world is given here (22) as a reason why he has not thus far visited Rome. On the one hand, he has been fully occupied elsewhere, and on the other, Christ has already been preached in Rome by others. But now his work in the east is finished, and his eyes are on the west, on Spain in fact (24), and he intends to seize the opportunity he has longed for to visit the Roman Christians, who would speed him on his journey, that is to say, they would become his base for this further outreach to Spain, and support him in it. Before discussing this further, however, we should not miss the significance of the apostle's mention of hindrances in 22. There are those who seem to imagine that meeting with hindrances and difficulties in Christian life must mean that something is wrong with them. This often results in an unsettled state of heart, leading them to hanker after some great experience which will suddenly transform them into spiritual 'supermen'; what they do not realise is that Christian life and experience takes place in the teeth of oppositions and difficulties. We should read 2 Cor. 1:8-9 or 2 Cor. 11:23-29, to see how Paul fared again and again, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led though he was. As to the reference to Spain, in 24, this is very thrilling. We do not know whether his desire was ever fulfilled, but at least we can gauge the strength of the divine restlessness in his heart as he longed to fulfil Christ's command to 'go into all the world' to preach the gospel. Of all the apostles Paul seems to have caught the vision more than any of them. In the words of our Lord in Acts 1:8, '... and to the ends of the earth'; who knows but that Britain may have also been on his heart and in his prayers? 'I am bound,' ('debtor' in AV) he cried, 'both to Greeks and non-Greeks,' in the opening passage of the epistle, and there could be no rest for him until that debt was discharged to the full. Well would it be for the church of God today if such a sense of debt gripped our souls!

### **15:25-28 THE CONTRIBUTION FOR THE POOR**

Before going to Rome, however, Paul had a more immediate duty (25), that of handing over to the church in Jerusalem the contributions given him by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (26) for the support of the poor. This 'contribution' (26) figures substantially in



other parts of the New Testament, especially 1 Cor. 16:1-4, as also Acts 11:27-30 and Gal. 2:10. The hope that a better understanding between Jews and Gentiles would result from this act of Christian stewardship on the Gentiles' part goes a long way to explain the importance the apostle clearly attached to it. We see from 2 Cor. 8 – 9, that although Paul encouraged this 'collection', the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia and elsewhere nevertheless acted willingly (27), regarding it as the payment of a debt due for the spiritual blessings of the gospel which had come to them through the Jews. The relation of financial stewardship to spiritual responsibility is significant here as an indication that it was part of the apostolic instruction given to believers. Once this mission had been completed, Paul would visit the Romans on the way to Spain (28). The phrase 'have received this fruit' may mean, according to Denney, that the contribution represents the fruit of the spiritual blessings sent out in the beginning by the church at Jerusalem. This is the point that Paul makes in 1 Cor. 9:11 in another connection, and it is one that needs to be borne in mind in all seriousness today. Giving is a fruit, and when it does not materialise, something is lacking in the spiritual life.

### **15:29 THE FULL MEASURE OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST**

'The full measure of the blessing of Christ' refers to Paul's confidence that his desire to impart some spiritual gift to them (1:11) will be fulfilled. His visit will prove fruitful to them in this way. There is a simple grandeur about these words. What is it that guarantees the fulness of the blessing of the gospel in a man's life? Paul says here, 'I know.' What made him so sure? Simply that his life was wholly under the divine control: 'To me to live is Christ', he says to the Philippians (1:21), 'slave of Jesus Christ', he calls himself again and again in his epistles. 'I consider everything as loss ... that I may know him' – the pattern is consistent: when there is 'nothing between', when a man's heart is utterly open and yielded to the divine will, it means that all God's purposes are finding fruition in him, whatever they be. For Paul this meant the full anointing of the Holy Spirit in his apostleship: but we think it misleading to assume that the fulness of the blessing of the gospel necessarily means prominence and success for everybody. A desire 'to be mightily used of God' may be nothing more or less than carnal ambition, and this has often excluded a man from any possibility of usefulness in the service of God: those who have been thus used have not usually started off by wanting such distinction, as witness Moses and Jeremiah: moreover, the fulness of God is not inevitably associated with 'being mightily used' in the restricted sense of soul-winning: Barnabas was not 'mightily used' in that sense, but 'he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith' (Acts 11:24). There is fruit and fruit in spiritual life, and bringing forth the fruit of character is not less important than the winning of souls for the kingdom. It is all a question of recognising – and accepting – the part God has given us to play in his great plan. And even if that part seems to us not only small but unobtrusive, and even insignificant (how

could any part be insignificant if it is God who has given it?), we shall still need the fulness of the blessing of the gospel to enable us to play it properly. God expects no more of us than that. Why then should we expect – or want – more of ourselves?

### **15:30-33 THE APOSTLE'S CONTINUING NEED FOR PRAYER**

Paul is clearly conscious that his visit to Jerusalem would not be without hazard, and this is why he appeals to the Romans for their prayers on his behalf (30). He is realistic enough to know that he would be in danger in Jerusalem from the attack of the unbelieving Jews, and also that his motives in bringing the 'collection' from the Gentiles might be suspected by the Jewish believers themselves. It is instructive for us to compare the relevant passages in Acts (21:17ff.) to see how these prayers were answered for him, and how – in another way than he could have expected – he was brought by God's will to Rome (for details see Acts 23:11; 27:24; 28:14-16). These verses give us a valuable study in prayer, and there is surely a lesson for us in the fact that they begin with an invitation to struggle and wrestle, and end with a reference to the God of peace: that is the pattern of true prayer, and we see from Acts what this co-operation in prayer on the part of the church in Rome effected for Paul: the account of his arrest (Acts 21:30-31) and his subsequent deliverance by the chief captain might have read very differently if prayer had not been made on his behalf. And we doubt not but that the Lord's assurance to him in Acts 23:11 was the answer to earnest prayer for him. Nor is it without significance that after that assurance, a great peace seems to have descended on his spirit, and nothing in all the turbulent events that followed, leading him finally as a prisoner to Rome, was able to disturb it. This was surely the work of the God of peace, and it may encourage us to remember the words in Job 34:29 (AV), 'When he gives quietness who then can make trouble?', and realise that we may safely lean on his faithful Word, come what may, and know a deep settled peace in our hearts.

