

Simple Christianity

by Ray C. Stedman

I hope you already have your Bibles open to Romans as we are beginning our study of this most powerful human document in the world: The Letter of Paul to the Romans.

- This book lit the fire in Martin Luther's heart that began the Protestant Reformation and changed the history of the western world.
- This book lit the fire in John Wesley's heart, resulting in the great awakening in England that saved England from the fate of France in the French Revolution.
- This book lit the fire in Karl Barth's heart in our own day and caused him to write his study on Romans which called the theological world back from the cold, barren deadness of liberalism to a much more vital and powerful Christian message.

This book, therefore, has become one of the most revolutionary books of all time. The Communists think that the writings of Karl Marx are revolutionary, but the writings of Karl Marx look like a Boy Scout manual when compared to the revolutionary power of the book of Romans! I mean that!

It is just because this book has become so familiar to us that we have lost some of the sense of its revolutionary power, but I hope we will approach it now with a sense of freshness and newness – as though we had never read it before. Perhaps we will see and sense once again the tremendous vitality, vividness, and power of this book.

As you know, this is a letter. It was written by the Apostle Paul to the Christian community in Rome. As best we can determine, he wrote it while he was in the city of Corinth, which was the cultural center of the Roman world. Paul had never been to Rome when he wrote this letter, yet he knew many of the people there. He had met them in various other places and some he had even led to Christ. There is a tradition that says Paul began the church at Rome, but this is most certainly not true. It is difficult to tell how the church began. Some have felt that perhaps it began with the remarkable visit from God in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Strangers from Rome were present that day. Some were possibly among the 3,000 who were regenerated and became the first members of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost. At any rate, a Christian church had begun in the city of Rome, the capital of the empire, and it is to the band of Christians there that this letter is addressed.

This letter is a magnificent explanation of Christianity. If you had nothing but the book of Romans, you would have every vital Christian teaching in the New Testament – in capsule form at least. It touches upon all the basic truths of Christian doctrine and teachings. So, if you master the book of Romans, you have the key to all the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments alike. This is why this is such a wonderful book with which to begin studying the Scriptures.

The first seventeen verses are the introduction to Paul's letter, and, like any good introduction, they sum up the major themes of the letter. We are calling this introductory message *Simple Christi-*

anity. As you know, there are several very brilliant writers who have attempted to explain Christian faith to non-believers, and they have written excellent books along this line. C. S. Lewis has put out a book that he calls *Mere Christianity*. J. B. Phillips has written a book that he calls *Plain Christianity*. J. R. W. Stott has written a book that he calls *Basic Christianity*. But we have chosen *Simple Christianity* because that is more in line with our mentality – mine at least! I think it catches the idea that this is simply putting forth the basic truths of what Christian faith is all about.

In this introduction, you find these truths summarized for us. Paul writes about three things: He writes about Christ, the Roman Christians, and himself:

- He writes about Christ because there can be no Christianity without him. Christianity is not a creed, it is a person. It is the life of that person relived in our lives today. Therefore, you can't talk about Christianity without talking about Christ.
- Paul writes about the Romans because these Roman Christians were just like us. They were the basic material within which God began his transforming work in human life, just as we are the basic material within which God intends to show his work today.
- Paul writes about himself because he is the pattern of what Christ will do. He is a living example of what God's grace can do.

In summary, there is a new power to appropriate, an old problem to be solved, and a clear pattern to follow. Now that is *simple Christianity*, and these three themes find themselves repeated in every setting forth of what Christianity is – a new power, an old problem, and a clear pattern.

Now let's look at it in detail:

First, Paul writes about **Christ**, in Verses 1-7:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh

and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ out Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of his name among the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;

To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. {Rom 1:1-7 RSV}

Since Christ is simply indispensable to Christianity, Paul sums up what we might call **the credentials of Jesus Christ**. Now you have not been in a Christian church very long before you have heard Christ set forth as the only one who is capable of solving the human dilemma. Christians everywhere stand fast and firm on the proposition that Jesus alone, of all the religious voices that have ever been heard, is the only one who is capable of solving the human dilemma. And anyone who has heard this claim who is not a Christian, if he is thoughtful at all, has the right to say: "How do you know this? What are the credentials of Christ that can make me believe that he can do this?" Well, here they are:

1. First, he was **predicted** long before he appeared. Now that is an amazing thing. Notice in Verse 2:

... he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures,

Jesus Christ was predicted long before he appeared. And I may say that no other 'manufacturer' of religious leaders can make that claim. He alone fits the pattern, fulfills the outline, and matches the test. This is one thing that sets him apart as unique among all the religious voices of the world. None other was predicted long before he came.

During the days of World War II, in the French underground, they often had occasion for agents to meet one another at various places to exchange information and to carry on the work of the underground. Of course, it had to be clandestine, and some of the agents had never met each other before. They had a very

simple means of identification so that each agent would know without a doubt that the man he met under certain given conditions was the man he could trust. All they did was to take a piece of paper and tear it in half; they gave one man half of the paper and mailed the other half to the other man. When they met, all they did was compare the two pieces of paper. If the papers matched, the agents were identified and there was no doubt about it!

This is the way that Jesus Christ fulfills the predictions of the Old Testament. He himself said that he came by the accepted way {cf, John 10:1-3, 10:27-28}. The sheep heard his voice and they knew that this was the one that came by the predicted route, and men could test his claims on the basis of the Scriptures they had. Paul brings this out before us as one of the unique marks that Jesus Christ is indeed God's intended deliverer of the human race: He came according to the prophets and the predictions.

2. The second mark of his uniqueness is that he combined in himself the nature of God and man. You see how we have it in Verse 3:

... the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God ... according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, {Rom 1:3-4 RSV}

Thus he combined in himself these two things:

- a) He came in the line of David, which means he had a genealogy, an ancestry, that could be traced back to David. His ancestry is traced for us in Scripture; therefore, he had the right to the throne of David. It is interesting that not once in all the time that our Lord ministered in the flesh did any man challenge his right to sit on the throne of David, though he continually made claim to the fact that he was David's son. No one ever challenged it – it was too clear. He came according to David's line of the flesh – he was a human being.
- b) When he was raised from the dead, Paul says it demonstrated, as we have seen here,

that he was the Son of God. He was the Son of God with the Spirit of holiness. He tied together these two things. In fact, the word for “designated” is the {Greek} word *horizo*, from which we get our word “horizon.” He filled the whole horizon of these believers with the conviction in their hearts that he was the Son of God. This is what you find flaming throughout all of the New Testament – this deep conviction, because of the resurrection, that these first believers are dealing with the Lord of life himself!

Because Jesus Christ is both God and man, he spans the great gulf between God and man. This is the unsolved problem of all other religions. They are always an effort to bridge the gulf from the human side, reaching out toward God, but they never can span it, because man cannot live on God's level. But there is one who came from God's side and bridged the gulf across to man! In combining in himself both natures, Christ becomes the bridge across the chasm between God and man. That is why Christ is unique, and no other ‘manufacturer’ of religion can make this claim!

I find so many times that people completely miss this point. I received a letter from a college girl some time ago. It was a very earnest letter. I suspected when I read it that she had probably been influenced by the Jehovah's Witnesses, though I am not sure – at least her questions were along the line that they often take. She said this:

“I don't understand how you can say that Jesus Christ is God. Now, to whom was he praying? Was he praying to himself?”

She went on to list several other instances of the same type. It was obvious her problem was that she thought Christians were claiming that the man Jesus was nothing but God – that he was God appearing on earth, but that he was not man.

Now, this isn't the claim that Christians make: They claim that he is *both* man *and* God – that is the point. It is not that he is God, Holy God, praying thus to himself, but that he is man also. This claim of Christ to be both

man and God is absolutely unique, and it is what makes him the one bridge between God and man.

3. There is a third credential here that marks the supremacy of Jesus Christ, and that is the **method of working**, as seen in Verse 5:

... through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of his name among the nations, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ; {Rom 1:5-6 RSV}

In other words, how does Christ effect his work in the world? How does he do it? All other religious leaders come and begin an organization, found a movement, or create a party, which, working through the usual ways of human propaganda and activity, spreads its doctrine. People then become convinced of a creed and follow that particular teaching. Now, this is not what Christ has done! He began what we might call a secret society through which his life would touch man. It is not an organization. It is not a political party. It is not a mass movement. And wherever the church has become this, it is a false thing. No, as Paul points out, the Lord's designated way of working is to call men into a unique relationship with himself, that, through their very lives and personalities, he imparts his own nature and life to others and touches and changes them. It is sort of another incarnation, when 'the word becomes flesh' {cf, John 1:14} all over again. The strange thing about the church is that the world never sees Jesus Christ until it sees him incarnate in another Christian. But when he has become flesh in another person's life, then, suddenly, somebody becomes aware that here beside him is something of Christ, and they see Jesus Christ once again. That process is to go on until it touches the entire world, as Paul says, "for the sake of his name among all the nations." Thus, it is a worldwide process of touching others through the lives of those men who are saturated with God, the men who are captured by Christ.

These are the marks of the true messenger of God, and, in line with modern marketing, we might

add the slogan, "Accept no substitute." Christ was predicted long before he appeared, he combined in himself the natures of God and man, and his method of working in the world is to impart his nature and life through men.

In Verses 8-13, Paul writes about the **Roman saints**:

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. {Rom 1:8-13 RSV}

There is not much we know about the Roman Christians, but Paul starts out by listing the evidence that they were indeed Christians. Their faith had been talked about all over the world – something had happened to these people.

Now, I confess to you that I get suspicious about people who call themselves Christians and nobody knows that they are Christians. I remember hearing of a boy who had been away working in a logging camp all during the summer. When he got back home, somebody said, "How did you get along? Did the fact that you were a Christian make any difference?" He said, "Oh no. They never found out that I was a Christian." Well, there is something wrong in such a situation.

But here in Rome were Christians whose faith had been talked about around the world.

I remember Dr. Carl Armstrong telling us about a time when he was down in Cuba. He was in a city where he had never been before. He wanted to try to locate a Christian assembly if he could. He thought he would just start out from door to door to see if he could find any Christians. He knocked on a few doors, and asked, "Are there any Christians here?" "Well," somebody said, "there are some Presbyterians, and some Method-

ists, and a few Baptists, but I don't know of any Christians." Well, there is something wrong, you see. Christianity ought to be visible, and it was visible in the lives of these Roman Christians.

It is evident, from these words, that Paul wrote to what we call "babes in Christ" {cf, 1 Cor 3:1}. That is, they were *new* Christians. They had become Christians by an encounter with Jesus Christ, face to face, and that encounter has transformed their lives so that their faith was known throughout the world. Notice, they did not become Christians by understanding the plan of salvation (nobody ever becomes a Christian that way). Rather, now that they had become Christians, they need to have the plan of salvation explained to them so that they might grow to maturity.

Now, as newborn babes in Christ, they were like all other babies. I have discovered that babies have one great characteristic – they are almost continuously in need of something! I speak as an authority along this line: New Christians often don't act very Christ-like. I think this is why there are so many misunderstandings about Christians. We need to remember that Christians begin their lives as babies, and they need to grow.

I am always running into someone who says, "Well, I meet so many Christians who don't have the qualities that I expect a Christian to have." Well, I do too, but it is oftentimes because we fail to realize that these are new, baby Christians.

We have a new baby in our home, and I have been watching her, and observing quite a few interesting things:

- First of all, she is very lazy: She just lies around the house all day long, and never does a thing to help. Everything has to be done for her. She is the most lazy person I think I have ever seen.
- Second, she is very thoughtless: She wakes people up in the middle of the night, and has no regard for their sleep at all. She never hesitates to interrupt a conversation to express her own desires or needs.
- She is also very rude: She'll burp right in your face and be completely unabashed about it! She is very uncooperative in many ways too: As I have watched that little life, I have said to myself, "Well, if that is what a human being is,

then I don't want to be one – lazy, uncooperative, rude."

Now, of course, I really haven't said that. I recognize that she is a baby, that she is going to grow, and that all the qualities I admire in human life will take their place in her life, and be brought into her being and character, as she grows and develops properly.

This is what we need to remember about babes in Christ – they need to grow. Throughout this letter, in the background, are these men and women of great need, just like you and me – normal human beings who need to be transformed by grace into the likeness of Jesus Christ. That is why this letter was written, and why it is so wonderfully instructive to us today.

The last thing that Paul writes about in these seventeen introductory verses is **himself**, Verses 14-17:

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish: so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." {Rom 1:14-17 RSV}

This is the other side of the picture. The Roman Christians represent new Christians, and, at the moment, the most he can say of them is that they have faith – obvious, visible, manifest faith. But now, of himself, Paul says three things. These three are the marks of Christian maturity. He says "I am" three times:

- "I am under obligation," that is, "I am **concerned** about others."
- "I am eager," that is, "I am **committed**, ready to fling myself without reserve into the work."
- And, third, "I am not ashamed," that is, "I am **confident**, resting on unshakable experience in Christ."

Now, these are the three marks of the man that God uses: The mature Christian is **concerned**, **committed**, and **confident**. The minute the Spirit of God begins to really work in your life and mine, these marks begin to show themselves, in this order.

1. I have seen this so many times in talking to somebody just at the very threshold of Christian faith, a person who has been brought to the sense of his need for Christ. After a person has yielded his life to Christ, almost invariably the first thing he says is, "You know, I have a friend I would like to tell this to." Or, "I want you to meet my mother" (or my father, or my brother, or my sister). Or, "I want to bring somebody else to talk with you." The first mark of the Spirit's work in our lives is that he begins to create a **concern for someone else**.

I have learned to recognize this as the sign of a genuine transformation, a regeneration. Normally our lives are built around self, and the longer we live that way the more self-centered we get. But, at the moment of personal encounter with Jesus Christ, this vicious circle of self-involvement is broken into, and, for the first time, there comes a gleam of light that begins to manifest itself in a concern for somebody else.

As that Christian life develops, that concern deepens until, like Paul, it encompasses the whole of the world and every kind of person in it:

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish: {Rom 1:14 RSV}

It makes no difference to Paul who it is, because his heart has been captured by the Spirit of God, who creates a concern for someone else.

2. The second mark is **commitment**, and I think that this is where the great struggle comes. Paul could say, "I am eager to fling myself into this thing." Most Christians are not ready to make that statement. The Christian life is very predictable. In a sense, you can trace its workings:

- It begins with the non-Christian, who says, in great, large, capital letters: "I." This is the trouble with men – "I" trouble.
- Then, as one becomes a Christian, another note is added. It becomes: "Christ and I." But that is still not right.
- As that Christian life grows and develops, the "I" becomes smaller and smaller until, at last, there is just "Christ" – "Not I, but Christ" {cf. Gal 2:20}. This describes the committed person, who is no longer thinking about what he is going to get out of it, or what blessings are going to be given to him, or what glory, admiration, or advancement he can get out to the Christian cause – but only "Christ."

This is an interesting thing: Commitment always means excitement. A lady came to me recently, and said, "I have been to you with problems before in which I needed an answer to a spirit of depression and despondency, but this time I have come to ask if it is wrong for me to be so excited about the Christian life." I wish more would come with that kind of problem – I love to have that kind. Of course, I told her, "No, it isn't wrong!" We need to temper our zeal with knowledge, and we can become overzealous very easily, but to feel and sense the excitement of Christian living is only the normal thing for a Christian. It means that here is a committed heart, a life that is wholly Christ's.

3. Finally, the third mark of Christian maturity is **confidence**:

... I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who has faith,... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed... {Rom 1:16a-17a RSV}

In other words, the gospel, as Paul says here, supplies the two things that men crave more than anything else in life – power and righteousness.

- a) Now, every heart longs for power – you know that. And, usually, we think that power is shown by the number of people we can control. If we can get so many people to jump at our command, this is a sign of power. We have so many people under us at the office. We love to order people around. We call in our orders to the store and get them delivered out to us. This is a sign of status or power. The whole human society is based on that concept of power.

But, in describing the Last Supper, John said that the Lord Jesus, knowing that all power was committed into his hands, rose and laid aside his garments, girded himself with a towel, and began to wash the disciples' feet {see John 13:3-5}. In other words, here is the manifestation of real power. Real power is the power to be humble, because then the power of God can work.

Dick Halverson was telling some of us a few weeks ago about speaking at a college conference where they were asking a lot of questions. One of the questions asked was, "How can I make the gospel relevant to this modern world?" Dick said that he was just about to answer it with some of the usual clichés, when the period came to a close and he had to leave the question until the morning. He had the whole evening and night to meditate on his answer. He said that as he began to think about that question, he was struck by the sheer ego that was that was revealed in it: "How can I make the gospel relevant to this modern world?" When he got up to answer the question the next morning, he said, "I would just like to say this: You can't make the gospel relevant. In fact, you don't need to make the gospel relevant, because Paul says that the gospel is 'the power of God.' Now, let's substitute that for the word 'gospel' – 'How can I make the power of God relevant to this modern age?' You see how egocentric that is? 'How can I make God important?'"

The gospel is the power of God. It is the secret by which the pride of man's heart is broken and the real power that is

manifest in God begins to manifest itself through a humble heart. That's where power is. That is the power of Jesus Christ that won hearts, and captured them, and carried them after him throughout his life.

- b) But the second facet of the gospel is **righteousness**,

... in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; {Rom 1:17a RSV}

And, again, righteousness is something that every heart longs for.

Let me show you what I mean. Suppose somebody starts to criticize you to your face. What do you do? Instinctively you start explaining why you did this, or you supply a good reason for it. You start justifying yourself. Now, that is the word used here – righteousness, being justified. And we all want to be justified. We are continually seeking to be justified in people's eyes, in our own heart, and in our own eyes, but the trouble is that self-justification never satisfies.

Have you noticed that? Once you have explained why you did something, and you go away, you are still not satisfied. You are never satisfied until the other person has agreed with it. We are continually seeking justification in another's eyes.

Now, it is this that the gospel supplies, because power and justification are found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is no longer self-justification, but it is God who says to the believer in Jesus Christ: "You are justified in my sight! You are righteous in my sight by virtue of Christ's work for you!"

Now, that is why Paul could say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." I am confident because I have seen it do what men are longing to discover. I have seen the gospel release the power in men's lives to be what they want to be. I have seen the gospel justify men so they no longer are straining continually to justify themselves. It has completely delivered them from all efforts at self-justification and self-centered

explanations of why they are doing things. The gospel delivers men from self-confidence, and brings them out into the fullness of the liberty of God. Such liberty is only found in believing that Jesus Christ can run a human life.

This is simple Christianity, isn't it?

This is why Paul was able to say, "I am confident! I am not ashamed!"

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When Everyone Knows God

by Ray C. Stedman

We come now to the main body of Paul's letter to the Romans. After the introduction (Verses 1-17), the first subject that is brought before us in this letter about the Christian faith is the true condition of man – what he is really like. In the book of Genesis, the first question that God ever asked man was a very revealing one. He came into the garden in the cool of the evening, after Adam and Eve has sinned, and his first question was, "Man, where are you?"

During a recent class taught by Dick Halver-son, I was struck by his treatment of this question. He pointed out that this is the question that God is always asking man: "Where are you?" Until you answer that question, there is nothing further that God can tell you about himself or about you. Dick illustrated it this way:

He said to the hostess of the class, "Suppose somebody had called before the class began, and said that they were trying to find the place, but were lost. What would be the first question you would ask them?" Well, of course, it would be, "Where are you?"

Until that question is answered, it is impossible to give directions for how to get anywhere. It is necessary to know where you are if anyone is going to help you. It doesn't do any good to ask for directions unless you know the answer to that question. If you think that you are someplace, but you are not, or if you think that you are in one location and are actually in another, then the directions that are given to you can only confuse you – they won't help a bit.

So, you can see it is true that the first thing man must answer is the question God asks, "Where are you?" That is where Paul begins the body of

this letter to the Romans. Where are you? Where are we? It is an interesting answer that we find.

The first thing Paul shows us is **man's opportunity** – the possibilities that we all have had to know God. This is a most interesting realm because it is the very question that is usually asked when you sit down to talk to somebody about Christ or about God. Inevitably, sooner or later, the question comes up: "Well, what about the heathens who have never heard the gospel?"

In Verses 18-20, we have the answer to that question:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; {Rom 1:18-20 RSV}

This is the answer that Paul gives to the question: "What about the heathens who have never heard?" His answer is that they are without excuse. Why? Because they have heard! They may not have heard the story of Jesus as we have it recorded in the Scriptures (what we might call high school or college level revelation about God), but they have knowledge about God.

I am often distressed when I hear missionaries – in an eagerness to wake people up to the need to obey the Lord to carry the good news of Christ out to the far corners of the earth – mistakenly leave us with the impression that men out there in foreign,

pagan lands are living in utter, total darkness about God. We are sometimes told that they have no opportunity to know God at all unless we go out with the gospel; they will perish in their sins without a chance unless Christians are faithful in the preaching of the Word. Now, I understand the zeal that prompts this, and I am in full sympathy with the need to go out to these lands and proclaim the gospel of Christ – but not for the reason that they give. It isn't because men are perishing without a chance. No one dies without a chance to know God. This is what Paul is declaring so forcefully here.

He says that there has been a universal revelation of God which has reached everyone, everywhere, in every age and time. No one has ever lived without the knowledge of God, for what can be known about God is plain to them, for God has shown it to them. God took the initial responsibility to let men know what he is like. God has shown himself to them. How has he done this? Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible nature has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made (i.e., in nature) so they are without excuse.

This is just a brief reference, but it is sufficient to show us that no man dies in total darkness – without the knowledge of God. The revelation is universal. Consider the beautiful words of Psalm 19:

The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handi-
work.
Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
There is no speech, nor are there theme
words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the
earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
{Psa 19:1-4a RSV}

Who lives who has not had a knowledge and understanding of God? It is written in nature, and in man himself, who is part of nature.

I was very interested some years ago in reading the story of Helen Keller, that remarkable woman who, as an infant, lost her sight, and her hearing, and her ability to speak. You know the story of how Miss Sullivan, in a most dedicated ministry of

love, reached through the darkness and silence to the soul of that dear girl and brought her into the knowledge of man and the earth and all that man knows. Thus, Helen Keller became one of the greatest women of modern times. She recorded that there came a time when Miss Sullivan, being a very godly woman and a wonderful Christian, wanted to impart to her some truth about God. So Miss Sullivan went to Dr. Philip Brooks and asked him to come and tell Miss Keller about God. As Dr. Brooks sat there, he talked to Miss Sullivan, and she translated the words to Helen Keller through the finger pressures that she used for communication. As she got across the idea about God, suddenly a light broke out on Miss Keller's face, and she answered back in her way, "Oh, I know Him. I've known Him a long, long time."

I think this is a wonderful confirmation that – even in the heart of someone who has no eyes to see, nor ears to hear – there is a written revelation of God in the human heart. And, if we but listen to this revelation, there is much knowledge about God that we can know.

In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we are told something about man's approach to God. We read there that it is impossible to please God without faith: "For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," {Heb 11:6 KJV}. We might call this the basic minimum of what it takes to know God. You must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. That is, we must believe in the existence of God and in the personality of God – that he is an intelligent being who responds to the seeking of man.

Now, this is exactly what nature proves, isn't it? All of us have had some sample, some contact, some encounter with the power of nature – we are awed by the mighty thundering of a storm that breaks upon our heads suddenly, or by the power of breakers dashing upon the shore. In some way, we find demonstrated to us the power of nature. God is a God of power, and that power indicates to us a force behind nature. Nature is alive with power. We are told that everything is in motion – the atoms that constitute this pulpit are constantly in motion. And behind the motion is the pulsating force of energy. Nature is one great mass of energy. It bespeaks, therefore, of mighty power that tells us of the existence of God.

But, more than that, all of us have experienced some knowledge of the sovereignty of God in nature. We don't play around with the laws of nature. Have you noticed that? When we discover a natural law, we are careful to observe it because, oftentimes, our very lives are at stake.

- You don't go fooling around with the law of gravity. You don't get on top of a 15-story building and shove your hands in your pockets and nonchalantly stroll over the ledge to show people how superior you are to the law of gravity. You won't break the law of gravity – you'll just illustrate it. They'll just scoop you off the pavement!
- We don't play around with the laws of electricity. When a wire is charged with 10,000 volts, we know that it will operate according to a strict and precise law, and we are careful to observe that law because one little mistake is enough to cause us to forfeit our life.

Nature is sovereign. It has the right to do what it was made to do, and in that we see the sovereignty of God – his right to be God, his right to choose, and his right to set up nature according to his idea, not ours. This, if acted upon, is the minimum basis man needs to know God – and every man knows this. This is what Hebrews 11:6 says. But I stress the words if acted upon. It is not enough just to know about God's sovereignty: It must govern us. It must control us. It must do something to us.

I was down in Southern California yesterday. To come home, I bought an airline ticket. The folder that the airline puts out doesn't read this way, but, in essence, it says, "To board a plane, one must pay the fare and hold a ticket" – and there is no getting aboard without it. So I complied with the rules and bought a ticket and had all that it took, potentially, to fly from Los Angeles to San Francisco. But, unless I acted upon that potential, it was of no value at all. I could have stuck the ticket in my pocket and walked around and said to myself all day long, "Well, I've got what it takes to get to San Francisco." But unless I went down to the airport, and handed in my ticket, and got aboard the plane, I never would have gotten here.

You see, it is simply not enough for a man to know that there is a God, and that he is a God of

sovereign being to be worshipped. We must act upon that fact. Without faith, which is a living, active thing, it is impossible to please God.

We read of **man's attitude** toward the revelation of God and the opportunity that he has in Verses 21-23:

for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and the senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. {Rom 1:21-23 RSV}

I believe that there is a time in every person's life – whether he is raised in a civilized country or in primitive society – when, in the dawning of his consciousness of the world and life around him, there is a knowledge that there is a God and that he is a God to be worshipped, a God of sovereign power. Then, each person is confronted with the choice to worship the God that he knows exists, or, under the pressure of his tribal customs, perhaps, or of the circumstances in which he lives, to be faithless to that knowledge that he has, and yield to the pressures, and turn away from God. This is the record that Paul gives. He says that men everywhere in the heathen world do not honor God as God, or give thanks to him.

That is a simple thing that God asks, isn't it.

There are three charges that Paul lays against these people:

1. First, **they did not give thanks**. Now, isn't that simple? If a lady walked across this platform, or across the auditorium, and she accidentally dropped her handkerchief, and someone picked it up and handed it to her, she would think herself most rude and boorish if she didn't say "thank you" for a simple little thing like that. And yet, God can supply everything that we need to live and breathe and have our being, and all the food and all that it takes to sustain physical life – and, more than that, all that for which our souls hunger and thirst – and many of us never take time to say a simple "thank you."

I think this is revealed often in the matter of just saying grace before meals.

Some of us who heard Doug Coe tell of his experience with the Teamsters Union will never forget the story of Herman, that dull, slow, dull-witted fellow who was used of God to open up a door of witness to Jimmy Hoffa and the leaders of the Teamsters Union: Doug told about a dinner they set up in a nightclub where all the leaders were to be. Doug was invited by Herman to come and lead in a prayer of thanks at the beginning of the meeting. Doug came into the nightclub and it was all dark, as it always is in those places. A combo was over in the corner beating out some hot jazz, and everybody was gathering around the tables. As soon as they sat down, they started to eat. Herman came over to him, and said, "It is time now for you to give the blessing." Doug said, "How are you going to do this? Everybody is eating. I don't know how you are going to stop this now." "Well," Herman said, "don't worry, I'll take care of it." He walked up to the microphone, scratched it to see if it was alive, and said, "Ha, ha! So you thought you were going to get by without praying, didn't you?" And everybody stopped with their forks halfway to their mouths, and turned around. Then Herman introduced Doug Coe, who led them in prayer. But it was a most unusual thing: That simple little act of thankfulness marks man's gratitude to God. They had not given thanks.

2. The second charge Paul makes is that these people **claim to be wise**. One of the most interesting things about men and women who reject Jesus Christ is that, almost invariably, the rejection of Jesus Christ is done in the name of education or progress. Isn't that remarkable? This is why our institutions of higher learning so frequently seem to be against the things of God. In claiming to be wise, they became foolish.
3. Then, the third charge Paul makes is that they **"exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images** resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles." Think of that! They take the glory of the immortal, incorruptible God, and make an image of it.

Do you remember what you did when you were in school and you wanted to insult the teacher? You drew an image of her on the wall

– a fearsome, gruesome caricature – and you wrote under it, "Teacher." Everyone who saw it knew you were expressing your contempt for teacher – you were insulting him or her.

When we want to express our utter contempt for some leader, what do we do? We hang him in effigy. We make an image of him and hang it up to show how contemptible he is and how contemptuous we feel toward him.

This is what man does with God. He makes an idol, and he calls it his God. He is insulting God; he is saying, "This is what I think God is like, God is a creature that I can handle, or ignore, or become indifferent to, or come and beg some favors from." This is why so many, many people have rejected Christianity – they have a caricature of God in their minds and they have rejected it as unworthy. Oh, they show some religious consideration for it, out of fear, or, perhaps, out of pressure; but, actually, they have insulted God by this type of thing.

Now, this is man's attitude. In the remaining verses of this Scripture, we see what inevitably follows this mental attitude.

Man's destiny is given in Verses 24-32:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobe-

dient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them. {Rom 1:24-32 RSV}

This is a fearsome passage, isn't it?

And yet, every one of these things is written on the pages of our newspapers every day. Just take a large metropolitan daily, and go through it, and check off the list, and you will find you can check all these things off every time.

And three times in this passage, Paul says, "God gave them up, ... God gave them up, ... God gave them up." To me, this is the most frightening thing about God. It is not the fact that he promises vengeance, or wrath – but, rather, it is that the nature of that wrath is that he lets me go ahead with what I want to do. He lets me choose wrong!

I find this bothers a lot of people. In our Home Bible Classes, people are always saying:

Well, why doesn't God stop men from doing those things? Why does he make us this way? Why does he let us make wrong choices? Why didn't he kill Hitler (or Krushchev) and eliminate this scourge from the earth?

Well, I think we are going a little too far afield when we ask the question that way. We should ask it this way:

Why didn't he stop you yesterday when you told that lie that deceived someone else? Why didn't he kill you in your tracks before you slandered that person that you gossiped about over the phone? Why didn't he stop you by cutting off your hands in a thunderbolt of judgment before you cheated on your income tax report last week?

If God is going to stop evil, why shouldn't he stop it there? And if he did, there isn't one who wouldn't be crying out against God, and saying, "You are unfair. You give us no liberty!" This merely reveals to us the unreasonableness of the human heart.

There is progression evident throughout this: You will notice that the first thing to which God gave them up was bodily defilement – they dishonored their own bodies among themselves. Then, he gave them up to dishonorable passions – that is,

their emotional lives. Then, as a final step, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, or base mind, as we read here – their mental lives, their wills are involved in this.

- If you will think back in your own experience, you will recognize that this is always the order in which evil moves in your life. Do you remember the first time you were tempted to do some obviously wrong thing – the first time you wanted to smoke, or to drink, or to experience sex, or whatever it was? It inevitably comes as a temptation for a new physical experience. You want to see how it tastes, or feels, or what it sounds like, or you want to see it. It always makes its appeal to the physical life.

The advertisers have discovered this. That is why we are always hearing, "Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should." The advertisers are making their appeal to the young boy who wants a new experience of taste in his life.

- When we yield to these temptations, we don't often really enjoy them – very seldom do we. We get the sensation, but we don't like it. But we persist, and it moves to the second state, where we really begin to enjoy it – our emotions become involved – we like it. We like the feel of it. We like the taste of it. We like the sensation that we are enjoying. And this is where Scripture is so accurate when it speaks of the pleasures of sin. Of course, sin has its pleasures – nobody would do these things if they weren't pleasurable.
- That, at last, moves us into the third, and terrible, state – when we deliberately and willfully choose to do these things, even though we already have begun experiencing what it describes here: "receiving in their own persons the penalty for their error." We deliberately choose sin. It becomes a status symbol with us. It is a mark of our independence. We fight for these things.

This explains why any movement for reform is always met with the bitterest opposition. It is not because these things have become so evil in themselves, but because they have become status marks

– marks of independence and man’s right to rule his own life. And yet, as we know, these kinds of things give us decreasing pleasure. They demand more and more in order to get less and less, until eventually it takes everything in order to get nothing.

Now, what is **God’s attitude** toward all this? This is the amazing thing. This passage closes with these words in Verse 32: “Though they know God’s decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.” If we were to stop right here, we would say that God’s attitude is one ending in wrath and hatred against these people. This is why so many people have the idea that God is just sitting up there as the judge, ready to cut off their heads if they get near him, because of the follies they have perpetrated. But you have read only half the letter in this case, because, as we read on, the amazing revelation in this letter is that these people who have insulted and offended and blasphemed God by their actions, who have refused his grace, and, in utter thanklessness, have wasted their lives that he is giving them – these very people are the ones whom God loved and whom Christ came to die for.

I read recently of a young man – a modern prodigal son – who had left home and then came back home after his father died. He was very kindly received by his mother. The day came for the reading of the father’s will, and the family gathered, and the lawyer began to read the document. To the surprise of all who were present, the will told in detail all the wayward career of the prodigal son. As the boy sat and listened to the account of his evil, he arose in anger and left the house. Nobody heard from him for about three years. When, eventually, they found him, he was told that the will, after telling of his waywardness, had gone on to bequeath him \$15,000.

This illustrates the way that men and women read the Bible today. They read this opening chapter of Romans, they read of this terrible condemnation, and they know how true it is. They know the guilt in their own lives – there isn’t one of us who hasn’t participated to some degree in some of these things which Romans mentions – then they stop there. Or, in anger, they get up in a huff and slam their Bibles shut, and say, “I don’t want to have anything to do with a God like that!”

But, if they read on, they discover that the whole purpose of this is simply to show them the love of God set against the dark background of human rebellion, for it is for this kind of people that Jesus Christ came. It was for them that he gave his life. It was for them that he poured himself out in death, that they might have restoration and harmony and be brought back into fellowship with God. For, of these very selfsame people that Paul describes here, it is written, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,” {Rom 5:8b KJV}.

This is the proof of God’s amazing love.

Prayer:

Our Father, we are moved as we see how intimately and clearly you know our human hearts and how foolish we are to try to hide anything from you. We know, Lord, that we must stand in the box and bow our heads in consciousness of guilt as we hear this terrible condemnation read against us. Many of us have not done many of these things, but we know that our hearts are capable of all of them. Lord, forgive us. We thank you for the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ. We pray that if there is anyone who has never received this forgiveness, he might receive Jesus Christ as Lord now, and know the joy of cleansing and full forgiveness. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

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The Secrets of Men

by Ray C. Stedman

I suppose there is one word that Christians use about their experience with Christ which bothers people more than any other word, and that is the word *saved*. Christians talk about “being saved.”

A lady at a Bible Class said to me:

“Whenever I hear that word, it makes me wince inside, and I feel uncomfortable. I wish they wouldn’t talk about ‘being saved.’”

Just last week, a man said to me:

“Now, look: If you are going to talk to me about being a Christian, don’t talk about ‘being saved.’ I don’t need to be saved!”

Well, I know how they feel. In fact, sometimes I feel the same way. I think it is wise to be careful in the language we use among those who are sensitive in this way. There are a lot of ways to talk about what happens when Christ comes into the heart without using the word *saved*, and yet saying the same thing without offending, and I think we should be careful not to offend. But, if it is really true that a man doesn’t need to be saved, then it is also true that Jesus Christ has nothing to say to that man. There is nothing that he can do for him, because the Lord himself said, “I am come to seek and to save that which was lost” {Luke 19:10 KJV}. That is what he came for – to save.

Perhaps it can best be explained in that little jingle which says:

Your best resolutions must wholly be waived,
Your highest ambitions be crossed;
You need never think you are going to be saved
Until you have learned you are lost.

That is what the opening chapters of Romans attempt to do. In Romans, we learn where we are

in God’s sight. We are answering the question posed in Romans 1 – the first question God asked man when our Lord came into the Garden of Eden: “Where are you?” {Gen 3:9 RSV}. And not only are we learning where we are, but also why we are where we are! What makes us act the way we do, and think the way we do?

In Romans 1, Paul points out that the first hindrance which keeps men from God is man’s reaction to the revelation of God. Paul puts it in these terms, “men suppress the truth” {Rom 1:18b RSV}. That is, they hold down, they restrain, they repress within their own hearts the truth about God that they know. This opening chapter of Romans is devoted largely to a recognition of a universal knowledge of God that men have everywhere. There is no such thing as an atheist.

Even the Communists – who are making the biggest possible demonstration of pretending that there is no God – continually reveal, in little things they say, that they too recognize God. When Khrushchev was over here, he used the name “God” on frequent occasions; and even Stalin one time, when news came to him of a battle that was won, cried, “Thank God!”

As G. K. Chesterton points out, it is impossible to swear properly without reference to God. Imagine ripping off a round oath in the name of natural selection, for instance.

So, you see, there is a knowledge of God. And there is enough knowledge of God in the conscience of man, and in nature around, to induce a spirit of reverent worship if it is followed. But men refuse to recognize this knowledge, and this is the basic human sickness that grips our race. They suppress and smother the truth they know by permitting wrong actions and wrong attitudes in their lives.

I shouldn’t say, *they*, I should say, *we*. We do this, don’t we? Even Christians do it!

Now, any psychologist can tell you that truth which is suppressed or smothered – refused recognition – always creates serious tensions and complexes in the life. Men become ridden with guilt, they become restless, they become dissatisfied, and torn with inner tensions. This is why we see the continuing phenomenon in human life of men all over the world continually being beset by the same problems – troubled with guilt complexes – with restless, unsatisfied spirits. Man's reaction to this is to run even further from God, to crowd him out of his life, to reason him away (if possible).

As we saw last week, the most violent rejection of God is almost always done in the name of education, of reason, or of philosophy. We try to crowd God out of our lives, though we don't actually wish to completely eliminate him. There are very few people who are willing to shake their fists into the heavens, and say: "There is no God." Or, "We don't want God!" Usually what we do is to put him way down on the list – until after our second heart attack – then we are ready for God!

And the result of that is predictable. When man is without the restraint of love for God, or fear of God, then he goes the limit in his reactions. The awful list that we have at the close of Chapter 1 is the record of the possibilities of evil that lie hidden in every human heart. These are now becoming more and more visible, I think, as this nation gradually drifts from its moorings and uses up the capital of our forefathers' spiritual heritage.

Chapter 2 presents another reason why men do not readily find God today. Paul points it out right at the beginning: That is, our tendency to point the finger at someone else – the amazing ability to find someone whom we consider worse than we are, and to ask God to concentrate on him and leave us alone. You'll notice this in Verse 1 of Chapter 2:

Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment on him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things, {Rom 2:1 RSV}

All of us know someone whom we consider a little bit lower on the ethical scale than we are, and what a comfort they are to our hearts! Every time our conscience gives us a little stab, we immediately remember these people, and we take courage,

and feel a lot better. If we analyze our thoughts, we find that we secretly feel God has no right to bother us while these people are around. Let him concentrate on them! They are the ones who need it!

Have you ever noticed how frequently this attitude is encountered? When you are stopped by a traffic cop, and he comes up beside your car, you say to him, "Officer, what are you bothering me for? Why don't you go out and catch some of the teen-age speedsters, and leave us law-abiding citizens alone?" I haven't checked on this, but I am sure that, if you asked a traffic cop, he would tell you this is the most frequent excuse he receives. We all want a lightning rod that will divert the stroke of divine wrath from us, and channel it off to someone we consider a little more worthy of it.

Now, Paul's answer to this is to show us the way God deals with men; and, in a most remarkable passage, he sets forth five principles of God's judgment in the first sixteen verses of this chapter. Let's look at these principles:

1. The first one is that **God judges according to truth**, Verses 2-5:

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls [or, literally, "is according to truth"] upon those who do such things. Do you suppose, O man, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. {Rom 2:2-5 RSV}

Psychologists say that we all have a mental image of ourselves, and it is usually quite a nice image. Others, of course, have a mental image of us which ordinarily is quite different from the one we have. Now, which is right? Well, probably neither one, because *what man really is* is what he is before God. It is God who sees man as he really is. God is an utter

realist. He doesn't confuse the issue, he doesn't cloud the matter with a lot of semantic obscurity. God sees us exactly as we are. This is why Scripture is so invaluable to us, because here – in this God-given, God-breathed book – we see ourselves as God sees us.

This is the answer to Robert Burns famous request:

O, wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as ithers see us!

And here is where we can do it. When we read the Scriptures we see God's divine image in man twisted and distorted. We see the way we prostitute his gifts, and we hurt the ones we love. We see how we wreck our own chances. We destroy our own dreams. We see ourselves as we are. And the saddest and most damning fact of all, is that we know we will find this in the Scriptures – that here is a mirror held up before us to help us see what we are like – and we don't want to look at it! The truth is that we don't want to know the truth. We would rather go on living in our dream world of fantasy and illusion about ourselves. Often it is only as we are driven by despairing circumstances, or by some grievous calamity, that there comes the moment of truth when we see ourselves as we really are. And the most wonderful place to see it and to find out the truth about ourselves is in the Word of God.

As it says here, God patiently waits to help us see through these delusions. He is patient with us; he is forbearing. He doesn't beat us over the head, and demand that we face the truth. He patiently waits and gently leads, and put us in circumstances where we see these things if we are willing to face the facts. Because he waits so patiently, we fondly imagine that we can go on living in our castle in the clouds forever. But all bubbles burst eventually, and, sooner or later, we discover that all along we were not fooling God one bit – he sees us for exactly what we are.

God's judgment is according to truth, according to things as they really are.

2. The second principle is brought out next. Paul says that **God judges according to works**, Verses 6-8:

For he will render to every man according to his works; to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. {Rom 2:6-8 RSV}

I think perhaps this passage is one of the places where a man finds some basis for the idea of a great balance sheet. Almost everyone has the idea, even if they have never become acquainted with the Scriptures, that God is conducting a moral weighing maneuver – that he puts all our good deeds on one side and all our bad deeds on the other side – and if the good deeds outweigh the bad, we get into heaven; if the bad outweigh the good, we go the other direction.

I was interested, during the recent breakfast meetings for businessmen, to hear how many of the men said this was their idea of how God worked, and therefore the whole purpose of human life was to try to get in as many good things as possible, and thus outweigh some of the bad things that we really can't help doing, or are driven to do for various reasons. They hoped that the good would outweigh the bad. Perhaps it is from this passage in Romans that the idea comes.

At first glance, it sounds that way, doesn't it?

Let's read it again. God says he "will render to every man according to his works; to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury." But Paul is really only pointing out that the deed reveals the heart. God will judge according to the result of obedience to the truth, or lack of obedience, that is in the life.

Putting it another way, what makes a man do good? It is because he has obeyed some truth, that is the only reason why men do good!

Well, what makes a man do evil? You have it right here: They obey not the truth but obey wickedness. This is why they do evil. This is going back of the deed, into the heart,

into the belief. It is simply true that men are what they believe.

Now, I believe there is truth short of the knowledge of Christ that makes a man do good. It is not only Christians who do good. Does that startle you? I think it is true. I think that lack of understanding of this fact is why our young people, coming from Christian homes and a Christian church, sometimes are shocked, staggered, swept off their feet when they get out into the world. They have grown up with the conviction that only Christians are good people, and they discover, when they get out into the world, that there are many good people who are not Christians. There are many people with fine moral lives, men on whose consciences you could ring a gold coin, men honest as the day is long – but who are opposed to the Christian faith. This shocks young people – they don't know what to make of it. Perhaps this is because they fail to grasp the fact stated here – when men obey truth, they do good, even though they do not yet know Christ.

But here also is the answer to the question often asked: “Will God save a man who lives a good life but never hears of Christ?” No single question about Christianity is asked more frequently than this. And the answer is, in the light of this statement in Romans: “It is impossible to live a truly good life and never hear of Jesus Christ!” Paul states clearly here that if anyone seeks to do good, and is looking for the truth, God “will give him eternal life.” Now, “eternal life” is but a synonym for “Jesus Christ.” Christ is eternal life. As John says, “This is the record, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son,” {1 Jn 5:11 KJV}. A little farther on in this same letter to the Romans, we read, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life ...” How? “... through Jesus Christ” {Rom 6:23 KJV}, his Son. Therefore, if God gives anyone eternal life, it is only by the knowledge of Christ, his Son. But truth obeyed leads to the knowledge of greater truth, until it leads at last to Christ.

So, what Paul is saying here is that it is God's responsibility to bring those who are seeking good to the knowledge of Christ. And this he does – we have accounts of it in Scripture:

- Cornelius was one like this. As we read in the tenth chapter of Acts, this Roman centurion was a good man – he was devout, but a pagan nevertheless – seeking to know the true God. An angel was sent to tell him to send men to a nearby town and follow their noses to the house of a certain tanner. There they would find a man named Peter, who would come and tell him the gospel.
- In the Old Testament, you have Rahab, the harlot {see Josh 2:1 ff}, and others.
- There is also the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, in the eighth chapter of Acts {Acts 8:27-39}.

These were eagerly obeying the truth that they had. And, you see, the test of whether a man is really obeying the truth and doing good is to offer him Christ. If that man is good, in the sense that God recognizes, then he will eagerly receive Christ. If he is only a respectable sinner, trying to appear good, he will reject the offer of grace.

I remember a Bible Class we had several years ago in the home of a lady who was not a Christian. Through the early sessions of the class she took great pains to let us know how good she was – how much she did for charity, how kind her attitude was, how tolerant she was, and so on. She never missed an opportunity to let us know how good she was. But, as the classes continued, she began to see every revelation of Scripture focusing upon the person of Jesus Christ. She saw at last that Jesus Christ is the crisis of human history, and that God ultimately weighs everyone in relationship to him. She became more and more withdrawn and cold. Finally, she just burst out in class: “I don't believe this stuff. I don't want this Jesus!” You see, the truth of the gospel drove her to the recognition that she was not good. This is the test – and she obeyed not the truth.

3. This is not all. Paul says, as the third principle, that **God judges without partiality**, Verses 9-11:

There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. {Rom 2:9-11 RSV}

That's hard to believe, isn't it? Really, we don't believe it, but it is true.

God is unmoved by any offers of vicuna coats, refrigerators, or luxury homes – you can't buy him off. You cannot buy his influence at all; you cannot influence him in any way.

Somebody was telling me about a traffic policeman who pulled a motorist over to the side of a road, and asked to see his license. When he showed his license to him, the cop said, "This license says you have to wear glasses while you are driving. Where are your glasses?" The man said, "I have contacts." The cop said, "I don't care who you know, you are going to get a ticket anyway."

There are many of us who think that if we have contacts in the right places, this will buy off the judgment we deserve, but this doesn't work with God. There is nobody in 'the right place' who can influence him so he will go easy on us. God is without partiality. He is not impressed by breeding, or by ancestry. He doesn't care whether your ancestors came over on the Mayflower, or whether they met it when it arrived – it makes no difference to him. It makes no difference whether your sins are notorious sins or respectable sins – he will treat them alike in his sight.

Do you remember Revelation, Chapter 3, where Christ is speaking to the seven churches, and he calls one of them "lukewarm" (Verses 15-17)? He says,

"I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." {Rev 3:15-17 RSV}

Now, these portrayed here are religious sinners.

I was reading in a thesaurus some time ago the synonyms of this word "lukewarm." One synonym is, "to be indifferent," another is, "to be respectable." That is "lukewarm." What is it to be lukewarm? It is to say, "I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing." This is what it is to be respectable – to think that you have no needs. The man who thinks he has need of nothing is the one by far the worst off, for, as God sees him, God says, "You do not know that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." And God treats the respectable sinner just as he does the notorious one.

4. There is another principle, the fourth, brought out next. In Verses 12-15 we see that **God judges according to opportunity:**

All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When the Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them ... {Rom 2:12-15 RSV}

Now, men are continually charging God with injustice because, they say, he condemns men to hell who have never heard of Jesus Christ. This is the most frequently voiced charge against the Christian gospel. We are always hearing somebody say, "Well, what about the heathen who never hear about Christ? How can a just God condemn them to hell without their hearing about Christ?" But, you see, God never condemns anybody on that basis. As we are told right here, "All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law." That is, if you disobey the truth that you have, even though

you have never heard of Moses or of Christ, you perish, not because you didn't hear of Moses or of Christ, but because you have disobeyed truth that you already know – that is the whole point. If you know of Moses and of Christ, and you still disobey the truth, you perish also, because your condemnation is even greater – because of the greater light involved. But, as it says here, even pagans have a form of basic law written on their hearts, and this is the basis of God's just condemnation of man. It is because they are not what they themselves know they ought to be. In other words, God judges you, not by some artificial standard of his, but by your own standard.

Recently, I was down in Newport Beach, teaching a Bible Class in a home. Quite a number of non-Christians were there, and one of them was a man from just across the street. He was a very charming individual, but he had made it known in the neighborhood already that he had no use for Christianity. As he came in the door, the first thing he said was, "I have come to be the Devil's advocate. I think the Devil needs a representative here tonight." We welcomed him, and told him to curl his tail around a chair, and sit down. As I began to speak on the opening chapter of Genesis, dealing with God's word to man, I could see in his face that this man had let down his guard. I don't think he was aware of how much he was revealing, but in that man's eyes I saw hunger written like I had never seen it before. At the question time, he, of course, came up with the usual question: "How about those that God condemns who never hear about Christ?" I answered (to all in the room), "Let me ask you this: Which of you has lived up to your own ideals? – because God won't judge you on the basis of something that you have never heard, but on the basis of what you already know. Now tell me: Who of you has lived up to his own ideals? Which of you has never deliberately done wrong? Which of you can say that you measure up to your own standard of what you ought to be?" You could just hear the silence in that room!

You see, it is not by some artificial standard that we stand condemned before God; it is because of what we know in our hearts about

ourselves. This indicates that God measures us by our own yardstick.

5. This is confirmed in Verse 16, where we read that **God judges according to the secrets of men** (the fifth principle):

... on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. {Rom 2:16 RSV}

Christ will be the judge, we are told. The gospel will be the prosecuting attorney. The charge will be the secrets of the heart that no one knows about but you – and God.

Samuel Johnson once said, "Every man knows thoughts of himself that he would not tell to his dearest friend." That is true, isn't it? And you know it is not so much the thoughts that come to our mind, because these are often temptations we are powerless to stop, but it is the reception we give them. We sometimes open the door and welcome them, don't we? Instead of driving these thoughts away when they come, we usher them into our living room, and set them down, and ask them to be comfortable and stay with us, and we invite them back again and again; we allow them to dwell there. These are the secret things that we don't want to tell anybody about – even our dearest friend.

Let me tell you part of the secrets of my own heart, if I may. I catch myself, every now and then (and I have for years), trying to figure out a way to perform a certain sin (which is particularly alluring to me) without paying the consequences. Don't look so shocked, because you do the same thing! I have worked out many ingenious ways by which I can make it "look good" to men, so nobody will blame me if I do this. It is amazing, the variety of ways that a matter can be approached to make it look acceptable to others. But the thing that stops me dead in my tracks is that, though I know I can make it look good to others, God knows my evil heart. And, someday, the thing that I can make look good to men will be seen in all its filth and depravity in his sight, and I will have to acknowledge that this is what it was all the time. Because I know that God knows the secrets of my heart, I am continually checked on this thing.

Now, this the ministry of the Spirit in our lives. Jesus spoke of the day when that which is uttered in secret shall be shouted from the housetops {cf, Luke 8:17} – and God knows our hearts now, but he will judge them then.

I was in a class last week talking about Noah and the flood. What a wonderful story that is! What a remarkable man Noah was! And, really, the only difference between Noah and the others of his day was that Noah made room in his life for God. That is all. It's wonderful to notice that. This man walked with God, and talked with God about everything in his life – all the little things and all the big things. And, for 120 years, as the ark was being built, God talked to him about the details of that ark as they went over the blueprints together. God would tell him where to put the window, and the door, and so on, as they worked and walked together.

Now, we read that Noah was a righteous man, but he didn't make himself righteous and then go looking for God. He just let God in, and God made him righteous. That is the whole secret. But then the flood came. Suddenly the delicate balance of nature was tipped by the evil of man, and the violence that was in the earth. The flood began to form. "The windows of heaven were opened," {Gen 7:11 KJV}, "the fountains of the great deep" were opened; the waters began to rise. Calamity came upon the world of Noah's day, but Noah was safe in the ark – where God had shut him in.

And I said to the people of the class, "This is exactly what everyone in the room faces!" And this is true for all of us.

Every one of us lives in exactly the same relationship in which the people of Noah's day lived. There is a great calamity coming, that we cannot escape, that will sweep away everything we have. It is as certain and sure as tomorrow morning's sun. It is what we call "death." When it strikes, it will be too late to build an ark. But God is talking to us; God is trying to reach us; God is dealing with us. God is trying to break into our lives in order that we might begin building our ark now.

It was really God who built Noah's Ark, not Noah. Noah just obeyed what God told him. God built the ark, and, in the moment of disaster, it was a place of safety for Noah. Now, this is what our Lord is telling us he doing today. Why does God tell you this that is recorded here in Romans 2?

- Is it because he wants you to despair?
- Is it because he wants you to realize that, when you stand before him, there is no chance? Obviously that is true, isn't it? We have no chance of standing in God's sight on our own merits.
- Is anyone prepared to stand up, and say, "If God is going to deal with me on this basis, I am prepared to meet him on these terms"? Of course not, all of us know we don't have a ghost of a chance.
- But does God tell us this to torment us? Of course not! He tells us this in order that we might give serious considerations to the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ, because, in that gospel, God has made a way by which he can offer us righteousness which is perfectly acceptable in his sight – a righteousness that we have nothing to do with ourselves, but which has been obtained for us by the work of another. In the gospel there is a way by which we may stand before God – perfectly acceptable to him, without any doubt, without any possibility of failure.

Now, that is why God tells us the truth about ourselves.

I watched the faces of the men during those recent breakfast meetings and saw them listening to men like themselves tell how they became aware of the great, empty vacuum in their lives, and how Christ came in and filled their lives. Some of these were men who had not given serious consideration to the claims of Jesus Christ perhaps for years. I saw them grow sober, quiet, reverent, respectful, as they realized that this was what God wanted them to hear.

This is God's message, you see. He tells us how hopeless is our condition in order that we might see how hopeful is the condition in Jesus Christ – and here he has once for all revealed the utter folly of attempting any other approach. He wants us to see the wonderful completeness of the approach that God himself offers us in Jesus Christ. This is why he brings us to this place, because, here in the gospel of the Son of God, we

have the perfect answer to all that God tells us we need.

Prayer:

Our Father, what folly to try to come in any other way! How foolish we would be – we poor, mortal men – to try stand in that august judgment day and know that you are dealing with us on the terms outlined here, when our own heart condemns us, when our own life, our own conscience, writes the word “guilty” against us! Lord, how dare we stand on any other basis than

that which is in Jesus Christ – righteousness made without any works of our own, without any merit of ours, but freely offered to us in him! As we come to Christ just as sinners, needing him, we can be saved. Lord, we thank Thee for this. May this be the day of the beginning of life to many who are yet without Christ. May some speak that word of invitation which says, “Lord Jesus, here is my life, here is my heart, I give it to you. Come and enter and save me, for your name’s sake.” We pray in his name, Amen.

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Red Herrings

by Ray C. Stedman

Let us begin with Romans 2, Verse 17.

Perhaps you are wondering a little bit about the title chosen for this study together, *Red Herrings*. It doesn't mean that there is something fishy about Romans. It is a phrase that you recognize is used frequently in conversation. It is a phrase that President Truman helped to popularize in his administration. Do you remember, he suggested that the Alger Hiss case was a "red herring," arranged to divert suspicion from the true issues of the day. He was, of course, mistaken in that. The judgment of history proved him to be so wrong that this phrase has become part of the language of the street.

A "red herring" is something that diverts attention away from an issue. It originated, I understand, from the practice of fugitives from justice who were trying to flee from prison and were being tracked by bloodhounds. In order to throw the dogs off the scent, they would drag a red herring across their path and thus try to confuse the scent and divert the issue.

In the opening verses of this chapter, the Apostle Paul showed us that God is an utter realist. He sees beneath all the varnish and the facade of our lives. He knows all our secrets. He sees the skeletons rattling in our closets. He knows all the carefully concealed, hidden areas of our life that we keep away from every other eye.

Imagine what it would be like if suddenly, by some strange process, everyone in this room knew everything about everyone else! Wouldn't we do like those Pharisees before the Lord Jesus, on one occasion? Beginning with the oldest, we would get up and quietly go out, one by one {cf, John 8:9}, wouldn't we? And when we begin to realize that God sees us like that continuously, we begin to grow uncomfortable in his presence – especially

when we realize that God wants to talk to us about this. It isn't so bad when we realize in the back of our minds that God does see these things, so long as he doesn't mention them to us. But when God starts being difficult about these things, and wants to talk to us about them, then we grow uncomfortable – like Adam and Eve when God came into the garden, and called, "Where art thou?" {Gen 3:9 KJV}. They realized they were naked and began to reach for fig leaves to cover their nakedness. So do men, when they begin to see what God is really like – they grow uncomfortable and start looking for a red herring to drag across the path to throw God off the trail.

Now, in these verses before us, we will see some of the "red herrings" that men so frequently use. This is such a natural reaction.

Remember when Christ spoke to the woman at the well in Samaria? He awakened her interest with his word about the living water that he could give her. Then he suddenly told her, "Go, call thy husband," {John 4:16 KJV}. And when she confessed that she didn't have any husband, he said to her, "Yes, but you have had five husbands, and the man that you are living with now is not your husband," {cf, John 4:18}. He began to move in on the secrets of her life. So you remember what she did? She threw in a red herring. She turned to the mountain, and said, "Our fathers say this is the place to worship God, but you Jews say it is in Jerusalem," {cf, John 4:20}. She tried to throw him off track with a theological issue – and this is the way we react so frequently.

This is what we have here in Romans. Here we examine some of the most common of these "red herrings" with which we try to throw God off the trail, hoping he will be satisfied and leave us alone.

The first is to have or hold a **proper kind of creed**. Notice Verses 17-24:

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God, and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” {Rom 2:17-24 RSV}

The most frequent facade that men erect between themselves and God, strangely enough, is religion. When God begins to bear down upon our life, and we become aware of the kind of person he is, and how thoroughly he knows us, almost invariably we tend to get a little religious.

This is the Jew of Paul’s day who is before us here, of course. And unquestionably he was the world’s greatest religionist. These are the pretensions (and notice they are not pretenses) that he makes. My, what a religious person is here – knowing God’s will, approving what is excellent, instructed in the Law – sure they are a light to the blind, to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, and so on. They were sure that God would accept them because they knew so much good theology. But Paul, you notice, removes the props very neatly with a few searching questions on how these people live. With a few questions, designed to probe the conscience a bit, he exposes the hypocrisy of their position.

In other words, as Paul points out, God isn’t fooled by the Apostles’ Creed recited devoutly every Sunday, or by the Lord’s Prayer piously prayed, or by a Scofield Reference Bible carried under the arm to church every day. These things may fool men, but they don’t fool God in the least. God’s question is always, “What effect does this truth have upon you?”

You know these things, now what does it do to you?

- How does it affect you?
- Does it make you more rigid and unbending and legalistic and demanding?
- Do your neighbors invite you in for coffee when they see you – or do they turn their back and look the other way whenever you are out in the yard?
- Does it make you easy to do business with – or does it make you a shrewd operator that nobody can trust?

This is the question, you see. God’s question is never, “What is your creed?” Now, creeds are important. I don’t mean to deny that, but this is never the essential thing. God’s final question to man is never “What is your creed?” but “What is your influence.” Do men blaspheme God because of you? This was the devastating indictment that Paul brought against these Jews. He said, “You can claim all these things – and perhaps they are true, and perhaps they are not – but the great issue is that, everywhere you Jews go, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the way you live.”

You see how Paul devastates the one who trusts simply in some outward creed, or some proper religious statement, as an indication that he ought to be acceptable before God.

I remember reading some time ago of a couple of young men who were standing on a street corner in Glasgow, Scotland, when a very dignified-looking older man walked by them. One of these young men turned to the other, and said, “You see that man? He is the founder of the infidels club here in Glasgow.” And the other young man said, “Why, you must be mistaken! I know that man. He is an elder of the church where I belong.” The first young man said, “That is exactly what I mean. He is an elder of the church, but the way he conducts himself in his business life, and in his personal affairs, he has turned so many away from God that he is literally the founder of the infidels club here in Glasgow.”

Now, this is what Paul is getting at.

I heard the other day a quotation that I want to share with you this morning, because I think it reflects this so wonderfully – so truthfully. It is by Chad Walsh, and appears in a book he has written, called *Early Christians of the Twenty-first Century*. This is what he says:

Millions of Christians live in a sentimental haze of vague piety with soft organ music trembling in the lovely light from the stained glass windows. Their religion is a thing of pleasant emotional quivers divorced from the intellect, and demanding little except lip service to a few harmless platitudes. I suspect that Satan has called off the attempt to convert people to agnosticism. If a man travels far enough away from Christianity, he is always in danger of seeing it in perspective and deciding that it is true. It is much safer from Satan's point of view to vaccinate a man with a mild case of Christianity so as to protect him from the real thing.

I am afraid that this is the position of many today. You see, this is the issue that Paul is raising. As soon as God begins to get real and vital about matters, we raise the matter of our creed and we simply say: "Look, this is what we believe. What is wrong with that?" And, of course, there is nothing wrong with the creed, but the issue is: What does it do to your life? How much has it changed you at home?

Now Paul goes on to a closely related issue. He raises the question here of a **prescribed ritual**. This is another "red herring." Notice Verses 25-29:

Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God. {Rom 2:25-29 RSV}

There is a little play on words here. The word *praise* is a play on the word *Jew*, because the word *Jew* means "praise." It comes from the {Hebrew} word *juda*, which means "praise." These Jews were praising themselves because they had the rite of circumcision. This was the great mark of the true people of God. Whenever anybody questioned their standing before God, they only had to refer to the fact that they were circumcised – this was the great mark.

Now, in the place of circumcision, you can put a number of equivalent things: You can put baptism, confirmation, church membership, communion, mother's prayers – almost anything you want. How frequently you find people raising these things!

I have often said to someone, "Well, are you a Christian?" And the answer I get is, "Well, I am a Catholic," or, "I am a Baptist," or "I was raised a Methodist," or, "I've been baptized." This is such a common thing. Just let the Spirit of God begin to probe into the state of the heart, and you see men quickly hold up their baptism certificate between them and God, and say, "Now, this what I ought to be judged on."

In the case of the Jews, it was circumcision. But, as Paul is pointing out here, God isn't fooled one bit by this. There are many uncircumcised (as Paul also points out), and also many unbaptized, unconfirmed, unpasteurized, unsimonized individuals who behave just as well as those who have been baptized, circumcised, simonized, or whatever it is.

Do you see? These things do not add anything to a person – that is the point – they don't do a thing for you. Regardless of what you have been taught, there is no value in an outward ordinance or outward ritual – none whatsoever.

"Well," you say, "what is a religious ritual, anyway? Why are these things here?" And the answer is: A ritual or rite is saying something to God in actions instead of words.

Now, if the meaning has been deleted from it by lack of commitment of the heart, then it is a meaningless gesture. If you do these things because you think God requires them, not because they are a voluntary expression of what you really want to say to God, then they are as meaningless as buying a birthday gift for yourself. In other words, God is simply saying here that he is interested in

ritual, and these rites mean something to him only if they genuinely express something that comes from the heart.

Baptism means that I am dying to the old life of selfishness and self-centeredness and self-living, and I am determined to expose my life to the control of Christ, and to live for the glory of God. Now, if it means that to us, it is a wonderful expression to God; but if you have the baptism without the meaning, it is a perfectly horrible thing. Don't insult the God who loves you by muttering some meaningless mumbo-jumbo before him, or play-acting some religious hocus-pocus that leaves you uninvolved, and, therefore, unchanged – this is what Paul is saying.

I heard of a dentist who took X-rays of every patient who came in and then made a special proposition to them. He said, "For ten dollars I will fill these cavities that you have here, but, if you don't want to pay that much, for five dollars I will retouch the X-rays." Now, the ritual without the meaning behind it is like that, it is a retouched X-ray – the cavity is still there.

A third "red herring" is found in the first four verses of Chapter 3. You see, Paul is answering the thoughts of the minds of his readers, and he raises the questions that must now be in everyone's mind:

**Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some were unfaithful? Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though every man be false, as it is written,
"That thou mayest be justified in thy words,
and prevail when thou art judged."
{Rom 3:1-4 RSV}**

Now, this is the "red herring" of a **privileged position**. By this time, the Jews who would read this were beginning to get a little indignant with the apostle. They were saying to him, in effect:

"Look, the way you sound, it is as though these privileges that God has given to us – our great religious heritage – really means nothing at all. You are undervaluing our heritage."

Paul answers:

"No, I am not; these things mean a lot. The Jews have been given a position of privilege – they were given the oracles of God; they were entrusted with the message of God; they were chosen as the channel by which God would communicate with the race – and this is a tremendous privilege."

They had the message that God wanted men to have. But when they kept that word to themselves, when they viewed it as a special badge of God's favor, and they locked it within their breasts and refused to share it with others, what then? Did their faithlessness mean that God would be like them, that he would prove faithless to his own promise? "No," Paul says.

Right here is the trouble with our thinking about God. Men think that God acts like they do. If we get irritated or piqued at somebody who doesn't prove faithful to their word, we say: "Well, I'll treat them the same way. Why shouldn't I?" Men believe that God, like them, plays favorites – that he will be loyal to his gang, no matter whether they are right or wrong. But, you see, we have such wrong ideas about God. J. B. Phillips, in his wonderful book, *Your God Is Too Small*, has a series of interesting caricatures of God as men see him today. He points out that many of us are living with infantile conceptions of God – conceptions of God that we gained as children which we have never thrown off since we grew to manhood or womanhood. So many of us still have these baby-like conceptions of God. It is almost as if we were still sleeping with our Teddy Bear!

But Paul says, "Let God be true." God is faithful to his own promises though every man be false. And privilege only increases responsibility in God's sight. God demands more from those who have more light than he does from those who have less. He will not withhold his judgment because they happen to have a long and respected religious heritage – it doesn't make any difference. This is such a pitiful defense, isn't it?

Not long ago, I was asked to visit a woman whose husband had committed suicide. She lived in a hovel, and, as she met me at the door, I could see that she was drunk. She invited me in, and, as soon as I explained who I was and why I had come, the first bit of information she gave was that she

was the daughter of a Methodist minister. You see, she was trying to hide under that pitiful, shabby refuge of a heritage that she thought would be all I would want. She thought I would be impressed – and I was only saddened by what she told me.

It doesn't make any difference whether your grandfather or your grandmother was a wonderful Christian – that can't be passed on to you. God has no spiritual grandchildren. Have you noticed that? You never read about his grandchildren. You read much about his children, but never about his grandchildren – he doesn't have any. Every Christian is individually a part of the family of God. There are no second-generation Christians.

When I was a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer told us he knew D. L. Moody and his family intimately, and that, so far as he could tell, he saw no indication in any of the Moody children that they ever came to know Jesus Christ. Now, that is a terrible indictment, isn't it? But, of course, you don't come to know God by natural relationship, or by belonging to a special-privilege class or group.

These things are false refuges.

We now come to another “red herring,” and this is the last one. It is the most suave and clever of all. It is found in Verses 5-8. Paul raises another question in the minds of these people. He says:

But if our wickedness serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? That God is unjust to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) By no means! For then how could God judge the world? But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just. {Rom 3:5-8 RSV}

Do you see his argument? He is saying that these people who are reading this will say to themselves:

“Well, now look. If our wickedness serves to display how just and holy God is – if, against the background of our evil, he is seen in all the beauty of his glory and purity, and his creatures thus see him as he is and glorify him

– well, then, why should he condemn us? Everything has turned out all right.”

There is a pleasing result in the end, you see – that is, **the end justifies the means**. This is one of the oldest of arguments.

Now, Paul's answer is wonderful! What he says is this: “It is true that God is going to work out all his plans, and he uses the very opposition of his enemies to accomplish these plans.” That is what the cross is: The cross appeared to be the moment of triumph of all the powers of darkness and evil, but God used it to be the foundation of the victory and triumph of Jesus Christ. God does this. But Paul's question is: If God let everyone off on that basis, how then could he judge the world? Everyone would get off then. Evil would never be judged – evil would go on unrestrained – and God himself would be proven unjust and evil, if he did that.

“No,” Paul says, “I am not teaching ‘let's do evil that good may come,’” – as some were reporting that he was teaching – “because, even though God uses the wrath of man to praise him, still man is responsible for his own evil, and God will judge that.” So, you see, you no longer can say: “Well, it all turned out all right in the end – God's got nothing to worry about. Why should he condemn me? He is glorified by it.”

No, God must judge the evil of man's heart.

When I was a boy, I read a story that I have never forgotten. I have never read it since, but I have never forgotten it because it made a great impression upon me:

It was the story of a sea voyage. In the hold of a sailing ship was large quantity of guns mounted upon wheels. These guns were chained down so they would not move about as the ship made its way through a rough sea. One of the men, through carelessness, managed to release one of these guns one day; he had not properly fastened the chain, so the gun was free. A storm came up, and the gun began to roll back and forth in the hold of the ship. It worked its way out and ran the whole length of the ship. As the storm mounted in fury, the gun rolled back and forth and began to batter against the bulkhead of the ship. Soon, it was apparent that the ship was in grave danger, because, unless this gun could be secured again, it would bash its

way through the side of the ship, and the ship would sink.

So the man who had been guilty of freeing it slipped down into the hold, and, at the risk of his life, rushed out, and tried several times to get hold of the gun, and throw a rope around it. But each time, almost as if the gun were alive, when he got close to it, the ship would move in such a way that the gun came lurching toward him, and he would barely escape with his life. After several hair-breadth escapes, he managed to throw a rope about it, and they finally secured the gun.

When the danger was over, the captain called him up on the deck and gathered the whole ship's company together. He got this man before them there, and he commended him for his bravery and his heroism. And he promised him an award – a cash prize that would be his when the ship docked – for the bravery he exhibited when he saved the ship. The man began to feel proud of himself because it had all worked out so wonderfully.

But, as soon as the captain had concluded the words of commendation, he ordered the man to be tied to the mast and shot through the head for his carelessness which resulted in putting the ship in danger.

I have never forgotten that story because it illustrates something of the character and justice of God. God cannot pass over evil, and though we may have done things that are good, they do not balance out the evil.

God sees us as we are – this is what Paul is telling us.

You see, none of these hollow defenses fool God. None of these defenses stand in his sight:

- God knows how we hate to be stripped of our defenses.
- God knows how hard it is to swallow our pride.
- God knows how we cling to our self-respect and our self-confidence. We think that if we lose this – if we admit how foolish, how evil, how wrong, how perverted we are – we have nothing on which to stand. We feel like we are losing our mantle of manhood or womanhood – we are being asked to surrender our last vestige of self-respect, and to admit total guilt – and God knows that.

- But God knows something else too, and this is the point: God knows that our self-confidence is based upon a delusion.
- God knows that our self-respect is the very thing that is keeping us away from the great gifts of blessing and glory he wants to give us.
- God knows that this thing which we fight like a tiger to defend, and refuse to admit, or give up, is the very thing that is like a cancer, gnawing away at our vitals and destroying us. And so, like a faithful surgeon, God plunges the knife deeply and cuts the thing out – if we will permit him.
- And then God knows this: He has another basis of confidence, another basis of respect that he intends to give us in Jesus Christ – a confidence that cannot be shaken, a self-respect that is righteous in his sight.

If we will allow him to take away our self-confidence and our self-respect, he will give us, in its place, that which makes us all that we want to be.

Yesterday morning I heard John French, a noted British actor, tell how, when Billy Graham came to London, John determined to arrange an interview with Billy so he could punch him on the nose and expose him for the fool, the liar, the cheat, and the scoundrel that he was convinced Billy Graham was. He told about how he arranged the interview, how he had an appointment with Billy in the lobby of a hotel, and how he walked up to him determined to show him up for the charlatan that he was sure he was.

As he greeted Billy, John French drew back his fist to hit him on the nose. But the first thing he knew, Billy had John's fist in his hand, shaking it, and telling him that he was glad to see him. That rather shook him.

Then John French told how Billy arranged an appointment with him a little bit later, and they met together in a room; how John hated him, loathed him, because he stood for all this "religious racket" that he felt was "such a blight" upon men; but how, as they sat and talked, Billy asked him, "John, do you know how it feels to be crucified?"

They began to talk about crucifixion, and what the Lord went through. The Spirit of God used this in John French's life. Gradually, there was a sense of confidence awakened, and they began to talk freely. At last, he said, he knelt and received Jesus Christ as his Savior.

John French told about how he had made his success in the theater, how he had fought his way up from the ranks, how he had blasted his way to the top of his profession by the sheer weight of self-confidence. Then he said these words as he concluded his testimony: "I left the theater when I became a Christian. I enjoyed it, I thought it was wonderful, but I will never go back to it because I found something far more exciting when I found Jesus Christ."

Now, this is what God is talking about here in Romans. He is undermining all the self-righteousness of man, in order that he might give us the righteousness of Christ. This is the free gift he offers every individual who will receive it. You can't have both. It is either your righteousness, your confidence, your self-respect, or it is that which comes from Jesus Christ as free gift to anyone who will have him. He is available to men and

women today as much as he was in the days of his flesh.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, how we thank you for the truth of this great message in Romans, how, through the centuries, men and women, having read this book, have found these things to be true. They have believed the simple writing. They have invited Jesus Christ into their life. They have found him to be the Living Savior. Anything else, anything other than this, they have found not sufficient. They have found the one who satisfies the deepest longings of the heart. For those who have not found Jesus Christ yet as Lord and Savior, we would ask, Father, that, at this moment, they may invite him in, that they may crown him Lord, that they may cast away all their foolish self-respect and receive that which he alone can provide – his own unsullied righteousness. We pray in his name, Amen.

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Peale or Paul?

by Ray C. Stedman

It would be a perfectly obvious statement to say that Norman Vincent Peale did not write the *Epistle to the Romans*. As you know, Dr. Peale is noted for being the advocate of the power of positive thinking, and the book of Romans does not begin with positive thinking – it begins with the power of negative thinking. It is the stripping away of all the self-confidence of man in order that we might see ourselves as we are.

Now, I mean no personal attack on Dr. Peale in using his name in this connection. I am only referring to the approach it represents – what has been called the philosophy of mental aspirin – this power of positive thinking.

Somebody has said that the difference between Paul and Peale is that Paul is appealing, while Peale is appalling. But I don't think this is quite accurate; actually, I think the reverse is true. I think there is a very real sense in which it is Paul who is appalling, and Peale who is appealing. In fact, it is the very sense that Peale is appealing that makes him appalling, and it is the fact that Paul is appalling that makes him appealing.

Now, if you will bear with me, I will show you what I mean. I have a quotation I would like to share with you. It was not written by Norman Vincent Peale, but it does represent, I think, something of the school of thought he represents – it is typical of that. It is from an article that appeared in the *This Week* supplement of the *San Francisco Chronicle* some time ago, called "The Art of Being Yourself," in the column, "Words to Live By." I quote, as follows:

The art of being yourself at your best is the art of unfolding your personality into the man you want to be. By the grace of God you are what you are. Glory in your selfhood! Accept yourself, but go on from there. Champion the right to be yourself. Dare to be different and to set your own pattern. Live your own life and follow your own star. Re-

spect yourself! You have the right to be here, and you have important work to do. Don't stand in your own shadow. Get your little self out of the way so that your big self can stride forward. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny spark of possibility within you into the flame of achievement. Create the kind of self you will be happy to live with all your life. Be gentle with yourself. Learn to love yourself, to forgive yourself; for only as we have the right attitude toward ourselves can we have the right attitude toward others.

Now, isn't that appealing?

That kind of talk always strikes us with a very right note, doesn't it? And, if you place it alongside these words from Paul in the third chapter of Romans, you can see what I mean in stating that Peale sounds appealing and Paul sounds appalling, for Paul says: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." But, you see, despite the popular appeal of this type of approach, there is one fatal flaw in this philosophy of self-improvement – it can't be done.

Take a little closer look at some of these things and see what I mean. Our quotation says: "Don't stand in your own shadow. Get your little self out of the way so that your big self can stride forward." Now let me ask you, very practically: How do you do this? It sounds good, doesn't it? But, how do you do it? Your little self is in the way. Your big self is back here, and yet the same self that you are trying to advance is the one that stands in the way. You see, we are only one self. Then how do we do this? This kind of a philosophy is really a problem trying to solve itself – which is impossible.

It reminds me of the little rhyme that says:

Peale or Paul?

I had a little tea party
this afternoon at three.
It was very small, three guests in all,
just I, myself, and me.
Myself ate up the sandwiches,
and I drank up the tea.
It was also I who ate the pie,
and passed the cake to me.

This is about as much real nonsense as this kind of thinking. It sounds beautiful – it sounds challenging – but it is totally impractical because there is no way of accomplishing it. It is like wrestling with yourself. Did you ever try that? I suggest that, in the privacy of your own room, you attempt this – wrestle with yourself! When you’ve got yourself down, who’s on top?

So, you can appreciate the realism of the Apostle Paul, who carefully documents his arguments from real life and sums up his conclusions with the remarkable statement of **man’s problem** that we read here.

Let me begin with Verse 9:

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

**“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands, no one seeks for
God.**

**All have turned aside, together they have
gone wrong;
no one does good, not even one.”**

**“Their throat is an open grave,
they use their tongues to deceive.”**

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

**“Their mouth is full of curses and bitter-
ness.”**

**“Their feet are swift to shed blood,
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they do not know.”**

**“There is no fear of God before their
eyes.”**

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by the works of the law since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. {Rom 3:9-20 RSV}

As you read Verses 10-18, you see that these are quotations Paul has gathered from the Old Testament. He has gone back through the library of the Hebrew Scriptures and gathered up verses from Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Isaiah, and has brought them all together here. So, here is the indictment and the conclusive word as to the problem of man.

As you read this list through, it’s very revealing, isn’t it? I am always amazed at the way people can read this passage and add, mentally, “except me.”

None is righteous, no, not one, *except me*.
No one understands, no one seeks for God,
except me.
All have turned aside, *except me*.

As you read this through with people, you can oftentimes sense them adding those two words. Or, as they finish reading this passage, they say, “This is true of everybody else, but not of me.”

Now, Verses 10-12 are an evaluation on the part of the apostle. He is simply gathering up what is true and showing us that, in man’s heart, there is often much religion, much seeking after *a* god, but not seeking for *the* God – with a capital “G.” Across this vast land, there are thousands of churches packed with people – like this congregation this morning – and yet this indictment of the Apostle Paul would include all of them. Among all these people, in churches and temples all around the world, there is none that seeks for God – no, not one!

Isn’t that amazing? The natural heart of man is not really looking for God!

Now, men look for *a god* all the time. This is the entire drive of religion around the world – to find *a god* that man can worship, because man cannot live without *a god*, and every man *has* his god. We see people out on Sunday mornings polishing and waxing them at times, and taking them on trailers down to the water’s edge, and so on. There are lots of gods, all kinds of them, many different varieties – and every man has his god.

But Paul says – as he knows the human heart in this divinely-given look at what man is really like – there is *not one* that really wants to discover God unless God draws that man to himself. That is what Jesus said: “No man can come unto me ex-

Peale or Paul?

cept my Father draw him,” {cf, John 6:44}. If you have hunger in your heart for God – with a capital “G” – and I know many of you do (and across this land there are many like you), it is not because you want God, but because *God wants you!* God is seeking you, and drawing you, to himself – that is what Paul brings out here. Man wants God, in a sense, but man wants to use him. Every effort to find God on the part of the natural man is tainted with the attitude that we want to bargain with God when we find him, we want to accept him as an equal, but not as our Lord. And that is what God must be – *our Lord!* This is why Paul makes this statement.

You see, we want God at times –

- when we are in trouble,
- when we are in danger,
- when we need comfort,
- when we need surcease from sorrow or heartache we want God,

– but we don’t want him all the time. But, if God be God, he must be God all of the time – that is the whole point. And so man denies God’s right to be God.

Now, Verses 13-17 are an examination of man’s condition. What are the results of man’s rejection of God? And notice how up-to-date this is:

It affects his talk, first of all:

“Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive.”

“The venom of asps is under their lips.”

“Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” {Rom 3:13-14 RSV}

When man refuses to bend his will to the will of God, it begins to affect his talk. You can tell it in the tone of his voice, in the words he chooses, in the biting sarcasm that comes forth, in the curses and bitterness, in the foulness of the tongue oftentimes, in the jealousy that is evident there. So, you see, it is true what Jesus says, that out of the heart of man, out of his inner being, come forth murders, adulteries, fornications, and foulness of every kind {cf, Mark 7:21}. This is man. It affects his talk.

Someone has said that if you want to prove this verse is true, go out on the street, go up to the first

man you see and hit him in the mouth, and you’ll see what comes out – curses and bitterness.

And it affects his walk:

**“Their feet are swift to shed blood,
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they do not know.”
{Rom 3:15-17 RSV}**

Someone has suggested that this would be a very remarkable verse to write above the doors of the United Nations building in New York: “Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they do not know.” Isn’t it true? Here are the nations gathered together – gathered to seek peace – but the outcome of it is constant friction, and trouble, and disturbance, and heartache, and bloodshed, and misery, and they do not know the way of peace.

Now the explanation is given in Verse 18 – one short sentence:

**“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
{Rom 3:18 RSV}**

There is no understanding of God’s being – no concern for his opinion. To put it in the words of the street today, “man couldn’t care less about what God thinks about him” – and this is the root of all of the problems in human life. There is no concern for God’s opinion in man’s life.

So we have this final sentence of indictment in Verses 19-20. Paul points out that even the Ten Commandments can’t help you here. What good does it do to have these laws, moral as they are, ethical and right as they are, – even though everybody subscribes to them – when all they do is simply point out how much we fail to keep them.

You often hear somebody say, “I don’t need Christ, all I need is the Sermon on the Mount,” or, “the Ten Commandments.” The obvious answer to such a claim is: Well, that’s fine, but do you *do* this? It isn’t enough just to have this code hanging up on your bedroom wall, or even to subscribe to it mentally, but, do you *do* these things?

Law is such that, if not kept, it demands retribution. The Ten Commandments, as Paul points out here, are for only one purpose:

through the law comes the knowledge of sin. {Rom 3:20 RSV}

As we measure ourselves alongside of the ten rules which God has given man, we discover that we have all failed. So it merely reveals how far short we have come.

Now, if we stopped here (and this is where so many people stop in their understanding of the Christian message) we would have the most discouraging, depressing message that man has ever heard. This is negative thinking, isn't it. And no wonder nobody wants it. If this is all there is, it leaves us with all our self-respect thrown away, our confidence gone, and we have nothing left. We are naked before God and man – and who wants to be that way? But, you see, if we stopped here, it would be only half the gospel, only half the story. Don't stop here! The other half is what makes it wonderful – **God's answer to man's problem.**

Notice that Verse 21 begins with the words, "But now." That word "But" is a *corner* word – you come to it and you turn a corner:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. {Rom 3:21-26 RSV}

Do you understand that? It is saying that what no man can do by self effort – that is, to be righteous and accepted by God – God will do for him *if* that man yields to Jesus Christ the right to be Lord of his life: This is the gospel.

Now, Paul points out that there is no use trying to press to any other point: There is no distinction at all between men in this matter in God's sight. There is no need to show your Boy Scout badge, or your baptism certificate, or your church membership, or your lodge emblem. As Paul says, "there is no distinction" here – the ground is level at the foot of the cross. All men have fallen short, as

Phillips so beautifully puts it, "of the beauty of God's plan" {Rom 3:23 J. B. Phillips}.

Who can argue with that? Have you fulfilled the beauty of God's plan for your life? Of course not! Then *all* have sinned and fallen short, and missed the beauty of God's plan. And *the only way* to be justified is by faith in Jesus Christ. All men can have him. And no man can be justified apart from him, who, by his death in our place, made it possible for God to receive us, and give us Christ's righteousness. Now, that is the gospel.

As you can see, the cross is the great place of exchange. As Paul writes in Corinthians, "He who knew no sin [Jesus] was made sin for us that we who knew no righteousness [in ourselves] might be given [or made] the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ," {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}. And this is done at the moment of faith, at the moment of acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ at the cross.

Now, this is a great mystery. I confess I never fully understand it – and no one else does – and we never will. What took place on the cross of Jesus Christ is a vast and insuperable mystery. We never can fully enter into it, but Paul points out two things that are made clear in the cross of Christ:

1. The first one is that, although God apparently overlooked evil in the past, and allowed it to go on, this does not mean that he is not righteous, as some men think. For, when God's Son took the place of sinners, and, on the cross, was *their representative*, God looking down at his own beloved Son, who had done no wrong, *spared him not*, but poured out upon his innocent head all the wrath that a holy God reserves for men who live in rebellion against him. It is forever on record, therefore, in the cross of Christ, that, though God accepts a sinner, he hates the sin and will not bend to it in the slightest degree. Thus, God's record stands vindicated by the cross. God, even when his own Son was there, would not spare him.

- This means that you and I can never get by with trying to get God to be lenient with us, for even when his own Son was there, he wouldn't spare him.
- It means that God is righteous and even though he passes over sin, and doesn't judge it immediately, and lets men go on in

their ways, and lets horrible things happen in human history, it doesn't mean that God is simply powerless, or careless, about what is taking place.

- Rather, the cross indicates that God has a holy hatred, continually, against all that stands against his righteous rule in men's lives.
2. But, on the other hand, the cross demonstrates his willingness to receive all who come to Jesus – he is the justifier of him who believes in Jesus – this is the declaration that Paul makes. Without distinction, love overcomes all our suspicion and gives us what we cannot earn.

Now, I hope this is clear because there are so many words that are spoken today that pervert and distort this wonderful message from God.

God denies all effort, all power of positive thinking,

- *Until* there has come the recognition of the complete lack of anything to offer him.
- *Then* he gives us all that we need, and,
- *From then on*, positive thinking is the only possible thing that will meet the need.

I remember that when I was in Dallas I taught for awhile at the Southern Bible Training School, which is a school for colored people founded by Ed Ironside, the oldest son of Dr. Harry Ironside, when he was a student at the seminary.

Dr. Harry Ironside was a member of the board of that school, and, during its early days, the school had a very precarious existence. They were meeting in just one room in a house in Dallas, and there were only about ten or twelve students that they had managed to persuade to come to the school. It used to be quite a heavy drain upon Dr. Ironside because Ed would write to his father for funds whenever the school ran short. Dr. Ironside told us at Dallas one day that he came down to the school, and they had their usual need of funds, and he said to his son, "Ed, I wonder if it is worth going on. This school is just such a continual drain on us all the time, and I really wonder if we are getting any-

where. Sometimes I think it would be better if we stopped." Ed Ironside didn't say anything. He waited a moment, and then said, "Well, Dad, I'll tell you: You come to the school session tomorrow night and just see what is happening."