### **15:30-33 PAUL THE STRATEGIST**

As a parenthesis we may point out in passing that these verses give us a glimpse of Paul the strategist: it is quite clear that he had a strategic mind, able to discern the divine purposes for his work in that day. It will be remembered that in the Galatian epistle the apostle speaks of God sending forth his Son 'when the time had fully come' i.e. at the strategic moment. And, humanly speaking, it surely was! – when the gospel came to a world conscious of intellectual, moral and spiritual bankruptcy – it was ripe for a sure word from God. And when it came, and when the expansion came for the gospel word, it was the fulness of the time in another sense also – the Roman empire was a suitable vehicle for the

propagation of the gospel – for there were Roman roads, Roman language, Roman communications, Roman law and order, to facilitate its progress. Paul knew all this, and knew therefore the strategic mind of God, and sought to follow its dictates and patterns in his own work. This is one of the great things in Paul's gospel – the emphasis on a reasoned approach, on the mind, on careful thought and understanding. We must realise that to say – as of course we must – that the gospel is a supernatural divine gift does not mean that it is contrary to natural human values or irrational in any way. Happy is the man who can see the working of divine strategy, and seek to put this into operation also in his own work. Paul could surely see the strategic importance of Rome in the possible service of the gospel. This is why, as we have already pointed out, he was so concerned to visit it, to impart to it as much as he could for the work's sake. And it is this that explains his concern for the church at Rome, that it should be deeply taught and instructed in the ongoing work of the gospel in preparation for the outreach to Spain. It must be with a message worth proclaiming that the forward movement will begin.

### **15:30-33 HOW BIG IS YOUR GOSPEL?**

There are those who are not very happy about the idea expressed in yesterday's note. They feel that no place should be more dear to the Lord than any other, and no set of believers than another. But this is not what we are saying. It is not a question of one being more dear than another. It is that when strategic places are touched, more people can be reached than in any other way. We should not forget what is said about Paul's ministry in Ephesus, that strategic centre: 'All ... who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord'. There is a word for us here in this: we live in an age of intellectual enlightenment, and our gospel must be big enough in terms of intellectual integrity and depth to commend itself to minds that think. It is to be feared that as evangelicals we have sometimes done despite to the true nature of the gospel and the work of the kingdom, by abdicating from this responsibility and preaching a message that is sometimes anti-intellectual and an insult to intelligent people. Our gospel is a big thing, and it should not be so proclaimed as to convey the impression either that it is intellectually shabby and nondescript, or that it is merely a devotional extravaganza suitable for certain pious and pietistic people who happen to be made that way. It should be so manifested and demonstrated that its grandeur will constitute a summons to the intellectual and the cultured, and the high and the noble, as well as to ourselves. One thinks of Charles Simeon, and his ministry in Holy Trinity, Cambridge in the 18th and early 19th century, whose influence made a lasting impression on all England in more than fifty years of far-reaching, trenchant, fearless ministry, an influence that continued for generations and decisively affected the course and development of the evangelical Anglican church up to the present day. One thinks also of the enormous influence of D.

Martyn-Lloyd Jones in Westminster Chapel, London, and that of William Still in Gilcomston South Church, Aberdeen, which has profoundly influenced so many lives throughout Scotland and far beyond over the past half-century.

### **15:30-33 FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

One further word about the 'collection' before we leave this chapter. We need to note certain implications underlying the matter of financial responsibilities and duties in the early church. We see, for example, in Acts 11:27-30, what may be called the beginning of this kind of financial ministry where the prospect of financial dearth prompted the determination to send relief to the needy brethren in Judea. Then, in Gal. 2:10, the reference to the Jerusalem apostles' urging of Paul to remember the poor, and his protestation that this was in fact very much in his mind and heart. We have seen also, in Rom. 12:13 Paul's instruction to the Romans about sharing with God's people who are in need. For Paul it was important to get the Gentile saints to recognise their responsibility for this work, in order to bring Jew and Gentile together. But the fact remains that teaching on finance was basic in apostolic ministry from the outset. It is interesting, in the light of this, that in almost all missionary situations today the problem of money is a major one. Young churches in the third world have found it apparently impossible to raise money to pay their pastors, obliging them to rely on overseas finance. Could it be that this failure lies in the failure to give basic teaching on the subject such as Paul gives here, and on the necessity of bearing this kind of fruit in Christian life? For giving is a fruit, and when it does not materialise something is surely lacking in the Christian life.