So the next night Dr. Ironside went down to the house, and there were about ten or twelve students there, and Ed Ironside was teaching them. Ed stood up, and said to them, "Now men, you know my father here, and you know the concern he has had for this school, but you know also that there has been a real financial drain upon him. My father said to me yesterday that he wondered if it was worth going on, that perhaps we ought to stop the school. I wonder what you men think about that."

Well, nobody said anything for a moment. And then one man got to his feet and began to speak. As you know, they have a very natural eloquence, and he said something like this: "Mr. Ironside, does I hear you right? Did you say something about closing this school? Why, let me tell you something. When you started this school last year I heard about it, and I was pastor of a church here in town. I had a big church of about 500 people. I used to love to be pastor of that church – I dressed up in my very best clothes, and put on my nicest white gloves, and I used to go to church every Sunday, and stand up in the pulpit and wave my hands and lead the singin' and I was so proud to be the pastor of that church." And he said, "I didn't know what to preach very much, but I knew you had to put 'rousements in. And, every Sunday, I used to put the 'rousements in till the people would be shoutin' all over the church. And I thought I was a wonderful pastor. But then I heard about your school and I came over to it. The first night you were teachin' the book of Romans. I listened to you, and as I sat there, and heard what God thought about man, I discovered that I was not dressed in fine clothes, as I thought, but, in the sight of God, I was dressed in filthy, dirty rags." And he said, "One by one, as I listened to you, you just took those filthy, dirty rags off me, and I just stood naked in God's sight. I went away and I said to myself, 'I am never going back to that place again; this is no place for a man in my position.' But," he said, "something drew me back the next night, and I came back again. That night you were on the third chapter of Romans, and you talked about what Jesus Christ had come to do, and how he came to give us his own righteousness, and how I

could have all that wonderful righteousness of Jesus to clothe myself in, instead of the dirty, filthy rags of my own righteousness. And," he said, "as I listened to you that night, Mr. Ironside, I asked Jesus Christ to come into my life, and he clothed me with his righteousness. And I went back and began to preach **that** to my people. There came a great change in our church, and you ought to see how many have come to discover that wonderful gift of righteousness for themselves. Mr. Ironside, if you close this school, the only light that us poor colored folks has in Dallas is going to go out."

Well, you know what happened. Dr. Ironside couldn't close it, and the school is still going on now – still ministering to those people in Dallas, preaching the righteousness which is by faith and not by us, a righteousness that can only be received as a gift.

Back in Exodus, the fifteenth chapter, is the wonderful accounting of the children of Israel on their wilderness journey into Canaan, and we are told that they came to a place called the Valley of Marah, and they found water there. They tasted the water eagerly in their thirst, but found that the waters were bitter, so they named them "Marah," which means "bitter," {Exod 15:23}. The leaders of the camp went to Moses, and said, "Moses, what shall we do? These waters are bitter. We can't drink them. Here we are, out in a vast and trackless desert, without water. What shall we do?" {cf, Exod 15:24}. Moses went to the Lord, and we are told that the Lord showed him a tree, and told him to cut down the tree and cast it into the water. When he did, the waters were made sweet.

Now, all those Old Testament stories are pictures for us of truth that applies to us. The bitter water is a picture of the dark and bitter passions within the soul of men. These very things that Paul is describing, that you and I know are in our own hearts, all the tears and fears, the anguish, the sorrow, the death, the crying, the dying of life are the bitter waters in which we live. But there is a tree – Peter says, "Who his own self bare our sins in his

own body on the tree," {1 Pet 2:24 KJV} – a tree that has the ability, when cast into the midst of the dark and bitter waters, to cause them to become sweet. That is just the picture of what God is offering us in Jesus Christ. A life that finds no fulfillment in itself – in its own constant, tiresome round of self effort to justify itself before God or man – ends only in futility and frustration. But when that heart looks to the cross of Christ, and believes what God has done there, and is willing to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, there comes the healing effect of that tree in his life, and he stands justified before God.

If you haven't begun your Christian life at this point, you haven't begun it at all – because this is where man begins his life with God.

Every one of us here has a righteousness that we are seeking to establish. It's either our own, or we are resting on Christ, one or the other: There is no other ground. Now, my question to you is this: Which are you resting on today?

Which is yours? This is the great question.

Prayer:

Our Father, we see that in your sight there is no man who is good enough, no one who can be good enough, for you know us as we are, Lord. You see our inner hearts, you know us just as we are. Give us grace to stop trying to draw these filthy rags of our own righteousness about ourselves, and to thus try to clothe ourselves in your sight. Give us the grace to stop this, and to gladly and freely accept from thee the perfect, righteous standing that is provided in Jesus Christ. May any man or woman who is without Christ, in this moment, ask him to come into their life, ask him to become Lord of their life, and, thus, in him, by receiving him, receive the righteous standing that you offer in Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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Exhibit A

by Ray C. Stedman

The opening chapters of Paul's great letter to the Romans are concerned with the introductory step of Christian life – justification by faith – faith in the death of Jesus Christ: Not faith in his life, but faith in his death. The alphabet of Christianity begins with the letter *A* – *Atonement*. And this is what we have in these first chapters – the place where God and man meet. As we see clearly from this, the only place where God meets man is at the foot of the cross – there God and man can meet.

The best way to impart truth is to illustrate it. If the speaker can put present truth in some graphic, pictorial form it makes it live. The writers of Scripture are very much aware of that fact, so Paul begins to illustrate now what he has already said to us. Romans 4 is nothing but one beautiful illustration.

Now, the best illustration is a living person, so Paul calls in Abraham as the illustration of what he means by being *justified by faith*. So, if you have had any problems about this doctrine, I suggest you pay close attention to the illustration because that should make it clear – as you see how it works in a living individual.

We will only read the first section of this, in order to get our bearings, and then we will dwell on the highlights of the rest.

Abraham is what we might call Exhibit A when it comes to justification by faith. This chapter is a closely-reasoned argument which was aimed at the Jewish mind, and, because it is so Jewish in its content and appeal, we don't have to spend time with the details, but, rather, we will look at the highlights, and then make the applications to our own hearts.

There are four points to Paul's illustration of Abraham here – four things that Abraham's life teaches us about justification by faith:

The first of them is **the fact of faith**. That is, the fact that justification is by faith, and no other

way. I'm going to read the full section here so you can see what I mean, beginning with Chapter 3, Verse 27:

Then what becomes of our boastings? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised because of their faith. Do we then overthrow the law by faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin."

{Rom 3:27-4:8 RSV}

Now, the key to this portion of the illustration is Verse 28 of Chapter 3. Paul says, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law," and then he says that Abraham is a perfect illustration of that fact.

As you think of this, the question comes, "How did Abraham obtain such a high position of privi-

lege and favor with God?” Admittedly, Abraham is one of the great religious names of all time. His name is honored by three of the great religions of the earth: Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. They all hold him in the highest regard. And, in God’s sight, in the Scriptures, he is set forth in a tremendous place of favor – given the title, “The friend of God,” {Jas 2:23}.

Now, how did he get there? That is the question. Was it by a lifetime of good works and trying to please God? And Paul’s answer is: “No, of course not. For if that were the case, God would owe Abraham righteousness as his just due, and Abraham could boast in the fact that he had done enough good works to gain something from God.” Paul says that you can never achieve righteousness by working in that way – righteousness does not come that way – he had already proved that. So he quotes the Scriptures that tell us how Abraham gained such a place of favor in God’s sight: “Abraham,” we are told, “believed God,” {cf, Gen 15:6a}. That is all. God had promised Abraham something, based upon God’s own ability to perform; Abraham simply believed, and, when he believed, he obtained the righteousness that he sought {cf, Gen 15:6b}.

Now, this is proof, you see, that true righteousness is obtained only by believing – nothing else – by simply believing God.

I realize that this word “believe” has been stamped on, stretched out, and pulled, and twisted, and wrung dry until it has lost its meaning in the mind of modern man. It has been used to cover everything from soup to nuts:

- We have a popular song, *I believe*, and, if you listen to it, you find it’s “I believe in nothing,” really. All the way through, this word “believe” is pinned to every little thing in order to make it acceptable, without ever specifying what to believe about.
- This week, perhaps, you read of the death of Adolf Eichmann by hanging in Israel, and that just as he stood on the platform, ready to step into eternity, he said these words: “I have lived believing in God, and I die believing in God.” Now, that kind of belief resulted in the murder of six million people – and that is not the kind of belief that the Bible is talking about.

You see how this word “believe” is misused? I would like to use a modern equivalent for this word – a phrase that, perhaps, you don’t usually associate with the word “believe,” but I think it makes it clear and vivid to us as to what Abraham did that made him acceptable to God. Let me substitute this phrase: Abraham *made room for God* in his life. Now that is what believing is: Abraham *practiced* God. He didn’t become righteous and then go around looking for God. He simply, in his sin and failure, *made room for God* and God made him righteous.

In all the history of the world, that is the only way that men ever become righteous before God – to start with making room for God in the life. And, *when* men do this, when they let God into their daily experience, and believe God enough to make room for him, *then* God begins to take over and make the life righteous. That is what happened to Abraham. Abraham *believed* God, he *made room for him*,

- He began to *talk* to him,
- He began to *walk* with him,
- He began to *listen* to him,
- He began to *pay* attention to him,

and the minute he did, God credited him with righteousness, and began to make it real in his experience.

Then David is called in as a witness – a confirming witness to the same thing. And, of course, these two names, Abraham and David, would carry a great deal of weight with the Jewish mind: Abraham was the great father of the nation, and David was its greatest king. Here are two of the greatest names in all of Israel testifying to the fact that nobody is made righteous before God *by good works*, but, rather, *by believing what God says*. Here we come to David’s testimony. It is interesting the passage that we have quoted here is the 32nd Psalm. From that Psalm are taken these words:

**“Blessed is he whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
Blessed [or happy] is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.”
{Rom 4:7-8 RSV; cf, Psa 32:1-2}**

If you look back into the history of David, you will find that he uttered these words at a time when his hands were red with the blood of Uriah, the Hittite. He had murdered a man. Also his heart was black with the sin of his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. He had fallen into moral iniquity, and at the time that he committed this terrible double sin of murder and adultery, when everything in his being cried out to run away and hide from God, David did not try to brazen it out, but, instead, *made room for God*, and came to him, and flung the whole dirty mess before God, and asked to be forgiven. He wrote these words: “Blessed is he whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed (or happy) is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.”

St. Augustine, that great leader of the early church, had these words engraved on a plaque, and hung at the foot of his bed, so that every night he could look at them. Here was another young man with a checkered past. Until his dying day, the last thing his eyes fell upon were these words of David: “Blessed is the man upon whom the Lord will not impute iniquity.”

Now, you see, this is justification by faith. And it shows that righteousness begins with the fact of faith – making room for God in our lives.

Now, this isn’t all, because there is also the question of **the time for faith**, Verse 9:

Is this blessing pronounced only upon the circumcised, or also upon the uncircumcised? We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned to him? Was it reckoned to him before or after he was circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. {Rom 4:9-10 RSV}

Now why does he bring all this in? Well, you can see the argument, can’t you? The Jew thought that circumcision was what made a man acceptable to God, just as today many people think that baptism is what makes a man acceptable.

There are millions of people today in this country who have been taught as children, and who, even as adults, think that the thing that makes them acceptable to God is the fact that they were baptized, or that they joined a church, or some other thing.

But Paul points out that Abraham was declared righteous *years before he was circumcised*, and that circumcision was only a sign of righteousness which he had already by faith. This is simply saying (we won’t trace the whole argument because it applied mostly to the Jewish mind) that it is not only necessary to *make room for God* in your life, but it is necessary to make room for God *first* – this is the first thing! This is what makes blessing from God possible, and everything else follows from it. In other words, God must be *the most important* and *the most evident* fact of your life.

I was impressed recently, in teaching through the opening chapters of Genesis, to read again the story of Noah and the flood. One thing struck me as remarkable: When Noah came out of the Ark after the flood (remember it landed on the top pinnacle of Mount Ararat in Armenia, a mountain that is some 16,000 feet high), and stepped out into a different world than he had left, a world that must have been drastically changed in all its outward appearance, the *first* thing that he did was to *build an altar* and *give thanks* to God. Now, I think that is remarkable, because, if you remember, there were emergency conditions – this was the only surviving remnant of the race, stepping out into a different world than they had left before. It would be something analogous to the landing of the first human being on the moon, or some distant planet of the solar system. These are conditions in which life is at stake. When they came out of the Ark all their place of safety was left behind. There was nothing but mud, and chaos, and debris everywhere around.

What would you and I do if we were back in those conditions? Wouldn’t we say: “Well, now look, let’s find a place where there is some dry ground and see if we can’t get a little shelter erected here. Let’s see if we can find some dry wood, and get a fire going, and get some supper on.” Maybe, *after* we had taken care of our need for food, raiment, and shelter, *then* we’d say, “Let’s have a thanksgiving service, and give thanks to God.” But, the remarkable thing is that Noah knelt down in the mud, with all his family, and the *first* thing they did was to give thanks to God. That is why Noah was saved – because he made room for God as the most important thing in his life.

I think that is a very revealing thing for us today. Why is it that we think that we have to do everything ourselves in our lives? Isn’t it because we have forgotten, by and large, this great truth –

that God is the first and most important fact in human life – and we put him way down on the list somewhere (as I've said before) somewhere after our second heart attack – *then* we have time for God.

- We have to get an education first,
- We have to make our living,
- We have to educate our children,
- We have to see the world,

and *then*, as we come to the close of life, then it is time for faith, then it is time to discover God.

Isn't this what Jesus was hitting at when he said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" {Matt 6:33 KJV}, and then, with a little touch of contempt, he said, "and all these things" you are struggling after will "be added unto you."

Well, that is the time when faith should come – *first* – before any rituals, or ordinances, and even before some of the other necessary things of life.

Now, in Verse 13, we have **the effect of faith**. We read:

The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. {Rom 4:13 RSV}

Here is something new. Paul points out that righteousness couldn't come through the Law, because it had to be by faith. The key phrase here is "inherit the world." The promise to Abraham and his descendants is "that they should inherit the world."

Many of you have thought, perhaps, that the Christian life was a narrow, drab, colorless affair. There are many people who think of Christians as being narrow-minded, rigid people who live in a tightly restricted area that has no enjoyment, no liberty, and no freedom. This is far from the case.

We are told that Abraham lived in the land of Canaan as a sojourner; that is, he never owned a square foot of the land, but he was free to have the entire land. As you read the life of Abraham, it is remarkable to see that though the Hittites, and the Canaanites, and Perizzites, and all the other "ites," dwelt in the land, that wherever Abraham wanted to move, he could go – they all moved out of the way

when he got there. In other words, he had the right to go and use the whole land, though he didn't own any of it. "And some day," Jesus said, "men will come from the east and the west and the north and the south and sit down with Abraham and Isaac in the kingdom of God" {cf, Matt 8:11 KJV}, and he will have the whole world. This promise is literally true. Abraham will own the world, and all his friends will enjoy it with him. Jesus said so.

This is exactly what the Christian life is like. The Christian appears to renounce the world and turn his back upon the immediate advantages of the world, but, in so doing, he finds himself free to use it as he will. And, someday, all of it will be his. Let me read this promise to you from Paul's letter to the Corinthians,

So let no one boast of men. For 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 Christ's; and Christ is God's. {1 Cor 3:21-23 RSV}

Communists speak of themselves as the wave of the future. How wrong they are! Paul says that "the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." One day this promise will be literally fulfilled, in the day when the sons of God are manifested and the whole creation (which is now straining and groaning, waiting for the day when the curse shall be lifted) shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty of the sons of God, and shall break forth into bloom {cf, Rom 8:18-25}, and we shall see the fulfillment of this promise.

Somebody has said that life is like a funnel: There are two ends to a funnel; you can enter it at either end. The non-Christian, the worldling, enters at the broad end and wants life to be at its broadest. He is constantly seeking to fling back the bars and to enjoy life at its fullest. So he enters the broad end of the funnel, and, as he proceeds, he finds that, inexorably, it grows narrower and narrower and more limited and restricted, until, at last, it is nothing but a tiny narrow aperture where there is hardly room to live, and it not worth the effort. This is why so many finally blow their brains out – take their own life – because life is no longer worth living, it has become so restricted and narrow and

limited. But the Christian life is like entering the other end of the funnel. At first it seems narrow. At first it seems like you are being denied some things. But, as you go on, it begins to broaden out, becoming wider and wider, until, at last, as the apostle says, “all things are yours” – the universe and all that is in it. As John says, “The world passes away and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” {cf, 1 Jn 2:17 KJV}.

That is the effect of faith.

There is one more thing here – **the nature of faith**. This comes to us from Verse 17 to the end. Paul says about Abraham:

as it written, “I have made you the father of many nations” – in the presence of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. {Rom 4:17-21 RSV}

This was, of course, concerning the promise that God had given him that he would he would have a son; and, though he was 100 years old, and his body was now dead in that sense, and Sarah’s womb was barren, Abraham believed God.

Remember those opening words of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the great faith chapter? Here we are given the only definition of faith in Scripture. In the modern version, it reads, “Now faith is the confidence of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,” {Heb 11:1}. That is, faith is the feeling of confidence that we will obtain what we hope for, based upon a conviction that there are things unseen that will bring these things to pass. Abraham counted on the unseen God.

If we believe in God at all, we must believe that he is the God who can do the impossible. And, as we read here, he is the God who calls into existence

the things that do not exist, who gives life to the dead. Obviously, he is the that kind of God or he is not God at all. Now, if we have to do with a God like that, then, obviously, we can expect that he can do things, even though, apparently, it seems as though he is making no progress in it. Faith, then, is the confidence that things you hope to be yours will come, despite all the present difficulties, and contrary to all the immediate evidence.

That is what Abraham experienced. As he went along, nothing seemed to be happening:

- No child came into their family,
- His own body grew older and older, deader and deader, and
- Sarah’s womb remained barren.

But Abraham wasn’t looking at these things. He was looking at the God who calls life out of death, and calls into existence the things that do not yet have existence. Because he had confidence in that kind of God, it didn’t bother him a bit what was happening in his own life. In the course of time, as you know, the record stands that promise was fulfilled.

Let me say this to you: This is the way a man comes to Christ. This is the way that I came to Christ. I read the Bible, and heard quoted from the Bible, some wonderful promises. I read of One who spoke as no other man spoke, I heard him speak enticing words to my heart, words like these:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. {Matt 11:28-29 RSV}

I heard him say,

... he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. {John 8:12b RSV}

I heard him say,

I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. {John 10:9 RSV}

As I heard these, hope flamed in my heart because this is what I longed to find, as it is what you long to find, and what every man and woman longs to find today – rest, fulfillment, supply, companionship, blessing, light in place of darkness. These are the things hoped for.

And then I heard the story of some unseen things: I heard the story of the cross in all its wonder and mystery. I heard that simple story of how they lifted up the Son of God, how in the darkness of that scene, God accomplished some strange and mysterious transaction: Somehow the sin of the human race was lifted off men and laid upon Jesus Christ, that his righteousness might be imparted to them. I couldn't understand it fully – I was only a boy of about ten years of age when I heard this story, and believed it. But I realized that here was a God who could do something about my problem, and I believed his Word.

When I did so, the course of my life was altered – the direction of my life changed. I didn't look any different on the outside, and I didn't act very different for awhile, but the course of my life was changed from that moment. I found a new capacity to love. I had a new dimension in my life – new attitudes that I didn't have before.

Though there has been stop-and-go progress along the way, the course and direction of my life from that time has never altered. My life's direction has been changed. It now moves in a different way.

That is what we call "conversion," and it comes simply as a result of faith.

Abraham is the great example that, when a man stands upon what God says, all that God promises will be fully paid out to that man. That is what faith is: Abraham is Exhibit A. I stand in the

alphabet somewhere down around X, Y, or Z, but it is the same story. A man who believes what God says can walk through the world, and though he walks contrary to the course of the world, though, perhaps, there are many things that he must say "No" to as he goes along, the direction of that walk is:

- Into the ever-broadening life of liberty and glory and blessing,
- Into the wonder of the fulfillment of manhood and womanhood,
- Into all the richness of an eternity with Jesus Christ, and
- Into all the fulfillment of the marvelous promises of God.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for faith. We know that faith, in itself, is of no value, except as it simply lays hold of the promise. We thank you, therefore, for the promise, that wonderful promise that these things will become true for us, as we, in the 20th century, hear the story of Jesus and believe what is written. Thus we enter into a new realm, and are changed; our life becomes different, Christ becomes real, and we rest upon the assurance that that which is begun in us will be perfected until the day of Jesus Christ. We thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Faith Faces Life

by Ray C. Stedman

This is graduation time, as is evidenced by the many young people who are home from school now – just out of high school and college. It is a very appropriate time to come to the fifth chapter of Romans, because Romans 5 is a graduation exercise. It takes us from the elementary grades of Christian life into high school. Up to this point in the book of Romans, we have been dealing with birth truths – the elementary, introductory truths of the Christian faith. But at this point in the book we learn of the existence of growth truths – the way to maturity and power, and the way to be effective in Christian service. This will occupy our attention through Chapters 5, 6, 7, & 8 of this great letter. Now, wherever the Christian church is weak (and it is weak in many places), and wherever Christians are weak individually, it's because they have never graduated into the High School of the Holy Spirit – they are still “babes in Christ” {1 Cor 3:1}, no matter how long they have been Christians. Sometimes you can find “babes in Christ” who have been Christians 15, 20, or even 40 years, and it is because they have never come into this high school truth of the Holy Spirit: They keep learning over and over again the same old truths about salvation in Christ that are presented in these early chapters (wonderful as they are), and never go on – never graduate.

The sixth chapter of Hebrews in the Amplified Version begins with a much-needed exhortation:

Therefore let us go on and get past the elementary stage in the teachings and doctrine of Christ, the Messiah, advancing steadily toward the completeness and perfection that belongs to spiritual maturity. Let us not again be laying the foundation of repentance and abandonment of dead works [dead formalism], and of the faith [by which you turned] to God. {Heb 6:1 Amplified New Testament}

That is an exhortation that is tremendously needed in these days.

The first eleven verses of Chapter 5 of Romans clearly show us two areas of Christian blessing, and two great reasons for Christian victory.

Let me bring the first before you – **the two areas of blessing** – in Verses 1-5:

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. {Rom 5:1-5 RSV}

Now, Verses 1-2 sum up all that we have learned in Romans so far – justification by faith. This is the first experience, and the results are three fold: Peace with God, access to God, and the certain hope of sharing the glory of God (in heaven). All this we have the moment we become a Christian. The moment we believe in Jesus Christ all these things are true for us. And they never become any more true – a person who has been a Christian for 50 years is no more justified than the man who just this moment has committed his life to Jesus Christ. All Christians enjoy these same blessings immediately, permanently, and continuously. Now, that is cause for rejoicing! And we do rejoice in this. We have been converted – the direction of our life has been changed as we have come to realize that God has a gift of righteousness to give us – something that we can never earn ourselves – a gift that Christ has given us, and we are

born again by receiving that gift and by the Holy Spirit working in our hearts:

- The question of our going to hell has been forever settled,
- The certainty of heaven is forever established.
- And this is cause for rejoicing.

And we ought to rejoice. Just as Paul points out here, there is a sense of peace that possesses us. You remember it well, don't you? How, that day when you came to Christ, you became aware that you were God's child – you were now in the family of God – and what a sense of peace came into your heart!

Then, there is a new sense of God's presence to delight us – we have access to God. When we talk to him, we feel that he is listening: He hears us. We have the right and the privilege of coming to him at any time any place – we have access to him.

Also, the certain hope of heaven sustains us. That is why we sing, "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there!" And certainly this is cause for rejoicing! But that is not all there is to the Christian life (though, unfortunately, this is all the Christian life that many people know; for them salvation begins and ends with these facts – though they have been rather weary and barren years, I am afraid). We look on to heaven, and we sigh after it, and say, "Thank God that someday we are going to get through of all the struggles and trials down here, and will be up there with him, and what rejoicing that will be!" Certainly it is proper that Christians rejoice in this fact. We are ready for heaven, you see, but the trouble is that we are not ready for earth. This is why you often meet Christians who are ready for heaven but are no use on earth at all – they are very heavenly minded, but they are of no earthly use. The reason for this is that they have never graduated from elementary school and go on into the truths that we find in Romans 5, 6, 7, & 8.

Now look at Verse 3. It begins with these words: "More than that." The idea here is – beyond this, in addition to these facts about heaven, about peace with God, about access to God – more than that, we rejoice in our sufferings.

Now, do you do that? Have you learned to live on this level yet? Do you rejoice in sufferings?

Now, this is being ready for life. You see, Paul takes the very worst thing about life, life at its worst, our periods of suffering (not all of life is suffering, thank God, it never will be that), but Paul takes the very *worst* things about life – the periods of heartache and sorrow and disappointment, the tears, the crying, the heartbreaks of life – the suffering, and he says *it makes us rejoice*: We rejoice in our sufferings.

Now, I believe it is time that we Christians take these words very seriously, because this is no special standard, reserved for just a few wonderful saints who, by virtue of great faith, are able to live on this high level – this is the normal expectation of every Christian.

Oh, I wish I could shout that, sing it, paint it – I don't care how – just so I could get across that message!

This is what God expects of every Christian, and he not only expects it, but provides for it. Anything less than this is simply sub-Christian living.

Have you learned to live on this level? Have you learned to rejoice in suffering? Or, do you still gripe and complain and grumble and murmur about all the circumstances that come?

Do you remember the story of Sophie, the scrub woman, who lived in New York City, and made her living scrubbing floors in the skyscrapers of New York? By that means, she earned thousands of dollars to send out missionaries. That one woman supported some twenty or thirty missionaries, alone. Sophie had a wonderful character of glory about her all the time – so much so that she used to cause people to stop her and ask what her secret was. On several occasions, while she was working, some office worker would come to work late and would say to her, "Sophie, I wish I had your faith – I wish I knew God like you know him." And she would say, "Well, if you would read your New Testament right, you could know him." This person would say, "Well, I read my Bible." In fact, she said this one time to a minister. He said, "I read the Bible – I read the Bible in Greek and Hebrew." And she said, "Well, you don't read it right!" And he said, "What do you mean?" "Well," she said, "when it says g-l-o-r-y in tribulations, you read it g-r-o-w-l, growl. That is the

trouble with you, that is why you don't have joy in your heart, you growl in tribulation."

That is exactly what Paul is getting at here, you see. Someone has said that the definition of a Christian is a one who is:

- Completely fearless,
- Continually cheerful, and
- Constantly in trouble!

That's true! Do you know the secret to that kind of Christianity?

Let's face it – most of us feel, really, that being a Christian should excuse us somewhat from trials and sufferings. I know that, if we are asked, we would say that we realize that sufferings may come, but that we don't think of them as really necessary. We think that sufferings are sort of signs that something is wrong, that, if we keep in fellowship with Christ, things ought to go well. And, if we have difficulty, we feel it is a sign that we are out of fellowship, or that Christianity doesn't really work after all.

Now that shows how wrong we are, for when Paul speaks of fellowship with Christ, he speaks of the fellowship with his sufferings (Philippians 3:10). And Peter, in First Peter 5:6-10, says that the matter of suffering is for *all* Christians everywhere. Let me read it to you:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. {1 Pet 5:6-10 RSV}

You see, suffering, trials, difficulties, hardships, disappointment are all an indispensable part of the process by which God makes us into what we long to be. He loves us too well to deliver us from this.

As we read here, there is a process at work in which suffering produces endurance (or patience);

and, oh, how we need patience! I do! Don't you, these days?

Suffering produces patience. You can't get it any other way. Don't ever pray for patience, for God will never give it to you – he can't give it to you. Patience is something that must be learned, and, if you pray for patience, God will bring you suffering, because suffering produces patience. There is no other way to get it. If you want another word for it, it is *fortitude* – suffering produces fortitude – strength.

And fortitude (or endurance, or patience) produces character. All of the most beautiful characters come out of suffering. You can't have a beautiful character without some degree of suffering. Suffering produces character.

Character (gradually growing into true manhood and womanhood) makes us hope, for we see that the job is being done, and we know that God is at work and that we need not stand at last ashamed and disappointed before Jesus Christ when he comes.

All this, Paul says, is because God loves us – so, when suffering comes, it is not a mark of God's anger; it is a mark of his love. That is what Hebrews 12 says, doesn't it? Every son whom God receives, he chastens because he loves him – not because he hates him – but because he loves him {cf, Heb 12:6}.

Therefore, there is no necessity to cry out, and say, "Oh, what have I done? What have I done, that God should treat me like this?"

We think that God is interested in getting a certain amount of work done in this world, and we think that the work is the important thing to God, but it is not so. God doesn't need us to do the work that he wants done in the world. He can do that with a rock, or a stone, or a child, or a tree – it makes no difference. Did not Jesus say, when the Pharisees rebuked the crowds for praising him as he rode into the city of Jerusalem on the triumphal entry – did not he say to them, "Look, if these should hold their peace, the very stones would cry out," {cf, Luke 19:40}. That is, God can use anything to do his work. This isn't what he is interested in. He is interested in our lives – it is what the work does to us, it is what life is doing to us. It is our character that God is after, and this is why (in love) he introduces suffering, tribulation, trials, disappointments, and anguish into our lives. These are an indispensable part of the process.

Oh, I wish we could see that! These things come because he loves us, and because he has given the Holy Spirit to us to do this very work in our lives.

Let me share with you a brief word from Amy Carmichael; some of you know of her great work out in India. She was a woman who suffered greatly through her life, but accomplished tremendous things for God in southern India. She writes this under the title, *The Shadowed Way*:

He said, "I will forget the dying faces;
The empty places –
They shall be filled again.
O voices mourning deep within me, cease."
But vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in forgetting lieth peace.

He said, "I will crowd action upon action,
The strife of faction
Shall stir me and sustain;
Oh, tears that drown the fire of manhood, cease."
But vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in endeavor lieth peace.

He said, "I will withdraw me and be quiet,
Why meddle in life's riot?
Shut be my door to pain.
Desire, thou doest befool me, thou shalt cease."
But vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in aloofness lieth peace.

He said, "I will submit; I am defeated,
God hath depleted
My life of its rich gain.
Oh futile murmurings, why will ye not cease?"
But vain the word; vain, vain:
Not in submission lieth peace.

He said, "I will accept the breaking sorrow
Which God tomorrow
Will to his son explain."
Then did the turmoil deep with him cease.
Not vain the word, not vain,
For in acceptance lieth peace.

Do you know what that means?

It means that the mark of a Christian who has grown to maturity, the mark of a spiritual Christian, is that he accepts everything that happens to him, without exception, as coming from the hand of the Lord into his life, and rejoices in what it is doing to him. Paul says:

In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. {1 Th 5:18 KJV}

So, if you are a Christian, no circumstance of your life happens to you except that it comes by the choice of God. Now, it is true that he may use Satan, and Satan does attack us, but never without the permission of Christ. Once Peter came to the Lord, trying, in his blindness, to defend Christ, and Christ said to him, "Fear not, Peter. Satan has desired to have thee that he may test thee, that he may sift thee as wheat. But fear not, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," {cf, Luke 22:31-32 KJV}.

This is what God brings *us* to. This is the *mark* of the spiritual Christian.

"Well," you say, "I know that I can't do it. I have tried this. I can endure, but I can't rejoice. And, I get awfully upset by these pious Christians who go around with a smile screwed on their faces and pretend like they are enjoying suffering."

I don't blame you! I get upset at this too. But this isn't any pretense. When Paul speaks about rejoicing in suffering, he is speaking about genuinely rejoicing in suffering. You see, the problem is that perhaps you don't see, yet, what is behind this – what will make it possible – and this is what we need to see.

This answer is briefly stated for us in these next verses as **the two sources of our hope**: Listen to Verses 6-11:

While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation. {Rom 5:6-11 RSV}

You have probably heard a great many sermons based on Verses 6-8, and that is as far as

they go. But that is only half of Paul's argument. These verses wonderfully show us the love that God has for us while we were yet sinners – so preachers dwell upon this, and point out how wonderful it is that God gives us a hope of heaven even though we are sinners, because of *the death of Christ*. But, if this is where you stop, then you miss the whole point of Paul's argument because that is just the first part of it. He goes on to build upon that foundation of the death of Christ and to show us that, if we have learned to rejoice in the hope of heaven because of the death of Christ, it will be much more certain that we can rejoice in suffering because of *the risen life of Christ* at work within us. In other words, his death makes us fit for heaven, his life makes us fit for earth. Because of the death of Christ, we can rejoice in the future; because of the risen life of Christ given to us, we can rejoice in the present. That is the difference. His death saves us from the *judgment of God*, but his life saves us from the *wrath of God*.

Now, the wrath of God here is not hell, nor is it the great tribulation. The wrath of God is the silent destruction of the soul and body that inevitably occurs when men disobey God, and it goes on all through life. Men are experiencing the wrath of God today – that is what we read in the opening part of this book, didn't we? Notice Romans 1:18:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. {Rom 1:18 RSV}

And then he went on to show us how God has given men over to their bodily passions, their lusts, the foulness of their mind, the pride of their hearts, and how these things are constantly taking their deadly toll out of human life so that life is coming apart at the seams. Men are coming unglued, and destruction is gradually taking over in their heart and life and soul. That is the wrath of God – being experienced right now.

Look at Ephesians 5:3. Paul says,

But immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one who is

covetous (that is, an idolator) [who has another god besides God], has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. {Eph 5:3-5 RSV}

Now listen:

Let no one deceive you [you Christians] with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. {Eph 5:6 RSV}

Are these Christians? Yes, they are – Christians who are doing things that the non-Christians live in continually. When Christians do them, the wrath of God comes upon them as well as upon the unsaved: They begin to come apart; they begin to come unglued; life begins to fall apart for them, as well; and Christ has come to save us from this, you see.

Now, these words simply mean that Jesus Christ will not stop with justifying you – and getting you ready to enjoy heaven someday. That is part of it, but it also means that he has made full provision to save you

- from your meanness,
- from your stubbornness,
- from your selfishness,
- from your nasty, mean tongue,
- from your bitter rebellious spirit,
- from your dirty thought life,
- from your filthy habits, and
- from your ungracious way.

I include myself in this, of course. He has come for this, and he does it, not by hounding me and beating me with the Law, not by taking the Ten Commandments and using them as a whip to bring me into submission, but by the impartation of his life – his life lived again through me!

You see, when I believed in the death of Jesus Christ, I was “in Christ,” but when I began to appropriate his life, then it is “Christ in me.” Jesus summed up the whole of the Christian life in these words: “ye in me, and I in you.” {John 14:20 KJV}. That is the Christian life.

Now, this is what we are going to learn about more fully in Chapters 6, 7, & 8. And I tell you that my heart's cry is that all of us will lay hold of this great delivering truth, that we may learn how

to live through life taking it all at its very worst and rejoicing in those sufferings that come – because this is the mark of having appropriated the fullness of the life of Jesus Christ. And, when this day comes, as Paul points out in Verse 11, we will not only rejoice in the hope of the glory of God – we will not only go around singing, “When the roll is called up yonder, I’ll be there,” but we will learn to rejoice in God himself – God will be the important one to us. We will learn:

- That he is more than any circumstance,
- That he is greater than all his gifts,
- That he is fully adequate for every situation in our life,
- That he is El Shaddai, the God who is sufficient.

Years ago I read a sermon by Dr. Arthur John Gossip, called *When Life Tumbles In, What Then?* He preached it the day after his beloved wife had suddenly died. He closed with these words:

I don’t think you need to be afraid of life. Our hearts are very frail, and there are places where the road is very steep and very lonely, but we have a wonderful God. And, as Paul puts it, “What can separate us from his love? Not death,” he writes immediately. No, not death, for standing in the roaring of the Jordan, cold with its dreadful chill and very conscious of its terror, of its rushing, I, too, like Hopeful in Pilgrim’s Progress, can call back to you who one day in your turn will have to cross it, “Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom and it is sound.”

Jesus has come, you see, to *prepare us to live* – to take life as it is at its worst, at its hardest, and to find in him those hidden streams that make it possible to rejoice in

- all the difficulties,
- all the hardships,
- all the trials,
- all the defeats,
- all the adverse circumstances,
- all the crushing disappointments,
- all the heartaches,

because they are producing in us the very thing God is after, and making us what we want to be!

Some through the water, some through the flood,
Some through great sorrow, but God gives us song,
In the night season, and all the day long.

Prayer:

Our Father, we want to learn this truth. We pray that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened to lay hold of it and understand it – that you have provided a way by which the One who walked in the hills of Galilee 1900 years ago can live that same wonderful life again through us and make it possible for us to be victor over every circumstance, over every heartache. Lord, we thank you for this. Help us to understand this. Help us to lay hold of it as we go on into these chapters, that we may begin to live it, and experience the real glory and beauty of Christian living. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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To Reign in Life

by Ray C. Stedman

When I was a student in Dallas Theological Seminary, I remember Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, president of the seminary, saying to us in a theology class that he considered the last half of Romans 5 the supreme test of a man's theology, and, also, that this was the most concentrated summary of the basic truths of Christianity in all the Scriptures. He said that when he was visiting in churches around the country, especially churches of Dallas graduates, he always took occasion, when he was in the pastor's study, to see if the fifth chapter of Romans was well worn in his Bible. While Dr. Chafer was alive, I always kept an index at that place in my Bible – in case he should come to visit me!

Now, this is a very important section – beginning with Verse 12 of Chapter 5 – and yet, if you take it all by itself, without relating to what has gone before, it is very easy to miss the whole point.

You remember, in the first part of this chapter, the Apostle Paul makes the statement that there is more to Christianity than simply believing in Christ and having our sins forgiven and looking forward to going to heaven someday when we die. And yet, there are millions of Christians who go no further in their Christian faith than that very fact.

It is true that we are delivered by faith in the death of Jesus Christ, and our hope of heaven is made sure by that, and we do have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ – all this being accomplished by his death for us upon the cross. But now Paul goes on to declare that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, comes to live in each believer's heart. And, if his death gets us ready for heaven, then his life (indwelling us) is there in order to make us ready for earth – that is, getting us ready to live life now. His death, you see, delivers us from the penalty of sin, but his life (his indwelling risen life) will deliver us from the power of sin over

us in our present experience. His death removes the bitterness of death for us; his life will remove the barrenness of our life for us.

I know that some of you are not afraid to face death because you are Christians, and you know that Christ has already bridged the gulf for you; but some are terribly tired of the weary, fruitless, restless, barren, boredom of life as it is lived from day to day. To learn that perhaps there is something more than this for the Christian, I think, to some of us, seems to be almost too good to be true – yet that is what Paul is telling us!

Now, in this last half of the chapter, he shows us why this must be true. In other words, here is God's provision that every believer in Jesus Christ, without exception, may live in continual, unbroken victory over every evil habit, every impatient spirit, every lustful thought, every discouraging circumstance, and every crushing disappointment in his life. He may enjoy, all the while, the smile of the Lord Jesus and the fellowship of an ungrieved Spirit.

Now we are going to examine this morning why that is true. It begins with a look at what a human life is like apart from Jesus Christ, Verses 12-14: We will call this **the reign of death:**

Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned – sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. {Rom 5:12-14 RSV}

The key to this section is the two little words, “death reigned.” This is the clearest statement, I think, in all the Scriptures, that something is obviously wrong with the human race – of which we are all a part. When the Scripture mentions the word “death” here, it means not only physical death, with which we are all so well acquainted, but it means, as well, the emptiness and the meaninglessness of life which we experience even while we are yet alive. In other words, there is much of death in life. You understand what I mean by that, I am sure.

Of course, there are moments, especially in youth, when life is exciting, thrilling, and it is great to be alive. It is a wonderful feeling, and all of life ahead looks interesting and fascinating and challenging. But all of us are aware that these moments pass, and they become farther and farther apart in our experience. And, as we grow older, we experience the fact (though we are reluctant to believe it) that life is becoming more and more characterized by a growing sense of futility and emptiness and meaninglessness. And it ends at last in the grave – the certain, final, pitiless doom of mankind.

Now, this is life apart from Jesus Christ. This is what is going on in the world right around us this morning, and many of us right here in this assembly can testify that this is what life is like to us. We feel a growing awareness of the emptiness of life.

This is why men who seemingly have everything that is supposedly worthwhile and valuable in life sometimes express themselves very forcefully as experiencing nothing but emptiness. Earnest Hemingway, before he died, said,

“I live in a vacuum which is as empty and as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug it into.”

And this is why men who are the idols of the literary world like Hemingway, Jack London, and others, who seem to young people to be the very expression of excitement, glamour, and challenge, take their own lives in hopeless despair and emptiness.

This is our inheritance from Adam. This is what we all share, without exception, even little children who cannot choose wrong deliberately, as Adam did. That is what it means in Verse 14: “Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of

Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”

Adam chose to do wrong deliberately, but there are many who do not choose to do wrong deliberately, such as little children, yet death reigns in their life. It simply means that the life story of every man is also the history of the world. And this is why the opening chapters of Genesis are so eternally meaningful to us when we read them – it is because we ourselves are constantly reproducing these stories.

Have you noticed that? For instance, when you read the story of the temptation of Eve {Gen 3:1-7} you discover that she saw the luscious fruit hanging there, in all its fascination and mystery, and she saw that it was good, and that it was to be desired, and that it would make one wise. She couldn’t resist it. We read that story and we know exactly how she felt because all of us have been there too. We have been fascinated by something that seemed to hold an air of mystery about it that would introduce a new realm of excitement and adventure – if we would just try it.

- We read about the shame of Adam and Eve after their temptation, and their desire to hide from God – and every one of us knows what that means. How many times have we come back from something with self-loathing and disgust in our hearts, and wished that we could find a hole, crawl in, and pull it in after us.
- We read of the jealousy of Cain and the murderous desire that was born in his heart – and all of us know what it means to be envious and to be angry at some remark that is made. We feel the burning of resentment and want to avenge ourselves some way.
- We read of the attempt to build the city of Babel, and we see a whole people set about the task of building a city that would supply all their needs, where they could be completely happy without God. We see such activity going on all around us today, and we are caught up in it ourselves.

Our own story, then, is simply a reproduction of the history of the world.

Now, that is what this passage is saying – we are children of Adam, in other words, and we all wake up sooner or later in some moment of truth to see the self-centeredness of our lives: We see the sheer egoism that dictates all our actions; we know that self is our god; we know that pride is our driving force; and no one had better say “nay.”

Now, this is human life without Jesus Christ. It is evil at the core. Though it can be made to appear good and respectable for awhile, its ultimate end is futility and death. There is not a thing we can do about it – not a thing! This is what Paul calls “the law of sin and death,” {Rom 8:2}. Like the law of entropy in physics, which declares that all things are gradually deteriorating (the universe is slowly running down), so, in our lives, that feeling of emptiness, futility, and meaninglessness comes upon us.

But there is good news as we read on in this brilliant analysis from the pen of the Apostle Paul. In Verses 15-21 Paul shows us what God has provided against this emptiness, in **the reign of life**:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous. Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. {Rom 5:15-21 RSV}

Now, that sounds very complicated, doesn’t it? But it is really a rather simple contrast between the old life we have from Adam – all of us – and the new life which we may receive continually from Jesus Christ. The old life produces futility, corruption, condemnation, restlessness, and death – and who of us this morning (even these young people here) hasn’t experienced this already? And it manifests itself in lust and in cruelty, in jealousy and in envy, in hate and in sharpness, in resentment and in bitterness, in laziness and, oh, so many other ways.

Now, tell me, do you have to go to school to learn how to do these things properly? Who taught you

- how to be lazy?
- how to be jealous?
- how to be envious?
- how to be greedy, and cruel, and impatient, and bitter?

Do you have to plan these out carefully each morning when you get up? Do you think ahead, and say, “Well, now, in such a situation, I am really going to let my anger go – I’m going to blow my top, and, oh, will I tell him off!”

Do you plan those things? Do you have to try to be jealous, or proud, or lustful? No!

Do you promise sometimes that you will never be good again, and then find yourself breaking your promise without realizing it? Do you? Of course not!

No, you accomplish these, as the old song says, by *doing what comes naturally*. That is all. It is a natural result of the old life that we all have from Adam. We don’t have to try to do these things; it is as easy as living. We all find it easy to be bad.

Now listen! God has found a way – and this is no joke – this is no blind alley – God has found a way to bring that old life to an utter, complete end, and to begin a new life in Jesus Christ. When you learn how to let that wonderful, risen life of Jesus Christ (once lived out through thirty-three years of glorious manhood in old Judea) take over in your life today, you will be good as naturally and easily as you are bad now – in fact, much more so. Listen again to the Scripture: “If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abun-

dance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign ..." Where: In heaven? No, "in life." These shall: "reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Thus, it is as easy to love as it is to hate when you discover the life of Christ within. If you are drawing upon that life, it is as easy to forgive as it is to be resentful – just as easy – even easier, Paul declares.

Now, in Verse 20, Paul shows the futility of the way we usually try to correct this problem of being bad – i. e., by the Law, or by the setting up of rules, by signing New Year's resolutions, or by "turning over a new leaf," as we call it. It is all law, no matter what we call it. And Paul says that Law came in to increase the trespass.

Isn't that an amazing thing? That is, when law comes in, when you put yourself under rules, you simply make things worse – you increase the trespass. I remember reading one of Charles Spurgeon's sermons some time ago; he told about spending some time down in a little hut in Italy. When he went into the hut he noticed that the floor was as dirty as he had ever seen a floor in his life. After he had lived there a day or two he could stand it no longer, and he sent for a cleaning woman to come in and scrub the floor. The woman came in and she scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed, but the longer she scrubbed, the worse it got. Finally, he began to investigate and he discovered that there wasn't any floor – there was nothing but the bare ground – and all the efforts of the water to clean it only made it worse!

Now, that is like the Law: The Law is a cleansing agent, and it exists to show us the true situation. You see, if there is nothing but the dirt of our Adamic nature there, the Law can only make it worse. In other words, Law controls the outward effect of evil.

Now, it does have some advantages; later on Paul will show us very fully the advantages of law. Law does control outward wrong so that it makes it possible for human beings to live together. If we didn't have laws, we couldn't exist. We couldn't live on this peninsula together if there were no traffic laws, and other laws, to regulate society. So law has a great advantage. There is nothing wrong with the law, but this is the thing that we must always understand: Law has no ability, none whatsoever, to change the change the heart – to change the desire. It cannot touch what goes on inside, and all the rules of life only increase the frustration and

rebellion with which we face life. And, at best, the Law simply makes you content with outward conformity.

But, now, listen: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" {Rom 5:20 RSV}, Paul says. That is, if Law does this to you, it is all the more certain that the life of Jesus Christ indwelling you shall create in you a desire to live more and more to the glory of God inwardly. You see, Christ's life is more powerful than Adam's life. That is what the meaning of the "much more" is all the way through, simply because God is greater than man. You cannot control the old Adam inside – neither can I – but Christ can!

Young Phillip Malancthon, Luther's young helper and a theologian during the Reformation, once wrote, after years of struggling to try to behave himself, "Old Adam is too strong for young Phillip." We, too, discover that after awhile. But this is what Paul is telling us so that we might understand that God has cut off this old life completely, and has found a way to cancel it out and to give us instead a new life – a totally different life – from which to draw all our strength.

This life has sometimes been called "the throne life." Coming down from the throne of the universe, where Jesus Christ is seated in power, there is ministered in my heart by the Holy Spirit (given to me by faith in Jesus Christ) a continual flow of the same life that made it possible for Jesus Christ to live and be what he was when he was here 1900 years ago. Within the frame of my life, my body, my spirit, my emotions, and my all, he will live that wonderful life again, in this 20th century, so that men will begin to see, more and more, Jesus Christ walking and living in me.

Perhaps this illustration will help: I have here a glove; it is a very fine glove. It is not even an old glove, for I bought it just recently. It is as good as gloves can be because it is perfectly made, as far as I can tell. Now, suppose I say to that glove, "Now look, glove, I want you to pick up that book." So the glove tries to do it, but it finds itself unable to do so because a glove, by itself, cannot function. That glove is like our own Adamic, human nature. It cannot do what God demands of it – it cannot love its enemies, it cannot pray for those who spitefully use it, it cannot respond with gratitude and thanksgiving to those who misuse it, and abuse it, and persecute it – it cannot!

Haven't you found that true? You cannot do it. You know you should, but you cannot, just like the glove cannot pick up that book.

So you say to me, "You foolish man, do you know what the trouble is? You haven't educated the glove, you haven't instructed it, you haven't told it how to do it." So I say to the glove, "Now look, it is really very simple: All you have to do is bend your fingers around so that you can get your thumb on the under side and the other fingers on the top, and then you can pick up the book. Now do you understand?" So the glove tries to pick up the book with the help of that instruction. Now, obviously, I can lecture the glove for fifteen hours and it will still be as unable to pick up the book as when I started. Education doesn't do it.

Ah, but you know the answer don't you? There is a way by which the glove can easily pick up the book without any difficulty whatever. All I need to do is to insert my life into the glove; that is all. Then it becomes as able to do as I am able to do. This is the truth that Paul is giving us in Romans 5, 6, 7, & 8 – that God has provided a way by which the total, risen life of Jesus Christ is made available to us. When that life fills us, as my hand fills that glove, we can do all that Jesus Christ can do.

Do you believe that?

So the book can be picked up without any difficulty by the glove. It is the glove that is doing it – isn't it? – filled with my life!

This is why Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," {cf, Phil 4:13 KJV}. And, if you are a Christian this morning, Jesus Christ has come to indwell your heart, and he is perfectly able to do everything through you that God can ever demand of you – or that life can ever demand of you. As you read the Gospel

record, there never was a time when Jesus was confronted with a situation that he could not handle, even though demands were made upon him that were far and away beyond what we (as natural man) could ever handle. When five thousand people stood before him, and they were hungry and had nothing to eat, was he able to feed them? Of course he was – because of the life of the Father perfectly filled him. So his life is to perfectly fill us.

Now, if you learn the secret of letting him live his live through you, all that I have said this morning (and more) will become gloriously true for you. Does that make your mouth water? It does mine!

In Chapter 6 we will begin to learn how to lay hold of this delivering secret.

I want to ask you to read Chapter 6 over and over again this week. Will you saturate yourselves with it? Then, when we meet again next Lord's Day morning, you will know what I am talking about when we go through this chapter.

Very few Christians live at this level, but it is not because it is too difficult. It is easier to live at this level than it is to live on the level of defeat – that is what Paul declares here. It is because they have never learned what God has said in Romans 6, 7, & 8 – that is why. And, when we learn this, then we discover what it is to live in victory instead of defeat.

All Christians have eternal life, but very few of them have abundant life. But Jesus said,

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. {John 10:10b KJV}

It is yours for the taking!

The Day I Died

by Ray C. Stedman

Verses 1-14 of the sixth chapter of Romans are the most important fourteen verses in Scripture, insofar as being delivered from *enduring* the Christian life to *enjoying* it is concerned. There is a difference between possessing *eternal life*, which all Christians have, and possessing that *abundant life* which the Lord came to give.

In Chapter 5 we learned why we behave so selfishly, and frequently so foolishly, in our lives. It is because we have inherited a selfish nature. We are *doing what comes naturally*, as the song says. Why does a peach tree grow peaches? – because it is a peach tree. And, an apple tree grows apples because it is an apple tree. So a son of Adam acts like Adam, simply because he is the son of Adam. This is why problems, difficulties, wrong attitudes, and wrong ideas break out in our lives, and we do not have to plan them, or seek for them. They come naturally. You are an expert at it, as I am, and any successful hypocrite, such as we are, knows this. There continually breaks out some problem of envy, or bitterness, or anger, or impatience, or sarcasm, or lust. It is part of the nature we inherit from Adam.

We have learned that God has proposed a way by which that old life may be brought abruptly and completely to an end, and another Adam put into us – the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ. The risen life of Jesus Christ, ministered continually to us through the Holy Spirit, whom we receive without measure when we recognize Jesus as Lord of our lives, makes it possible for us. Acting from that life, we can be good just as easily as we are naturally bad in Adam.

Now, that is a simple truth, but it is a tremendously revolutionary principle. It is actually easier to be good when we are acting from the life of Jesus Christ, because the life of Christ is much stronger than the life we received from Adam – for God is stronger than man. Discover this, and you will learn that you don't have to try to be good.

This struggle to be good is our greatest problem now. But, when we discover this principle, we need no more to try to be good than we try to be bad now. The life of Jesus produces goodness as naturally and easily as the life of Adam produces badness now.

At this point, the inevitable questions come:

- “Why aren't Christians living on this level?”
- “If this is true, and this is what God has provided us in Christ, then why aren't Christians living like this?”
- “Why is there so little evidence of this transforming experience of wholesome, attractive Christian living?”
- “Why is there so much of this barren, baffled, grim, boring, frustrated Christian living so evident around us on every side?”

It is right at this point that Chapter 6 begins.

The first thing Paul shows us is **the attitude that brings defeat** in the Christian life, Verses 1-2:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? {Rom 6:1-2 RSV}

The question that he asks is really this: “Because our helpless condition in selfishness and sin drew Christ from heaven in order to die for us, should we go on being selfish in order that he might continue to show his forgiving grace to us?” Is that the attitude we should have? The answer is: “By no means!” Certainly not!

You say, “Well, I'd never say *that* to God.” But that is exactly what we all say! Every time a

Christian sins, that is what he is saying to God. Every time a Christian disobeys, and walks in his own way, he is saying to God:

“Look, you have given me the perfect life of Jesus Christ to live within me, a life which cannot do wrong and will never do wrong. If I choose, this life can be my life – but I don’t choose. I choose, rather, to do this wrong thing, because I know when I confess it to you, your grace will abound, and you will forgive me, and then I can go until I choose to sin again.”

Isn’t that the pattern that we see lived out over and over and over again? We go on struggling to be good, but choosing to do wrong and then confessing it. Then we do it again, and confess that. Finally, we are ashamed to go back any more, confessing this thing. So we give up, and decide that the best thing is simply to keep up as good an appearance as possible. As long as we can, outwardly, be as good as the rest of the people around us, we are satisfied – so we become content with defeat.

Now, bless your hearts, God never intended that his people, his children, should live that kind of a wilderness experience. We do not need to live that way. Something is wrong when this is the pattern of life; something is missing.

Let me show you, in one wonderful verse, what God intends the Christian life to be like. It is simply and beautifully stated in Second Corinthians 2:14:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. {2 Cor 2:14 RSV}

That is what the Christian life ought to be – always led in triumph by Christ. What a contrast to this attitude of expecting to keep on sinning because we know that God will be gracious to forgive us. No wonder we are so weak!

In the next section, Verses 3-14, we discover **the appropriation of faith** that brings victory:

Do you not know that all of us have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as

Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body [the life that we have been living in the past] might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. {Rom 6:3-14 RSV}

Does that sound complicated: There are really three simple steps here. But the most important thing about them is the *order* in which they come. I want you to see that.

I saw a sign the other day a sign the other day that read, “When all else fails, follow directions.” That is a good sign to hang over the sixth chapter of Romans. It is strange the way we read the Scripture – we try to frost the cake before we bake it! We are continually reversing the order of the Word of God.

You remember the Lord Jesus said, “First remove the log that is in your own eye and they you will see clearly how to remove the sliver that is in your brother’s eye,” {cf, Matt 7:3-5, Luke 6:41-42}. We read that, and we say, “Oh, yes, I know what that means. That means if he will apologize first, then I will apologize.” No, it doesn’t mean that! It means: *First* remove the log that is in your own eye; start there. *Then* you will see clearly how to remove the little sliver that is in your brother’s eye.

So the order here is important.

1. First, you must know what God declares to be a *fact*, Verse 3:

Do you not know that all of us have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? {Rom 6:3 RSV}

This is what God declares to be a fact. The next step is the exercise of faith, but faith always rests on a fact. Have you discovered that? God never asks us to believe something without giving us a fact to believe. This is the great, solid foundation of our Christian faith: It rests upon facts. And, this is a fact:

- Not only that Christ died for our sins,
- But that, when he died, this old life that we got from Adam died with him;
- It not only died, but it was buried.

This is a fact and our faith must rest upon it.

Suppose you are having trouble with your swimming and I come along, and say, “Don’t panic now – just hang on.” You say, “Hang on to what?” “Well,” I say, “just hang on. That’s all. Just hang on.” But, unless I give something to hang on to, my words are valueless.

Well, here is something God gives us to hang on to – a fact that he declares is true, and God never asks us to believe something that is not true. That is the fact:

- Our old nature, that we have been living in, and having all this trouble with, died when Jesus Christ died.
- It became true for us when we believed in him.
- It not only died, but it was buried as well, totally put away.

Now, let me put a parenthesis in here: The baptism that is mentioned here is not water baptism. It is the baptism of the Spirit, by which we were made part of the body of Christ.

Water baptism is a sign of that, but the essential thing here is the baptism of the Spirit.

The way some people read their Bibles, I am reminded of the fellows that go around with witching wands, looking for water. Have you heard of these? They take willow sticks and go around looking for water – and wherever water is, the stick turns down. {Some} people read their Bibles that way. They go through it, and, wherever it mentions baptism, down goes the stick – indicating water. Wherever it reads “baptism,” they find water.

But, this isn’t water baptism. This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, of which water baptism is a symbol. This baptism united me to Christ, and, the day that I believed in Jesus Christ, God cut off this old life, and crucified it with Christ, and buried it with him, and declared that it no longer had any right to live in his sight.

Now get that! This is tremendously important. *That* was the day I died:

- The day that I believed in Jesus Christ, God made this real to me, and
- The reason that he put it to death was because it had absolutely no power in it to do good.

The other day, a friend and I were pushing an old car because we couldn’t get it started. The battery was dead. We pushed it to a station where the service man hooked on another battery to the terminals of the old one; then he said, “Now try it.” We switched on the starter button, and immediately there came a surge of power into the engine – utilizing the energy of the new battery. Where once there was no power, now there was plenty.

Now, the trouble in our lives is that we have this old battery that we got from Adam, but it is without power. God declares it to be dead, but we simply refuse to believe that it is dead. We have a certain fondness for it because we have had it so long. After all, it is the original battery that we got when we were born. As a matter of fact, it is a family battery – it has been passed along from generation to generation, and we hate to part with these old antiques. We refuse to believe that it is no

good. Of course, we are encouraged to use it by the flood of sales literature we see, suggesting ways to discover hidden power in our batteries. Or, we are told that the trouble is, we are not pushing the starter button hard enough; if we will learn how to push the starter button harder, we can get it to work – there is nothing really wrong with the battery, it is the starter button, the motivating source. Or, we are told that if we can hook enough cars with dead batteries together, we can get enough juice to run one of them – so we organize committees to get things done.

Across this country this morning, in one form or another, there are preachers (who should know better) who are preaching this devilish gospel of “try harder.” Nothing could be worse! This business of telling Christians to “try harder and you can make a success of your Christian life” was born right in the pit of hell. I don’t know who originally phrased it this way but I have heard many times someone say, “Well, I believe that if I do my best, God does the rest.” That is the most damnable lie ever spoken! If you live on that basis, you’ll never get beyond doing your best; and, your best isn’t good enough, and it never will be! As preachers proclaim the gospel of “try harder,” Christians are responding with new resolves to consecrate their old selves to do their best for God, yet, all the time, they are totally ignorant of God’s provision of a new battery, available in Jesus Christ, with sufficient power to meet *all* the demands of life.

All this begins with the knowledge of an unshakable, unchangeable fact: Paul says, “I am crucified with Christ” {Gal 2:20a KJV}. I, all my old self, all that I am in Adam, was crucified and buried with Christ. God finds no good in it, reckons no good in it, and expects nothing but failure from my old self. We must do the same.

2. The second step is *consider* – an attitude of faith resting upon the fact that we have previously seen. Notice Verses 11-12:

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. {Rom 6:11-12 RSV}

The King James Version has, “reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive to God” {Rom 6:11a KJV}. This is a word which indicates a continuing attitude. Keep on counting yourselves to be what God says you are! This means we must learn to recognize the sign of the old life within us, and refuse to let live what God has declared has no right to live. We must not presume to find good in that which God says is totally evil. In other words,

- Stop protecting the old battery!
- Stop protecting the self life!
- Stop excusing it, and justifying it!

This is the key point.

Stop pampering yourself in these matters and making excuses for what God says is wrong, and, thus, letting live what God says is dead. There are many excuses: “Oh, I’ve got a hot temper, but it is just because I am Irish, you know. My whole family has this trouble, so there is nothing I can do about it.” Or, “I am troubled with lust, but that is because I am a Latin.” Or, “I am young.” Or, “I am hot blooded.” Or, “I am cold blooded.” Or, “I am red blooded.” Or, “I am strongly sexed.” Or, we are loveless and we say it is our circumstances that make us this way. Or, it is the other people with whom we work. Thus, we are continually excusing ourselves, and giving the flesh reason to live.

Every time you, as a Christian, let enter your thought life any of these things that God has said are the old Adam in you, you are presuming to let live what God declares has no right to live. The only life that God recognizes as having the right to live in you is the risen life of Jesus Christ. But you cannot appropriate that life until you give up trying to make the old life suitable. That is when the death of Christ becomes fully effective to you.

“Well,” you say, “does this happen in one great crisis?” Sometimes, yes. But I rather think that it is a result of a series of smaller crises, if I may put it that way. The Spirit of

God knows that this thing within us, the flesh, this self-centered life, is what is destroying us. He takes the manifestations of it, one at a time, and makes us face up to them. Any failure to face up to one of these things, as the Lord brings it to our attention, means no further progress until we stop clinging to the specific thing that he is talking about.

3. Whenever we put into action, even in little ways, what God declares to be a fact, nothing can stop us from the third and greatest step, which is *yielding* to, or appropriating, the life of Christ. Look at Verses 13-14:

Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life... {Rom 6:13a RSV}

Notice that order. What comes first? Death: "...as men who have been brought from death to life." You can't have life till you have experienced death. You can't have Pentecost till you have been at Calvary. That is what he is saying.

... as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. {Rom 6:13b-14 RSV}

Here is the great word *yield*. I know it often means to us "to give in" or "to give up," as though we were to sit down, and wait for the Lord to stick a pin into us and make us go. I find so many Christians miss the point here because they think that resting in the life of Christ is an inactive sitting down and a passive waiting for directions. It isn't that. *Yield* means "to give over" – to give over your body, your mind, your will, your emotions, your physical members – give them over to the indwelling secret of the life of Jesus Christ. You begin counting on him continually to operate and energize you to do whatever is in front of you to do, whatever it may be, whether it is tying your shoe, preaching a message, witnessing to someone, washing the dishes, anything, every-

thing! You need the life of Jesus Christ to do everything!

How simple this really is! In the same way that you received his death as sufficient payment for the penalty of sins, and rested on that fact, so you simply believe that, now, his life is in you to be to you all that you need in any circumstance:

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: {Col 2:6 KJV}

But when you listen to Christians pray, you can see how little they understand this. We say, "Oh, Lord, give me strength. Oh, I need strength, Lord." "Give me patience," or, "Give me purity." "Give me power," or, "Lord, give me victory." And all the time the Lord Jesus is saying, "I don't give anything, I *am* your strength." "I *am* your patience." "I *am* your power." "*Take it; just take it!*"

We don't have to sing the song, "I need Thee, Oh, I need Thee. Every hour I need Thee." No, instead, we should sing, "I have Thee, Oh, I have Thee. Every hour I have Thee."

It is right at this point that the Christian life becomes an exciting, wonderful, wholesome, attractive experience because impossible things begin to happen. You cannot do, he can do. He is the God of the impossible. The Christian life never becomes attractive till you start doing impossible things. That is why it is so boring and frustrating to us otherwise. But when we *yield* to his indwelling life, we begin to discover the bigness, the greatness, and the glory of God. Life becomes wholesome and healthy and happy because you are no longer in charge – Christ is! And you never know what is going to happen next! But, whatever it is, you are perfectly ready for it because you are trusting in the One who indwells you, who is perfectly adequate, and perfectly competent, to meet every situation – no matter what it is.

It is not you doing your best for God. It is Christ doing his best through you. What a difference that is!

Here is the whole Christian life in a nutshell. Right here, in these first fourteen verses of Ro-

mans 6, you have all the truth for victory in the Christian life. In the following chapters, Paul goes over this again, taking up the problems that develop in learning how to apply these things. When we get to Chapter 12, we will discover we are no further along than we are right here in Romans 6:14.

Chapter 12 begins, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice to God,” and Verse 13 of Romans 6 says, “yield your members” (that is, your body) “as instruments of righteousness unto God.” That is saying the same thing.

What a difference this truth makes. When Christians begin to discover the glory of the indwelling life of Jesus Christ, there is a transformation that is immediately visible on their faces. It is a life of rest. It is the life we sing about:

Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry, touch the spirit there.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest,
Finding as he promised, perfect peace and rest.

Perhaps you don’t understand it all yet, but Paul will go on, in the rest of Chapter 6 and in Chapters 7 & 8, to explain more in detail these great principles. However, it is all summarized right here.

This is the secret of the so-called ‘great saints’ of God. They are common, ordinary people, like you and me, who have learned this secret. This indwelling, risen life of Jesus Christ is available to every single Christian, without exception. We can all be ‘great saints’ because of this indwelling secret.

One of the common people who became a ‘great saint’ was dear Annie Johnson Flint. This is what she wrote in a poem entitled, *Let Us Go On*:

Some of us stay at the cross,
Some of us wait at the tomb,
Quickened and raised together with Christ,
Yet lingering still in its gloom;
Some of us bide at Passover feast
With Pentecost all unknown –
The triumphs of grace in the heavenly places
That our Lord has made our own.

If the Christ who died had stopped at the cross
His work had been incomplete,
If the Christ who was buried had stayed in the
tomb
He had only known defeat;
But the way of the cross never stops at the
cross,
And the way of the tomb leads on
The victorious grace in the heavenly place
Where the risen Lord has gone.

So let us go on with our Lord
To the fullness of God He has brought,
Unsearchable riches of glory and good
Exceeding our uttermost thought;
Let us grow up into Christ,
Claiming His life and its powers,
The triumphs of grace in the heavenly place
That our conquering Lord has made ours.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we long for this. We sense its possibilities. We realize there is more to the Christian life than this constant cycle of boredom, defeat, heartache, misery, and failure. Lord Jesus, we ask that we may grasp this secret. May it break upon us in all its simplicity, and yet in all its beauty, the perfect provision which you have made for us to live in victory over every trial because it is your life lived in us. Amen.

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Choose Your Master

by Ray C. Stedman

Now we look again at Chapter 6 of the book of Romans – as we are roaming through Romans.

The other day my oldest daughter, Sheila, and I were riding together in a car, and she looked over at me, and said, “Daddy, would you teach me how to drive?” She is fourteen. I said, “Yes, I’ll be glad to. Maybe this summer we can do that, but I’ll tell you how now – it is very simple. All you do is sit behind the wheel, hold it, push this peddle to go, and push this other one if you want to stop – that is all there is to it.” She looked over at me, and said, “Oh, Daddy, there’s more to it than that!” And, of course, she is right; there is more to it than that, as you know. But, in a way, she was wrong. Essentially, these are the major processes of driving, yet there is a great deal more in learning how to do it, as everyone knows.

In the same way, Romans 6:1-14 is all there is to know about life and victory in Jesus Christ. But doing it involves a learning process. In the first fourteen verses, we are told that

- We need to *know* what God declares to be a fact. All faith rests upon God’s facts, and this is a great fact; this first step is exceedingly important because it makes us realize that it is possible to be delivered from the reigning power of sin in our lives. We need the knowledge of God’s fact.
- In the second step, we are to *consider* it true in the day-by-day experience of our lives. We are to act upon the fact. We are to maintain an attitude of awareness that God looks at us this way. And we are to look at ourselves in the same way.
- Then the third step, and the wonderful one, is *yielding*, the leaning back, the resting upon the mighty indwelling, conquering life of Jesus

Christ which is designed to meet any circumstance that comes our way. As we learn this secret, we discover that it is as easy to be good in Christ as it is to be bad in Adam – just as easy. Here we discover that it is no longer the struggle to be good and trying to make the old life behave that we have been engaged in so long (and failing in so continually), but it is simply receiving, continually, the life of Jesus Christ which cannot be bad. It is wonderful, but, like driving, this must be learned by living, not be reading or hearing about it.

If you expect to learn these truths simply by reading the sixth chapter of Romans, it would be like taking a correspondence course in swimming. Have you ever tried that? No, you have to get into the water. You have to put these things into action, and that is when victory begins to come.

Now, beginning with Chapter 6, Verse 15, we find that Paul applies these truths to life itself: One by one he takes the problems that will arise as we learn to ‘walk in the Spirit.’ That is what this is – the phrase “walk in the Spirit” {Gal 5:16, 5:25 KJV} means to enjoy the fullness of the indwelling life of Christ.

The first problem that comes is what we might call the problem of **part-time victory**, Verse 15:

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! {Rom 6:15 RSV}

You’ll notice that this verse is very similar to the first verse of this chapter, and the question that is asked is phrased similarly. In Verse 1 we read, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” In Verse 15 we read, “Are we to sin because we are not under law but

Chose Your Master

under grace?” And the answer is the same, “By no means!” Certainly not!

Now, there is a difference between these questions that is hidden largely in the tense of the verb that is used. I hope you will pardon my Greek for protruding here this morning, but it is important to understand that there *is* a difference here. The first verse means “Are we to *continue* to live in sin, to abide in it, to stay in it?” Is there to be no change in our life now that we have become a Christian? And Paul’s answer is, “Of course not; we cannot continue.” This is such an important thing, because, if there is no change in your life after you receive Christ, then there is a serious doubt whether you ever received Christ at all. As Charles Spurgeon put it, “An unchanged life is the mark of an unchanged heart, and an unchanged heart is a sign of an unregenerate life.”

- If there is no change,
- If your attitudes are the same,
- If your outlook is the same, –

then there is a very serious doubt as to whether you ever became a Christian at all! That is what is involved in the question of Romans 6:1.

The other question is not, “Shall we continue to abide in sin,” but, rather, “Should we sin *even once* now that we are not under law but under grace?” That is the meaning of the question in Romans 6:15. Once we begin to realize the mighty power of Christ living in us, as opposed to the futility of trying to be good, we begin to experience some wonderful, great victories in our lives.

This is beautifully pictured for us in the book of Joshua, in the Old Testament.

I hope you have learned to read your Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and to see how God so beautifully uses these Old Testament stories to illustrate the tremendous truths of the New Testament. One of the most effective books of the Old Testament in this respect is the book of Joshua, for it gives us the picture of Israel entering the land – and the land is always a picture of the fullness of the Spirit, the walk in Christ, that we are talking about here in Romans.

As Israel came out of the wilderness of self-effort across the river Jordan and into the land, the first obstacle that lay in their pathway was the tremendous city of Jericho, with its great, high walls –

tremendous walls, we are told. Archeologists, who have now laid bare the foundations of these very walls, tell us that they were very likely over 100 feet high and some 50-60 feet thick. This was an impregnable fortress. Ah, but you know the story – we have heard it sung so many times – how “Joshua fit the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down.” Actually, it wasn’t a fight at all: As they surrounded the city in the name of the Lord, and in the strength of the indwelling presence of God in their midst, the walls simply fell down flat – that is all.

We discover that here is a picture of the *life of victory* that comes in laying hold of the truths in Romans 6. As we discover and apply this truth, problems that have been insurmountable obstacles to us, problems that have baffled us and mocked us and conquered us for years, simply disappear as we lay hold of the indwelling life of Jesus Christ – and it is wonderful. We begin to experience victory.

But, you remember, that *after* the battle of Jericho, as you read on in Joshua, the next chapter tells us of the account of the greed of one man, named Achan, in the camp of Israel who coveted part of what God had set aside for himself. The result was a thorough defeat at the little village of Ai.

All this is a picture of what we are talking about here in Romans 6:1-14. We see the principle that brings about victories like the victory of Jericho, but, in Verse 15 to the end of the chapter, we see some of the problems that arise that make possible a defeat like Ai.

I hope you are following me. If not, I suggest that you read those opening chapters of Joshua in order to see exactly what I mean.

Now, when we discover that there is the possibility of living in defeat, even though we have learned the secret of victory, then we must face the question that is asked in Verse 15. Is the occasional failure permissible? Can we get by on this basis? And the answer is, “Certainly not!”

I know that many experience this. We discover the joy of deliverance. Then we also discover that the old life still has power to tempt us and draw us back into its control. We realize that, even though it is true that Jesus Christ lives within us to be all that he is (which is all that we need), nevertheless the temptation is to strike a balance and work out a compromise. We find ourselves wanting to draw on Christ for the power to meet the times of stress

Chose Your Master

that come – the big problems – but we rather like to put on the old comfortable slippers of the flesh the rest of the time, and enjoy that.

This is the problem brought before us in the rest of this chapter, and it is essentially a problem of *incomplete acceptance of God's sentence of death* to the old life in Adam. It represents only a partial turning from the old life and a partial acceptance of God's sentence of death upon what we are in ourselves.

I hope we see this, for it is very important. It is an attempt to settle for part-time victory – but, of course, part-time victory is also part-time defeat, and this is where the problem lies.

All of us recognize that there are certain aspects of our old life that we inherited from Adam (which we call the natural life, our human nature, if you please) that are wrong and evil. We know what they are – lying, lust, hate, drunkenness, blasphemy, and some of the more outward things. When we become a Christian, we realize that these have to go, and we give them up quite readily because they hurt us. Many times they have injured us, and we are glad to see them go. But there are other aspects of that same old life that we don't quite so readily see as being wrong, and we cling to these.

I don't know what it might be in your case, but some of the common areas of life that so frequently hang on like this are:

- Ambition,
- Self confidence,
- Possessiveness (wanting to hold onto our friends, loved ones),
- Depression, and
- Anxiety (worry).

You say, "We like these things?" Yes, some of us do! We like to do them. Some folks think they are not doing their job if they don't worry. For instance, we think we are failing as parents if we don't show an anxious, furrowed brow every time some little things happens to our children. And there is also self pity, fear, hardness to each other, gossip, exaggeration – some of these areas. Now, if we hang onto these things, in effect what we are doing is saying, "Lord, isn't it all right to draw on your life for deliverance from the sins I hate, but to allow the manifestations of some of these little,

harmless thing that I love?" But, of course, they are not harmless at all. What we are really asking is what Paul asks here: "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" And the answer is, "By no means!" Certainly not! Not even once!

Then he goes on to give two reasons why this cannot be. The first one is **the enslaving power of sin**. In Verses 16-19, he says:

Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification. {Rom 6:16-19 RSV}

Now, I think that you see that the underlying truth of that passage is that man is made to be mastered by something. We need a cause. Every young person is looking for a cause to live for, and to die for. When we are not aware of any cause in our life worthy of the effort, we flounder and feel depraved and deprived and hopeless. And the amazing thing is that, in all of life, there are only two possible masters: Either Christ or self; either one or the other.

Everything we do relates to either one or the other – Christ or self. Paul brings out here the fact that for so long all of us knew only one master. We served self without reserve:

- We lived for ourselves,
- We loved ourselves,
- We struggled to advance ourselves.
- We fought to protect ourselves.
- We hated all rivals to ourselves.
- We loved only those who catered to ourselves.

As that little jingle says,

Chose Your Master

I lived only for myself alone,
For myself and none beside
Just as if Jesus had never lived,
And as if he had never died.

That is the way we lived, and then we found Christ, or he found us. We found a new master, yet the old love of self was still there. Now this is the problem, isn't it? Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters," {Matt 6:24 KJV}. It must be one of the other; it cannot be both – not 'it shall not' but simply 'it cannot' be both – no man can serve two masters.

After we have discovered the delivering power of the life of Christ in us, if we try to keep alive part of the old man, try to compromise, and –

- give up lust, but keep ambition, or
- give up drunkenness, but keep worry, or
- give up lying, but keep self pity, or
- deny hate, but excuse fear, or
- refuse jealousy, but permit impatience,

– what we are doing is simply selling ourselves back again into the power of that old tyrant, self. That is what Paul declares.

You see, the second group of sins which we kind of cherish and like to keep around really comes from the same source as the first group. It is *all* part of the old life – *all of it* – and obedience to *any of it* puts you under the power of *all of it* – that is what Paul is saying. It begins to grow. You let it take root in some little way in your life, and protect it, and, even though the Lord talks to you about it, you say, "Oh, Lord, it isn't very important. It is only a trivial thing. Let's not worry about it." If you do that, you discover that it begins to get a grip on you, and soon you drift back more and more into the control of self. With it comes all the misery, all the heartache, all the defeat, all the boredom, and all the frustration that you once knew.

Now, I know that we don't see all of the old life, and its control over us, at once. Bit by bit, as the Spirit of God makes us aware of these things, these areas must be faced and surrendered to the place of death where God puts them. What does he do with what we are in Adam, what we are by nature, the old man? Why, he simply calls it up before him, sentences it to death, carries it out and executes it, and puts it in the grave because that is

all that it is worth – the whole thing, all of it, completely. Then we must make this real by believing that fact – that all of it is worthless in God's sight – ambition, everything!

Do you see? When we come to that place, then we begin to realize victory. But, if we compromise a little, we will soon be back in the old cycle of defeat and barrenness that we knew for so long. However, Paul points out that it also works the other way around. You choose Christ in these struggles and you find that he grows on you, and he gets a grip on you. The power, and the glory, and the strength of his life begin to grow stronger and stronger.

You remember that old story about the Indian who became a Christian and was giving his testimony about what his Christian life was like. He said, "You know, since me become Christian, me find have two dogs inside: One big black dog, all time bad, all time fight; and one big white dog, all time good. And these dogs fight all the time." And someone said, "Which one wins?" And he said, "Whichever one I say 'sic-em' to!"

You see, there is a continual choice, and the choice makes possible further victories. Little choices make little victories grow into larger victories. What Paul is simply saying is: Now choose your master. You can have only one. You can't have both. If it is not Christ and continual victory, then it is self and increasing defeat: *Choose your master!*

These verses have given us the enslaving power of sin, and this is one reason we can never say, as Christians, "Oh well, these things are not important; there are some things that we don't need to get serious about."

The second reason is **the evil effects of sin**, Verses 20-23:

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. {Rom 6:20-23 RSV}

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Here Paul asks another very pertinent question: When you lived for yourself, what were the results in your life?

Well, what were they?

There was some pleasure, wasn't there? Yes. You know there are pleasures in sin, plenty of them. It wouldn't be any fun if it were not so. We love to do some of these things. We like it, and it is fun at the time. We have a good time. Ah, but what then? In Hebrews it speaks of "the pleasures of sin" {Heb 11:25 KJV}, and then it adds this phrase, "for a season." Just "for a season." What then? Now, honestly, what was the result when you lived for yourself? Wasn't it emptiness and misery, strife with others, unrest and unhappiness, and shame and despair?

You remember Lord Byron, that brilliant English poet, who gave himself to enjoy himself completely without restraint all the early years of his life. When he was 29 years old, he wrote these words:

My days are in yellow leaf.
The fruit of life is gone.
The worm, the canker, and
The grief are mine alone.

Burned out already at 29!

And Paul's question is this: Do you think that, now that you have become a Christian, if you still permit the old self to live when God says that it has no right to live, that the old life will produce any different crop than it did before? Do you think that God will somehow protect you from the results of your own folly? Of course, the answer is "No." "Be not deceived," he says in Galatians. Don't kid yourselves:

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. {Gal 6:7-8 RSV}

This is written to Christians. You can be a Christian, know all the delivering truth of Romans 6, be a teacher of that truth, and yet, because you still choose to let live what God declares has no right to live, you never know – you never realize – the glory and the freshness and the joy of Jesus Christ living his perfect life through you. As Paul

says, the result of serving self is death: "The wages of sin is death."

In Southern California, on the east side of our state, we have a great valley, called Death Valley. Why is it named that? Well, some think it was named that because of the many people who died there – prospectors, and others, who tried to get through the barren wasteland. Perhaps it was, but I wonder if perhaps it was not named that really because it is such a picture of death, because its very emptiness suggests death, because it is just a barren, worthless wasteland.

Now, this is what the word "death" means here. When it says, "the wages of sin is death," it is not talking about hell because it is written to Christians. Ultimately, it is true that sin – unredeemed, not brought under the blood of Christ – brings us to hell. But this is written to people that *are* redeemed: The wages of sin *in your life* is death – emptiness, barrenness, worthlessness! That is what is taught here. The wages of sin are paid out right while you are living. And you receive the continual results of choosing to ignore the life of Christ within you, and attempting to live a Christian life by doing 'the best you can' – that is, you experience emptiness. That is the death referred to in this verse.

You can choose this if you want to. That is the dignity that God always gives human beings: We have the right to choose. He never makes us be what we ought to be; we have the right to choose to be otherwise – even as Christians.

Some of you, because you have a good personality, or a handsome face, or some special talent, are continually impressed by what you are apart from Christ in you. You can blast your way to the top of the heap by the power of your personality, or by the force of your special talent, and win the approval of many. But you will stand at last ashamed and repentant before the one whom you have robbed all your lifetime of his right to be himself in you. And you will look back on barren, wasted years filled with death, simply because you chose to be yourself in place of what he is in you.

On the other hand, you can choose to know "the gift of God" which is eternal life. Now, that is not heaven, any more than death is hell here. "Eternal life" here is not glory some day, but Christ right now. You can know the fulfillment, the glory, the satisfaction, the power of the life of Jesus Christ lived out in you through all the years ahead

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– until, at last, you stand in his presence with a life that he can approve because it not your life, it is his life all the time, lived out through you.

As Joshua said to the people as he led them into the land, “Choose you this day whom you will serve” {Josh 24:15 KJV}, so God is saying to Christians who discover the possibilities of living in victory in Jesus Christ because of his life indwelling us: “Now choose.” You can’t have both. You can’t have both the self life fulfilled

- with all its ambitions,
- with its desire for advancement,
- with its seeking for approval and plaudits of the crowd around and of men,

and also the life of Jesus Christ. You can’t have *his life* for *your program* – it must be *his life* for *his program*.

In Romans 6, God is challenging us, “Choose now! Which will you have?”

To those of you who make the choice to believe what God says, it is possible to lay hold of all the fullness, all the fragrance, all the might, all the

power, and all the glory of Jesus Christ living his wonderful life again through you.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we pray that we may make this right choice. We know that we hear the call of the flesh within us, the desire to seek for self advancement, and for self glory, to be in the public eye, and to be in the center of the circle rather than let you have that place! Help us, Lord, to realize that this can never be until we are willing to believe what you said about what we are. But, oh, we thank you, Lord, that, when we do, the opposite is true. As we lay hold of you, you lay hold of us. Your life becomes sweeter, and greater, and more fragrant, more evident, more manifest, more mighty through us, to become effectual, fervent, earnest workers for your name’s sake. We ask it may be so, in Jesus’s name. Amen.

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Do Christians need the Ten Commandments?

by Ray C. Stedman

The seventh chapter of the book of Romans deals with the very knotty problem of whether Christians need the Ten Commandments any longer.

If you haven't discovered already, I am sure you'll soon recognize this as a sure-fire question with which to start a religious argument. Any time you want to enliven a dull evening, I suggest you pose this question as a topic of conversation, and you'll find that everyone in the room soon chooses up sides – and off they go. Most people who discuss this question, I have discovered, follow the same method: If they persecute you in one verse, flee to another! And so it goes all evening long – the discussion generates more heat than light.

But this is a very important question, and I hope we can see it now in line with the apostle's whole argument in this section of Romans.

You'll notice that Chapter 7 begins with a question:

Do you not know, brethren ... that the law is binding on a person only during his life? {Rom 7:1 RSV}

If you have taken note, three times in this section, Paul asks that type of a question, and it is important to trace his argument that way.

Back in Chapter 6, you remember, it begins that way in Verse 3:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? {Rom 6:3 RSV}

There Paul is telling us that the old life that we all inherited from Adam (this life of independence from God) ended when we believed in Christ's

death – *so we cannot go on unchanged!* As Charles Spurgeon said, “An unchanged life is a sign or an unregenerate heart.” Though you may have made a profession of faith in Christ (whether as a young person or as an adult, it makes no difference), and, since that time, your life has not changed, then you have just been kidding yourself: You are not a Christian because an unchanged life is a sign of an unregenerate heart. That is what Paul says, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” {Rom 6:1 RSV}. God forbid! Certainly not! It can't be *because we have entered into his death.*

In Chapter 6, Verse 16, he asks a similar question:

Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? {Rom 6:16 RSV}

Here again he is pointing out something that rests upon the death of Christ – the fact that the whole of the old life must go, completely, in the death of Christ, and that, therefore, as Christians, *we no longer have any excuse whatever* for failure in our lives. As long as we excuse any degree of failure at all, we are slaves to it. That is what he is saying here. We are bound by it. You see, it is not a case of “I can't” any longer. If we still continue to live in failure after we have become Christians, it is not because *we can't* have victory, it is because *we won't!* We won't be delivered. That is what Paul is saying.

Now, in Chapter 7, he has this other question:

Do Christians need the Ten Commandments?

Do you not know, brethren ... that the law is binding on a person only during his life? {Rom 7:1 RSV}

And in Verse 4 you get the other side of it:

Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law ... {Rom 7:4a RSV}

In other words, the Ten Commandments are no longer necessary as a guide to proper behavior in the Christian life *for we are not under law but under grace*.

The reasons why this statement is true are given in the section that follows. If you will permit me to just give you briefly the divisions of this section, perhaps you can follow a little easier:

Verses 1-3: The illustration that clarifies;
Verses 4-6: The explanation that verifies;
Verses 7-13: The application that glorifies.

(By now I am sure that you are saying this outline is the alliteration that terrifies! But I think that, as we go through this, you will see what I mean.)

First of all, in Verses 1-3, we have **the illustration that clarifies**:

Do you not know, brethren – for I am speaking to those who know the law [that is, the Jews] – that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. {Rom 7:1-3 RSV}

Now, this is a simple picture. It is a case of a woman who is married twice. The apostle points out that, in her first marriage, she was bound to her first husband as long as he lived.

Now, perhaps this phrase “bound by law” is hard for us to understand in these days of easy divorce, but, unquestionably in God’s sight, marriage is intended to be for life. That is what is meant, of course, when you married people stood before a preacher, or a justice of the peace, and you said

that you were taking each other “for better or for worse until death do us part.” That is for life. However, we have some modern versions of that. Hollywood says “for better or else.” Or, as some woman has put it, “I took him for better or worse, but he is much worse than I took him for.” We are inclined to tone it down like this, but, in God’s sight, it is true that *marriages are for life*. The only exception which the Lord gives us is that of a marriage broken by unfaithfulness – when a man no longer is a husband, but he becomes a philanderer.