## **6. PARTNERSHIP IN GOD'S SAVING RIGHTEOUSNESS (16:1-27)**

### **CHRISTIAN GREETINGS 16:1-16**

#### **16:1-16 EVERYONE A PARTNER**

There are two ways of looking at this chapter with its extensive catalogue of names, and it constitutes a temptation almost to the reader of the epistle to the Romans to think that he has now come in effect to the end of it, and that these final greetings can be passed over rapidly and cursorily with the minimum of attention. But there are several considerations that should make us pause before making such a hasty judgement. For one thing, it would be to have forgotten that what Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:16 that all Scripture 'is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness', applies with just as much force to this chapter as to the others. There is indeed profit for us here, and we must take time to extract it from this list of names, and to see it, as surely it is meant to be seen, as a significant expression on Paul's part of the command to 'love one another', a practical outworking of the spirit of the gospel he has been writing about, a significant expression also of the glorious reality of the communion of the saints, for he makes mention of some 28 people, whom at one time or another he had met in the course of his journeyings, and who were now in Rome. How many he remembered, and how much it must have meant to those unknown folk to have been mentioned by name, in this greatest of New Testament epistles! This is the value of the chapter for us, teaching as it does the grace of Christian courtesy and, more, the grace of caring. Paul was not only a great theologian and a mighty apostle, he was also a great human, and he paid attention to little things that were important to people. There is a kind of spirituality that would dispense with such courtesy as being unnecessary, but not so Paul. He was a true great-heart, big in sympathy and compassion and understanding. And if there is anything that his remembrance here teaches us, it is first and foremost the duty of showing appreciation and gratitude.

#### **16:1-16 GOSPEL PARTNERSHIP IS PERSONAL**

Here is how Dr. Emil Brunner describes the passage in his commentary on this chapter:

*A dry list of names – so it appears at first sight. Yet it is one of the most instructive chapters of the New Testament, provided one knows how to read it properly. This conclusion of the letter is particularly significant for the reason that it comes at the end of the 'Letter to the Romans', the greatest, the richest and hardest piece of doctrinal writing in the whole Bible: in short, the one*

*which comes nearest to a system of dogma. It is one and the same Paul who penned the 15 preceding chapters and this 16th chapter, and the one is as important to him as the other. The Christian community consists of persons, and the most important, indeed, the only thing in the community that matters are persons: God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and Christian people. The relationship of these persons to one another – that alone is essential in the Christian community; it does not concern things or doctrines in themselves. Even the doctrines deal with the relations between persons, namely the negative and positive relation, with sin and grace. Thus, also, the personal relations of the apostle to the communities, to the individual members of these communities, are not a matter of secondary importance but belong to the substance of the letter. Neither Paul himself nor his message are too great for such personal greetings.*

## **16:1-2 SERVING WITH SUCCOUR**

Cenchrea was the sea port of Corinth, and Phoebe was a servant of the church there. It is assumed, though not stated in the text, that she was the bearer of the epistle to Rome. She is called a 'deaconess' in RSV (translating the word 'diakonos') but the word did not at that time have the technical sense it has with us today, and we cannot infer the existence of an ecclesiastical order from its use here, although doubtless then, as now, there was much work that a woman could do in the fellowship. Paul commends her to the saints as one worthy of their fellowship and practical help. The word 'help' in 2 ('succourer' in AV) is often used of a wealthy patron, and this suggests that she was a lady of wealth and position who exercised a wise stewardship of her means in the service of the church. The exhortation to 'give her any help she may need' is thought by some to indicate that she was to be in Rome on business and could be helped in it by believers there, in return for her delivery of the epistle. The nature of her help to other believers and to Paul is unknown, but hospitality, care in sickness, succour in danger, and financial support may all be included. Consider the warmth of fellowship these verses presuppose: here is a stranger in a strange city, but she is to find among the saints warmth and care and kind helpfulness and every assistance in her mission there, whatever it be. We would like to think that it was always so, in every fellowship. Some are set in the church to be 'helps' (1 Cor. 12:28), and if Phoebe was one such, surely there must have been others in Rome who could give reciprocal help to her. In certain circumstances the help given may have eternal significance. Look at the help given Paul, for example, in Acts 23:16. It unquestionably saved the apostle's life: and it was given by a lad whose name we do not even know!



## **16:3-4 REJOICING IN FELLOW WORKERS**

The insight into Paul's character as an apostle – not only in these verses but throughout the whole passage – is very impressive, painting a picture of a great-hearted human. This is important, on two counts. For one thing Paul is often represented, by those who are not very happy with his doctrines, as a rabid, dogmatic, and rather forbidding figure. But how wrong this proves them to be! It is easy, and a commonplace, to transfer a dislike of a particular doctrine, and an opposition to it, from the doctrine itself to the man who teaches it. Paul is not the only one to have suffered in this way! For another thing, the apostle shows good evidence of the worth of his own doctrines here. For this is sanctification – the creation of a new humanity which is really and truly human. Paul has been soaring in the heights of spiritual exhortation in this epistle, but this does not separate him from people, but rather draws him nearer to them in the truest, most Christ-like sense. As has already been indicated in a previous note, he manifested the grace of courtesy and was not slow to show appreciation and gratitude. These are not optional extras in the Christian make-up. And there is something else: no one can fail to be impressed with the number of women mentioned in the chapter – which gives the lie to those who brand Paul as a woman-hater (mainly because of the emphasis he makes in 1 Cor. 7 about marriage and his teaching on the exclusion of women from the official ministry and eldership of the church). Does it not occur to people that his attitude might be dictated by principle, and not by personal prejudice? In this matter, as in many others, there are none so blind as those who will not see!