But the central point here in Romans 7 is not marriage; marriage is just the illustration. The key point is that the woman who is married is helpless to change her situation until her husband dies, and any attempt on her part to do so beforehand only violates the law and makes matters worse. She becomes an adulteress if she tries to live with another man while her husband is still alive.

It is obvious, as you apply this, that we believers in Jesus Christ are portrayed in the woman.

Well, the question then is, “Who is the first husband?” And here you get a difference of opinion – some say it is the Law, and some say it is something else. But I think, if you have followed along in the argument of the apostle in these chapters, it is obvious that the first husband is *not* the Law (the Law is what holds the two together), but it is our old man – our old self – our old life received from Adam. What the Scripture calls “sin,” *that* is our old husband, the old life that we inherited from Adam. We were bound to it, linked to it, as a wife is to her husband, and there was nothing that we could do about it.

Now, this is true, isn’t it? We have to live with ourselves. And all that we are, despite the fact that it may not be very nice sometimes, is what we have to live with. There is no running away from it, or trying to flee from it. We are bound to this, apart from the work of Christ.

Up to this point in our studies of Romans we have been calling this life “our old self” as though it really were us who were like this. But I think, at this point, we need now to understand that this is really “a false self” – what we would call a pseudo-self (pseudo means false). The Scriptures tell us (now this is God’s view of things as they really are, not as they appear to us, but as they really are) that sin, or this old life, is *an alien invasion* of human nature. Sin inhabited man’s spirit at the fall and

has been passed along to every human being born on this earth ever since (with the exception of Jesus Christ); it has reigned there, undisturbed and unchallenged, until challenged by Christ.

Now, we have lived so long with this old life that we identify it with ourselves – we think it is us – this continual urge to be the center of everything is what we call “our self.” In a sense, we do this because it is the only nature we have, the only guiding principle that is in us as fallen men and women. We just feel that this must be us because we feel so driven to be the center of life, the center of interest, and the center of attention:

- We want to be regarded with favor.
- We are continually relating everything to ourselves.

As someone said of the last German Kaiser, who was a very vain man, “When he goes to a christening, he wants to be the baby. When he goes to a wedding, he wants to be the bride. When he goes to a funeral, he wants to be the corpse. He wants to be the center of everything.” How clearly we understand this feeling!

Now, living that way, we have all occasionally felt the Spirit of God (from the outside) making us hungry for true righteousness. I don’t think there is a man alive who doesn’t some time say to himself, “I wish I were not what I am; I wish I were different.” All of us have the consciousness of wanting to be more than we are, and we admire true righteousness. This is what made Jesus Christ the attractive person that he was; people wanted to be like him. He fascinated men, he attracted them, he drew them to him.

The Scriptures speak of “the beauty of holiness” {1 Chr 16:29, 2 Chr 20:21, Psa 29:2, 96:9 KJV}, and I think, if you realize what holiness is, you can see that this phrase is true. Holiness is health of being or of spirit. And this beauty of holiness was perfectly expressed in Jesus Christ.

Now, all of us have felt the hungering to be like Christ, or to want true righteousness. But all the efforts that we make to be good, or to do good things, only really serve to brand us as hypocrites, because, until we have come to know Christ, though we try outwardly to be good, inwardly we know that we are still the same old self-centered creatures we always were. And that describes a

hypocrite, “an adulterer” Paul calls it. We are an adulterer, you see, we are still married to the old life within, which lives only for self and its advancement. We want something else, but the law of our being keeps us from getting it.

Now, when Christ came (this is the story of the Scriptures), he lived a perfect life without any conscious effort to do so. He completely fulfilled the Law, as naturally and as easily as we live our Adamic lives. But, just before he died, while he was hanging on that cross, suspended between heaven and earth, we are told that he took upon himself our old nature. One of the most amazing sentences in all of Scripture is this: “He who knew no sin was made sin – *was made sin* – for us” {cf, 2 Cor 5:21}. And when he became what we are, he became our old husband, then he died. Thus, when Christ died, our old husband, that false self, the self-centered ego died, and we were set free. This became true for us when we received Jesus Christ into our life as Lord.

Not only are we free from the rule of the old husband, but also we are free from the law that bound us to him and controlled our life with him, and we are now free to marry another. This time it is Jesus Christ, risen from the dead – the risen Christ – so that just as he once became our old self on the cross, now he lives to become our true self, living that same wonderful, perfect, holy, attractive, mighty life through us again in this 20th century, right in this very hour – today – now!

This is the amazing declaration of Scripture – Jesus Christ, entering your life and mine, by faith in his word, usurps this alien invader and sin must leave when he takes his rightful place in the very core of our being, the very center of our life.

Sin is now on the outside calling to us and influencing us. We are not delivered from the sound of its voice; we can still feel it, and hear it, and it can influence us. If we yield to it, now that Christ has come, we are again an adulterer, a hypocrite – pretending to be something that we really are not.

Do you follow me? I realize that this is a bit complicated, but it is a tremendously important truth, and perhaps the next section will help make it clear.

Let's look at **the explanation that verifies** in Verses 4-6:

Do Christians need the Ten Commandments?

Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. {Rom 7:4-6 RSV}

Notice how that fits the illustration: “Through the body of Christ” we are told – that body that was put to death on that bloody cross – we died to the Law which bound us to the sin within us. For, every time that we tried to be good (before Christ came in), the Law simply showed us how far short we came. It exposed our inner sin, and we realized that, even though, outwardly, we could meet the demands of other human beings around us, inwardly, we were still the same miserable, self-centered, troubled, unhappy people that we had always been. Do you see?

Now, since Christ has come, we belong to another. It is he who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. This is a wonderful truth! In other words, the only life that is fruitful in God’s sight is the life of Jesus Christ in you and me!

May I say that again? This is *so* important that, if you don’t get it, you are going to spend a long, long time trying to serve God, and be acceptable to him, and get nowhere! The only life that God says is fruitful and acceptable and worthwhile in his sight is the risen life of Jesus Christ lived again through you and me. All other effort, any other way of living, is fruitless. Jesus said to his disciples:

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit. But without me ye can do nothing. {cf, John 15:5 KJV}

How much? Nothing!

Isn’t it amazing how busy we can be doing nothing! You see, while we were living in the flesh, as Paul says, while we were living what we call a natural human life, all our struggles to be good resulted only in fruit for death. There was fruit, but it was fruit for death, and, as we have seen all

along in this letter, death is a symbol for barrenness:

- Much effort, but little effect,
- Much sincerity, but no real accomplishment.

Fruit, you see, but it was fruit for barrenness, and worthlessness, and uselessness. We never really *did* anything! We never really *got* anywhere!

This is the experience of so many. And the more we read the Ten Commandments, and the more we tried to follow the Sermon on the Mount, the more condemned we felt because we were struggling to do something that we could not do. Even as Christians, we will discover that this is what self-effort brings us – *we produce fruit for death*.

The wonderful, transforming truth is that, if we lean back upon the mighty, refreshing, indwelling, conquering life of Jesus Christ within us, quietly counting on him to live and work through us to do all that needs to be done, we no longer need the written code of the Ten Commandments, or any other code, to direct our conduct because, as Paul says, we walk “not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.”

Now, let me ask you this question: “When Jesus Christ was here on earth, did he need the Ten Commandments?”

Now, I didn’t ask you, “Did he believe in the Ten Commandments,” or, “Did he fulfill them?” Of course he fulfilled them because love is the fulfilling of the Law.

Any time you act in love, you don’t need a law to tell you what to do. You just act out of the heart of compassion that love gives, and you will automatically do what the Law wants done. Of course, Christ fulfilled the Law, but he didn’t need the Law, you see, for if the Ten Commandments had never been given he would have been the same wonderful, mighty, attractive person that he was. He wasn’t struggling each day, as we sometimes do, to try to be good. He *was* good – everywhere he went. His nature is good. His nature is love. He didn’t have to work up feelings of love for some of those old hard-crusted, embittered Pharisees. He just loved them.

As Dr. Sanders said last week, “Even though he was sometimes angry with them (and anger is not incommensurate with love), he still loved them, for he looked on them and was grieved because of

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the hardness of their hearts.” Grieving is an activity of love. You see, Jesus didn’t have to *try to be* this, he *was* this, and he will be this *through our lives*.

So, if Jesus Christ is living his life through me, I don’t need any outward law to direct me. If I love my neighbor, I don’t need any sign that says, “Keep off the grass.” I won’t walk on his lawn because I am concerned for his welfare as much as my own. I would no more think of walking on his lawn until I wore a path through it than I would on my own. Do you see?

If I love my neighbor, I don’t need any Law that says, “Thou shalt not steal” {Exod 20:15 KJV}, or “Thou shalt not covet” {Exod 20:17 KJV}, or “Thou shalt not lie” {cf, Exod 20:16 KJV}. If I love, I will do these things automatically.

Well, then, should we throw the Law out? Should we just sneer at every attempt to quote it to us, and remind anyone who questions any of our attitudes that “we are not under law but under grace”? Well, let me ask you this: Did Christ? What did he do? What was his attitude toward the Law? Even though he didn’t need it, how did he regard it? You know the answer: He honored it; he highly regarded it.

Paul moves on now in this last section, Verses 7-13, to **the application that glorifies:**

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead [i.e, undiscovered, inert]. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died; the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might be-

come sinful beyond measure. {Rom 7:7-13 RSV}

Is that hard to understand? Let me explain it. You see, here we learn the true purpose of the Law.

Paul says, “if it had not been for the Law, I should not have known sin.” Now, he knew that there were sins in his life (i.e., occasional wrong deeds). All of us know that. But if it had not been for the Law he would never have learned that those sins came from *a nature of sin* within. That is what he is saying.

And this is the problem, isn’t it? Isn’t it amazing how all of us are always right in our own eyes? If we were our own judges, how easily we would get by on everything. We might admit to a few mistakes once in a while, or even an occasional fall, but our hearts are right, aren’t they?

A couple of weeks ago at Mount Hermon, Don Moomaw was speaking to the high school group and he told us about an incident in his own life just after he was married:

He and Carol, his wife, were on their honeymoon down in Palm Springs, and they went into a restaurant in the center of the city and got into the honeymoon corner, way back in the dark. They were enjoying talking to each other, discussing their new life together, and saying all those things that honeymooners say to one another. They finally become aware of a rather large and noisy party of people that were seated at the table next to them (or under it, I don’t know which). They had been there for some time and they were well inebriated – drunk, in common parlance. They were discussing all kinds of things – politics, what went on in the neighborhood, and so on. Finally, they got around to the inevitable – a discussion of religion. Don said that there was one woman who dominated the discussion, and they were going on at great lengths about the faults of the church, and everything else that was wrong here and there. Finally, she made the statement: “Well, I don’t care what the Bible says, or what all these other people say, or what the church says, I just let my conscience be my guide.” Or, as she said it, “I jush leth my conshush be my glide.”

You see, if we live according to our own light, everyone does what is right in his own eyes. But Paul says, “One day it came home to me that the Law says, ‘Thou shalt not covet’ and I realized that this meant not to desire something which belongs to

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another – his wife, his property, his honor, his position of favor, anything that belongs to another. ‘Thou shalt not covet.’”

And Paul said, “I set out to obey that, confident that I could do it like I had been fulfilling the other parts of the Law – thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie, thou shalt not bear false witness, commit adultery, and so on. But the first thing I knew,” he said, “I found myself saying, ‘Oh, I wish I had that.’ I envied another one’s success. I found myself maneuvering behind the scenes to get another person’s property. I chewed my fingernails because another fellow got the job I thought I ought to have. I was depressed over the popularity of another man.”

And, as he says in Verse 8, “sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, wrought in me all kinds of covetousness. Everywhere I turned, I found I was coveting.”

And, finally, he said, “The more I tried to suppress it, the worse it got until, finally, I saw that the trouble was myself, my own selfish heart, *my sinful nature.*”

That is what the Law taught him, and so he thanks God for the Law. He glorifies it. It is holy and just and good: *There is nothing wrong with the Law!*

And Verse 13 reminds us again of **the purpose of the Law:**

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. {Rom 7:13 RSV}

That is what the Law is for.

So many think that God gave the Ten Commandments to the human race in order to keep men from sinning. He didn’t at all. Notice Verse 20 of Chapter 5: “Law came in to increase the trespass.” – to increase the trespass – that is what the Law is for! It was given to arouse the sin which was in man, and, thus, in making him sin all the more, it made him discover the utter futility of trying to please God by self-effort.

As long as sin, in our sight, is just mere peccadilloes – trivialities, just slight blemishes in our

character – we never get serious about doing anything about it.

But:

- When sin becomes sinful beyond measure,
- When we see that the reason why we have so much difficulty getting along with somebody is because we are so contrary, so ornery, so self centered, so mean, so desirous that somebody be moved through the screws and be subjected to pain because we have been hurt,
- When we begin to become aware of how our own life is what is creating the problem in somebody else’s life, and they are loveless because we are so loveless to them,

Then:

- We get serious about finding out God’s process of casting it away and we fling ourselves in helplessness upon the mighty indwelling life of Jesus Christ to simply be himself in us!

Now, I recognize that when we, as Christians, choose to walk after the flesh, the Spirit sometimes uses the Law to show us our folly, and rebuke our barrenness, and bring us to our senses again. That is why Paul, over in First Timothy, says,

Now we know that the law is good, if anyone uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murders of fathers and murders of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, {1 Tim 1:8-10 RSV}

Whenever we get into that state we need the Law, even as Christians. But when we walk in the Spirit, allowing Jesus Christ to live his life again through us, we need no law. If we attempt to put that life back under the Law, what we are really trying to do is to be faithless to our new husband, the risen Christ.

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You see, he will be himself in us, and what he *is* is perfectly acceptable to the Father. So, as A. B. Simpson once put it:

Once 'twas busy planting,
Now 'tis trustful prayer.
Once 'twas anxious caring,
Now He has the care.
Once 'twas what I wanted,
Now what Jesus says.
Once 'twas constant asking,
Now 'tis ceaseless praise.
Once it was my working,
Hence it His shall be.
Once I tried to use Him,
Now He uses me.
Once the power I wanted,
Now the mighty one.
Once for self I labored,
Now for Him alone.

Prayer:

Our Father, in the confusion of our sin-burdened minds, we sometimes have difficulty laying hold of the truth that you declare to us, and perhaps this morning some of us are struggling to understand what this means. Father, we pray that thy Spirit may clarify it to us, and that we will simply receive it, and certainly not struggle against it and try to argue against it as though it were not true. For we know that those who discover this wonderful life of Christ within begin to experience the fullness of blessing of the Christian life, and Christ becomes real and vivid and clear to us once again. We thank you for that. We pray now that this may be the experience of each of us, as we turn from the old nature and from the old law and rejoice in the full deliverance that has come to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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False Consecration

by Ray C. Stedman

This section of Romans is teaching us how to walk in the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit is the only way the Christian life makes sense. If you don't learn how to walk in the Spirit, then your Christian life is going to be an enigma to you and to everyone else, for this is the whole reason we are called to be part of the body of Christ – that we might learn to walk in the Spirit. This is the process taught us here in Romans 5, 6, 7 & 8.

The problem of walking in the Spirit is not *how* to walk, but how to *keep walking*. It's not hard to tell anyone how to walk in the Spirit. In fact, we have it in the first fourteen verses of Chapter 6 in three very basic, simple steps:

- *Know* what God says took place on the cross of Christ regarding you and your old man, your old nature, your human life.
- *Consider* it to be continually true for every day, every hour, and every moment of every day.
- *Yield*, give over, lean back upon the mighty indwelling life of Jesus Christ who has come to live in you and work through you. Expect him to live his life through you and to do it without destroying your personality and without setting aside your activity.

That is the simple process, but the problem is not how to do it but how to keep doing it.

Have you ever noticed that even a baby, when he learns to walk, has no problem taking the first step? The problem is taking the next ten steps – it is not how to walk, but how to keep walking. Almost all babies, as soon as they know how to stand, know how to take a step. They do that automatically, naturally. They put one foot in front of the

other, take a couple or three uncertain steps across the floor, and then what happens? Well, you know, they look around, or they get worried about what they are doing, or they get engrossed in the process, or something diverts their attention, and down they go.

This is the experience we have so frequently in learning to walk in the Spirit. I think that all Christians have known some brief times, at least, of the joy and the thrill of walking in the Spirit. There are times (not always emotionally felt either) when all of us have sensed God working through us, and much being accomplished, quite apart from us – this is the experience of walking in the Spirit.

It is like Peter walking on the water after the Lord called to him. Peter said, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee," {Matt 14:28 KJV}. And the Lord said, "Come," {Matt 14:29}. Without thinking, Peter jumped out of the boat and started to walk across the water to the Lord. About half way across he got excited about the wind and the waves and began wondering how in the world this was talking place anyway, and he became diverted and distracted, and began to sink. Then he cried, "Lord, help me!" {cf, Matt 14:30}, and the Lord reached down and picked him up again. This is a beautiful picture of what it means to walk in the Spirit.

When we begin to walk in the Spirit, there are certain hindrances that come in. This is what Paul is taking up now in these three chapters of Romans.

The first of these we have already looked at. We saw that the first hindrance to a walk in the Spirit is a secret love for our sins which makes us unwilling to accept God's verdict upon them:

- We are reluctant to call things what he calls them.

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- We don't like the names that God uses about what goes on in our lives.
- He calls them lying, lust, hate, selfishness, but we prefer our own terms:
 - Instead of lying, we say, "It is just a tendency to exaggerate."
 - Instead of lust, we say, "We have a hot-blooded nature."
 - And we never say we hate somebody, we say, "We have a cordial dislike."
 - And instead of selfishness, it is "sensitivity," which we regard as a mark of refinement.

But light demands honesty, and when God the Spirit turns the light upon our lives, we no longer can all pianos "tables," or tables "pianos," we have to call them what they are. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another," {1 Jn 1:7a RSV}. That is the first hindrance.

The second hindrance is what is before us in the last part of the seventh chapter, and the first four verses of Chapter 8. It is what we might call a false consecration to the Law of God.

In the first thirteen verses, that we looked at last week, we saw that the Law has one great effect upon us: It shows us the sinful nature we have in Adam. We learned that it is not only the things we do that are wrong, but behind it, and in back of it, is a tainted spring, a corrupt fountain, that keeps pouring out sin – a sinful nature. And we also learned that life in Jesus Christ (or Christ living in us) doesn't have any need for the Law at all, no place for it, even though it honors and highly regards the Law.

Now, that brings us to the last section of the seventh chapter where we see further reason why the Christian must not be under law. This section presents three things to us. Let me give you the headings so that you may follow me:

Chapter 7:14-20: The Behavior that Baffles,
Chapter 7:21-25: The Law that Limits,
Chapter 8:1-4: The Force that Frees.

In Verses 14-20 we can look at **the behavior that baffles**. Paul says,

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. {Rom 7:14-20 RSV}

And you say, "My, I didn't know the Apostle Paul knew me so well," for this is a record right out of our own lives, is it not? This is the struggle that the apostle experiences when he tries, as a Christian, to obey the Law or to do good.

You remember the illustration that I have used on several occasions; it was one of Dr. Ironside's favorite illustrations of law and grace: It is the story of the young Indian lad who had never been off the Navajo reservation until Dr. Ironside brought him to Oakland. He had been a Christian only about two years. When he came to Oakland, he was taken into a group of Christian young people one Sunday night when they were discussing law and grace. He listened to them as they argued back and forth about the various aspects, and then the leader called on him to say a few words. He said something like this:

"Me been listening to you talk about law and grace, and the longer me listen, the more me think you don't know what law or grace is."

He said,

"Let me tell you what I think: When Mr. Ironside ask me to go to Oakland with him, we get on a big train down in reservation. I never been on a train before, and we ride and ride and ride all day long, and, finally, we come to Barstow out in desert."

And he said,

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“Me very tired so me get off train to walk platform and stretch legs. While me walk around platform, me see sign that say, ‘Do Not Spit Here.’ Me look at sign, and me think, ‘what strange sign white man put up – Do Not Spit Here.’”

And then he said,

“While me look at sign, before I know what happen, me spit! I look all around platform and I see many people spit here. I think to myself, ‘How Strange.’ Sign say, ‘Do Not Spit Here’ but many people spit, and I spit.”

And then he said,

“We got on train again and come long way, up to Oakland, and some friends meet us at train, and take us to beautiful home. I never been in such home. Mr. Ironside take me in and show me soft chair and excuse himself for awhile, and I left alone in room. I look around and everything is so nice – soft, thick rug on floor, beautiful walls painted lovely color, pictures hanging on walls – everything so nice. I walk around room and I think to myself about something, and I look all around room and all over the wall, and I try to find sign that say ‘Do Not Spit Here,’ but I cannot find sign. I think to myself, ‘Too bad all this lovely room going to be ruined by people spitting on floor.’ Then I look around on floor, and see nobody been spitting there – and then it come to me: When the law say, ‘Do Not Spit Here’ it makes me want to spit, and I spit, and many people spit. But when I come into grace, and everything lovely and nice, I don’t want to spit, and I do not need law to say, ‘Do Not Spit Here.’”

I think you will agree that, in many ways, this is a wonderful illustration. It certainly is an excellent illustration of what the Law does to us. It arouses our sinful emotions, as Paul says, and makes us want to do what we are told not to do. Who has not experienced this? But, in other ways, the illustration falls short of what grace really does, for it shows, indeed, how the Law stirs up our inward resentment, but it is incomplete in its illustration of grace. For, after we become Christians, we soon discover that, although

- we do have new life in Christ and it is wonderful, and
- we enjoy peace with God, and
- we have access to him, and
- we know that we are in the family of God, and
- we know that we have a certain hope of heaven, and
- we rejoice in that,

despite all this wonderful atmosphere, *we still want to spit!*

We find that grace hasn’t taken this problem away; a desire not to spit is not sufficient. For, even though we may be horrified at the thought of defiling the wonderful room of grace by spitting, the truth is we sometimes catch ourselves spitting anyhow!

That is what Paul is talking about here in this illustration. The struggle of this passage is expressed for us in Verse 18, the latter part, where Paul says, “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.” Who has not experienced that as a believer in Christ? What a baffling experience this is!

Now, up to this point,

- We have been learning how subtly the old life leads us into sin in ways we never suspected possible.
- We have discovered the depths of sin in our life opened up to us by the Holy Spirit that we didn’t realize were there.
- We see the cleverness with which we have been camouflaging, even from ourselves, the hidden perversities within, and the silken subtleties with which we excuse ourselves from these manifestations.

But, led by the Spirit, we go from crisis to crisis, confessing each time these newly discovered manifestations of the old nature. Each time we experience release, and victory, until another symptom is called to our attention by the Spirit of God. Then,

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at last, we seem to come to an end; we rest in the knowledge that we mean to judge every evil symptom that appears:

- We face up to the fact that it is our harboring of these hidden sins that prevents us from living in victory in Christ, and
- We realize that the whole thing must go.

As we look at ourselves, and come to that place, and, led of God, we say, “By the grace of God, as I see these things brought to my attention, I’ll put them where he puts them – in the place of death – and these things shall not reign in my life any longer.”

- Then we have such a sense of cleanness and we feel that the one thing that has been preventing us from victory is doing and thinking wrong, so we have cleared that up, and now we are ready to serve Christ.
- Then, perhaps, we go to a consecration service, and we dedicate ourselves to him – we offer him our time, our talents, and our abilities – and then we rise up to go out to capture the world for Christ. But, to our amazement, there is no power, there is no effectiveness, no fruit in what we try to do. It is a hard old grind in which we become discouraged and defeated, and, before we know it, some evil that we thought was gone has cropped up again in our life.
- Then we go to the Lord, and say, “What’s wrong, Lord? I am simply trying to serve you. I am trying to do the right thing. Why no power? Why this defeat in my life again?” We know that it is not our hearts that are wrong. We want to do the right thing. We are trying to. As Paul puts it, “it is no longer I that do it.”

It is not that I am still clinging to some sin that I am not willing to give up:

- We are wanting to do the right things, but we still find that sin is around, and it baffles us and mocks us.

- We think that maybe we made some mistakes, so we try again.
- We consecrate ourselves again.
- We resolve again.

But it is the same old story: It seems to work for awhile, and then – defeat! The most discouraging part of it is to face honestly the name that Paul gives to this position. It is in Verse 14 – carnality! “I am carnal,” it says. In other words, this battle is a description of a carnal Christian.

“Oh,” you say, “wait a minute. I thought a carnal Christian was a backslider, one of these fellows who used to go to church, but now watches TV instead of attending prayer meeting on Wednesday night, or maybe the kind who has run off with someone else’s wife – that is a carnal Christian.” Well, you’re right. That is one kind of a carnal Christian, but Paul is talking about Sunday School teachers and missionaries, pastors and Christian workers, and good, honest, ordinary, average, sincere Christians who want to do God’s will:

- They have been to consecration meeting after consecration meeting.
- They have responded over and over to the appeal, “Christ did all this for you, now what will you do for him.”
- They sense the call to commitment, and, in earnestness and utter sincerity, without a vestige of hypocrisy, they say, “Lord, here I am, I give myself to you.”
- They have gone forward backwards, and sideways.
- They have raised their right hand, and their left hand.
- They would stand on their heads, if it would do any good.
- They have prayed harder.

- They have studied harder.
- They have wept harder.

But nothing seems to help, and they are terribly, desperately tired and discouraged! There are many Christians in this state.

Are you there?

Such Christians have one thing left to learn. They are still subject to the law of sin and death, as Paul points out, in **the law that limits**, Verses 21-25:

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. {Rom 7:21-25 RSV}

Here Paul is analyzing this baffling condition of defeat:

The first thing he says is, “I discover that the law of temptation is still present with me. I find it to be a law that, when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. That is, every desire on my part to do right is met by an equal urge to do wrong.” This is the law of temptation, and there is nothing alarming about it. I think many Christians make a serious mistake here because they feel that they should expect to be delivered from temptation, from any sense to do wrong. But Paul simply faces the fact that this is a law. Satan is still around to allure us, and, through the flesh, try to tempt us and trap us – even the Lord Jesus did not escape this – he was subject to temptation just as we are. Temptation is a necessary part of the process of learning how to refuse evil and choose good. So it is always there, but it is not the problem.

The second discovery the apostle makes is that, though my desires are right, the will is redeemed and set right, and the heart is purified, yet the flesh is not able to respond to the demands that the will makes upon it: My best efforts cannot please God! We learn that the flesh is not only sinful, but help-

less – it is totally incapable of pleasing God. For many Christians, it is shocking to learn that sin is not only doing something wrong, but that it is also trying to do something right in our own effort. That is sin. That is part of the old nature as well. This is what Paul discovered.

Now, this is a secret that God has gone to great lengths to teach his people throughout the ages.

- This is what our Lord was referring to when he spoke to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he retired into the deeper shadows of the garden to pray. He said to Peter and the others, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation,” {Matt 26:41 KJV}. That is, ask God to keep you from being tempted now, because, if you are tempted, you will discover that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak! Peter ignored that warning, and slept instead of praying. He boldly tried, in utter sincerity, with the best of motives, and with complete consecration of heart and mind, to serve the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane.

You know the story of how he ended up baffled, and broken, and weeping over his blasphemy and denial – a living picture of what we have here in Romans 7: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” {Rom 7:24 RSV}.

- This is the secret that Jacob learned, as recorded in Genesis 32:24-32, when, at the brook of Peniel, he struggled to get God to bless him. This is a picture of the way we struggle. We make our plans and programs, and work everything out, and say, “Now, Lord, bless this.” And so frequently, nothing happens, and there is no blessing on it. Jacob was doing that. He was struggling with God, trying to get him to bless him, until God finally put his thigh out of joint, in order that he might learn to cling in helplessness to the only one who could be his strength.
- That is what Abraham learned after the birth of Ishmael, when he had the promise that God would give him a son who would be the heir of all the promises that God had given him. The years went by and nothing seemed to be happening, and Abraham couldn’t wait any longer, and, in complete sincerity, with the best of mo-

tives, and with the deepest desire to do God's will, he tried to help God fulfill his will. He took an Egyptian girl for his wife and almost destroyed his home in the process. It wasn't until thirteen years later that he began to see that God not only has a will, but he also has his own way of performing that will.

- This is what Moses learned when he tried to deliver Israel after he graduated from the University of Egypt. He stood there on the steps, with his diploma in his hand, trained in all the knowledge of the Egyptians, with all that he felt qualified to be used of God to be the deliverer of Israel. He knew that he had been called to that from his birth, because his mother had told him the stories of his birth, and he set out to do the work that God had called him to do. Within 48 hours he had become a murderer instead of a missionary, and he had to flee from the face of Pharaoh {see Exod 2:11-15}.
- This is what Paul learned after he had been three years in Arabia, praying through the Scriptures and learning anew how Jesus Christ is in all the Scriptures. He came back to Damascus and went into the synagogues with confidence that his background as a Pharisee, raised in the traditions of Israel, would give him access to these people. He thought he could be God's instrument to deliver Israel and bring them back to Christ. He went in and began confidently to preach Christ in the synagogues, but they wouldn't listen to him. Then, one night, his friends had to take him out and let him down over a wall in a basket, like a common criminal. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church later and said he gloried in this experience, because then he began to learn how helpless he was in himself, and all that he was, all that he had, all his training and ability were nothing. "God can take me just as I am, a mere man, and use me" – this is what he concluded. And you remember how he went up to Jerusalem, and there, broken and defeated, the Christians shunning him and having nothing to do with him, he knelt in the temple and the Lord appeared to him, and said, "Get thee out of Jerusalem and go home – back to Tarsus," {cf, Acts 22:18 KJV}. And for seven years Paul waited in Tarsus till he learned the secret

that all his training and ability made him highly qualified to be utterly useless. At last he discovered this secret that the flesh can do nothing to please God.

- Andrew Murray writes:

God works to will and He is ready to do, but, alas, many Christians misunderstand this. They think that, because they have the will, it is enough, and that, now, they are able to do. This is not so. The new will is a permanent gift and attribute of the new nature, but the power to do is not a permanent gift, but must be received each moment from the Holy Spirit. It is the man who is conscious of his own impotence as a believer who will learn that by the Holy Spirit he can lead a holy life.

All this is really just the struggle of the old nature to obey some law, whether it is the Ten Commandments or some other law. We hear sometimes how God uses a man, and we say, "Why doesn't God use me that way?" And we put ourselves under the 'law' of someone else, and try to do the same thing, but it never seems to work.

I remember my own experience, if I may just share an autobiographical word with you:

- When I graduated from seminary, I thought that the power needed for a ministry lay in the man of God – so I studied men. I followed them. I saw men that were being used of God, and I said, "What is it that is the secret of their power?" When I thought I found it, I tried to imitate it, and to adapt it to myself. I caught myself aping men – talking like them. Some of you will remember how, coming fresh from the influence of the ministry of Dr. J. Vernon McGee, I used to talk like him. I wore bright red shirts, because I thought that was the hiding of his power. I finally realized that the power did not lie in the man.
- Then I thought the power lay in the message: It must be what men say that is so moving and powerful and potent. So I listened to men, and read books, and when I ran across a passage that I felt would beautifully state some truth, I would almost memorize it – so that I could repeat it. When I had a message that was particularly blessed of God, I'd say, "Well, that

worked. I'll put that one aside, and the next time I am invited to speak at a conference or some special place, I'll bring that one out. That is the one that will do the trick." I would go to the conference, and, in all confidence, I would bring the message out and preach it – and it would fall flat! I would go to the Lord, and say, "What's wrong? I am simply trying to do what is the right thing. Here is a message that you blessed before. What is wrong?"

- At last, baffled and defeated, I learned the lesson that power does not reside in the man or the message. "Power belongeth unto God" {Psa 62:11 KJV}, and God never gives it to anyone. He will live it through men, but he never gives it to anyone: Power belongs to God.

Paul sums up this whole picture in Verse 25:

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. {Rom 7:25 RSV}

That is, I know there is deliverance in Christ – thanks be to God for that – but I have found that as long as I, of myself, serve the Law of God with my redeemed will, then I will also, by inevitable law, serve with the flesh the law of sin and death. In other words, 'Do It Yourself Christianity' Never Works!

Now we are ready for a look at **the force that frees**, in Chapter 8, Verses 1-4:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. {Rom 8:1-4 RSV}

We have come to the full noontide of the gospel. When we come to the end of ourselves, both in

not doing evil and in trying to do good, then we are ready to rest upon the work of Another to do everything through us that needs to be done. We are no longer responding to the love motive; that is, "Christ did something for me, therefore I must do something for him." But, now, we are acting from the life motive. The only commitment that will hold up, you see, is that which springs from our reliance upon his life in us.

The first word to us here is, "there is no condemnation." Blessed words!

When you discover your inability to serve God by much zeal, and much prayer, and much study, and you waken to your frustrations and your bafflement – then you are tempted to quit being a Christian. You say, "Oh, Lord, what's the use? I have tried, and tried, and tried, and I get nowhere. Why try any more?" Your heart condemns you, and you feel terrible.

It is right at this point that John says, "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, for he knoweth all things," {1 Jn 3:20 KJV}. Though we are self-condemned, God doesn't condemn us. He knows that there is a struggle, and he is not surprised or alarmed. It doesn't shock him as it does us, because he expected nothing but failure all the time! He knows the flesh; he knows it can't do anything, and he's not surprised.

Sometimes, even though we are very disturbed, the greatest moment in our life is when we come to God, and say, "Lord, I quit! I cannot do it." God says, "Good! That is what I have been waiting for. Now I'll do it." And, without a word of reproach or rebuke for our failure, he does through us what we struggled in vain to do – that is "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

Notice what he says: What neither the Ten Commandments, nor any other law, could ever accomplish, what no standard of perfection that we are trying to follow could ever do, because of our weak, sinful, unable flesh, is now fully accomplished in us by another principle: The indwelling life of Jesus Christ, ministered to us continually by the Spirit to do everything that life demands of us, fulfilling the Law, and more. However, the law of sin and barrenness still persists. It is still present, and ready to spring into action whenever we harbor sin or try to serve Christ by our own will or ability.

We will discover this to be so, and that is why Paul puts this struggle in the present tense. But

when we abide in Christ, as he abides in us, and we recognize that for everything we do, whether it is

- tying our shoe,
- washing the dishes,
- preaching a message,
- typing a letter, or
- whatever it is –

for everything we do, we must rely in total dependence upon the law of the Spirit of life in us; then that law takes over and cancels out the law of sin and death. What we could not do by our own effort, we do through him.

I discovered when I was about 18 years of age that I had in my members a law that was operating, called the law of myopia (or nearsightedness), which made my eyes unable to see what other people with normal eyesight could see. I struggled against that thing and tried to ignore it, and to squint and endeavor to see anyway, but I couldn't. The harder I tried, it seemed, the worse it got, until, at last, I learned of another law – the law of lens correction. A couple of years ago I had an eye doctor insert a tiny plastic lens into each of my eyes (contact lenses, they call them), and, now, without any effort on my part, the law of lens correction operates to cancel out the law of myopia – so that I can see with better than normal vision. All I need to do is to be sure that the lenses are in my eyes. I put them in every morning, then, all through the day, I don't have to think about them any more. They are continually operating to correct my sight, and the law of lens correction sets me free from the law of myopia!

So too, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus sets me free from the law of sin and death!

This is *the exchanged life*, the released life. It is a continual paradox. Life in the Spirit is a life of restful activity, and this is a paradox. It isn't simply sitting around waiting for orders from God. It is facing life with all its mystery and fascination,

- with a continual recognition of, and
- constant praise and thanksgiving for

the fact that, within, is the indwelling life of Christ, ready to do instantly, through me, all that I need to do. As I rest upon it, I find that I can simply go ahead doing the normal, the natural, the obvious,

and, in it and through it all, God is at work! Life becomes a continual matter of the expectation of miracles, of excitement, because of what God does through me – and yet it is rest without struggle.

This is particularly evident in witnessing: I used to be so concerned about to whom I should witness; I would pray that God would lead me to the one that he had prepared, and would try to talk to everyone that I met, if I could. Then I discovered that, many times, I was doing more harm than good – that I was driving people away from the gospel. I would make them uncomfortable, and they would avoid me, and, as a result, would be much harder to reach because of my efforts. At last, I learned to rest upon the indwelling life of Christ, and now, when I get aboard a train or a plane, I look for the obvious – the most comfortable seat. I now expect God to lead me to the one he wants me to reach. I talk to the one that sits down next to me in a normal conversation, and, if something seems to develop a little bit, I follow it through – if it doesn't, I don't worry about it. It may be the man that I will meet at the water cooler is the one, or it may be that the Lord just wants me to enjoy a friendly conversation about the Dodgers and the Giants with this man. This is normal life, you see. Yet, I have had more opportunity for effective witness this way than ever before.

This is not only a life of restful activity, it is a life of captive liberty. That is a paradox too. In other words, everything is right unless I know it is wrong, because it is the job of the Holy Spirit to let me know that something is wrong – and he does! I feel the check, if I am honest with him. Then I can walk in liberty continually. If I am dishonest, or if I refuse to listen, then I am plunged right back into the same old futile struggle which is here described, in Romans 7. But if I walk in honesty before the Lord, I find that everything is right unless I know it is wrong. I can do all things. The legalist turns that around; he says, "Everything is wrong unless I know it is right." But Christ gives us a life of liberty in the Spirit.

It is also a life of power-filled weakness. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels," Paul says, "that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us," {2 Cor 4:7 KJV}. Sometimes we are very much aware of the vessel; we get tired, feel weak, have a scratchy throat, or sore muscles. The weakness of the vessel is evident. But we have a treasure within that, even in the midst of infirmi-

ties, is able to manifest itself. This is why the apostle could say, “I glory in my infirmities, because when I am weak, then I know that the power of Christ rests upon me,” {cf, 2 Cor 12:9-10 KJV}. So it is a life of power-filled weakness.

Then, it is a life of joyful suffering. I have told you before that this is the mark of a Christian life lived in the fullness of the Spirit – rejoicing in suffering. Paul points this out in Chapter 5.

In 1900, when the Boxer Rebellion broke out in China, it seemed as though all the work of the China Inland Mission would be destroyed. Every day new reports would come of pastors beheaded, or missionaries captured. Hudson Taylor was then an old man, and his co-workers feared that his health might break under the pressure of continual bad news. One day, when a particularly distressing bit of news had come in, the office workers went up to Hudson Taylor’s home to see how he was taking it. They feared for what they might find, but, as they drew near, they heard the old man singing. As they listened, they heard him sing:

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
In the joy of what thou art.
I am finding out the greatness
Of thy loving heart.

Thou hast bade me gaze upon thee,
And thy beauty fills my soul,
For by thy transforming power
Thou hast made me whole.

Yes, this is a life of victory over suffering, strength over weakness – in the presence of weakness. This is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this truth. You have said that we shall know the truth and the truth shall set us free. Father, you know that the flesh resents this exposure of the phony nature of its righteousness. We don’t like to be told that we cannot do things for you, but we thank you, Lord, that if we are willing to believe you, and lay hold of this, that very self-mortification crucifixion brings us to the place of resurrection, and we rejoice in life in the Spirit. May this be our experience, in Christ’s name. Amen.

In the Arena

by Ray C. Stedman

I have entitled this study *In the Arena* because the whole passage seems to capture the atmosphere of the running of a race, a pressing on in the strength of the indwelling Lord to a goal or a prize to be reached. This is what the Christian life is.

The sports contest is a frequent source of illustration with the Apostle Paul. I rather imagine that he must have, on some occasions at least, frequented the Olympic Games back in those early days, and thus was well acquainted with the athletic contest, since he draws so many illustrations from this source. When he wrote to the Galatians, in his great letter to them, he reminded these people that they had begun in the Spirit, but were now trying to be made perfect by the flesh. He said to them, "You did run well, but who did hinder you?" {cf, Gal 5:7 KJV}. That is, you started the race very well.

Those of us who saw the great Russian-American Games here at Stanford last week will never forget the sight of that tremendous Russian distance runner, Bolotnikov. He, on one day, ran the 10,000-meter race, that grueling endurance grind, and then, the next day, came back to win the 5,000-meter race. I was there on Saturday, seated close to the front, and, as the contestants came around the track, I could see their faces clearly. I took special note of this great Russian runner as the race progressed. I could see his face as they came by, covered with sweat and grime, and evidencing a bit of pain. You could see the lines of increasing weariness as the race went on. Then, the thrill of that incredible last lap when he stretched out, and ran away from all the others, and left them far behind to win that race. It was a tremendous feat, and one that I will never forget.

That is where the race is run – right down in the grime and sweat and dust of the arena. Also, that is where the Christian life is lived – right down

in the pain and sweat and tears of life, with its mixture of joy and sorrow, its glory and grime, its triumph and despair. That is where the Christian life is designed to be lived, and if we don't get that out of the book of Romans, especially out of Chapter 8, we are missing the dominant emphasis of this passage.

Somebody has said that life is like a football game in which the real men are down on the gridiron playing the game while the Christians are up in the stands explaining it to the ladies. Now, if that is your concept of Christian living, you've completely missed the point.

The Christian life is the life of Jesus Christ lived again through you:

- It's not our trying to live like Christ – that is a misconception,
- Nor is it our trying to be Christ-like – that is another misconception,
- Nor is it even Christ giving us the power to live a life like his.

It is none of these. It is Christ indwelling us, living his life again through us. And that life was designed to be lived right in the roughest, toughest, hardest, most difficult spot on earth – your home, your job, your everyday circumstances – right there!

This is the test of whether you are laying hold of the power of the life of Christ in you. Is your home life different? If doesn't make any difference how well you talk out in public, but are you different at home? That is the test – for that is where the Christian life is designed to be lived.

Right here I think some of us need to hear the apostle's question again:

“You did run well, but who did hinder you?” {cf, Gal 5:7 KJV}

That is, you started out fine – many of us remember what a change came into our lives when we became Christians – habits changed, attitudes changed, outlook changed – we were *different*:

- We experienced new joy,
- We had new power,
- There was sense of victory –
- What a change it was!

Everyone could see it! But now, gradually, there has come, through the years, another change in which we evidence that we have lost interest – we have grown listless, we are indifferent to spiritual values. We may still go through all the motions of Christianity, but there is no power, no glow, no fruit in our lives. Many of us have found ourselves right here in Romans 7 – living the life of defeat and despair. We are running the race, but we are running it like a paralyzed man, hobbling along in the feeble efforts of the flesh.

Paul sets forth the reason this in the opening verses of Chapter 8: We are walking according to the flesh, and not according to the Spirit.

You say, “I don’t understand those terms; I have read that passage so many times, and it seems to say something, but I don’t quite get what. What does this mean, ‘walking according to the flesh’ and ‘walking according to the Spirit’?”

Well, that is right where we want to begin now, in Romans 8, with a look at these two divisions:

Verses 5 - 9: The Analysis of Paralysis
Verses 10-14: The Possibility of Maturity

Let’s look first at Verses 5-9, **the analysis of paralysis**:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot; and

those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. {Rom 8:5-9 RSV}

We learned in Chapter 5 that there are two sources of life in this world. There is Adam, and there is Christ – the first man, and the second man. All of us were, by nature, born into Adam. We have the life of Adam, so we behave like Adam. We have the same difficulties that Adam had. But, when we are born again, by faith in Jesus Christ, we are no longer in Adam, we are in Christ. As Paul reminds us in the Corinthian letter, “if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come,” {2 Cor 5:17 RSV}. But in this section before us we learn something further: We learn that the active agent, the motivating force, which takes this life of Christ and makes it available to us is the Holy Spirit – the indwelling Holy Spirit. In John 16:13-15, Jesus said to his disciples before his crucifixion, “When he shall come,” speaking of the Spirit, “he shall take of the things of mine and make them real to you,” {cf, John 16:13-14 RSV}. He shall take them and unfold them to you. So the agency by which the life of Christ (and all that we have in Christ) is made available to us is in the Holy Spirit.

Now, on the opposite side, the motivating force that makes the life of Adam available to us is the flesh (or the egocentric self). The reason behind all our actions when we were not Christians was invariably self-interest.

If you look back to those days before you knew Jesus Christ, you will discover, as you look within, that the motivating force – the thing that urged you on to do what you did – was your self-interest, your egocentric self, the promotion of self in some form or another. This self can be extroverted or introverted. It can be self which is manifested in self-confidence, self-aggressiveness, and so on, or it can be self which is manifested in self-pity, self-regression, timidity, and other things. But, once we learn what Christ is to us, and what he has come to be in us, then the normal state for a Christian should be one of continual fruitfulness. It is recorded in John 15:5, 8 that Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” {John 15:5a RSV}; “if my life is abiding in you, you will bring forth much

fruit,” {cf, John 15:7-8}. This is the continual state that we can expect. This is what is called ‘walking in the Spirit.’ But, after we realize this, we discover that it is still possible to ‘walk according to the flesh.’ The key to victory or defeat in the Christian life is set forth right here in Verse 5:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. {Rom 8:5 RSV}

Here is the distinction, but I think that many people get a very false idea of what this means. They think that when it says to “set your mind on the things of the Spirit,” it must mean that you go around thinking holy thoughts about God, and meditating on Bible verses all day long, or thinking of heaven all the time. And they think “the things of the flesh” are your business life, the dirty dishes in the sink that need to be washed, the routine of life, the pleasure in which you are engaged, and so on. We seem to think that Christians who ‘walk in the Spirit’ are those holy men and women, remote from life, who are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly use, but this is entirely wrong – nothing could be further from the truth. If you’ve got the idea that, when you become a Christian, you must put your mind on the shelf, and your social life in the closet, and become a ‘Holy Joe’ or a ‘Pious Pete,’ you have missed the point completely because that is not what it is.

No, “the things of the Spirit” include the whole range of life, the entire spectrum, with all its changing color, and the fascinating mystery of life: These are the things of the Spirit. Thus, it involves food and drink, clothing and music, life and art, politics and science, marriage and business – all of life! As Paul says to the Corinthians, “All things are yours” {1 Cor 3:21b KJV}, “and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s,” {1 Cor 3:23 KJV}. So all of life is involved in this – in the things of the Spirit – and Christians make a great mistake in thinking that it is a limited, narrow, rigidly defined area that we are concerned with ‘in the Spirit.’

Now, “the things of the flesh” cover the same range; it covers all of life. If you are concerned about living today, you are involved in all of these things – food, music, clothing, literature, art, politics, business, marriage – all of it. And these are

included in “the things of the flesh,” but from a different approach. In other words, the difference between the “things of the flesh” and “things of the Spirit” is not a *different kind* of thing, but it is the *different attitude* with which you come to them. It is a different approach, a different sense of values; that is what we are talking about here.

Let me paraphrase it this way:

He who sets his mind on the values of the Spirit, on the attitudes of the Spirit, on the point of view of the Spirit, walks in the Spirit; but he who sets his mind on the values of the flesh, on the attitudes of the flesh, walks in the flesh.

Let me illustrate, if I can, by asking you this question: How do you view your work? What do you think about your vocation, your calling, the way you make your living? Is it to you just a way to earn a living, to keep the wolf from the door, to feed and educate your children, to supply the fleshly needs of your life, and, perhaps, also, to give you a little status in society? Is this what your job means to you? If it is, you have the mind of the flesh, you are walking according to the flesh. On the other hand, is your work, to you, God’s chosen area for you to exhibit Jesus Christ, and the way that you have of glorifying him by faithfulness and willingness to do the tasks that are set before you? Is it the means that you have of earning money to give to those who are in need around you, and to share the abundance that God gives you with others? Is it the way that you have of fulfilling the joy of giving, and, incidentally, to provide the supply of food and clothing and education that your family needs? Well, if it is, you have the mind of the Spirit, you are walking according to the Spirit. It is the same work, but approached with a different attitude.

How do you view recreation? When you amuse yourself, why do you do it? Is a way to kill time? Is it a way to amuse yourself for an hour or two or maybe give you a thrill; all recreation or amusement exists only that you may have a thrill? Or is it a way that enables you to show off your unusual coordination of body?

If it is, you have the mind of the flesh. On the other hand, is it a way to refresh your body and soul, and to challenge your mind and your body to something that stimulates it, and presents a chal-

lenge to you? Is it a way to share the delightful activity of some occasion with others, to enjoy the gift of life and strength which God has given you, and to make you fit to get back to your regular work better able to accomplish God's purpose in you? If it is, you have the mind of the Spirit. It is the same recreation, but approached with a different attitude.

This is what the apostle means. All through life, the way in which you view these things is the thing that marks whether you walk according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. To what do you relate everything?

Psychiatrists tell us that every one of us needs a reference point, a reference group. This is the reason, for instance, that young people are under so much pressure, continually, to conform to the crowd. That is why they all have to have the same kind of hat or shirt or pants or hot-rod or something – because they are relating everything they do to their reference group, to the crowd that they are with – and that is the mind of the flesh. The mind of the Spirit is relating everything to God, and to his point of view and values. When you do this, Paul says, you are walking in the Spirit.

We see the practical results of these two ways of life in Verses 6-7:

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; {Rom 8:6-7 RSV}

Remember, the flesh is not only that which urges us to please ourselves and do the wrong thing, but it is also that which seeks to advance ourselves by getting us to try to do the right thing in our own effort. And, no matter which it is, the result is inevitably death in our life (death in this connotation means barrenness, fruitlessness, spiritual poverty) which is a stench in the nostrils of God; it is hostile to God.

It may look very good to man, and you may win your way to some position of favor or influence or position in the sight of men, but, in the eyes of God, if it originated from that self-effort

- to be somebody,
- to gain something,
- to advance yourself,

then it is a stench in the nostrils of God. We need to understand this clearly, and I think it is clearly evident in life.

I was listening to Dr. Vernon Grounds on the radio the other day, and he was recounting for us the sordid and unfortunate story that has been in our newspapers – the story of Billie Sol Estes down in Texas. I was interested to hear the facts about this man: This man is a Christian; he is a lay preacher, and his home has been a center of evangelical activity in the town of Pecos in West Texas. He is a fundamentalist. He neither smokes nor drinks. He has had meetings in his home specially set up for young people: When the world around was putting on enticing programs that would get them involved in worldly pursuits, he opened his home so that they could come in and have a time of Christian fellowship and keep them out of this. In other words, he was accepted and regarded in Pecos as the epitome of a Christian fundamentalist living for Christ in that town. But now we know the whole story: Outwardly, everything was right. Inwardly, the heart was wrong and continually conniving to advance itself.

This is a revelation of what is happening, more frequently than we even dream, in lives around us.

Now, if you begin to feel a little smug at this point, let me remind you that the mind of the flesh can be exhibited in an outwardly perfectly moral life. You don't have to have your life suddenly collapse, like Billie Sol Estes, and be exposed to the public gaze, and have everyone see the inward moral rottenness of your life in order to be living in the flesh. You can have a quite moral life, with nothing legally wrong about it, for the carnal Christian is not only (as we learn here) the hypocrite, but he is also the sincere Christian who is trying his best to serve Christ by his own efforts. This is what we struggle with, isn't it? This is what makes it so difficult for us. We say, "Well, what can be wrong with that?" Well, the answer is right here:

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, {Rom 8:6 RSV}

even though it tries to, for "it cannot." It simply cannot.

When the Russian astronaut, Gherman Titov, was in San Francisco, he was asked what he believed about God, and he said,

“I don’t believe in God. I believe in man – in his strength, his possibilities, and his reason.”

I thought, as I read that, there is a clear statement of what Paul means by the mind of the flesh: “I believe in man – his strength, his possibilities, and his reason.” Now, it’s possible to show that same attitude and yet begin your statement with the words “I do believe in God” as well as “I don’t believe in God.” In other words, you can say, “I believe in God” and then live as though everything depended upon you. This is the mind of the flesh that Paul is talking about here, and it is as hostile to God as the attitude of Titov is.

Let me show you something on that; it’s taught by type in many places in the Scripture, but there is one that is particularly interesting in Ezekiel 44. Ezekiel is speaking, in Verse 15, about the millennial temple and of the priests of God, serving God, and he says,

“But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me; and they shall attend to me to offer me the fat and the blood, says the Lord God; they shall enter my sanctuary, and they shall approach my table, to minister to me, and they shall keep my charge.” {Ezek 44:15-16 RSV}

Now these are priests ministering to God, which is a picture of the Christian today.

“When they enter the gates of the inner court, they shall wear linen garments; they shall have nothing of wool on them, while they are ministering at the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen turbans upon their heads, and linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat.” {Ezek 44:17-18 RSV}

Now, why in the world is God so concerned about what his people wear? The answer is in that last statement: “They shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat.” Why? Because

sweat makes you stink, as any magazine will duly inform you if you read the advertisements. And God does not want people stinking as they serve him, to be perfectly blunt about it. Sweat comes from the flesh, and this is a picture for us of the hatefulness in the sight of God of self-effort when he has provided the fullness of the indwelling life of Christ to be the source of strength. To attempt to try to do the right thing and to do the best you can as a Christian is an insult to the indwelling Spirit who is there to be all that you need and more. The carnal Christian, you see, is the one who struggles to do something which is right, and perfectly good, but who ignores the life of Christ and all the wonderful provisions that God has made, at the infinite cost of the cross of Christ, to give to us an adequate source of power to live the Christian life.

So serious is that, that we have a warning against self-deception here, in Verses 8-9:

... those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. {Rom 8:8-9 RSV}

Notice the difference here between walking “according to the flesh” and being “in the flesh.” Those who walk “according to the flesh” are Christians who are living below their possibilities; they are carnal, either sinfully carnal or legally carnal. For it is possible, you see, to be “in the Spirit” but “walk according to the flesh.” But, on the other hand, those who are “in the flesh” aren’t Christians at all. This is what Paul means when he says, “Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” He is still “in the flesh” – he is in Adam, and that is the only life that he knows, and that is the only power he knows.

If you do not have the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ, received by faith in Jesus Christ, you are simply not a Christian:

- You may be a church member,
- You may be very faithful in religious matters,
- You may be trying to lead a moral life,

but, in the eyes of God, you have ignored the one great provision that he has made, at infinite cost,

for acceptance in his sight, and, therefore, you are not a Christian. “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

The clear implication here is that, if a man, though he profess to be a Christian, walks continually according to the flesh, he raises the grave suspicion that he is in the flesh and not in the Spirit – that he is not even a Christian at all. That is why it is such a serious matter when Christians fail to walk in the power of the indwelling Christ.

But now let’s move into the section which brings us good news of **the possibility of maturity**, Verses 10-14:

But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit which dwells in you.

So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. {Rom 8:10-14 RSV}

This phrase in Verse 10, “your bodies are dead because of sin” has puzzled many people. It simply means that, when you were not a Christian, the deeds of your body, the things that you did, motivated by the egocentric flesh or self, were worthless as far as God was concerned. But when you became a Christian, and the Spirit came to dwell within, that control by the self-life didn’t automatically change – it still continues. In other words, Paul is saying again that those in the flesh cannot please God – they simply cannot – and this is the first thing that we need to learn in our relationship with God. Your spirit was made alive by imputed righteousness. You have a new will and a new heart, as we read, but your body is still under the control of the self, or the flesh. You are what is called in Scripture “a babe in Christ” – carnal, not through willful choice, but through ignorance. This is what we have seen as the first stage of the Christian life, set out in Chapters 1-4 of Romans. However, the point is that you don’t have to remain

there. No Christian need remain in the place of carnality and defeat. Since the indwelling Spirit is in you, then you have all that you need to realize the victorious life of Jesus Christ in your body right now.

This is what Paul is saying in Verse 11:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Spirit which dwells in you. {Rom 8:11 RSV}

“Oh,” you say, “I thought that was a promise that we would be resurrected some day.” No, it isn’t that at all. I used to think that too, until I saw the phrase “mortal bodies,” not “dead bodies.” Now, “mortal” means “not dead yet,” and, as I read in my Greek reference indexes and concordances, I found that Mr. Thayer (than whom there is no whomer when it comes to the realm of Greek authority) says that this word means “subject to death, therefore still living.” So, this is not a promise that God is someday going to raise your body out of the grave; it is a promise that right now, in your life, your body can be made subject to the life of Jesus Christ, and his life lived through you will transform your whole experience – you become a genuinely new creature in Christ Jesus.

This is the same truth that you have in Second Corinthians 4:10, where Paul says we are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” Now, tell me, isn’t that what you really want? When you think of the life of Jesus –

- that life of courage, and power, and poise,
- that life of gentleness and calmness and peace and grace –

isn’t that what you want living in you and through you? Well, this is the secret: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,” {2 Cor 4:10a KJV}. That is, reckoning all my own self-efforts to be worthless, and useless, and nothing in his sight. Unable to do anything myself, I now lean back on the indwelling life of Jesus Christ and I find him present to live again, and to make my body live through him, so that his life is mani-

fest in my mortal body! Not resurrection someday, but resurrection life right now!

Paul concludes we owe nothing to the flesh with its urges to self-pleasing and self-effort, for it results in nothing but death and defeat. But, if we continually lean back upon the indwelling power of the Spirit and do everything in dependence upon that alone, then we learn what life can really be like. Our salvation begins to make sense, and we discover that the same body that once was helpless to please God now becomes the very instrument by which God is served. God's cause is advanced, and Jesus Christ is manifested to others.

Paul then says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." This is an important point. This means that only when we begin to let Jesus Christ live through us do we pass

- from childhood to manhood,
- from carnality to spirituality,
- from infancy to maturity.

Then we begin to demonstrate what it is to be a son of God in the world, for only those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. Paul goes on to show us that we are the children of God the minute we believe in Jesus Christ, and cry, "Abba, Father." We are the children of God, but we have no right to call ourselves the sons of God until we learn to be led by the Spirit in the victory of Jesus Christ.

I am not going to stand here this morning and belabor you with exhortations to grow up and get out of the kindergarten and stop being children and become sons of God – I never saw a boy yet that didn't want to be a man, and nobody needed to urge him on. I believe that if you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ you will never be content to be just that. You will want to be more – you want to fulfill all the possibilities of life in Jesus Christ and to be a son of God, visibly manifest to the world as such.

What Paul is saying is that you don't need anything new for this. You don't need a new experience. You don't need a special gift of the Spirit – or crisis time. You don't have to plead and wait before God before this can come to pass:

- You need to get serious about obeying the voice of the Spirit of God,

- You need to take the Word of God seriously,
- You need to begin to believe him.

We don't have to beseech him, and pray, "Lord, give me strength." He is there to be our strength. We don't have to say, "Lord, give me grace, give me peace; Lord help me through this." He is there to help us, and we just need to begin to take it, and live it, and claim it, and quit kidding ourselves, and start obeying the Word we already know.

You don't need to run away from life to be a Christian – a victorious Christian. But, rather, the call is to:

- Face life, and
- Rise up like men, and
- Walk in the strength of God in the midst of this 20th century world.

I close with this word from Jim Elliott, one of the five missionaries who laid down their lives in Ecuador among the Aucas. He is writing to his parents, and he says,

Mr. and Mrs. Blank have a nice home, and belongings, and two cute kiddies, but are so like the rest of us that it is disheartening. We are so utterly ordinary, so common-place. We profess to know a Power the twentieth century does not reckon with, but we are harmless and therefore unharmed. We are spiritual pacifists, non-militants, conscientious objectors in this battle to the death with the principalities and powers in high places. Meekness must be had for contact with men, but brash, outspoken boldness is required to take part in the comradeship of the cross. We are sideliners, coaching and criticizing the real wrestlers, while content to sit by and leave the enemies of God unchallenged. The world can not hate us; we are too much like its own. Oh, that God would make us dangerous!

I echo that prayer. I don't know what your heart says, but, if I know my own heart, I am so aware that this is the great need of this hour in which we live –

- That men may see Christians for what they are,
- That they may see something else than this namby-pamby, watered-down, milksop kind of Christian living that is content with defeat.

It is time that we take seriously the possibilities that God in Christ offers us, to be a disturbing factor in our generation. This is what God calls us to, and (may I say this to my own heart as well as to yours) you can have just as much of this victory as you really want, because it is when we really begin to take God seriously that these things become possible. Christ is not waiting. It is we who are hindering and holding back the manifestation he wants to make of his life in this world.

Prayer:

Our Heavenly Father, we pray this morning that we may sense the possibilities that are hidden in the words of this chapter, and call into action that manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ – not by the clenching of our fists and the gritting of our teeth, not by the effort of ourselves to try to be something for you, but by the quiet resting upon your desire to be something in us. Lord, forgive us for the way we set your Word aside in our lives, and do not give heed to it. Teach us to pay no attention to the continual amassing of material things, placing our values on the things of the world rather than the things that you count valuable. Lord, forgive us; we would now begin to rise up and walk like men in this generation. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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The Joy of being Grown Up

by Ray C. Stedman

May I warn you that this is not going to be a sermonette. “Sermonettes are for Christianettes,” as someone has said (i.e., for baby Christians). One of the troubles of the church today is that we are plagued with people who have been babies for a long time. Now, babies are wonderful. We have a new baby in our home, and we think she is the finest thing that was ever made – the latest model is the best – but after a baby has been a baby for twenty years, it gets kind of tiresome.

One of the problems with the church is the number of Christians who need to be fed Pabulum when they ought to be eating strong meat (as the writer of Hebrews puts it in the fifth chapter). Unfortunately, the usually prescribed treatment for prolonged adolescence merging into premature senility that plagues many Christians has been for the pastor to stand up and whip people and try to make them grow by telling them to *try harder*. As we have been seeing in these sections of Romans, this will never work, because you can't grow by trying all the exhortations to try harder, to pray more, to study harder, to try to grow. And all the whippings and beatings that come from pulpits across our land are very ineffective as a cure for this condition.

None of you parents do it that way. When you have a child in your home and you are a little bit concerned about his growth rate, you don't get him up before you, and say:

“Now, what is the matter with you? Why don't you try a little harder to grow? If you would just put your mind to this, and set yourself to do it, you would grow. Now *think about it*, and *try harder!*”

We don't do that in the physical life – it is obviously quite an impotent way of doing it. The only way to help someone grow is to help them under-

stand the conditions of growth, and to act upon them. When they do that, then growth takes care of itself. That is what we have been attempting to do in these studies in Romans:

- To understand how it is God wants us to grow,
- To appropriate the new life that he gives us, and
- To act according to the conditions under which it grows.

In this section in Chapter 8, we come to a description of Christian maturity. This is a passage that is rich with suggestiveness. It is sort of like a quick glimpse behind a curtain that intrigues and fascinates you, but never quite explains what is going on. I never read this passage without a sense of the mystery that is involved in it – it is an intriguing section. There are two divisions here, two very worthy themes:

Verses 14-17: The Sign of a Son

Verses 18-25: The Sense of Suffering

Let's look at Verses 14-17 and take the first section – **the sign of a son**:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, “Abba, Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. {Rom 8:14-17 RSV}

You will notice that the apostle uses two words, “children” and “sons.” There is a difference between “children” and “sons” – between a child of God and a son of God. All true Christians, as the apostle points out here, are children of God – born into the family by faith in Jesus Christ. This experience our Lord Jesus himself called being “born of the Spirit,” {John 3:8 RSV} – the new birth, when, by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ upon the cross, we believe God and are born into the family of God. These are the children of God.

Now, the sign of a child of God is that he knows the Father. That is always a sign that you belong to the family – you know the father. This is set forth here in this expression of “Abba! Father!” “Abba” is the Hebrew (or, more exactly, Aramaic) word for “father” and it is the first sound that a baby makes.

I remember hearing a few years ago of Dr. Alan McRae, the professor of Hebrew at Faith Seminary in Philadelphia, and a well-known expert in the Hebrew language, and of the new baby in his family. While Dr. McRae was away on a trip the mother set about teaching the baby to say “Daddy” so that he could welcome his father home with that wonderful word. She struggled for a week or so, trying to get the baby to say “Daddy” and finally got him to say the word several times – so she was confident that, when his father returned, the first thing that he would hear from his baby would be that wonderful word, “Daddy.” The moment arrived, and Dr. McRae stepped through the doorway, and there was the little one ready to greet him. The father held out his hands, and the mother said, “Now, say it!” The baby looked up, and said, “Abba, abba, abba.” Of course, knowing that his father was a well-known Hebrew student, he spoke Hebrew to him! Well, that is the first word that a baby speaks, and it is a sign that we are in the family of God when we have a sense of fatherhood – that he is our Father.

Dr. Donald Barnhouse related on his radio program some time ago an incident when a girl had received word that her fiancée had been suddenly killed in an accident. She was a new Christian, and, when she got this word, she was tremendously disturbed. She went into her room, and locked the door. Her mother heard her sobbing, and, after a bit, her mother said to her father, “I think you had better go up and see her. She needs a father right

now.” So the father went upstairs, and was about to open the door, when he heard his daughter sobbing. Quietly, he opened the door a crack, and saw that she was kneeling beside the bed, with her head buried in her hands, crying out, “Oh Father! Oh, Father! Father!” The man just quietly shut the door again, came back downstairs, and said to his wife, “She is in better hands than mine.” She knew her Father!

This is the first mark of new life in Jesus Christ, the sign of being a Christian, the sign of being a child of God – you know the Father.

But the sign of a son is somewhat different. The sign of a son of God is that he is an heir of God, and has begun to possess and enjoy his inheritance. I realize that the son and the child are the same person. If you are a child, this also makes you the potential heir – this is certainly true. But there is a difference between entering into the full possession of your inheritance and simply having it held in abeyance for you until you reach your age of majority. This is what the apostle is talking about here. In other words, until you begin to live in the fullness of the Spirit of God, you are like a minor child who has not yet entered into his inheritance. For it is those “who are led by the Spirit of God” who “are the sons of God.” This is what he is talking about all along. Paul is trying to urge us to enter into our inheritance.

This picture that he draws comes from the Roman custom of adopting their children. A Roman father, if he had male children, never referred to them as his sons until they were of age. They were his children, but they were not his sons. But, when they became of age (which was about 14 in the Roman system) he took them down to the public forum, and, there, they were publicly adopted by their own father and thereafter regarded as his heirs. They entered into participation in their father’s business, and had a share in his inheritance. This is what Paul is referring to here. As long as we are just *children of God* we know the Father, we are in the family of God, but we never begin to enter into our inheritance until we learn to walk in the Spirit as *sons of God*.

Now, you hear a lot of nonsense these days about the joys of childhood. Every now and then you run across some writer who writes a very descriptive passage about how wonderful it is to be a child. They regard childhood with a great spirit of

nostalgia, as being that carefree, happy, ideal time of life.

Well, I don't know how you feel about it, but that has never struck me as being true. I had a happy childhood, but I would never want to go back into it because, as I recall, when I was a boy I couldn't wait to be a man! I found the restrictions of childhood rather irksome and frustrating, and I felt so inadequate and so incompetent, and I was always fearful of failure, and of not being quite able to handle a situation. When I grew up, I gloried in the sense of adequacy and liberty that being grown up gave me.

Now, I do hope, as Christians, we begin to see that salvation never really begins to make sense until we start acting as mature sons of God. This is when our salvation begins to count – when we enter into the wonderful liberty of the sons of God.

Now let's see what this inheritance is: Paul says that those who are led by the Spirit of God are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," {Rom 8:17b KJV}. An heir is one who *possesses* what he owns.

"Well," you say, "can you own something that you don't possess?" Oh, yes. I have just been working through my library, and I find that I own a lot of books that I don't possess. I own the books but I don't have them; they are not in my possession. They have been loaned out, and others have them in their libraries. But, also, as I was going through my library, I found a two-volume set that had been given to me by my uncle some time ago. When I opened the cover I discovered that it was a Christmas gift to my great-grandfather, who was a preacher, given to him by his son on Christmas in 1863 – almost a hundred years ago. Now I have that book, and, in that sense, I am my great-grandfather's heir – I own what was once his.

This is what the apostle is talking about when he says that when we begin live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit, and are led by the Spirit, we become heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ: What once was his now becomes ours.

As you read through the record of the life of Jesus, you are struck with that remarkable life that he lived –

- The compelling power of his words,
- The tenderness of his actions,

- The courage and manliness of his deeds,
- His keen insight into human nature,
- The marvelous calm and poise that was his in every circumstance,
- The unforgettable impact that he made upon everyone.

What is the secret of a life like that? Wouldn't you like to discover it? What are the hidden resources of this sinless life, mighty in word and deed? Is it because he was himself the Son of God, God the Son now come into human flesh? Is his deity the reason he had such a wonderful life? Well, the strange thing is, as you read through the Gospels, you discover that the one thing he kept saying about himself was that he himself was nothing:

- When they challenged him about his healing of the impotent man, he said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do," {John 5:19b KJV}.
- And when they challenged him on the judgment that he passed, he said, "I can of my own self do nothing," {cf, John 5:30a KJV}. Over and over this was his continual plea – that, as the Son, he did nothing.
- Then, at last, in the Upper Room, as he gathered with his disciples in the very shadow of the cross, with the air tense with anticipation and fear, when he spoke to them about leaving them and going to the Father, they were very disturbed. They said, "Well, where is the Father?" They were thinking in terms of space and time. They thought, "The Son is *here*, the Father is *somewhere up there*." And, you remember, Philip voiced the words of all the disciples when he said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough for us," {cf, John 14:8}, i.e., "open the heavens and give us one glimpse of God, and then we will be able to face the world with confidence, even though you are gone." Do you remember what he said? He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen

the Father,” {John 14:9 KJV}. “I and my Father are one,” {John 10:30 KJV}.

Now, if that were all that he said, we might think that what he meant was that he and the Father were *the same person*. (There are some people who have taken those words in that sense.) But he didn’t stop there; he went on. He said to them, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself but: the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works,” {John 14:10 KJV}.

The great secret was out at last. You see, in all that wonderful ministry of his, he was simply living in fellowship with an indwelling Father. He shows us, in his life, that man was intended to be a son of God like that. The true son is one who himself is nothing, but who lives in continual dependence upon an indwelling one within who does everything – both of them distinct beings, both of them thinking, and feeling, and willing, and acting – yet one is nothing and the other is all.

And then he said, “As the Father has sent me, even so send I you,” {cf, John 20:21 KJV}, i.e. “as the Father lived in the Son, so Christ lives in the believer today.” The same wonderful secret that made him mighty in word and deed is the same secret that is available to every believer in Jesus Christ who desires to enter into the full inheritance that we have in him.

I hope that you can see that this is not some pleasing and convenient addition to life which we can take or leave. This is not something optional – there is no other life than this! Anything else than this is living death. The Bible declares it, and experience confirms it. “Without me,” Jesus said, “you can do nothing,” {cf, John 15:5 KJV}. This is a fundamental necessity if I am ever to know life, and live it to the full. That is why Paul puts this right in the very center of the book of Romans – this is *the essential thing!*

Immediately, the shattering revelation is made that, if you and I begin to live this kind of life, it will lead inevitably into some kind of suffering. Did you notice that?

... heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
{Rom 8:17 RSV}

This takes us into the next section, where we consider **the sense of suffering**, Verses 18-25. Paul says:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. {Rom 8:18-25 RSV}

One of the thorniest questions that is ever asked a Christian is, “Why do the righteous suffer? Why do Christians suffer? Why does a God of love and power permit his loved ones to go through anguish here on the earth?”

Any of you who have been in the place of pain and suffering, or have watched others go through these times of heartache and anguish, have felt the full force of that question come home. The Apostle Paul felt qualified to answer it. You know the record of his sufferings; it is rather disturbing to us comfortable saints today:

- He was shipwrecked and left afloat on the sea;
- He was beaten with rods many times;
- He was beaten with stripes five times, 39 stripes each;
- He was hounded and hungry;
- He was in prison often;

- He was beset with physical infirmity that bothered him all of his life;
- He was in danger on land and sea:

This is the man who now tells us what suffering is for!

What is the reason behind suffering?

Well, the first thing that he says is that suffering is an expression of our union with Christ, i.e., we are to *suffer with him*. This is very important because just suffering alone is not the thing that accomplishes anything in our life, but it is *suffering with Christ* that does it. There can be a lot of suffering that goes on in your life and mine that is not *with him*, but it is only the suffering that is *with him* that accomplishes anything.

I am sure that, if his life is in us, and expresses itself through us, then we are bound to suffer because his life is love – and love always suffers in an imperfect world. In fact, the test of true love is willingness to suffer.

I wish that young people would understand that. Some of you young ladies could give your boy friend a little test the next time he vows to you eternal love: Ask him to come over and mow the lawn for you next Saturday and see if he is willing to suffer a little bit – because, without doubt, the test of true love is its willingness to suffer.

And, if we love Christ, then we find in our hearts a willingness to suffer for his name's sake. There are three kinds of suffering; let me give you these briefly:

- First of all, there is that suffering which comes to us as a result of our own folly, our own sin, and this is the most frequent and common, even among Christians. We share this, of course, with all other human beings – the pain, the heartache and grief, the tears and misery that we just cause ourselves because of our stubbornness, and our selfishness, and our rebellion, and all the evil within us. This kind of suffering, obviously, is *not* suffering with him; Christ has no part in that.
- Second, there is that suffering which comes from circumstances over which we have no control – what we call accidents – those congenital deformities with which we are born, the

results of other's actions, unforeseen circumstances that come crashing into our lives. This *can be* suffering with Christ or not, depending upon our attitude toward it. If we take it in rebelliousness, and refuse to accept it, and fight against it, or find ourselves becoming bitter and resentful, then this is simply suffering that comes without accomplishing anything for us. It only makes us hard, and bitter, and difficult to live with. If we take these things, however, as from the hand of a God who knows what he is doing and whom we can trust, recognizing that we need these things to accomplish something that he is after in our life – in love – then this is suffering with Christ.

- Then, third, there is that suffering which comes from involving ourselves deliberately and willing in the problems and heartaches of others – shared suffering – when we deliberately get ourselves involved in somebody else's need and suffer along with them. This is obviously and *clearly* suffering with Christ; that was what he did when he was here.

There are three things you can do about suffering. In the face of suffering, you can either:

1. Break out,
2. Break down, or
3. Break through –

one of these three.

- If you break out, you rebel; you leap over the bounds, you break out of the boundaries; you grow bitter and hateful and hard.
- Or, you can break down; there is much of that happening today – becoming neurotic, being filled with self-pity, running away from life, withdrawing from society.
- Or, by the grace of God, the Christian can break through and touch the hidden springs of the life of Christ within him, and accept the suffering with joy, but gladly counting not our life dear unto ourselves, as the Scripture says {cf, Acts 20:24}, but gladly counting it a privilege to bear suffering for

his name's sake. This is what you read about in the Early Church, isn't it? When they were beaten and persecuted, they went home rejoicing that they were counted worthy to bear suffering for his name's sake {Acts 5:41}. Now, that is breaking through – what a difference!

Then we read that suffering is not only our union with Christ, but suffering with him is the way to glory. It is the process by which God brings glory into our life. You notice, "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him," {Rom 8:17 RSV}.

In Second Corinthians 4:17, Paul says, "this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." In other words, it is the sufferings that create the glory; you can't have the glory without the suffering. If you avoid the suffering, you cancel out the glory, because the one is the process of the other. This is what Paul declares all the way through this passage, and he says also that it is achieving a gain that is far beyond the cost.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us [or in us]. {Rom 8:18 RSV}

When you think of the record of Christian suffering through the centuries –

- All the beds of pain and anguish,
- The years of agony that some have gone through,
- The persecution,
- Being thrown to the lions,
- Burned at the stake,
- All the tremendous past of Christian suffering

– then put that alongside what Paul says here, it is an amazing statement, isn't it. He says, "I consider that all the sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed as a result of it," {cf, Rom 8:18}.

It reminds me of that line from the poet Clough:

For while the tired vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back through creeks and inlets making
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

That is, down here it doesn't seem like we are getting very far, nothing seems to be accomplished; but over yonder, where we can't see, the great floodtide of suffering is washing in a great wave of glory which shall be revealed in its time.

Then the apostle also says that suffering results in releasing creation from the bondage to futility: He says that the creation was subjected to futility, the whole world of nature around us (and what an accurate phrase that is) was subjected to futility.

Haven't you discovered, over and over, as you live through life, that

- Something you have felt would return to you wonderful rewards,
- Something that would be the fulfillment of your dreams,
- Something that seemed to be so bright with promise

turned to cobwebs in your hands when, at last, you laid hold of it? It was subjected to futility. It didn't bring you what you wanted. You found that all that you had left was dust and cobwebs.

I think that the dead body of Marilyn Monroe is probably one of the most eloquent and mute testimonies we have today to the truth of this statement – the futility of life as we know it.

Every archaeologist's spade turns up the dust of silent civilizations of the past, where men and women lived, like you and me, with all the hopes and dreams that they had, but they have all long since crumbled away into the dust of the centuries, and been forgotten.

As I drive down the highway, every cemetery seems to me to be a mute reminder of the hunger of the human heart to want to be remembered for all time. Bertrand Russell, who is, of course, the high priest of atheistic philosophy today, has caught this very note of futility in nature, and, in this thought, he says,

The life of a man is a long march through the night surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none tarry long. One by one, as we march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is man's life; on him all his race, the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.

That is what life looks like when you don't see it from the standpoint of Jesus Christ!

But Paul says (listen to this!) that the whole world of creation is standing on tiptoe eagerly craning its neck to see the day when God shall show forth the sons that he has been preparing – the manifestation of the sons of God {cf, Rom 8:19}. In other words, this present life in which we are living is just a school time that we Christians are going through, and here we have been placed to learn some lessons that are preparing us for the great day yet to come. And one of these days it is going to be graduation day – the day when the sons of God will shed their humble attire and manifest that they have been princes in disguise all along, indwelt by the same wonderful secret of life that Jesus Christ had when he was here, indwelt by divine life, a man who is the vehicle of the divine life.

The last thing that the apostle says is that suffering teaches us how to handle the glorified body:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. {Rom 8:22-23 RSV}

I believe that the resurrection body is to be an instrument of such wonderful responsiveness and power and glory that God doesn't dare give it to us now, until we have learned, in the Spirit, how to become subject to him and obedient to his life within us. Until we learn that, he gives us this kind

of frail, old, worn body of ours to learn on. In these, Paul says, we groan. And I have heard the groaning, haven't you? But, as the body deteriorates, the spirit grows stronger, and it is getting us ready for those new bodies to come. As Paul puts it, "the outward man perishes, but the inward man is renewed" {cf, 2 Cor 4:16 KJV} day by day.

The other day I gave my oldest daughter a driving lesson, and she wanted to start driving the Oldsmobile because it has an automatic shift. But I said to her, "No, dear, I think it would be better if you would start with the Chevrolet. It has a stick shift, and a clutch, and it is a little bit cranky and hard to operate at times, but if you will learn how to run this car, you'll have no trouble at all with the Oldsmobile."

You know, in a sense, God has done that with us: He has given us these old, cranky, balky, pain ridden bodies of ours, and has told us that, if we learn how to handle these, if we will learn how to make these obey, and present these to him as a living sacrifice, then we will grow ready in spirit to receive those glorious bodies that are now being prepared for us. And Paul says that, with this hope before us, we can patiently wait for God to teach all that we need to know.

The "outward man is perishing" {cf, 2 Cor 4:16 KJV}: How true this expression is! It is interesting how, as we grow older:

- The print seems to become smaller,
- Newspapers seem to be farther and farther away,
- Stairways grow steeper and hills grow higher,
- People your own age are so much older than you are, and
- Those that are younger are so much younger than you were when you were their age!

People change, don't they? I saw an old friend the other day and he had changed so much that he didn't even recognize me!

As we move toward the end of life, the outward man is perishing, but what is happening to the in-

ward man? That is the great thing that God is after. What is happening inside? Is he learning how to walk in the Spirit? Is he learning how to be obedient to the divine life within? – how to walk in continual fellowship and dependence upon that risen life dwelling within? It is this that prepares us for those glorious bodies which will someday be ours, which will be responsive to every demand the Spirit makes upon us, and through which God intends to reach the whole of his created universe to establish his kingdom wherever there is matter in the universe.

The closing word here is one of hope. I like that. Paul says,

Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. {Rom 8:24b-25 RSV}

This means that the future for the Christian is as bright as the promises of God. We don't have to subscribe to any philosophy of despair, e.g., those words from Bertrand Russell. The Christian looks forward to a greater hope than he had in the day when he stood as a young man facing life for the first time.

I will never forget, a year or so ago, dear old Dr. Russell was invited to speak to a number of the high school young people at a conference at Mt. Hermon. He stood up before those young people, well over 90 years of age, with that wonderful, glorious shock of white hair and with his face beaming, as he told them about how he first came to know Christ some 80 years before. They listened with politeness and interest, but I could see, as I watched, that most of these young people were feeling sorry for this dear old man, for, after all, life was almost over for him and all the wonderful possibilities of life lay before them. All their dreams and their hopes lay unfulfilled in the future, and they were living in a time of great hope, but here was this poor, old man almost ready to drop – with one foot in the grave – and they felt sorry for him. But, as I watched them, I remember thinking, “His hope is greater than their hope” because:

- All they can hope for is just a few years of the experience of the futility and the frustration of life, if that is all they have,

- While he is standing on the edge of the most exciting adventure that man can ever know, and
- Is about ready, having been prepared by the Spirit of God through long years of patient waiting, for that glorious manifestation of the day of God which will open up into eternal, exciting experience beyond the imagination and comprehension of man.

I thought of old Caleb, back there in the Old Testament, who, after 40 years of marching with the children of Israel in the wilderness, looked at the land from Mt. Hebron, and at the giants, and said to Joshua, at 85 years of age, “Joshua, give me this mountain for I am as strong yet as I was in the day when Moses sent me into the land” {cf, Josh 14:11-12 KJV}. He saw that land 40 years before when Moses sent him in as a spy. He saw the mountain, and he wanted it. Hebron means “fellowship” and he claimed that mountain as his own, and, for 40 years, as they wandered in the desert, Caleb, by faith, lived in Hebron – in the place of fellowship. In appropriating faith, he was there already, and, at last, there came the day when he actually entered into it and possessed it – even though he was 85 years of age. All through that account we are told the secret of that man's strength, and hope, and faith. It is given in these words: “He wholly followed the Lord his God,” {cf, Num 32:12}.

Doesn't that make you and me feel a bit ashamed? Just such a simple thing – to wholly follow the Lord our God would bring us through all the encircling years, through all the difficulties and trials, and the heartaches, traps, and tricks of life, to that place where we stand ready to enter into our inheritance – not only to enter in, but to be ready for it – that God may express through us what it means to be a son of God!

Prayer:

Our Father, these words have been lifting up our hearts and our eyes somewhat, to look beyond this present life. We thank you, Lord, that the Christian hope does not end here, but looks beyond to realms that are beyond our comprehension at the moment, and into exciting and

thrilling possibilities that are far greater than we can even dream at this present hour. But we thank you that the secret of attaining these, the secret of entering into our inheritance lies in this simple thing that we have been speaking of all along – fellowship with our Lord Jesus – that he dwells in us as thou, the Father, once dwelt

within him – that we have the same possibilities as he had, of life lived to the full. We pray, Father, that we may begin to possess them, that we may begin to enjoy them as being your sons, that we may begin to understand and to see something of the supernatural possibilities of Christian living. We ask it in Christ's name, Amen.

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Prayer, Providence, Praise

by Ray C. Stedman

Romans 8 is a great favorite of many people, and yet, though we love to read this chapter, amazingly, there are relatively few who really live in it. The reason for this is that we like to get into the beauty and glory and triumph and victory of Romans 8, but we tend to skip over the struggle and heartache and darkness of Romans 6 & 7. But you can't live in Romans 8 until you have experienced the reality of Romans 6 & 7. The joy and the victory of this great chapter rests solely on the death and the struggle of Romans 6 & 7.

I wonder if you have learned the principle in your Christian life that Calvary comes before Pentecost – that the fullness of the Spirit is only possible after having entered into the experience of the death of the cross. I am not speaking, of course, of being crucified in physical terms, but of what this means to you spiritually. All through the Word of God, the testimony of the Scripture is that death precedes life – that it is out of death that life comes. You remember that the Lord Jesus said, “except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,” {John 12:24 KJV}.

This is the unerring principle of productivity and fruitfulness as set forth in the Scriptures. Likewise, it is necessary for you to be an infant before you can enter into your inheritance as a son and experience the fullness of what life is like in Jesus Christ. That is what we have been learning in these opening chapters of Romans, and, if you have followed along, you remember, in our last study together, we were noting how the Christian life is a life of paradox:

- It is a life of power lived in the presence of weakness, and you have to have the weakness in order to have the power.

- It is a life of hope that is lived in the midst of futility, where everything around is stamped with futility, yet, in the Christian, this becomes translated (transformed) into hope.

It is all because of the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

I hope that we have seen that the life of the Christian – the Spirit-filled life – is not a life designed just for the weekend, just for Sunday, or just for the church. It is a life designed for the home, the school, the shop, the office, the sink – wherever you are. And it is there that God expects us to live a Spirit-filled life. The Spirit-filled life is not a religious jag that you experience every weekend to make you forget what happened during the week, but, rather, it is designed to meet the need of every moment of that week, and to be your source of strength and power right through all the difficulties of the week.

Let's pick up our text in the 26th verse of Romans 8, where we see now how this begins to work out in our practical life. The first thing that Paul brings before us is to show us how this works in the matter of **prayer**:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. {Rom 8:26-27 RSV}

Notice that Paul admits that we do not always know how to pray, but it is very clear that we know that we should pray – if we are Christians. In fact,

prayer is the instinctive mark of the believer in Jesus Christ.

Remember when Paul was converted on the Damascus Road? He had gone to Damascus breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Christians, and had already gained a reputation as the most violent and hostile persecutor of the Christians. Then he met Jesus Christ in the dust of the Damascus Road, and was led by the hand, blind and unseeing, into the city to wait there till someone should be sent by God to instruct him further as to what to do. Then it was, you remember, that the Spirit of God spoke to a man by the name of Ananias, and said, "Go to the street called Straight, and there you will find a man called Saul; and there I want you to baptize him because he is a Christian," {cf, Acts 9:11}. Ananias objected, and said, "Lord, this man is the most terrible persecutor the Church ever had; I can't go to him!" {cf, Acts 9:13-14}. And you remember what God said, "behold, he is praying," {Acts 9:11 RSV}. In other words, this is the sign that he is now a believer, and he has yielded himself to Christ – he prays.

Prayer, I think, is the most distinctive mark of a Christian. If you don't pray, or have any desire for prayer, then it is very likely that is a sign that you are not a Christian at all, because, as the poet has put it, "Prayer is the Christian's native breath." And we can't live without praying – it is the simplest and best expression that we have of our sense of dependence upon God.

Have you noticed that nobody prays unless he feels a sense of dependence? People that feel independent, and able to run their own lives, never pray. It is only when we come to the place where we realize we can't handle everything that we begin to pray, and out of that sense of dependence comes the instinctive cry of the heart expressed in prayer. In fact, that Christians pray indicates very clearly that God desires us to have a conscious participation in working out our own salvation.

As we have been seeing all along, God himself is in us, having taken up residence in the believer to perform all that is required, and each one of us has a power within which is quite sufficient to meet every need that we have: God is that power. He is the originator and the performer of it all. Nevertheless, he always involves us in conscious cooperation.