## **16:3-4 THE WARM REALITY OF REAL FELLOWSHIP**

In these notable expressions of the reality of the communion of the saints, as expounded in the previous chapters, we may see the variety of function that exists within the body of Christ, with each member fulfilling his particular service and thus contributing to the body's upbuilding and enrichment. This is certainly true of Aquila and Priscilla, who fled Rome at the decree of the Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2) and came to Corinth where they met Paul. This was the beginning of a great and enduring friendship, God-given and of inestimable worth to Paul, and this shows us how God can turn persecution and seeming disaster into good. The uprooting of their home in Rome meant abounding opportunities for them in the gospel. This underlines the truth that since Christ's victory on the cross, evil no longer has the initiative in the world, but has become a tool – nothing more – in the hand of God (cf. Phil. 1:12 for another expression of this thought). We have no knowledge of how or when they risked their necks for Paul (4a), but Acts 18:12, 19:3, or 2 Cor. 11:22ff., may give us possible indications. The thanks of the Gentiles (4b) may refer to a widespread ministry on Aquila's and Priscilla's part, or to the fact that their intervention on Paul's behalf preserved

him for his continuing ministry among the Gentiles. We may well consider at this point what immense personal devotion Paul was able to inspire. It is obvious from this passage that there was a whole host of people who would have done anything for him, with a glad abandonment of love and affection, but did not this all stem from his utter devotion to Christ? Christ was so manifest in him, and there is nothing that makes a man so attractive and loveable. Not least important in this was his warm and spontaneous appreciation of the love and care shown to him. He was never afraid to give praise. He knew, as many do not seem to know, that genuine praise, as distinct from flattery, humbles as well as helps the one who receives it. Have you not found it so?

### **16:5-6 OPEN HEARTS AND HOMES**

It is the second thoughts that we give to these passing greetings that reveal the wealth in them. The 'church in their house' (5) reminds us that in the days of the early church all the gatherings were in private homes. This suggests the potential for fruitfulness that a Christian home can be when placed at the disposal of Christ. What is our home? A place where we may selfishly enjoy personal security and pleasure, or a spiritual haven for those that are young in the faith, a 'Bethany' for the weary and heavy-laden, a sanctuary for the troubled and distressed? What possibilities there are when homes as well as hearts are sanctified unto the Lord! Paul refers to Epaenetus, the first convert to Christ in Asia, (mentioned only in the New Testament here in 5) as 'my dear friend', and we may well understand the particularly tender affection which the apostle had towards him, for the ties that bind a spiritual father to his spiritual children are not less, but more, enduring than those of flesh and blood. And Mary (6) – here is a saint – unknown but for this solitary mention, yet remembered down the ages as one who willingly expended herself in the service of the apostolic band. The fact that her hard work is recorded should encourage us to realise that no service, however insignificant, is left unnoticed by God. All will be written in his book, and doubtless the great Day will surprise the unknown faithful ones and give pleasure and joy to their hearts when all manner of kindnesses come up for remembrance at the throne of God. He is not unrighteous to forget our labour of love.

### **16:7 FELLOWSHIP IN FAITH AND SUFFERING**

If 'relatives' refer to blood-relations, and not merely 'fellow-Jews' (the commentators are divided on this point), a fascinating possibility opens up here. Andronicus and Junia were in Christ before Paul, and this means that they must have been converted in the early days of Pentecost, and may indeed have been among the first three thousand converts under Peter's

ministry. The question that arises is whether they were instrumental by their prayers in bringing Paul into the kingdom of God. When we remember the lengths to which he went in his persecution of the Church, and the bitterness of his heart against the gospel, we may well imagine with what distress any relatives of his might pour out their souls in prayer for his conversion! This verse stands in Scripture as an encouragement to all who are burdened about the salvation of those who are near and dear to them, and bids them keep on believing for them. If prayer can bring in the chief of sinners and make him the mightiest apostle of all, can anything be too hard for the Lord? 'Outstanding among the apostles' can mean either 'well known to the apostles' or 'well known as apostles themselves'. The word 'apostle' is sometimes used in this wider sense by Paul. It is fairly clear from the New Testament, as Leon Morris says, that there was a wider circle of apostles than the twelve, and it would seem that this couple belonged to that wider circle. Morris goes on to say that some find an argument from this that we should understand the second name to be masculine, holding that a woman could not be an apostle, but we should bear in mind Chrysostom's comment, 'Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!' On this interpretation, as Cranfield points out, 'the apostles' must be given a wider sense as denoting those itinerant missionaries who were recognised by the churches as constituting a distinct group among the participants in the work of spreading the gospel.

### **16:8-12 GIVE THANKS IN LIFE, NOT DEATH!**

Ampliatius (8) and Urbane (9) are common names of Roman slaves, and appear together on an early 2nd century inscription, which gives a list of imperial freed-men. Apelles' character (10) had been put to the test in some particular circumstance and had 'passed with flying colours', if the phrase 'approved in Christ' is to be taken seriously. Aristobulus (10b) is taken by some to refer to a grandson of Herod the Great. His 'household' may refer to his slaves taken over after his death by the imperial palace. Narcissus (11) is thought to be a freed-man of the Emperor Tiberius, who was put to death early in the reign of Nero. As in 10, his household would become the property of the emperor. Tryphena and Tryphosa (12) whose work is commended, are among the several women mentioned by Paul in this chapter, and his warm and appreciative greetings once again give the lie to the charge that he was prejudiced against women. The generosity of his appreciation is striking, and underlines for us the duty of expressing this whenever opportunity arises. The following quotation, from a source now forgotten, sums up Paul's attitude admirably:

*Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheerful words while their hearts can be thrilled and made happier by them; the kind*

*things you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send for their coffin, send to brighten their homes before they leave them. If my friends have alabaster boxes laid away full of fragrant perfumes of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over my dead body, I would rather they bring them out in my weary and troubled hours, and open them that I may be cheered and refreshed by them. I would rather have a plain coffin without a flower, or a funeral without a eulogy than a life without the sweetness of love and sympathy. Let us learn to anoint our friends beforehand for their burial; post-mortem kindness does not cheer the burdened spirit. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward over the weary way.*

### **16:13-16 BEYOND NATURAL AFFECTIONS**

The Rufus mentioned in 12 is probably the same as in Mk. 15:21, the son of Simon of Cyrene. It does not need a gifted imagination to see a fascinating story lying behind his conversion! Paul is writing this more than quarter of a century after Calvary, and mention of Rufus' mother indicates that at the time of the crucifixion her family may have been quite young. With what awe and wonder would Rufus and his brother Alexander listen to the story their father had to tell of how he was privileged to carry the Saviour's cross! It would be little surprise if that story should have left an indelible mark on their hearts, and finally brought them to a personal knowledge of Christ's forgiving and saving love. And what of the significant phrase at the end of 13 – 'a mother to me, too'. It is a particularly moving thought that the homeless apostle who for so long had had no certain dwelling-place, should have been given a mother's care and love by this nameless woman. In how many ways was service rendered, and what wealth of love expended, for Christ's sake! We do not have to seek far in order to find avenues of service for, as William Temple once said, 'There is no conceivable combination of circumstances in which it is not possible to love.' Philologus and Julia (15) may have been husband and wife; the next two on the list are brother and sister, and the inclusion of a number of saints with them suggests another house-church like Priscilla's and Aquila's. The greeting of an holy kiss (cf. 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26 for the same expression, and 1 Pet. 5:14 where it is a 'kiss of love') is an expression of fellowship and love in the specifically Christian sense (16), not that of mere natural affection. It is mentioned by one of the early fathers as having been incorporated into regular Christian worship. 'The churches' will refer to those in the east with which Paul had been associated: they would doubtless know of Paul's desire and intention to go to Rome, and would have expressed their Christian interest in the believers there.

## **FINAL EXHORTATIONS 16:17-20**

### **16:17-20 WATCH OUT! DANGERS ABOUND**

After Paul's greetings to many of the saints by name in Rome – a passage in which we find displayed the rich, warm sympathy and compassion of his heart and also the great possibilities inherent in the idea of a Christian home put at the disposal of the Lord; and above all, shining in every verse, the glorious reality of living fellowship, a fellowship of love and caring which is the best and most effective witness to the truth and power of the gospel of grace and salvation – Paul now utters a note of warning, in face of some very real dangers that existed in their situation in Rome. The fact that Paul was writing this letter to them from Corinth, where the church was rent by faction and party strife, gives an added solemnity to this word. From the way in which Paul speaks it seems likely that it was an error that threatened rather than one that had already taken root in the church at Rome (for Paul commends their obedience in 19). What he refers to, therefore, is likely to have been problems and difficulties that had already caused harm and hurt to the other churches in Asia and Europe after Paul's departure from them, and his concern is to prevent them from doing such harm also in Rome. It is not so much a question of differing views as of allowing such differences to become an excuse for dividing the fellowship. It is the divisive spirit, critical and censorious as it so often is, that has always done harm to the church. The precise identity, however, of the troublemakers is not known. Bruce thinks they may have been similar to the 'evil workers' of Phil. 3:2,18; Denney that they had not as yet appeared in Rome or begun to work there, which is likely in view of the confidence Paul expresses in their obedience (19). We do not, in fact, need to know what exactly was in Paul's mind for the danger has relevance for us, apart from any consideration of the specific circumstances of Paul's day. We shall continue the discussion of this in tomorrow's note.

### **16:17-20 THE SMOOTH FLATTERY OF FALSEHOOD**

The danger facing the believers in Rome – and this is just as truly a danger for us today – is that of being drawn away from the truth of God by something that has the appearance of truth, but is in fact a deviation. This is, then, a problem of heresy, and the passage is important for us as showing the nature and causes of heresy in the classical sense of that word. One would think that surely intelligent people would be able to discern between truth and error without much difficulty, specially when they had in their hands the truth of God, by which they had been nurtured and developed in the faith. But no, it is not so simple as this, and that for three reasons. For one thing, Satan has a hand in this (20). For another thing, inspired by him this is 'smooth talk and flattery' designed to deceive. In the

third place, there is an inward 'fifth column' at work, namely their own carnal appetites, which influence thinking whether consciously or unconsciously. The scholars maintain – and they are surely right – that the story in Gen. 3 lies behind Paul's words here, and the keynote in that chapter is 'deception'. Eve was deceived into thinking that the situation was different than it was. Satan cast an evil spell upon her mind and heart so that she could no longer see that what God had forbidden in his Word must necessarily be evil and have disastrous consequences. When one reads together the two verses – Gen. 2:17b and 3:6 – it becomes clear that the deception was complete. And this is how souls are perverted from the truth today. One has only to think of the heretical sects to realise how true this is.