This is something that I think many people fail to see. So many Christians get the idea that God is going to do everything, and they just have to sit and wait, and think all they need to do is fold their hands and nothing more than that, and God will do everything. God *is* going to do everything, but it is going to be *through* them. You will never grasp the full meaning of the plan and program of God for Christian activity until you see that the human will, and the *human mind*, and *human effort* are always involved in what God does *through you*. This is certainly obvious in the matter of prayer. God expects us to pray. He wants us to ask for things – even though he knows that we need them.

Christianity is not a kind of sublime welfare state, where you just sit around and the government does everything for you. That is a false conception. But the Christian life is expecting God to be at work in you – and then going ahead and doing that which is necessary, with a conscious realization that God is present to do it through you. This is quite a difference.

When the Lord Jesus taught about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, he pointed out that there were certain things that we need. He spoke of eating, and drinking, and living, and wearing clothes, and all these necessary things. He said, "Your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things," {cf, Matt 6:8 KJV}. You don't *need to tell him*, he already knows it. Yet, at the same time, he said in his model prayer that he asked us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," {Matt 6:8}. God knows that we need bread, but *he wants us to ask* for bread. He is ready to supply it; he is ready to meet our need, but there is always this conscious participation in what God is doing in our lives.

So this passage sets forth the fact that *we ought to pray*, and James reminds us that "we have not because we ask not," {cf, Jas 4:2 KJV}. Much of the time we are miserably poverty-stricken in our spiritual lives, and in our physical lives, simply because we never stop to ask God to give us anything. We expect that he knows what we need, and we expect him to supply it, and we never ask him for anything.

God wants us to ask, but, also, there are times when life is just simply too big, and too complex, and *we don't know what to ask for*. This is what Paul is speaking about when he says,

... we do not know how to pray as we ought... {Rom 8:26b RSV}

Haven't you been in the situation where you wondered what in the world to pray for? You didn't know how to pray. You didn't know what would be the best solution to the problem. You could see two sides to it, and one way looked like it would work, then you would see the other side and it looked like another, entirely different process would be the thing to do – and you didn't know what to pray for. We recognize that there could be times when we would be praying conflicting things.

I imagine the San Francisco Giants pray that God will help them win the pennant, and the Dodgers are praying the same things. What is right? I don't know. There are many other situations like that – when we don't know how to pray as we ought. What then?

Paul says the indwelling Spirit helps our infirmities, our weaknesses, and he prays

for us with sighs too deep for words. {Rom 8:26c RSV}

The word for “sighs” here is really the word “groanings” – “with groanings to deep for words.” Now, what are these?

There are some who tell us that this means a special manifestation of the Spirit, such as tongues or ecstatic cries that come from the heart, and there is a movement abroad today to revive the gifts and signs of the gifts of the Spirit. I understand that, in the next few weeks, here in Palo Alto, there are going to be meetings held to investigate this matter of reviving of tongues and other ecstatic gifts in the church. I am not going to go into that subject this morning, except to say that this is *not* what this verse is talking about – there are not ecstatic cries or tongues or any special language that is mentioned here. No, Paul specifically says that the praying of the Spirit is too deep for words – or utterance – it is unuttered, it cannot be expressed. It is felt only in the heart; it never comes to the surface of the lips; it never can be expressed. In other words, these are those deep yearnings of the soul that all of us feel at times *for more of God* for ourselves, or, perhaps, for someone else. This what we often call “a burden.”

Have you ever sensed a burden in your life for prayer for your own needs or someone else's

needs? Well, this is what Paul is talking about. It is that clamant thirst after righteousness that our Lord Jesus said is *blessed*:

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.” {cf, Matt 5:6 RSV}

It is a dissatisfaction with the present experience of your life, and a discontent with the shallowness of your present Christian experience, and a hungering after richer fellowship with God which are born of the Spirit within. It is the evidence that, deep within the heart, is a spirit that cries out for more of God. It is expressed in the song, *Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts*, in the words, “from the best bliss that earth imparts, we turn unfulfilled to thee again.” This is the cry of the Spirit within for something more, something deeper, something more precious, something more satisfying than our present experiences – and it is always according to the will of God, as the apostle says. In other words, the job of the Spirit of God in your life is to keep you pressing on, so that you don't settle down and become satisfied. Now isn't the time to be satisfied.

Have you ever noticed that men and women of God, both in the Word of God and in the history of the church, have been hungering and thirsting after more? There will come a day when *we are going to be satisfied*, when we will awake in his likeness, but down here there is never any resting place.

We have all experienced this, haven't we? We have come through times of spiritual crisis to the place of victory, perhaps after weeks and months of weary, frustrating defeat. God, at last, brings us to the place of victory, and we rejoice in the freedom and the glory of the new found fellowship with him, and then we say, “Lord, I want to live on this plane.”

We are like Peter up on the mountain top: We say, “Lord, let's build three tabernacles here, and let's stay up here! This is wonderful!” {cf, Matt 17:4, Mark 9:5, Luke 9:33}. But God will never let us stay there – there is always that pressing on which is born of the Spirit within. The Spirit prays within us, creating those restless yearnings for something more of God than we now possess.

Then what happens? Well, you see the results of such praying, in this next section. It is what we oftentimes call “**Providence.**”

We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. {Rom 8:28-30 RSV}

The great statement here is in Verse 28: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him.” Or, as the King James Version has it, “All things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”

Now, you know that verse, don’t you? How many times have you quoted it? It is simply saying that the things that happen to you are God’s answer to the silent yearnings of the Spirit within you –

- Not some things that happen to you, but
- Everything that happens to you,
- Whatever it may be!

It is God’s way of meeting the cry of the Spirit within to lead you into a deeper and a more wonderful experience of God’s grace, and God’s glory, and God’s person.

We preachers tend to expound this as though it only covers the trials and the heartaches because that is where most people have trouble – they can’t accept those – but it isn’t speaking only of trials and heartaches. It is *everything* that happens, all the delightful things as well.

One of the wonderful things about walking with Jesus Christ is the many delightful surprises that lie along the way. He often has happy little incidents that take place:

While we were in Colorado Springs recently, we drove up to Denver for a day or two. We had planned to take the super-highway that runs between the two cities, but we ended up taking a gravel, wilderness road. The day before, I had taken the

family fishing in the mountains back of Pike’s Peak. My wife caught a record trout, and we got so excited over the trout that we forgot the baby’s stroller, and left it by the side of the lake. So we had to go back up and get the stroller. While we were there, we saw that the gravel road that we were on eventually led to Denver, so, having plenty of time, we decided to take that road to Denver.

It was a wilderness road (i.e., it went through the mountains away from civilization), but we were used to California wilderness roads – where there is a gas station at every other bend in the road. We went for 32 miles and didn’t see a thing, and were beginning to run very, very low on gas. Still there was no sign that we were arriving anywhere!

Finally, I saw a car stopped along the road, coming from the other direction, so I stopped to ask him what was ahead. I said to the man, “Can you tell me how far it is to a gas station on up ahead?” He looked at me, and said, “Oh, I don’t know. I have been riding around in these mountains all morning and I haven’t found one.”

So we went on a little way, and there was another car stopped and I asked him, and he said, “Well, it is at least twenty miles on to a gas station.” Since, the needle on my gauge was already resting on the empty mark, and I said, “I’m sure that I can’t make that!” He said, “Well, I tell you what to do: You go up the road about two or three miles, and you will come to a fork in the road, and there is a sign that says there is a campground about half a mile away. There are lots of campers there, and perhaps one of them may have some gas.”

So we began to ask the Lord for enough fumes to get us down the road three or four miles. We got down there all right, and asked the first campers if they had any gasoline. The man said, “Well, no. We don’t have any gas, but we have a can – an empty can. Maybe I could drain some out of the car.” We were talking about it when another man walked across the road, and said, “You-all having trouble?” I said,

“We are running pretty low on gas, and it doesn’t look like we are getting anywhere where we can get some.” “Gas?” he said, “I’ve got 10 gallons of it in the back of my pickup here.” So he took us over and gave us 2 gallons of gasoline – plenty to get us to the nearest gas station – and *our need was provided*.

As we were riding along I just thought to myself, “I don’t know why this happened, but I just imagine it was one of those little delightful things that the Lord Jesus throws in to show you how well he can take care of you when you need it – even poor California tenderfeet, wandering around in the wilderness, can be taken care of.” It isn’t all heartache, by any means, there are so many delightful surprises.

Incidentally, the next day, in Denver, a man who had been down at the conference in Glen Eyrie, and was greatly troubled about circumstances in his life, heard that I had gone to Denver. He chased me all over town, and finally sought me out, and we talked for two or three hours. When I had occasion to relate this little incident to him, his face just beamed as he realized how true it was that God could take care of his own. I think that is why the Lord allowed it to happen.

But there is no need to avoid the other side, because not only does this include the lovely things, but it also includes those heartbreaking and painful experiences where life just seems to collapse around you and fall apart at the seams. Now, these experiences are sent; they don’t just happen. This is the testimony of Scripture to the believer. These things are sent – everything, without exception – they don’t just happen. They are working together for good to accomplish the deep yearning of the heart, awakened by the Spirit within, for more of the grace and glory and person of God.

Many of you remember Wendy Welch, who was here for many years, and the experiences of pain and sorrow that he went through – how his legs became diseased and had to be amputated, and how, at last, the disease took his life. Just before he died he wrote this testimony, which I read at his funeral:

I asked the Lord to heal me and to make me whole,

But he lamed me to teach me humility.
I asked him to make me rich,
But he impoverished me to teach me to trust him.
I asked him to let me run my life and do his wishes tomorrow,
But he admonished me that there may never be a tomorrow.
I asked him to let me enjoy the sin of pride in material things,
But he took them away to make me dependent upon him alone.
He gave me nothing that I asked for, and everything that I wanted.
I have no choice but to trust him with everything, from now to eternity.

That says it, doesn’t it? “He gave me nothing that I asked for, but everything that I wanted.”

This expresses what God is doing in our lives – he is working out the situation not to supply *our wants* but *our needs*. And those needs find expression in the deep unuttered longings of our hearts, those restless dissatisfactions that show we cannot be satisfied with what we are presently going through, but cry out for something more, something greater, something yet to slake the thirst of our soul.

The great revelation here in Verses 29-30 is that it is all according to a plan. These things sometimes seem to come to us without any pattern or meaning, but they don’t. There is a plan and a goal that God has in mind, and the goal is set forth here in Verse 29: “Those whom he foreknew, he also predestined.” Don’t be afraid of that word “predestined.” That means that God thought it out in advance, just like we plan a house before we build. So God planned what he is going to do – he predestined:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. {Rom 8:29 RSV}

You see, God isn’t content to have just one Son in his family; he wants a whole host of them. He wants a great crowd of sons, of whom Jesus Christ is the first and the chief.

In order to accomplish that, through the encircling centuries, he has been working out his plan by which he is producing (through the Spirit at work in men's lives) the glories, and the grace, and the character of Jesus Christ – that we might “be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.”

This is his goal with you: It is not to make you a great prayer warrior, or to make you a top Christian layman. These all may be a part of the process, but the goal that he has in mind is to make you like Christ – not to look like him, but to be like him. Yet, the amazing thing is that, though he makes all in the same character, there is an infinite variety in their expression; this is the glory and beauty of God's work.

Have you noticed that this pattern is so prominent in nature? God makes everything out of the same simple elements, but they are always different. Every one of us has a nose, two ears, a mouth, a forehead, some hair (more or less), a chin – and, with these few simple elements, God made faces. But he never makes two alike; with these few simple elements to work with, there is infinite variety.

Now, this is the way God works: Though we all share the character of Jesus Christ, it is not a mold that stamps out the same being over and over and over again, but there is an infinite variety of expression of the beauty of the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. The plan began in eternity past and doesn't end until eternity in the future, but it is such a vast process that we can't comprehend it.

That is why we are puzzled and confused about the parts of the process along the way. We are like the weaver who weaves cloth, and, working from the wrong side of the garment, all we ever see is a tangle of threads that seems to make no sense at all. But, when the process is finished, you can look on the other side, and there is the pattern beautifully worked out. That is what life is like with us. That is what God is doing in your life and mine.

In view of this, the final word here is a great shout of **praise!**

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring anything against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died,

yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecutions, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. {Rom 8:31-39 RSV}

Now, that is a wonderful statement, and, in times of doubt, I suggest that you try to answer these questions. There are eight of them here. Just take them, one by one:

1. “What shall we say to this?” Well, what shall we say? How do you answer this kind of proposition?
2. “If God is for us, then who can be against us?” That is, “What difference does it make who is against us?” If God is for us, is there anything that can be against us that is greater than he?
3. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also [freely] give us all things?” He who so freely gave the choicest thing that he had to give when we were yet sinners and enemies of God – now that we are his friends – will he not complete the process? That is Paul's argument.
4. “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?” What voice is there that can say something that will stand against us, when God is for us?
5. “It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?”
6. “Is it Christ Jesus?” Is he the one? Why he died for us; he arose again; he is at the right hand of God; he loves us; he intercedes for us. Is he going to condemn us? No!

7. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”
8. Then he lists these things in two parts:
 - A. First, he lists the perils of life: “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword?” No! None of these things!
 - B. Then he lists all the things of the unseen world: “I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation...”

And his conclusion is that “in all these things we are more than conquerors.” What does that mean, “more than conquerors”?

If we barely manage to win our way to heaven by the skin of our teeth, we could be said to be a conqueror, but a “more than conqueror” is someone who takes the worst that life can throw at him and uses that to become victorious. “More than conqueror” is one who, by the grace and the gift of God, and in the strength of God within him, actually takes the very things that are designed to destroy him, and they become stepping stones instead of stumbling blocks. That is being “more than conquerors.”

Just this week, I finished reading an amazing book written by Ernest Gordon, the dean of the Chapel at Princeton University. He tells of his own experience as a British officer in the Japanese prison camp by the River Quai in Thailand. This camp was made famous by the movie, *The Bridge over the River Quai*.

He was one of the prisoners that built that bridge, and he tells about that camp, and about their indescribable starvation diet which made them nothing but walking skeletons, yet they were driven out each day to do heavy labor on the bridge. Thousands of them died as cholera, and other diseases, swept through the camp. The morale of the camp plummeted to the bottom – there was nothing left. It was a hopeless, hideous situation in which men lived in filth and squalor, and walked about as the living dead. He tells how he himself descended,

through disease and weakness, to a place where his body was taken and laid away in the death house, among all the corpses. Though he was still alive, he was laid there to die.

In that camp, there were one or two people who, though they were not what we would call Evangelical Christians, nevertheless, entertained a deep faith in God. One or two men began quietly, in the midst of the darkest hour of the camp, to exercise a little faith and a little love, and to do things for one another. Gradually this spirit spread, and soon others became involved. They organized a massage team to go around and massage one another’s legs to try to restore health to these members that had ceased working. Gradually this spirit transformed the camp, and faith and joy and hope sprang into being again. They organized an orchestra, made their own instruments, and finally had a 40-piece orchestra. They organized a church. They began Bible study classes, and a man who had been a skeptic all his life was the teacher. As he taught the Bible, he began to see something of the reality of these things.

The story goes on to tell how this whole camp was transformed, and though the outward circumstances were unchanged, the Japanese were as hostile and as cruel as ever, the work was as heavy and the disease was rampant, yet the spirit of those men was literally transformed and they became joyous, happy, victorious individuals – many of them. The whole camp became entirely different.

He told how, when at last they returned to civilization, they looked forward to coming home – to a place where they would experience again the joys of life. But, when they got home, they discovered that civilization is an illusion – that the realities of life were discovered back in the prison camp. It was when they were down in the darkest, and the deepest, and the lowest depths of their lives that they began to lay hold of the eternal verities that strengthen a man’s soul. They became, by faith, “more than conquerors.”

This is the message of this chapter, isn’t it? The eternal verities are not doubt and fear and death, but life and hope and love. Though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet – and now abideth faith, hope, and love; these three, but the greatest of these is love {cf, 1 Cor 13:13 KJV}. And as God’s love, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit {cf, Rom 5:5 KJV},

manifests itself in your life, you can discover (as Paul discovered, and as every Christian has discovered through the centuries) that faith and hope and joy and peace are the great underlying verities of life.

They always work, no matter what the situation may be.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you that we have this great testimony from the apostle, and we join with him in these words of praise. Thanks be unto God, who has given us such a One who can triumph in us – in the

midst of the most pressing circumstances of life. Lord, we thank you for the indwelling Spirit who creates within us a hunger for this very experience, and, in the creating of the hunger, brings about the circumstances that will drive to the discovery of these things. We thank you, Father, for this. We know that, though the road be painful, and though it may lead through some times of sorrow and stress and heartache, yet it leads always into the dawning of a day when we shall see and know as we are known, and enter into the reality of rest in thee. We thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Who Chose Whom?

by Ray C. Stedman

The ninth chapter of Romans centers around the thorniest subject that a preacher can preach on – election (or, as some call it, predestination). This is one subject that is guaranteed to raise blood pressure whenever it is brought up, so I want to begin by reminding you that the duty of Christians is to love one another, even though they disagree about matters of interpretation. This subject has been the cause of major divisions in Protestantism.

You probably know that Protestants in general are classified, theologically, as either Calvinists or Arminians. Now, that is not Armenians – it has nothing to do with Armenia, or the folks who come from Armenia. It is Arminian, which is simply derived from the man who first successfully expounded these ideas: Arminius, a Dutch theologian who lived in the seventeenth century. These two groups have divided Protestantism over the subject of the election of God. Roman 9 is the meatiest passage in the Bible that deals with this matter, and, in a sense, it is the test of a man's theology.

As I read through this chapter, in preparation for this during the last several weeks, I was more and more impressed that this chapter, to many, will seem like a violent roller coaster ride. It begins slowly – you know, that long pull to the top – but then it takes a steep plunge that leaves many people breathless. Let's see if we can survive the ride.

There are two things that I would like you to keep in mind:

- First of all, I did not write this; Paul did. I think the best that we can do is simply to work our way through the clear argument of the apostle. If you will follow with me on that, and, together, try to understand what he is saying, and, then, if you differ, your quarrel is not with me but with the greatest theologian the church has ever known. In fact – since we be-

lieve that Paul spoke and wrote by the inspiration of God – your quarrel is with God if you cannot agree with this passage!

- The second thing that I would like to remind you of is that Romans 9 follows Romans 6, 7, & 8. There appears to be a rather sudden change of subject here when you go from Romans 8 to Romans 9 because, in the previous chapters, Paul has been concerned with the Christian and his development in spiritual life (learning to walk in the Spirit), and suddenly he seems to switch to the matter of Israel – Romans 9, 10 & 11 is all centered about the nation Israel. But this is not really a change of subject. It is simply that Paul is illustrating, by using Israel as an example, the great themes that he has developed in Romans 6, 7, & 8. If you remember, the theme of those chapters is primarily that the life that you and I have received from Adam (our human life, as we call it) is a totally worthless and useless thing in the sight of God, so far as producing anything that lasts or endures. This is the unquestioned statement of Scripture: All that is of any value in your life or mine, all that will in any degree go toward satisfying that hunger in our hearts to do something worthwhile, can only stem from the activity of Jesus Christ dwelling in us. That is the great theme of Romans 6, 7, & 8. To paraphrase the little motto that you see on the wall occasionally,

Only one life, t'will soon be past,
Only what is done *by* Christ will last

The nation Israel becomes the example of that in Romans 9.

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As you know, one of the basic characteristics of our human nature is that we have a tendency to fix up the outside of our life and to let the inside take care of itself. In other words, as long as we can get men to approve of what we are doing, we feel that God certainly ought to – and this ought to be acceptable to him. Especially is this true if we have a great religious heritage that we can display before anyone who is interested –

- If we have been baptized by the right mode,
- If we belong to the right church,
- If we worship in the proper way,
- If we read the correct version of the Scriptures,
- If we observe the accepted taboos,
- If we sing the best hymns at the correct tempo,
- If we give heartily and heavily to missions –
- *Then* we think that certainly we ought to be acceptable to God!

I find that some people simply cannot believe that you can do all these things and still God would be totally unimpressed by it. This was the mistake that Israel made as a nation, and they are a picture for us of the mistake that many people continue to make today.

We have in Romans 9 the prime example of **unavailing privilege**. Paul says:

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ [I think we will take the marginal reading here as more suited to the context], who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen. {Rom 9:1-5 RSV}

Here is Paul, the great authority on Judaism, listing for us the remarkable privileges that Jews have enjoyed as a people. There are eight special marks of God's favor:

- They are the only nation in all the earth of whom God said, "Thou art my son," {Psa 2:7 KJV}. They had a *sonship* relationship to God.
- They had *the glory* – they had seen the glory of God revealed. That is an amazing statement, but time after time God had appeared in glory unto this people, and no other nation can make that claim.
- They had *the covenants*: All the covenants, the agreements that God made with men, were made with Jews, made with the nation Israel. God never made covenants with Gentiles.
- *The law* was theirs. The Law – the greatest statement of the character of God that we have outside the New Testament – is the Ten Commandments, and this was given to Israel on Mount Sinai.
- To them was also given *the worship*, i.e., the divinely prescribed temple ritual – the only divinely given religious system in the world was that given to Israel – all others are cheap, man-made substitutes. But to Israel was given, by God, a divinely prescribed system of sacrifices and rituals.
- To them also was given *the promises* of the kingdom glory, that they would be, at last, the head of the nations – and God's kingdom would be centered in them.
- *The patriarchs* – i.e., the fathers – were all Jews: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David; all of them.
- Finally, as the supreme thing, and the climax of their religious favor, God himself chose to enter the human race in *the person of Jesus Christ* through them. This is a remarkable thing!

What a heritage this is!

When I was a student at seminary, a Jewish Christian evangelist spoke to the seminary student body. He told us about a time when he was in Boston speaking to a group of Christians and non-

Christians meeting together in a private home. After the meeting a very prim and austere lady came up to him – one of these people that Dr. Ironside used to call “a female dreadnought.” She steamed up under full power to this Jew, and said to him, “Sir, I am not all interested in what you have to say. You talk about this gospel as though I needed something. I want you to know that I am from one of the finest families in Boston, and our people have been here in this country from the beginning. My ancestors came over on the Mayflower, and I have a great ancestry.” He looked at her, and said, “Lady, you have an ancestry? Why, you don’t know what an ancestry is! You trace your ancestry back to the Mayflower, some 300 years ago. I have an ancestry that goes back to Abraham – some 4,000 years ago – I am a Jew. But my ancestry did me no good at all!”

This is exactly the picture that Paul is drawing here. What saddened the apostle beyond measure was that, with all this religious privilege and favor, the Jews were actually further from God than the Gentiles who didn’t have any of this. The most religious nation that was ever on the face of the earth was Israel (it still is today), yet they did not know God. Isn’t that amazing? It certainly shows the emptiness of mere religion, as favored and as genuine as it may be.

The fact that Israel did not know God was amply demonstrated in the treatment that they gave the Apostle Paul. They hounded him, harried him, persecuted him, opposed him, tormented him everywhere he went. Yet there is not one word of bitterness here, not one word of resentment against this people. So filled is Paul with the Spirit of Christ that he can only say that I wish that it were possible to send me to hell in order that he might save all my brethren in Israel! I don’t think there is any statement in the Scriptures that more fully declares the fact that Paul was filled with the Spirit than this; it is a thoroughly divine statement.

Poor Israel! They thought that, because they had descended from Abraham, they were God’s children – that they automatically became children of God. But, instead, they were bitter, proud, self-deceived, and boasting in these empty privileges, and Paul’s heart goes out to them because of that.

- Does this mean, since Israel was in this condition, that God was not true to his promises to Abraham?

- Does it mean that God meant to save all of Israel, as it sounds like from some of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but somehow he just couldn’t do it?
- Paul says, “No!”

The problem was that Israel misunderstood the basis of salvation – and many people are doing the very same thing today. In this next section, Paul shows us the true basis of God’s method and plan of salvation among men. This basis we can set forth in two words – **unpredictable election**:

But it is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but “Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.” This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of promise are reckoned as descendants. For this is what the promise said, “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, “The elder will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” {Rom 9:6-13 RSV}

(Here we have come to the top of the first section of the roller coaster, so hang on!)

Paul says it is not that the promises have failed, but, rather, that God does not choose men on the basis of anything that man does, or is, at all!

There is a lady in this church who says frequently to me, “I ask myself every day, ‘Who am I that God should ever be so good to me?’ Or, ‘What have I done? Why should he be so kind to me?’” She has been asking me that question for ten years, and I still can’t answer her. The reason is because of what Paul brings out here – that the Jews were obviously wrong in thinking that God chose men because they were descendants of Abraham (notice his argument). He says that, obvi-

ously, it can't be on that basis because God chose Isaac but didn't choose Ishmael – and both of them were sons of Abraham. Only, as he says, the children of promise are acceptable to God – only those born out of God's activity, not from man's activity, are going to be accepted before God.

In other words, nobody is *born* a Christian. They can't be! It isn't natural birth that fits us for the kingdom of God; it is divine birth alone. Those who have been acted upon by God's Spirit to create a new birth are the children of promise. You remember that Isaac was born after nature was dead in the case of his father and mother – they were so old that they could not have children by natural means – they had long passed that time. And then Isaac was born – it wasn't by anything that they did – Abraham and Sarah had nothing to do with it. It was completely and wholly God's activity. And, when Isaac was born, he was not only physically the child of promise, but spiritually as well. Ishmael was rejected. God chose Isaac and not Ishmael. Therefore, it could not be on the basis of being descendants of Abraham.

Moreover, neither is it on the basis of God's foreknowledge of what men will do that he chooses them. This is where many people feel that we have an explanation of why God chooses some and not others. They say he looks ahead and sees what they are going to do, and, because of his foreknowledge, he chooses them. No, it is not that! Paul says so! Before Jacob and Esau were born, when they had done no good or evil at all, God chose Jacob and not Esau – and these were twin boys. You see, it is not a question of what man's character, or his work, may be. While these boys were yet in their mother's womb, God chose to bless Jacob and accept him, and to reject Esau and allow him to remain under the curse of the Adamic sin in which he was born. Well, you say, he foreknew that Jacob would be a good man and that Esau would be a bad man. No, he didn't. If you read the record very clearly, you can see that, in many ways, Esau was a much better man than Jacob. If we had our choice of which one to live with, I certainly would choose Esau rather than Jacob. Jacob was a schemer, a rascal, a usurper, always working underhandedly to see what advantage he could take of someone – and he did this all his life. No, God didn't choose them because one of them was better than the other. Both of them were equally depraved at this point, and they were

equally lost. Yet God chose to save Jacob but not Esau. Therefore he says, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

I know that this quotation is taken from the book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, and it has been pointed out that this was written long after Jacob and Esau had lived, and that this was God's conclusion after he had seen all that they were going to be and all that their descendants were going to be. But that is, of course, to ignore God's foreknowledge; he knew that all along. No, that is putting the cart before the horse:

- Men are not good and *then* God chooses them,
- Men are good only *because* God has chosen them –

that is the point. The whole teaching of Scripture is that our fallen nature is such that it cannot please God, and, until God begins to operate upon our lives, there is nothing that we can do to please him.

You see how clearly Paul sets that forth. Now notice specifically that he says that God's basis of reference is not man's work, but simply God's own choice, his calling:

... though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, {Rom 9:11 RSV}

this choice was made.

This is what our Lord Jesus meant when he said to Nicodemus, "The wind [or the Spirit] blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it [you can trace the activity but you can't predict it, you don't know where it is going to strike next]; so it is with the Spirit," {John 3:8 RSV}. The Spirit of God moves according to his own will, and only that. No man can predict or control where he is going to go.

It is not that God looks forward to see what good man will do and *then* chooses them. They cannot do any good until God's Spirit in his sovereign will begins to move upon their life and heart. Unless you begin there in your theology, you will get nowhere in the study and understanding of God's work and character.

Now we come to the next section, which we call **unchallengeable sovereignty**:

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But, who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?" {Rom 9:14-21 RSV}

With this we begin to grasp the fact that God does not intend to save all men. He never did. He reserves the right to choose whom he will save.

Then, immediately, someone says, "That's not fair! Everyone should have an equal chance to be saved, and God is unjust." This is what Paul faces here. The fact that Paul raises this issue right at this point is proof that he intended us to understand that God chose Jacob and rejected Esau on no other basis than his own will – otherwise he wouldn't raise this question.

If, as some people say, God foresaw that Jacob would believe in him, and then chose him because of that knowledge, then, of course, it would be a very reasonable thing to choose him, and no one would ever raise this objection and say that God was unjust. But it is the very fact that our fallen nature rebels at this idea that indicates that this is exactly what God says he does.

Paul refers to God's words to Moses in Verse 15: "He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion,'" {cf, Exod 33:19}. I think it is very helpful for us to remember *when* God said this to Moses. It is taken from the book of Exodus, and if you look in the 33rd chapter, you will see that this was at the time when Israel was at

Mount Sinai. Moses had been on the mountain with God getting the Law; he had been there for forty days and forty nights. While he was up on the mountain, down at the foot of the mountain Aaron and some of the leaders of Israel listened to requests of the people and decided that they would make a god for them to worship. Ignoring all the mighty acts that God had done for them, and his revelation of his own person and being to them, and though they had seen the mountain shaking and quaking, and the fire and the noise and thunder that had proceeded from it, nevertheless this people had turned to idolatry. They asked Aaron to make them a god, and Aaron collected all the jewelry in the camp, and melted it, and made a golden calf. Then the people began to dance around the golden calf just as the pagans around them did, in a voluptuous riot of sensuality, stripping off their clothes until they were naked, and running about this god and worshipping it in the most horrible form of heathen idolatry. When Moses came down from the mountain with the Law in his hands, he was tremendously angry – he was furious at this – he dashed the Law in pieces and went up to the top of the mountain again. God was angry with his people, but Moses began to intercede, and God pointed out that even Moses could not intercede for people like this. Israel had lost every vestige of any possible claim they had upon God. They had forfeited every possible right. Then God retreated into his sovereignty, and said to Moses in Exodus 33:19 (paraphrased): "I will bless whom I will bless, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion to whomever I want to show compassion." The only hope that Israel had of escaping the just doom that was hanging over their heads (there stood nothing between them and the wrath of God at all) was God's sovereign choice that he would not show his wrath, but that, instead, he would have mercy.

So God's election, you see, operates against the background of a people who had lost all rights and all claims upon his mercy, he just shows it as he wills.

Again, the basis of salvation is stated for us here:

- It is not that man wills, or chooses,
- It is not that God foresees that you are going to choose Christ,

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- It is not that man tries or exerts himself or attempts to find God.
- It is simply that it is God's choice to show mercy on whom he will.

The fact that a man wills to believe, or that he tries to please God, is simply *an indication that God is at work*, but these things are not the reason why he works.

There comes to mind the story of a man who was giving a testimony at a meeting, and he told how God had sought him and finally found him. This man became a Christian, and he was testifying to the grace and joy that was his. When he sat down, the leader of the meeting, a man with rather a legal turn of mind, said:

“Now, brother, you have told us about God's part in the way you became a Christian, but you never mentioned your part. When I became a Christian I had to read the Bible, and I had to seek, and I had to pray, and I had to do all these other things, and you have not mentioned anything about them.”

And the other man was on his feet at once. He said:

“Yes, you are right. I didn't mention anything about my part. Well, my part, sir, was running away from God for thirty years, and his part was running after me until he found me.”

Now, I don't know where he got his theology, but it was very straight and clear – and it is exactly what Paul sets forth here.

At this point in the chapter, Pharaoh is brought in to show the other side of it. Moses and the story of Israel is there to show how God shows mercy upon whom he will, but Pharaoh is brought in to show that God hardens whom he will. We are told that God raised him up for this very purpose, i.e., he put him on the throne for that purpose. It doesn't mean that he caused him to be born in order that he might be lost – God never does that – but he put him on the throne in order that Pharaoh's stubbornness and obstinacy would be the background by which God's power and grace might be displayed. I know that the Old Testament says over

ten times that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but Paul knew those Scriptures and Paul doesn't refer to that part of it. Paul picks up this phrase about God hardening Pharaoh's heart because he clearly means to indicate that Pharaoh was lost because God did not choose to show mercy on him – and Pharaoh, of course, wouldn't *want* the mercy of God until God *did* begin to act upon his life and heart.

Now do you see the picture? Moses and Pharaoh both belong to the same guilty lump of humanity. Moses was not inherently any better than Pharaoh was. Neither of them had any claim on God – so God was free to exercise his sovereign right to *choose Moses* but *not to choose Pharaoh*, and he did just that.

Right here somebody says, “Well, look, if I can't believe until God chooses to act upon me, then why does he condemn me for not believing?” This is invariably the charge that man brings against God, and you will notice that this is exactly what Paul brings in here.

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”
{Rom 9:19 RSV}

This is the question that men ask.

Many, many times in Bible classes, when we are wrestling with these themes of election and predestination, someone who is there, understandably, raises this issue:

- I have heard them say, “Now, look, did God know that man would sin when he made him?” And the answer, of course, is “Yes,” because he knows all things. He knows the end from the beginning. God knew that man would sin when he made him. He didn't make him sin, but he knew that he would.
- Then the question is, “If that is true, why did God make man so he could sin?” I have had that asked me scores of times, and, usually, the one who asks it looks around with a rather self-satisfied look that says, “Well, that ought to settle your hash.” And it sounds logical and unanswerable, doesn't it? It makes unbelievably sound so reasonable and just. “Why, of course I can't believe until God chooses to allow me to believe; therefore there is nothing that he can

blame me for. Fine!" But Paul goes behind that question to show its true character; he shows that it is really an attempt to put all the blame on God, and, thus, to make the creature more righteous than the creator, so that man becomes more just than God. It is really man saying to God,

"Look, God, step down from that throne a little bit. I want to talk to you. I have a few questions to ask you. Sit down here; I want to give you the third degree. Now, tell me this: 'What right have you to make me this way?'"

This is simply another way of saying, "You have no right to be God," for a God that is not sovereign is no God at all! When we talk about God, we are talking about a sovereign being, and *sovereignty* means "the right to do what you will without giving an answer or reason to anybody." And God must be that kind of a being or he is no God at all! Anyone who asks this question, or who raises this issue (as Paul brings it out here) is really saying, or demanding, that God submit himself to man's will, and, of course, that makes man God. This is the great lie of the Devil – that man could be God. This was the great temptation by which he subverted and betrayed the original couple.

Paul goes on to show that, within the limits of man's finiteness, he exercises the same kind of sovereignty that he tries to deny to God. This is illustrated in the matter of the potter and the clay. Doesn't the potter have the right to take a lump of clay, divide it in half, take half of the lump and make a beautiful vessel that is designed for display in a living room, and take the other half and make a slop jar or something for the kitchen? Doesn't he have this right? Yes, he does. The potter has the right to do with the clay as he wishes – this is Paul's argument.

"Well," someone says, "but clay is not human beings; clay is an unfeeling substance without will. We human beings have a will, and we have feelings."

Well, then take man's relationship to the plants and animals – these are living beings. Doesn't a gardener have the right to dig up a bush and throw it away if he doesn't like it, or to plant it in another part of the garden, or to take up this tree and plant

another in its place? Do we deny him that right? Does anyone challenge his right?

If a farmer has cattle, does he not have the right to divide a certain number off and send them to market to be slaughtered, while he saves others for another two or three years? Does anybody question his right? You see, this is sovereignty.

You housewives, when you have flies come into your home, don't you have the right to either shoo them out the door or swat them with a fly swatter, one or the other? We exercise this kind of sovereignty all the time – and we are only creatures – but man in his pride and arrogance refuses to grant this same sovereignty to the only being who has the right to exercise it whenever he chooses. Now, when we call God, "God," we mean that he is *sovereign*, and if he is sovereign, then he can make man to be whatever he chooses him to be. To deny that is to deny God his godhood and to make man a god in his place.

Finally, we will see how he exercises that sovereignty, because, of course, it all rests on the character of God. What kind of a sovereign being do we have? So, in this last section, we have what we may call **unanswerable grace**:

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea,

**"Those who were not my people
I will call 'my people,'
and her who was not beloved
I will call 'my beloved.'"**

**"And in the very place where it was
said to them 'You are not my people,'**

**they will be called 'sons of the living
God.'" [God's saving grace is going
to move among the Gentiles.]**

**And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel:
"Though the number of the sons of Israel be
as the sand of the sea [as God promised
Abraham], only a remnant of them will be
saved [because it is the children of promise
that are saved, not the children of Abra-
ham]; for the Lord will execute his sentence**

**upon the earth with rigor and dispatch.”
And as Isaiah predicted,
“If the Lord of hosts had not left us
children,
we would have fared like Sodom and
been made like Gomorah.” {Rom
9:22-29 RSV}**

The simple truth is that if God did not move upon man’s will to make us believe, not one man in all of time would ever be saved. Jesus said, “No man can come unto me except my Father draw him, and all that my Father had given me shall come unto me,” {cf, John 6:44, 65}. That is the same thought, the same teaching.

“Well,” someone says, “you are teaching that God elects some to be saved and others to be damned.” No, not so. All are lost already, and God is not responsible for that. God never elected man to be damned, that was man’s own choice. The only time that man ever exercised his own free will was when Adam chose to accept the principle that the Devil set before him and to act independently of God. The moment that man made that choice he plunged himself – and the entire race of men following – into the natural results of that decision.

If I had sitting before me here this morning a glass of poison that I knew would kill me, I would have the choice of whether to drink it or not. But once I drank it I no longer would have any exercise of free will – I must reap the results – and this is the condition that God says the human race is in. Having drunk of the dregs of independence from God, at the instigation of Satan, man is plunged into the darkness and the depths of fallen humanity, and it is only God’s saving, electing grace that calls *any* out at all. It is not God’s hardening that deprives a soul of salvation; that merely leaves him in the state that he is already in. But if God did not move in mercy, we would all be like Sodom and Gomorah – blasted, corrupted, ruined, and burned.

Think about that for awhile when you think over this matter of God’s electing grace.

You see, if we find fault with God for saving some but not all, we are really asserting that men have a right to be saved, that they deserved to have mercy shown them. But the truth is that we deserve nothing but hell – all of us! As long as we demand that God consult us about our salvation, we slam the door to discovering his grace. But if we are willing to let God be God, and be sovereign

in the exercise of his will, then we begin to see what it costs God to save men – not only the darkness and the anguish and the loneliness of the cross, but, as Paul points out, even today God is long-suffering in his patient dealing with evil men. God is putting up with all the foulness and hatred and enmity of man.

- Listen to a conversation around you sometime,
- Listen to people talk about God,
- Listen to the way they take his name and cast it into the dirt and walk over it – the very one in whose hand is their very breath,
- Listen to the way they speak in arrogant independence of him, and act as though they have the right to do whatever they want to with the very body he created, and died to redeem,
- Listen to that, and then think of how many centuries God has been waiting patiently with that attitude!

God could stop evil any time he chose. With but a flick of his finger he could wipe out the whole human race, but he doesn’t do it. And why doesn’t he? Because, as Paul says here, he desires

... to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, {Rom 9:22b-23 RSV}

Those verses suggest that, in order that some might be saved, there must be some who are lost. I don’t understand this. I don’t think anyone does. But I leave this with the sovereign choice of God who is willing to put up with all that man throws at him, century after century, in patient endurance, in order that he might bring to fulfillment the desires of his heart in the salvation of some.

Now, you will notice that it doesn’t say that God made men fitted for destruction. No, he didn’t. Adam did that, and men have helped him along ever since. But

Who Chose Whom?

- Wherever man feels a hunger for God,
- Wherever he finds faith in his heart to believe the record of the Scripture concerning Jesus Christ,
- Wherever man grows weary of his selfishness and of evil,

there is where the wind of the Spirit of God is blowing, wooing and fitting the man or woman, little by little, “to be a vessel of mercy prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called.”

Prayer:

Our Father, these are mighty themes, far beyond our limited understanding, but we

thank you for the simple fact that if were not for your saving grace, not one of us would be here this morning, for there is none who seek God, none who really want to be holy and right and true, except as your Spirit does breathe upon us and create that desire in the first place. We thank you for that. We pray that any here who sense the moving of the Spirit – who are hungry for you, who want to be right, and who want to be forgiven – may recognize as well that this is the very indication that you do intend them to be forgiven and will find in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams, and the fulfillment of those passions awakened in them by thy Holy Spirit. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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How Far Away is God?

by Ray C. Stedman

I have just returned from visiting France, Germany, and England; and one of the things that I noticed about these three countries is that each is tremendously different. They have completely different languages, each has a different culture, the people of each nation have different characteristics, and, though they are very closely situated to one another (less than an hour's flight by airplane from Germany to England, for instance), nevertheless, these three European nations are tremendously different. Yet I was aware that, with each of these nations, there is a basic problem, one that is essentially spiritual in its nature, and it is exactly the same basic spiritual problem that we have here in the United States.

Perhaps one of the most influential men of recent times who is shaping the thinking of men is a Dane who lived in the nineteenth century; his name is Soren Kierkegaard. When he was a young boy, Kierkegaard was taken to church by his parents to the state church in Denmark every Sunday morning. He grew up in the church, and noticed that there was a great disparity between what was taught, and the way that people acted in church, and the way they lived the rest of the week. He was troubled by this, and eventually he wrote on this matter very penetratingly, very deeply, and very helpfully. His conclusion was that the basic problem of his nation, as with other nations of the world (of Western Europe, at least) was how to make Christians out of people who are already "Christians" – i.e., how to make "Christians" *Christian* – how to make men and women put into practice seven days a week what they so glibly state and sing on Sunday morning. This is the basic problem that is facing Europe today, and the United States as well.

As you open the pages of Scripture, especially here in the book of Romans, you see that this was exactly the problem with which Paul was confronted in the nation of Israel – the most religious nation on the face of the earth. This nation has never been exceeded in its religious zeal (it was true then and it is still true today). Yet it was a nation what was very, very far from God.

In Romans 9 we saw that the great theme was *the sovereignty of God and his electing grace*. It set forth the fact that not one of us would ever become a Christian, not one of us would ever remotely dream of seeking God, if it were not for the electing grace of God which sought after us first. The call of God awoke us out of the sleep of death, brought us to our awareness of our need, created a hunger in our heart, and set us to looking for him. That is the theme of Chapter 9.

By contrast, in Chapter 10 we have the matter of *the responsibility and the moral freedom of man* set forth. These are two themes that are usually regarded as opposed to one another. You can get into long arguments over this matter of divine election versus man's free will. There has been a great deal of heat (but very little light) that has been evidenced by the arguments that have gone on for centuries over this question. But you will notice that Paul puts them side by side and says that they are both true. I don't think that we will ever begin to understand the workings of God in our world today until we acknowledge that both of these great pronouncements are true: God must call us before we can possibly move toward him; yet, if we do not respond in a responsible decision, we are to blame for not knowing him and for continuing in our lost, fallen condition.

Paul places these two ideas side by side: See how he analyzes the problem of **the weakness of religion** – man presenting a religious facade, a false front, in life. This is what he has to say, beginning with Verse 30 of Chapter 9 and continuing through Verse 4 of Chapter 10:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith, but that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling-stone, as it is written,

“Behold I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; and he who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified. {Rom 9:30-10:4 RSV}

The countries that I have just visited, i.e., England, France, and Germany, are *religious lands*. I was struck by the fact that, in every land, the church is very evident – i.e., the buildings.

Paris is a city of churches. I climbed to the top of the tower of Notre Dame. (There are 250 steps to the top, and, when you get there, you are glad that there are no more!) I looked out over the city, and the one thing that impressed me was the tremendous number of church spires. Almost everywhere they pointed up to the sky, breaking the skyline of Paris, but Paris is a city that is very far from God. And, through France is a land that has been dominated and saturated by the pronouncements and teachings of the church for centuries, yet it is a land that is suffering deeply from God-hunger – a great and overpowering hunger for spiritual reality.