### **16:17-20 AVOID THEM!**

Paul's prescription for the dangers of heresy is striking and unequivocal: 'Keep away from them' (17). There are those who would attempt to argue with them, but the apostle seems to indicate that this is not something that can be helped by argument. They must be left severely alone. We should notice, says Brunner, that:

*where Paul sees the 'community' in danger from within he proceeds as ruthlessly as a surgeon who desires to remove the growth in time and radically before it fatally injures the organism. Where the corruption of Satan becomes noticeable, there is no room for pity.*

C.S. Lewis has a penetrating comment to make on the insidious nature of evil. In his Reflections on the Psalms he says:

*I am inclined to think a Christian would be wise to avoid, where he decently can, any meeting with people who are bullies, lascivious, cruel, dishonest, spiteful and so forth. Not because we are 'too good' for them: in a sense because we are not good enough. We are not good enough to cope with all the temptations, nor clever enough to cope with all the problems, which an evening spent in such society produces. The temptation is to condone, to connive at; by our words, looks, and laughter, to 'consent'!*

We can hardly fail to realise that this is a very real danger, for it brings us to the crux of the matter. We are drawn away because already a secret capitulation may have been made in our minds and hearts to the unhallowed thing and this has taken place because behind the intellectual issue there has been a moral challenge. Think of Eve again. She came round to being convinced that the forbidden thing was pleasant and good, and to be desired – because first of all, in her heart, before ever she had reached out for the forbidden fruit, she had taken it a hundred times in her thoughts and in her secret desires. Now the antidote to



error, of this or any other kind, and the assurance of victory, lies in obedience (19-20). ‘What Paul wishes here for the Romans,’ says Denney, ‘is moral intelligence, not impaired in the least by any dealings with evil ... integrity of the moral nature is the best security: the seductive teaching is instinctively repelled.’

## **16:17-20 WISDOM AND INNOCENCE**

Following on from the quote from Denney at the end of yesterday’s note, Paul exhorts the believers in Rome to be ‘wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil’ – that is to say, to recognise good when they see it, and be able to discern that ‘all that glitters is not gold’ (as in the case of the ‘smooth talk and flattery’ in 18). On the other hand, they must be ‘innocent about what is evil’. This does not mean to be innocent simpletons, but the very opposite, namely by the singleness of their eye to discern evil and to have nothing to do with it. They are not to be taken in by the subtle attractions of evil things. And, paradoxically, the more they know – and show – the simplicity of Christ, the more discerning they shall become about evil, and best of all, the more surely they shall know the victory of God over Satan in their lives. For as obedience is the antidote to error it also gives the assurance of victory. The God of peace accomplishes his purpose of redemption through the obedience of Christ (cf. 5:19), and when believers obey in Christ, they share his victory too. The promise about the crushing of Satan follows immediately upon the exhortation to be innocent about what is evil, and we must not fail to see the link between the two, nor must we miss the sequence in 17-20. Divisions in the fellowship are traceable ultimately to Satan himself, and we must learn to recognise his baneful influence in them. Above all – and it is a wonderfully encouraging thought – this is the first open reference to Satan in the epistle, and it suggests that through the power and grace of the gospel of Christ he may be kept strictly in his place and given a back seat in our lives.

## **GREETINGS FROM THE APOSTOLIC TEAM 16:21-24**

### **16:21-24 MISSION IS A TEAM EFFORT**

Greetings are resumed again, following the parenthesis in 17-20, but now they are from Paul’s companions. If ‘relatives’ include all three names in 21b, then Lucius cannot refer to Luke, the beloved physician and writer of Acts, but an alternative punctuation is possible, separating Lucius from the other two, so that the latter only should be understood as Paul’s relative. Luke was certainly with Paul at this time (Acts 20:5ff.), as Lucius of Cyrene (another suggested identification, Acts 13:1) certainly was not. But we cannot be certain. Paul

courteously allows Tertius, his scribe, to greet the Roman church in the first person (22). Tertius had taken down at Paul's dictation the profound utterances we have been studying, and we can well imagine the thrill it must have been to him to be the first to hear the mighty teaching. It is not difficult to think that again and again during the writing there were pauses for discussion with the great apostle, and doubtless not a few expressions of wonder and joy as the argument proceeded to its glorious climax. This is of course the great binding force in any fellowship of people – their common interest and absorption in the things of God. Given such an interest – consuming passion it was with Paul and his companions – a quality of fellowship is created that is unspeakable in its depth and richness. It was said of King Saul and his companions in old time that they were a company of men whose hearts God had touched, and this is perhaps the best possible description of the little group mentioned here. Gaius (23) may be the same Gaius as is mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:14. He was Paul's host in Corinth. How much Paul can convey in a single phrase! Host, not only to him, but to the whole church – and straightway, in imagination, we can visualise his home, with an open door to all the saints in Corinth. Like Priscilla's and Aquila's, his home and his heart were dedicated and consecrated to the Lord. It is all a matter of stewardship: and when we recognise that all we have has been given on trust from the Lord, to be used for his glory, such a transformation is possible. Erastus, as city treasurer, probably one of the most influential believers in the fellowship, and Quartus, a unknown brother, are linked together in greeting the Romans: differing in function, they are equal in dignity in the fellowship of believers. It is this kind of association that displays the reality and the richness of our oneness in Christ.

## **16:21-24 ONENESS IN CHRIST**

A further comment on the theme of our oneness in Christ may be seen in the words of Dr James Denney in what he says on Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:17, 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation':

*Those who are in Christ have died to the whole order of life in which men are judged 'after the flesh'. Perhaps the Christian church has almost as much need as any other society to lay this to heart. We are still too ready to put stress upon distinctions which are quite in place in the world, but are without ground in Christ. Even in a Christian congregation there is a recognition of wealth, of learning, of social position, in some countries of race, which is not Christian. I do not say these distinctions are not real, but they are meaningless in relation to Christ, and ought not to be made. To make them narrows and impoverishes the soul. If we associate only with people of a certain station, and because of their station, all our thoughts and feelings are limited to a very small area of*

*human life; but if distinctions of station, of intelligence, of manners, are lost in the common relation to Christ, then life is open to us in all its length and breadth; all things are ours, because we are his. To be guided by worldly distinctions is to know only a few people, and to know them by what is superficial in their nature; but to see that such distinctions died in Christ's death, and to look at men in relation to him who is redeemer and Lord of all, is to know all our brethren, and to know them not on the surface, but to the heart. People lament everywhere the want of a truly social and brotherly feeling in the church, and try all sorts of well-meant devices to stimulate it, but nothing short of this goes to the root of the matter.*

## **THE APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION 16:25-27**

### **16:25-27 OUR VICTORY IN HIS**

Paul concludes with a doxology which recapitulates the leading themes he has unfolded throughout the epistle. But before we make detailed comment on it, exalted in its dignity and grandeur as it is, we need to go back a little, to what is said in 20 about Satan being crushed under the feet of believers, and link this with the words at the beginning of 25, 'Now to him who is able ...' ('to him that is of power' is translated elsewhere as 'to him who is able', as in Eph. 3:20 and Jude 24 and elsewhere), for it is Christ who accomplishes this for us. It is worth dwelling on this for a little. One thinks of a related passage in 1 Cor. 15:25-28 which describes the consummation of the work of the gospel in which God in Christ shall put all his enemies under his feet – a glorious and thrilling passage and prospect. But Paul is saying something rather different here, for here it is our feet that Satan is to be put under! This, however, is simply the other side of the matter, corresponding to the passage in 1 Cor. 15, and is the necessary implication of it. His feet – our feet, or, to put it in a different way, the battle, God's battle, in Christ's death and resurrection, spoiling principalities and powers and making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in the cross – and our battle, in which he gives us to share his victory and triumph in Christ. It is not we who bruise Satan, but God, and it is he who puts Satan under our feet. And it is always best to see our battle in the context of the battle. That is the way of appropriation! (Paul is surely thinking here of Gen. 3:15 and the primal promise of redemption in which God says 'He (the coming Seed) shall bruise thy head, thou shalt bruise his heel.') Appropriation, we said – this is the road to victory. We take his victory over Satan and make it our own, by faith. But this is something we need to know; what is more we need to recognise the presence and activity of the evil one in our situations, and be able to say, 'an enemy hath done this.' When we do, it is only a matter of time ('shortly') before that victory is realised in our experience.

## 16:25-27 THE GOD WHO IS ABLE

This wonderful doxology (or benediction, call it what you will) with which Paul draws the epistle to its conclusion is, from sheer doctrinal depth, scarcely bettered by anything in all the epistle. It will certainly take more than one note to deal adequately with all the implications of what the apostle says in it, for it contains nearly all the leading themes he has enunciated in its chapters. The form of words in the AV, as we have already pointed out, conceals the fact that we have the same kind of statement as in Eph. 3:20 and Jude 24-25, and like these references, this also stands here to assure us that what has been spoken of in the preceding chapters is no vain or idle or impracticable dream, but can become a glorious possibility through the power of the living God. It is significant to note that this assurance – ‘He is able to establish you’ – corresponds exactly to what the apostle says in 1:11 about his longing to impart some spiritual gift to the Romans, ‘to the end ye may be established’. Here is the same word, and between these two references – 1:11 and 16:25 – there is described for us the means by which God accomplishes this great work. God is able to do this thing, to establish us, and when the preaching of the gospel is answered in us by the obedience of faith, he will do this, and does to it.

It will be helpful to consider, before we go any further, the other ‘he is able’ statements in the New Testament – taken together, they paint an impressive and enormously encouraging picture. Here they are:

- 2 Tim. 1:12                    ‘Able to keep that which I have committed unto him’
- Jude 24                        ‘Able to keep you from falling’
- Heb. 7:25                    ‘Able to save to the uttermost’
- 2 Cor. 9:8                    ‘Able to make all grace abound’
- Phil. 3:21                    ‘Able to subdue all things unto himself’
- Eph. 3:21                    ‘Able to do exceeding abundantly ...’

Do you know the words of Herbert Booth’s lovely hymn?

*All the rivers of Thy grace I claim  
Over every promise write my name.*

These are some of the promises. Claim them today!

## **16:25-27 ABLE TO ESTABLISH YOU**

There are three points in particular that may be underlined in this wonderful doxology that serve to emphasise and sum up its message for us, in amplification of the words 'he is able'. First, what God is able to do; second, how God is able to do it; and third, when God is able to do it. As to the first of these, we look at the phrase, 'able to establish/strengthen you'. The word Paul uses here means 'to set or make fast, to fix, to root in a particular spot, to anchor'. It is used in Lk. 16:26 in the parable of Dives and Lazarus, of 'a great gulf fixed', and the idea there is that of permanence, immovability. We have the idea expressed in Ps. 40,

*Upon a rock He set my feet  
Establishing my way.*

It speaks therefore of the 'end-product' of the work of the gospel in the soul of a man, the development and production of lasting and enduring marks of character and integrity in the life of the believer. This is a bigger thing than we might at first imagine. For it speaks of stability of Christian character, and it is here that we see the real implications and force of Paul's words. For this is precisely the problem with so many of us: we are not stable in Christian character, but very often the victims of change and variation, sometimes on top and sometimes not, sometimes on the wave of a great enthusiasm, and sometimes in the trough of a great depression, sometimes hot, and sometimes cold. One is not thinking at the moment of the more obvious or gross disorders that mar human lives, but of the more deeply entrenched lesions on the human personality which make sustained goodness and constancy of life very uphill work. When one thinks of this, and realises the material God works with when he begins his work in our lives, one realises the magnitude of what Paul is saying. To establish, in this context, is miracle indeed.

## **16:25-27 THE PROMISE OF BETTER THINGS**

We may take the apostle Peter as a case in point, to illustrate what is said at the end of yesterday's note. He was not a bad man, as we count bad men today. He was devoted, devout, religious, a disciple. It is not on that level that we detect the flaws, but much deeper. One thinks of the dangerous impulsiveness in him, the quicksilver nature, the rashness, the sometimes uncontrolled boisterousness, the undependability, the weak-willed-ness, the cowardice – these are the problem areas of life where men need healing – and these are problems that can, and do, exist alongside a genuine spirit of discipleship – problems of personality, emotional problems, problems of human relationships. It is here that stability must be won if lives are to glorify God. One thinks of the young man who, devout and ardent to a degree, could not conceive of the possibility of life without a girlfriend, and lived from

one emotional crisis to the next, suffering agonies of either exultation or despair. He was in and out of love, and always convinced that the latest one was God's will! Nor is this the only area in which emotional disorder can reign and wreck a life: there are the temperamental disorders, there are the 'sensitive' people who demand special treatment because they are not like other folk (have you ever noticed how insensitive towards other people such folk can be?). This is one of the things Paul deals with in Eph. 4:14-15 – 'no more children tossed to and fro ...'. Now, God is able to establish such people. Our Lord said to Peter, prophetically, 'thou shalt be called Petros – a rock' and he fulfilled it! This is the good news of the gospel to all the weak and the wayward – a promise of better things. Good news also to all those who hesitate to come to Christ because they are conscious of such weaknesses and fear they will forever prevent them from 'keeping it up' if they did come to him. But God is able. He does the keeping up, and can change these dangerous and fatal weaknesses into rugged strength like granite and make our souls like the mountains that are round about Jerusalem that cannot be moved.

### **16:25-27 A GOSPEL THAT PREVAILS OVER ALL SIN**

Our second consideration is how God is able to do this work of establishing, and the answer is that he does it through the gospel, through the preaching of Christ according to the Scriptures. Paul describes that gospel here, and in 2 Tim. 2:8, as 'my gospel'. He had truly made it his own, wrestled with it, grappled with it, been mastered by it and proved its power to save – his gospel, as expounded in all its fulness in this epistle. A man called to preach is not called to proclaim to the world his personal experience; but at the same time no man who has not tasted the life-giving, liberating, saving power of the gospel in his own soul has anything worthwhile to preach. More than fifty years ago now, when called to give testimony in public to the grace of the gospel in my life, I was able to say – falteringly, and hesitatingly, but with conviction – that, knowing what God in Christ had done for me and in me, there was no one I could despair of. Since that time, over the passing years, I have met many, many broken and soiled and marred lives, with many tragic needs, and I can say today with even greater conviction, knowing what Christ has done for me in these years, that there is no one I could despair of. I know now, as I could not fully know then, that there is no habit or sin over which grace cannot prevail.

It is intriguing to see the threefold use of the word 'according' in this doxology, first in relation to 'my gospel', then in relation to the revelation of the divine mystery, and finally in relation to the commandment of the everlasting God to make known that gospel. This is something to be meditated upon with all reverence, as we become increasingly aware of the vastness of the mystery of divine grace. One is reminded of the words in Deut. 29:29: 'The



secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever'. We shall make a further comment on this in tomorrow's note.

### **16:25-27 THROUGH THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH**

The 'revelation of the mystery' (25) is in apposition to 'my gospel' and 'the preaching (or proclamation) of Jesus Christ': the gospel (and the preaching of it) is its concrete expression and illumines it. It is God's redemptive purpose in the gospel. Which purpose, kept secret for long, is revealed in the gospel: but 'in the gospel' is not merely a synonym for 'in the New Testament', for his gospel was witnessed to by the law and the prophets (1:2; 3:21; 4). In this sense, it is made known 'through the prophetic writings', i.e. as interpreted by the early church which based its gospel preaching upon the Old Testament Scriptures. This mystery was revealed, and its preaching fulfilled, by the command of the eternal God to bring about obedience to the faith. This brings us to the third and final consideration: when God is able to do this. And this answer is: through the obedience of faith. This, we should note, repeats the thought in 1:5, 'for obedience to the faith'. And concerning this we may say, briefly, two things: the first is that this represents and defines our response to the gospel. For faith is obedience, nothing more or less than this. And the second thing is: the design of the preaching of the gospel is to create faith in the heart. Faith cometh by hearing. This is why the gospel is commanded by God to be made known to men. The whole of the epistle to the Romans, and indeed all of preaching is designed with this in view.

### **16:25-27 GLORY TO GOD FOREVER THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!**

Emil Brunner closes his commentary on Romans with the statement that this final doxology is

*a powerful recapitulation of what was important for him in the letter – God's honour; it is the reason and goal of all proclamation and teaching. He alone is the teacher, the only wise God. For his will had been unknown to mankind throughout its entire history until it pleased him to reveal the secret and to break the silence through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It concerns the delivery of this message in the Name of God; for only where God is known as he revealed himself, can one obey him, and only where one is obedient to him does one serve his honour. God's honour and obedience through faith, both one in Jesus Christ – that is the message of the apostle Paul.*

And so we come to the close of this magnificent and glorious epistle. Its final doxology has reminded us of the wonderful possibilities inherent in the gospel for a full and comprehensive salvation. This is why it is so essential for us to come to grips with its teaching even unto battling and wrestling, for not otherwise will Christian character be forged in us to the glory of God. It is certainly true that no one who intends to do anything or be anything of worth for God can afford not to know this epistle and come to terms with its message. Such a study can never be easy going – but then, ought we to expect such a mighty work as the transformation and recreation of character and the establishing of souls immovable in grace to be easy, and without effort? If it cost the Triune God the infinite sacrifice of Calvary to make men whole, how should we think that it will cost us less?