When I went through Germany I could not help remembering that this was the land of the Reformation, the land where Martin Luther lived. Once

the Reformation had swept with a vital power throughout the whole land, awakening it, and transforming it. Today the churches of the Reformation are everywhere in Germany, but it is the same story – West Germany is a country of full pockets and empty hearts.

In England it was the same. England is a land to which we are greatly indebted for the rich heritage that we have received from it. I visited Westminster Abbey and St. Paul’s Cathedral, and yet remembered that in London only 2% of all the population attend church. It was evident on Sunday in that land that there are very, very few who come into the churches. There, as in our own land, the problem is not the *absence of religion*, but of *religious depth*. There is plenty of the wrong kind of religion.

A number of years ago I remember reading a message by Roger Hull, the president of the Mutual of New York Insurance Company. He was speaking to a large crowd of business men in the city of Chicago, and he opened his address with these rather startling words. He said, “I am convinced the greatest problem that America faces today is that of the casual Christian.” Now, that was from a business man: The greatest problem that America faces is casual Christianity! It is amazing, when you stop to think about it, how easily we slip into hypocritical acts – even in church. I was rather surprised, and disappointed, to learn that last week on Sunday morning, here in this church, there were some folks listening to the World Series on a transistor radio while the church service was going on. I am sure that they didn’t think that this was irreligious, or irreverent. I am sure that they had no consciousness of what they were doing, but, when I heard of this, I thought of the words of Jesus to the woman at the well when he said to her, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,” {John 4:24 KJV}, “for the Father seeketh such to worship him,” {John 4:23b KJV}.

The great problem of our land, and of other lands, is exactly what Paul outlines here:

- A superficial religion,
- A seeking after their own righteousness,
- A contentment with making the outside appear right,

- A complacency and satisfaction with the inside, even though it is completely wrong.

I know, when we begin to face this problem, the remedy that is usually suggested is to find some way to get people to take their religion seriously and get more involved in the activity of the church. In other words, if we can find a way to turn the casual Christian into a concerned Christian the problem will be solved. In our country, more than in Europe, we have found a way by which we have enlisted people in religious activity, and our churches, in contrast to those over there, are full. We have people lined up in a program right up to their necks!

- They are immersed in it.
- They are on this committee and that committee.
- They belong to this group and that group.
- They are continually busy in a constant round of religious activity.

But we haven't solved the problem, because, as Paul points out here, Israel is forever an example of the falsity of this approach. The answer is not just "getting busy for God." It isn't just trying to be more active in the things that the church is doing. Zeal is no substitute for reality. Warming up a pot of spoiled meat doesn't change its rottenness. Or, as C. S. Lewis so graphically put it, "No clever arrangement of bad eggs will make a good omelet." Putting a man to work is no answer. The answer is not a program, the answer is a Person. It always is.

Paul says of Israel, "They have stumbled over the stumbling-stone," and he quotes from Isaiah, where God says: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble, a rock that will make them fall; but he who believes in him will not be put to shame," {cf, Isa 28:16 RSV}. By these words he is saying that God never offered man anything except through Jesus Christ, and the transforming of a man, or a home, or a nation, is never accomplished except by a new appropriation of Jesus Christ – that is all.

Now, I would like to ask you, "Is your life weak, and fruitless, and afflicted with a great deal of casual Christianity?"

Well, if it is, the answer is not to try harder, the answer is not to get yourself involved in more programs. The answer to how to make "Christians" *Christian* is Christ – not activity but receptivity, not effort but faith. Laying hold anew of the reality of the presence of Jesus Christ is the answer.

If I would gather up the impressions that were left upon me in this recent tour of Europe and put them in one phrase, it is, simply, that in every country that I visited, as in our own country, the great need is for men and women, individually, to come face to face with the Lordship and the sovereign claims of Jesus Christ in his or her life.

Now, at this point, someone always says, "Well, how do I do this? What do I need to do in order to find this new power and this transformation, this saving grace?" Paul answers that question by outlining for us **the simplicity of faith**. Look at Chapter 10, Verses 5-13:

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." {Rom 10:5-13 RSV}

When I was flying out of Berlin, through the air corridor, I was very interested in what was going on in the villages and countryside beneath me, because that was the Eastern Zone of Germany. As we flew along, we came to a little town and my friend, Dr. Dirks, leaned over and said, "That town is Eisleben, where Martin Luther was born." Then, of course, I looked at it with renewed interest.

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Down in that little town was born Martin Luther, and, later, when his life drew to a close, he returned to that same little town, and there it was that he died. It was a strange feeling to look down into that little town where Luther was born, and had died, and to think that it was now behind the Iron Curtain, and there was no religious ceremony of any sort permitted in that little village. And I recalled the story of Martin Luther –

- How, as a monk in the Augustinian monastery, he sought to make himself acceptable to God,
- How he would spend long, weary hours lying flat on his face on a cold stone floor, praying hour after hour, beating his breast, weeping and crying over his sins, trying to discover some way of release and of forgiveness,
- How he put himself under punishment and made his body undergo suffering in order to do penance for his sins, and
- How, finally, reading through the Scriptures in this very book of Romans, he was struck by one phrase out of the first chapter – “the just shall live by faith” {Rom 1:17b KJV}.

Those words hit him like a sledgehammer, and he realized that God was saying that it wasn't necessary to *do* anything. God isn't asking us to *do* a thing. He is asking us to believe what Christ has already done. Martin Luther stood up and began to walk in the strength of that verse, and it gained power upon his soul and his heart until it gripped him, and he sent it in flaming letters of fire across Germany. It created the Protestant Reformation: “The just shall live by faith” – not by *doing* anything!

The most deadly question that a man can ask is the question we ask when we begin to sense that we need something from God: “What shall I do to win God's favor?” Well, there is nothing to do, Paul says. If it depended upon *doing*, if you were going to *accomplish* what had to be done to deliver you, this is what you would have to do:

1. You would have to climb up into heaven and bring Christ down from heaven.
2. You would have to go down into the grave and bring Christ up from the dead.

Now, who can do that? Obviously, all that needed to be done was far beyond our ability to do it. The great word of the gospel is that it has all been done. Now, believe it! Believe it, and walk in it!

This is what we have difficulty doing. But it is the simple walk of faith that, when the heart begins to rest upon it, transforms a life and makes available to an individual all the mighty transforming power of God to make him what he ought to be. This is what happened to Martin Luther, and it is happening to men and women all over the world today – by this same simple process of resting on what God has done.

I am amazed at the way we Christians continually seek something more before we are ready to do anything for God:

- We want God to give us some kind of an experience,
- We think we have to have a special call,
- We need a special kind of a feeling about a work before we will undertake it (no matter how obvious it is, and how much it needs to be done).

I have had people say, “Well, I'll pray about it, and if God calls me to do it, then I'll do it.” No, this isn't what the word of faith is.

I know that there are people who are looking for a special additional experience that will give them power. They think, “If I could only speak in tongues, then I would be able to do, and be, for God what I ought to be.” So they begin to seek this experience some way. All of this is simply a means by which we are trying to escape the force of what God has to say to us – that Jesus Christ is instantly available to us or to any heart that is willing to acknowledge his Lordship, his right to be sovereign, and who will obey him on that basis.

This is what Paul says, “The word is near you ... because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised

him from the dead, you will be saved.” This doesn’t mean just the initial experience of the Christian life, it means anything in the Christian experience from which we need to be saved. In other words, let’s believe him and move out to meet any demand that comes, because he says that Christ is here – he is available since he has taken up residence in our life by that initial act of faith.

- He saved you: *Now believe it* and you are saved.
- He is your strength: *Now believe it* and do whatever needs to be done. You don’t have to wait for a feeling. You don’t have to wait for a call. Whatever is before you that needs to be done, do it in the name of the Lord because he is with you.
- He is your peace: *Now believe it* and count it a sin to worry any longer because he is there to be all that you need.

This is what he is saying in this passage: *Now believe it!*

Now, if Christ is available to all without distinction or reserve, then there is only one thing left: That is **the necessity of proclaiming it**, or preaching it. This is what we have in this last section, Chapter 10, Verses 14-21:

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!” But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

**“Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world.”**

Again I ask, did Israel not understand?

First Moses says,

**“I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”**

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

“I have been found by those who did not seek me;

I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” {Rom 10:14-21 RSV}

Paul is simply proving that Israel had no ground of complaint for not having heard what God had to say: They had heard! Not only through men sent of God, but through the silent witness of nature and of their own hearts, they had heard! In other words, no man lives untouched by God and unaware of his existence in all the world.

Dr. Richard Halverson spoke to a small group of men in Germany and described something of the work of International Christian Leadership. After speaking, he had a question time, and one of them asked this question:

“You have been talking to men who are members of a church, encouraging them to work, but what do you say to a man who is a Communist, who doesn’t believe in God, who has no interest in the church, who thinks this is all tommy-rot? What do you say to him?”

In thought Dr. Halverson’s reply was very wise. He said:

“There is no place in all the world, whether it is behind the Iron Curtain or anywhere else, where a man doesn’t have an empty heart if he doesn’t know God. So, begin with the empty heart, the life that is unfulfilled, and the unsatisfied yearnings and longings of a heart that knows no rest.”

This is what Paul says, too. In all the world, men are waiting to hear, and they are convinced by the silent witness of their own hearts that they need something. The full power of the Christian gospel is only known by the process that we call “incarnation.” That is, it is better *caught* than *taught* – it isn’t the preaching of the words so much as it is the witness of the life. When the Spirit of

Christ dwells in a human heart, that man or woman becomes a witness, sent by God, to be an influence wherever he or she is. This is a tremendous truth if we really grasp what we have here and in other parts of Scripture.

Jesus said to his disciples one day, “Greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father,” {cf, John 14:12 KJV}. Did you ever think of the implications of that word? What he is saying is that when he goes to the Father, the Spirit of truth {see John 14:17} will come into the world and the Spirit of God will take up his residence in human life – your life and mine. When the Spirit of God comes into a man or woman’s heart and life, that person becomes capable of doing the works that Jesus Christ did in Galilee and in Judea – not only the works that he did, but greater works than these shall be done. Now, in the world today, it has been estimated that there are some 81 million Christians. When our Lord was here on earth, he was only one man, living in one country, and he could never be anywhere else, but in the world today there are 81 million Christians. I realize that they are in various stages of knowledge and belief, but just suppose that in 81 million Christians there was carried out what God had in mind for them to do, and to be, so that in 81 million places in the world there was going on what was going on in Judea and Galilee 1900 years ago! You can see the possibilities for reaching a world for Christ – 81,000,000 places where the Spirit of God would be working through a man or a woman to transform, by his saving grace, the lives around them. That is what we have set forth here, and it is a matter of simply being *available to him* – of presenting ourselves to him – in order that he might use us in any way that he pleases.

In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah was in the temple, and he saw God, and he was overwhelmed by that presence, he said, “My lips are unclean, I can’t say anything,” {cf, Isa 6:5}. He felt his human weakness, and this is the proper attitude to have in a place like that, but that wasn’t the whole story. God sent an angel who took a coal from the altar, symbolic of the Holy Spirit, and put it on that man’s lips, and then said to him, “Who will go for us?” {Isa 6:8b RSV}. Now, it is interesting that God did not say to Isaiah, “Isaiah, will you come and go for me?” He put it on the basis of a volunteer; he said, “Who will go for us *now* into the world to be a witness, to be a proclaimer of what

Jesus Christ can be in human life today?” And, when Isaiah was touched and cleansed by the coal from the altar, he stood and said, “Lord, here am I; send me,” {cf, Isa 6:8c}.

That is what God is saying to us today, “Who will go back into the world, back into the place where you live, into the shop where you work, into the home where you are, into the neighborhood where you live? Who will go for me?” He is waiting for men and women who know Jesus Christ, who are walking in the obedience of faith, and who know that *everything that Christ is* is already theirs, and they need but to simply step out and to respond to it in faith. He is waiting for us to say, “Lord, here am I; send me!” Will *you* say that? This is the process by which God means to fulfill the words of the Lord Jesus, “Greater works than these shall you do because I go unto my Father and the Spirit has come unto you.”

This morning we are celebrating the table of the Lord together. I hadn’t meant to say this, but I am so impressed with the fact that Christians simply seem to wait for God to do *something more* before they are ready to respond in obedience to him. It is for this reason that there is such difficulty getting people to do things, because they are not ready to be his, they are not ready to say with Isaiah, “Lord, here am I; send me,” {cf, Isa 6:8c}.

“You are not your own, you are bought with a price” {1 Cor 6:19b-20a RSV}

What does that mean? Well, if it means anything at all, it means that you no longer have the right to say, “No!” when God says there is something to be done. Do you know that we could find no one to prepare the Lord’s table this morning? It was asked at the women’s meeting for volunteers, for somebody to prepare the Lord’s supper, and no one was willing to do it. And, finally, somebody had to drive in from the country in order to get this done – a simple thing like that!

I have been *so* disturbed by the fact that Christians are *unavailable to God!*

- No wonder nothing is going on!
- No wonder neighborhoods aren’t transformed!
- No wonder doors are shut!

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- No wonder the saving grace of God is seemingly locked out!
- No wonder nothing happens in our country!

How do you make “Christians” *Christian*?

The only answer is by a new glimpse and a new contact and a new confrontation with Jesus Christ, in order that we might respond to his call with “Lord, here am I; send me.”

Prayer:

Our Father, we wonder how long it shall be before we begin to evidence the simplicity of faith. How this word, Lord, has rebuked us. What do we need more? What yet have we need of, Lord? You have said,

“The word is near us, even in our hearts, even on our lips” – we need nothing further. We have him who is all, if we know Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, Lord, may we, in the quietness of this moment, acknowledge before you that we are indeed men with unclean lips, but you have cleansed us with the coals from off the fire of the altar of God. And may our hearts say, in this moment, as we meet at this table this morning, “Lord, here am I. Forgive my deliberate withholding of myself from you. Forgive my subtle attempts to invent excuses to keep from doing what is before me that needs to be done in your name, and accept me, Lord, to be your instrument by which your mighty transforming, saving power may flow out to men and women today in my neighborhood, in my house, and in my office.” In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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The Christian and the Jew

by Ray C. Stedman

This eleventh chapter of Romans throws a great deal of light on the strangest nation that ever existed – the nation of Israel. Today we view it against the background of over forty centuries of anti-Semitism, that dark, unexplainable, yet consistently recurring pattern of hatred against the Jews. You may have read in the paper recently of the sudden and violently brutal attack against a Jewish rabbi in New York that resulted in his death. It stirred up an entire neighborhood there. Whether this is just hoodlumism or another outbreak of anti-Semitism is not particularly clear, but it is true that we never seem to get away from the strange and unexplained hatred of the Jew. The root of anti-Semitism is undoubtedly the resentment that other nations feel against the Jews' claim to be God's chosen people, and it finds expression in various ways, some violent, others merely mockery. Perhaps one of the best known expressions of this feeling in its milder form is the little jingle:

How odd
of God
To choose
the Jews

This is the background of this chapter in which Paul asks, and answers, two questions which are still being asked today about Israel:

The first question is in Verse 1: "I ask, then, has God rejected his people?" To phrase it another way, "Is Israel a total loss as far as God is concerned?" Is it true that the Jews have really had their chance? Is there no hope of salvation for a Jew?

The second question is in Verse 11: "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall?" That is, "Is God through with Israel as a nation?" Is there no longer a place for them as a chosen people in the future history of the world? And you will recognize that

these are questions that are still being asked about this enigmatic people.

We want to examine these questions as Paul brings them out, but, as interesting as these questions are, they are not the major reason why this chapter was written. I think we will totally miss the point if we stop with merely answering these questions. I know that many people divide the letter of Romans into three great divisions: Chapters 1-8 they say are doctrinal, Chapters 9-11 are dispensational (having to do with God's dealing with Israel), Chapters 12-16 are practical in their application. I think this is a mistake because it treats Chapters 9, 10, & 11 as though they were merely a parenthesis in Paul's development – sort of an interjection of Paul's favorite hobby horse – his concern for the Jews which he couldn't get away from (so he kept putting them in – in somewhat the same way that Baptist preachers are accused of interjecting the mode of baptism into their subject matter). But we must never forget that Chapters 9-11 are really a great illustration of what Paul has been teaching the Christians in Chapters 1-8.

Therefore, we will miss the point unless we apply this illustration to what he is saying. In other words, if we want to understand how God works with us, we can look at the way he is working with Israel.

So let's look at the illustration now, beginning with the first question that Paul asks, "**Is Israel a total loss?**"

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Eli-

jah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written,

**“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that should not see and ears
that should not hear,
down to this very day.”**

And David says,

**“Let their feast become a snare
and a trap,
a pitfall and a retribution for them:
let their eyes be darkened so that
they cannot see,
and bend their backs for ever.”**

{Rom 11:1-10 RSV}

Now, the question is, “Is God through with Israel?” When God set the nation aside upon the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, their appointed Messiah and Redeemer, and turned to the Gentile world, does this mean that the Jew is cut off from God’s grace and favor?

This is the question that Paul asks, and the answer is: “No. By no means!”

Then he points to himself as an example. He says, “I myself am an example of this.” The mass of the nation was blinded and hardened by their official rejection of Jesus Christ, but there is, Paul says, a remnant of grace which is permitted to see the truth about Christ and to believe. And, he said, “I am an example of that remnant.” You remember that, despite his positive hatred against Christ, and, though he lived and breathed in a continual attitude of hatred and unrelenting persecution against the church of Jesus Christ, nevertheless, God’s grace arrested him on the road to Damascus, and broke through the darkness, and the blindness, and brought the light of Jesus Christ to his heart.

Paul says, also, that this has been true in past days, when the light of faith of the nation has burned very low. He reminds these Gentile readers of the days when Elijah came to the conclusion that

he was the only one left who was faithful to God. After his remarkable triumph over the pagan gods on Mount Carmel, when the fire came down from heaven and consumed his offering, Elijah fled into the wilderness from the wrath of Queen Jezebel. There he crawled under a juniper and said to the Lord, “Oh, Lord, let me die! I am the only one that is left!” {cf, 1 Ki 19:4-10}.

All too often some of us in the ministry know how he felt. There are times when we feel like crawling in, and saying, “Let us die. We are the only ones left.” There are some of us, in these days of declension and darkness, who have this feeling that we are the only ones that are faithful.

But God’s answer to Elijah was, “Elijah, I have seven thousand men who haven’t bowed their knee to Baal. You are not the only one left. Why, there are seven thousand that you don’t even know about that are still true to me,” {cf, 1 Ki 19:18}.

So Paul says, “God had his election of grace even in those dark days of Israel’s history.” But he also says that if God works this way by grace, then it can’t be on the basis of works. That is, it isn’t what men are doing by which they can merit this position of election in God’s sight, but rather grace puts the matter beyond justifiable complacency. In other words, God saved some where none deserved to be saved – that is the argument.

So, through the centuries since Paul wrote these words, there have been Jews who were raised, perhaps, to regard Jesus Christ as an impostor; they were taught to call him a bastard; they regarded him as a blasphemer, and a man claiming to be God – yet their eyes have been opened and they have turned to faith in Christ and have been saved. There have always been a band of wonderful Hebrew Christians who have seen the truth about our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the proof that God has, even through these intervening centuries, a remnant among Israel – so Paul’s answer has been well sustained.

Now, what is the application of this to us? Why does Paul tell us this about Israel? What is pictured for us in this relationship that God has with Israel?

As we have pointed out, what God does with Israel as a nation is a picture of what God does with a Christian as an individual. This is a very helpful rule of thumb to apply to your study of the Bible, especially the Old Testament. When you see what God does with this peculiar, elect people, Is-

rael, then you see what he is planning to do in your particular, individual life.

Paul points out that God has rejected most of the nation, but has preserved for himself a remnant of grace. Now, what does this picture in your life as a believer in Jesus Christ? Well, as we learned in Chapters 5-8, there is a part of our life that God utterly rejects, that he will not have anything to do with, that is as utterly worthless to him as anything could be –

- Our own human efforts to please God,
- Our own attempts to do what we think is right and best without reference to the work of Jesus Christ in us,

– this is what the Scripture calls “the flesh.”

God says in these chapters that this is utterly worthless. He rejects it. He sets it aside. Though we sincerely mean to serve him (our sincerity is never in question) just as Israel through all those centuries sincerely sought to serve God through their offerings and all their little additions to the Law. Nevertheless, these things in our life are tainted by our self-interest and wrapped around by our own plans and programs, and they are disowned, utterly, by God.

The interesting thing is that when we begin to think that we really have obtained some status in God’s sight, this is the indication that we really are in a most pitiful condition. Have you noticed that? Remember that letter to the Laodicean church in Revelation, the church that could pride itself on how much it was doing and how much it owned and said of itself, “I am rich and have all things and have need of nothing.” But God said to it, “You do not realize that you are poor and wretched and miserable and blind and naked,” {cf, Rev 3:17}. This is the position of any person who thinks by their church works, by their efforts, by their sincere zeal for God’s work and program, that they are pleasing him. God says, “No! All this is set aside as utterly worthless.”

I imagine that some of you, who were listening as we went through Chapters 6, 7 & 8 of Romans, perhaps, became aware, for the time, how much of your Christian life was spent in just that way. Perhaps you realized that doing the best that you can was really an ignoring of the provision of God in Jesus Christ for you, and that you had been doing

the best that you could for a long, long time. And you wondered if, perhaps, those years were utterly wasted, and you may be even crushed by an awareness of the barrenness and fruitlessness of your Christian life. But here is a word of encouragement, because what Paul is illustrating here is that, in the life of every believer in Jesus Christ, God always preserves for himself a remnant of grace – we can put it that way. In other words, our Christian lives are never quite a total loss before God. There are many things that the Spirit of God permits us to do which are wrong – terrible, spiteful, hateful, lustful things – which fill up the record of Christian life much too much, but there are some things that you cannot do! That is what he is saying: There are barriers which you are not permitted to cross. This is what Paul means in Galatians when he says,

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. (Gal 5:17 RSV)

There is the area where God draws the line, and will not let the Christian go beyond. It is not because the Christian is trying to be good or is intent upon keeping the will of God, but simply God’s grace that draws the line, and says, “You cannot go any further.”

I wonder if most of us have not at one time or another experienced that checking point of the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever noticed in the Scriptures that, though Christians often act wrongly (and we have to admit this), it is never said of the genuine believer in Jesus Christ that this wrongness is his character, but rather that he is really something quite different from the way he is acting at the moment? You remember in Ephesians, Paul says, “once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; [therefore] walk as children of light,” {Eph 5:8 RSV}.

The basic character of the life of Jesus Christ remains unchanged, even in the Corinthians, in that church which was so troubled and so filled with problems and schisms and divisions, in those men and women who (though they were Christians) were living in dishonor and disgrace and division, he writes these words:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. {1 Cor 6:9-11 RSV}

So God preserves a remnant of grace, even in the lives of some of us who stumble and fall so frequently.

I think you can see that this is the basis for the doctrine of eternal security of the believer. Scripture says that

- It is possible to lose much,
- It is possible to remain withered and stunted as a Christian for years,
- It is possible to wander in a wilderness of unbelief where you are tortured with hunger and are thirsting after the things of God and are never satisfied,
- It is possible to stand someday before the Lord Jesus Christ and be ashamed and guilty for all the wasted years

and be saved though as by fire, and yet purely by God's grace. Scripture also says that, at that time, every man shall find praise of God – a remnant of grace. That is encouraging, isn't it?

In spite of yourself, God breaks through at times and makes you act like a Christian. This is the only basis that we have for maintaining that Christians are "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," {cf, Matt 5:13-14 RSV}.

It is true that, when the salt has lost its savor, it is good for nothing but to be cast out "and trodden under foot by men" {Matt 5:13 RSV}, as Jesus said. And a Christian who has not yielded his life to the controlling power of God is a worthless testimony before the world, but there will be times, even in that life, when something of Jesus Christ shows through – a remnant of grace. That is encouraging, isn't it?

Now notice, in Verse 11, Paul's question, **"Is Israel through as a nation?"**

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! {Rom 11:11a RSV}

That is, "Is Israel to be made the head of the nations, as once promised by God?" "Have they lost forever their privileged position before God?"

And, interestingly enough, many commentators today say, "Yes." They say that the church has now assumed the promises that were once made to Israel, and Israel will nevermore have a chance, as a nation, to fulfill these promises.

And, also, this is the place which the nation Israel has taken for itself today. You read the writings that come out of the land of Israel and, except for a very small group, the majority of them are taking the position that the nation Israel is no more than any other nation in God's sight, and that they want to take their place among the nations as no different than any other nation.

But Paul says this is not true. Paul says that the promises of national blessing are still valid to this nation. Then Paul has three things to say about their present rejection.

Let me just quickly go through these, because I want to come to the application of them to ourselves:

He says, first of all, that **it was necessary to set Israel aside** in order that the Gentiles might be saved:

But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as the first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. {Rom 11:11b-16 RSV}

In other words, he is simply saying that we must understand that Israel was set aside, and it was necessary that they be so, in order that the gospel go out to the Gentiles.

Remember when Jesus was approached one time by a woman from the coast of Tyre and Sidon? She wasn't an Israelite. She came and asked him to heal her daughter, and, at first, he wouldn't even speak to her – he uttered not a word. But she wasn't discouraged, and she kept after him. Finally, he said to her, "I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," {Matt 15:24}. In other words, the time is not yet come to reach Gentiles, and this woman was a Gentile. But she persisted in her faith and her knowledge of the basic character of God, and, as you know, she won through and the Lord did deliver her daughter. But this is simply our Lord's recognition that there was a time when God confirmed himself in a special sense to the nation Israel, and it was necessary that Israel be set aside before that free gift of God's grace could go out to the Gentiles.

God had originally intended to use Israel as a showcase of his grace. He said,

"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit... And you shall chase your enemies,... and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you ... {Lev 26:3-4, 26:7a, 26:8b RSV}

The crops would not fail, the wine would last till the next vintage, they would be healthy and strong, and so on. He promised that he would break off the shackles from their back and they would walk uprightly among men. The nation was to be such a manifestation of the visible presence of God that all the nations of the world would hear it and come to them and seek to know the secret of this people. But, as we know the record of history, they did not do this because they had not learned the basic lesson of human life – that man himself is nothing. They seized the position of favor and perverted it, and made it center upon their own glory, so that ultimately God cut them off as a nation, in order that the gospel might go out to the Gentile world. It was sent out to the Gentiles, who had no standing before God at all, in order that the grace

might operate in their lives, so that when Israel would see how God would bless people who had no standing, no rights, no covenant in his sight, they might become jealous, learn of their own insufficiency and thus turn to God on the right basis.

This is God's great program – what he is working out in the world today. Paul argues that if the setting aside of them brought this blessing to the world, how much more will their restoration create worldwide blessing.

Out of this comes this next thought. He says that **the Gentiles need to beware** lest they, too, become proud and self-sufficient before God:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. {Rom 11:17-21 RSV}

I think this is a word well taken.

Have you ever really realized that God was under no obligation to save you? He didn't have to. He would be perfectly just in not giving you a chance at all. Have you ever realized that?

The Jews at least had a covenant to which they could point, but we who are Gentiles don't have anything to stand on before God. At any time, God could stop this process of calling out believers from among the Gentile nations and none of us would have any just cause of complaint before him!

We take our salvation so much for granted, I am afraid. Listen to these words from Helmut Thielicke, one of the great preachers in Germany today:

We do well to grasp the tremendous implication of this thought, for it is to the effect that my acceptance by God cannot be taken for granted, and that Jesus' death on the cross for me cannot be taken for granted. We European Christians have gradually become accustomed to the dangerous and unhealthy idea that the

grace of God is thrown at us. Voltaire cynically said of the forgiveness of God, "It is His job." But this is not so. Things are quite different from the popular assumption. The kingdom of God is not thrust upon us. The grace of God can also be silent. We certainly cannot claim it. It may be (and, if so, I cannot blame God) that in my last hour I will sink into darkness and the one figure who might be with me through the gloomy portal will be missing. It is in no sense of duty or obligation of Jesus to bear my sins and to take me through the black gate of death. If he does this, it cannot be taken for granted. And I make bold to say that even the most orthodox churchman will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he is continually surprised that mercy has been shown to him.

That is a rather startling thought, isn't it?

Someone once asked Charles Spurgeon concerning the statement of the Bible, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," {Rom 9:13 KJV}. They said to him, "How could God ever say, 'Esau have I hated'?" And Spurgeon said, "That isn't my problem. The thing that makes me astonished is how could God ever say, 'Jacob have I loved.'"

When we get into that position, I think that we will begin to appreciate the marvelous grace of God toward man.

Paul goes on to say, in the last verses here, that there is a day coming when **God will restore Israel** to its promised place as head of the nations, and all the living Israelites will be saved.

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

"The Deliverer will come from Zion,

he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

"and this will be my covenant with them

when I take away their sins."

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of the forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once

disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. {Rom 11:25-32 RSV}

I assure you that the present happenings in the land of Israel is in no sense a fulfillment of these words: God has not restored Israel to the land. God has permitted the nation to come back to the land, but this is not the restoration that is predicted here, or in the rest of the prophecies of Scripture. It is only after the darkness of that terrible day that is coming to Israel, referred to by the Lord Jesus as the "great tribulation" {Matt 24:21}, that this day shall dawn of which Paul speaks, and which was described by Zechariah when he says,

... when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. {Zech 12:10b RSV}

Then shall Israel, all Israel, turn to their appointed Messiah. But Paul's promise is that God has a place, yet, for national Israel.

What does this mean to us? Again, this is an illustration. "So," we ask, "what is he illustrating in the life of the believer?"

Well, it is exactly what we have set forth in Romans 8. There we learned that God indeed sets aside the entire self-activity of the human life as being unable to accomplish anything in his sight. And, just as God set Israel aside in order that grace may do its work among the Gentiles, so God completely sets aside all the flesh, all my self-effort, all that I am by human nature; and then (and only then) do I begin to learn what God can do through me.

When we freely admit in practice – not just in word, but in practice – that without Jesus Christ we can do nothing, then we shall learn that we can do all things through him who strengthens us {cf, Phil 4:13}. It is

- When we quit trying to plan everything out and think that it all depends on us,

- When we begin to realize that he has placed within us the very One who is able to plan all things well,
- When we understand that he intends to do through us – through our will, through our mind, through our thoughts, through all our activity of life – that which will accomplish his purpose,

then we begin to see wonderful things happen! It isn't that we look different or that we act differently, but we begin to notice that strange things begin to happen in our lives – when we constantly expect God to work through us in Jesus Christ:

1. First, we learn that little things that we say fall with great weight upon people's minds and hearts around us. Doors open that we don't expect, and we have opportunities to move into areas that we didn't realize could ever be opened us. And sometimes our smallest remark seems to come as a bolt from heaven to somebody's heart, opening up a whole new vista of living grace, Christ working through us – that is what he is teaching here. When we are willing to let our self-effort be set aside, as God set Israel aside, then grace begins to work.
2. Secondly, we learn that it will never be any different than this, no matter how long we are Christians. We, ourselves, never become any better, or more able, to serve Christ in ourselves. Just as Gentiles, having been saved by grace, and then becoming proud and self-sufficient, find that God is just as able to cut off that grace as he is to begin it in the first place, so we, individually, as Christians, must learn that it is always, and only, Christ working in us that accomplishes the Father's will. Therefore, pride is forever our greatest temptation and our cruelest enemy. The one thing that we must continually watch is that we do not begin to feel that we are anything, or that we can do anything, it is all Christ within us!
3. The last thing is the revelation of Scripture in Chapter 8 that someday even our flesh will serve God. By his grace, in that day of which Paul speaks, when creation is freed from the bondage of sin, and the sons of God stand forth

in resurrection power, even that which has once been set aside as useless is now rendered useful to God. The sons of God, in resurrection bodies, serve God in the flesh. And then even that which was once rejected and cursed is made to fulfill the promise and to demonstrate the power of God.

Now this is why Paul ends this chapter with these wonderful words:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,

or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. {Rom 11:33-36 RSV}

How this cuts away all the pride and self-sufficiency of our lives! How this reduces us to a place of weakness – yet with the knowledge that his strength is made perfect in weakness {cf, 2 Cor 12:9}!

Now you can go out to serve in the glory of this mystery – not you any longer, but “Christ in you, the hope of glory” {Col 1:27}, working through you –

- In your home,
- In the place where you carry on your business,
- In the way you drive through traffic,
- In your attitude toward every living person you contact.

Jesus Christ at work – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year – in your life. This is the grace of God!

Prayer:

Our Father, what a revelation of the might and the power and the wisdom of your grace this gives us. How truly you set aside all the empty, foolish planning and struggling of men in order that you might provide in us that dynamo of power which

is able to be and to do all that you ask of us in Jesus Christ our Lord! Now give us the simplicity of faith to believe this, and to

begin to walk and to live in these terms, quietly trusting you to fulfill it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Discovering the Will of God

by Ray C. Stedman

When we come to this point in the book of Romans, we are ready to talk about commitment. In a way, I approach this subject with trepidation because I feel it can be a very dangerous subject. There is a type of preaching that has a ministry of exhortation, in which Christians are continually being exhorted to commitment – to Christian commitment. Often this ministry is carried on without the minister ever saying *what* we should commit to, or *why*, and, especially, never saying *how*. As a result, there are many Christians who are stirred to the point of commitment and eager to do something for God, but they don't know the first way to go about it. Thus they become what is so frequent in our modern American life – consecrated blunderers. The result is a barrenness in their own ministry. That is why I am afraid of the subject of commitment.

On the other hand, I am aware that there is a danger of having understanding without activity. Activity without understanding results in blundering barrenness, but understanding without activity is equally bad. There is such a thing as knowing without going – a willingness to sort of sit and sour – and understanding without activity is disobedience. So we need to beware of both horns of the dilemma. To err in either direction results in coldness, hardness, complacency, and barrenness in life.

The chapter division between Romans 11 & 12 is rather misleading. The division falls right in the middle of Paul's line of thought, and when you start with Romans 12:1-2 (which is one of the most quoted passages in the New Testament), you miss completely the force of the apostle's argument. It is like going to the grocery store and taking the middle can out of a stack of canned tomatoes – it makes a mess out the whole affair. You cannot

understand this great passage until you tie it with the great doxology with which Paul closes Chapter 11.

Let's start with what we may call **the logic of commitment**:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. {Rom 11:33-36 RSV}

- This is more than just a hymn of praise and worship about the greatness of God,
- This is more than an expression of the awe and wonder of the apostle's heart at the majesty of God,
- This is primarily an expression of the utter madness of trying to live a life apart from complete divine control.

In this passage we have two basic philosophies of life meeting in a headlong clash:

This last week the world has been watching with bated breath the two greatest powers on earth threatening to meet in a headlong clash in the Caribbean Sea. Everybody has been waiting anxiously to see what the outcome will be. In very much the same way, here in this passage, there comes to-

gether at last two very conflicting and diverse outlooks upon life which meet headlong – and one is completely demolished by the other. Here the common philosophy, “My life is my own to live as I please,” meets headlong with the philosophy, “My life is God’s to do with as he wills.” You can recognize how diverse these two are. We frequently hear the idea reflected in our conversation that man is somehow sufficient unto himself – we don’t need God. That idea comes directly in conflict with the concept of the apostle that man is but a vessel, made to contain God, and is utterly and totally useless without him. Here we see what the outcome is.

The big gun that Paul used to demolish the argument of man is simply to say, “Take a real look at God.”

Look at his *omniscience* first of all; his wisdom and knowledge are such that man doesn’t even remotely approach it. We love to boast about our accomplishments, and we speak in glowing terms of how tremendous it is that we can send our vehicles into space and fling a heavy object up onto the moon. In comparison with what we were doing fifty years ago, of course, this is great – but, in comparison with what God does every single day, it is nothing. We think we have done so much when we finally get a satellite to successfully revolve around the earth, but God does this every night. We look up in the sky and see that he has millions of them, billions of them, uncounted trillions of them, “squillions” of them, revolving around each other – and no one even thinks it is worth applauding. This is the greatness of God! I think it is a healthful exercise to read the 38th through the 41st chapters of Job occasionally. There God summons Job to a little debate on the natural realm – the realm of natural theology – and simply asks him a long, long line of very embarrassing questions about what goes on in the natural world. He sums it up by saying, “Now, Job, can you do these things?” And Job has to admit that he can’t. And then God says, “What right have you to complain about the way I am running things in your life, if you can’t do these things?” It is a very humbling experience to read these chapters in Job. That wonderful passage in Isaiah 40, Verses 10-18, concerning the greatness and majesty of God, and his wisdom and knowledge, far exceeding anything that man ever remotely approached, describes what Paul brings forth here.

Then he says, “Look at God’s *inscrutability*.” This is what theologians today love to call his “wholly otherness” – i.e., his difference from us. Cowper caught it in his well-known poem:

God moves in mysterious ways,
His wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea;
He rides above the storm.

We humans can’t comprehend his actions. Who can predict what God is going to do? Who can explain his methods?

We know that there are times (all of us have experienced it) when we have been in the midst of circumstances that have totally baffled us, and we have said that there is no rhyme or reason for this – it makes no sense whatsoever. But, as we have lived it through and look back upon it, we can see that there was a pattern working its way out through all the dark and difficult days – and we see that God’s wisdom was greater than ours. This is what Paul is speaking of; he says that man continually tries to thwart God’s will and to escape his control, but God takes the very plans that are made to defeat him and uses them to accomplish his purpose. How are you going to win with a God like that? He has an unfair advantage in this game of international chess today, and it is only necessary for us to remember that, to have a sense of peace of heart about what is going on.

Actually, man never violates or breaks God’s laws. We think we do, and, sometimes, in our strutting ignorance, we fancy that we can get away with things and that the result will never catch up with us – but it always does. We never break God’s laws – we only illustrate them. If you announce that you are going to break the law of gravity and then step off the top of a twenty-story building, you won’t break it – you’ll just illustrate it. When they dig you out of the pavement, you will have proved that the law of gravity still works.

And when we break (in our fancy) the moral laws of God, we don’t really break them; they are still in action; they still exact their relentless vengeance upon us. The other day I received in the mail an advertisement for a new book on sex. We are getting a lot of literature flooding the mails today, more than ever before, and there is a license that has seized the publishing industry in this respect to publish almost anything on sex. This was advertis-

ing a book entitled, *Sex and the Single Girl*. The author had written a little bit of an introduction to the book which was printed on the advertisement, and she said something like this:

There are many people who feel that a single girl has no sex life at all. Nonsense. The modern single girl can have an unending series of affairs with attractive males, yet without loss of self-respect or independence.

When I read that I thought, “There is the old lie again, as Satan whispered to Adam and Eve in the garden, “Yea, hath God said? ‘Ye shall not die,’ {cf, Gen 3:1-5 KJV}. There won’t be any results like he said would take place, if you do this.” This is exactly the attitude reflected by the writer of this book. She was giving the impression that it is quite possible that all this Victorian nonsense about observing the laws of sex is pure rubbish – it is quite possible to violate them and none of these evil results will follow. But anyone who has sat and listened to those who have lived like this and then come for help in time of trouble knows that, inevitably, the unending series of affairs becomes harder and harder to find. The attractive male becomes whoever-you-can-get, and self-respect turns to disillusionment and self-pity. All too frequently, the end to that kind of living is a bottle of pills and a phone call to the police.

You see, God doesn’t need to throw his thunderbolts at us, or threaten us with brimstone. God’s wisdom and knowledge and character are such that, even when we run against him, and try to thwart what he is doing, quietly, inevitably, and relentlessly the judgment begins to enwrap us, and to entangle us, and we destroy ourselves.

Paul tells us to remember God’s inscrutability and then to look at God’s **inevitability**:

For from him and through him and to him are all things. {Rom 11:36 RSV}

Think of that!

- From him comes all things,
- Through him all things are holding together (as we read in Colossians 1:17), and
- To him all things are trending.

God stands at the beginning and the ending of every path upon which you stand today, and there is no escaping him anywhere. Paul says, “In him we live, and move, and have our being,” {Acts 17:28}. Whether we recognize his presence or not, he is absolutely inevitable.

Someone was telling me last week about Charlotte Bennett, who, as many of you know, lay long in the hospital, suffering greatly. Just recently she confessed to one of her friends, “You know, the thing that has been worst about all this has not been the pain, or the long, unending hours when there seemed to be no release, but the worst thing has been my inability to swallow!” Just a simple thing like that, a thing we take so for granted every day, our ability to swallow! We never dream that it might be taken away – that it is a gift of the grace of God upon us. We are in God’s hands, he is never in our hands, but we are in his hands – for better or for worse.

And, in view of this, Paul is saying that the most logical, the most sensible, the most natural thing in the world is to *present your body to him as a living sacrifice*. Or, to put it in terms of the Ten Commandments, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy might,” {cf, Deut 6:5 KJV}. What is more natural? All your life is in his hands, everything you are is his to control. How foolish, then, to try to live on any other basis.

Recently there was a poll taken among the university students in Europe to determine their basic approach to life. It was discovered that, by far and away, the most common approach to life was one of simple anxiety – not anxiety about death, but anxiety about life itself.

I remember that during the Billy Graham crusade in San Francisco there was a group of young high school students that went up to the crusade one night, and I rode on the bus with them. At the crusade, a number of them went forward and registered a decision for Christ. On the way back home, one of these young men, a fine-looking football player, was sitting there in the seat by himself, and I slipped into the seat beside him to talk to him. I was talking along the line of what this decision for Christ would now mean in his life, and, among other things, I mentioned that it would mean freedom from the fear of death – that he need not look upon death as a fearsome thing. He stopped me,

looked over at me, and said, “You know, I have never been afraid of death, but there is one thing that I have been afraid of: I have always been afraid that I will waste my life!”

I think a lot of people have that fear – a fear that we are going to waste our lives – and we *will* waste our lives if we live them on any other basis than what Paul now sets forth.

This is the logical, inevitable, natural result of an awareness of what God is like, what he is, and what he does. So, here, in a sense, in Romans 12:1, we have a formula for **how to avoid a wasted life**:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. {Rom 12:1 RSV}

The heart of the whole matter is right here. I want you to listen closely to this, because you are not truly committed to God unless these things that Paul speaks of are true in your experience. He says four things about what true commitment is. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what it means to be committed to God – to be a committed Christian – but here it is made clear:

1. The first thing he says is “present your bodies.” Why bodies?
 - Why not present your spirits? That is the inner part of our being.
 - Why not present your souls? Or,
 - Why doesn’t he ask for what we usually ask for in a commitment service:
 - ⇒ Present your money?
 - ⇒ Or your time?
 - ⇒ Or your life?

No, Paul says, “present your bodies.” I think that it is because man is so made that, when we at last get around to making our bodies available to something, we have given our whole person to that cause. That is what he means.

I frequently hear, as all pastors do, somebody say to me, “Well, I am sorry I can’t make it to the meeting tonight, but I will be with you in spirit.” And I understand what they mean, but I find it rather disconcerting to speak to a hall full of spirits; I would so much rather they bring their bodies. You see, if you move your body into action, you have really given yourself. You can come short of it in a thousand different ways, and sound very pious in doing it, but it is when you finally put your body on the line that you really have given yourself.

Men frequently say, “Well, I’ll give you my time.” Or, “I will give you my money.” But this is oftentimes a very pious dodge to evade a genuine commitment, because it is only part of the life.

Or people say, “I am totally available,” but the first request they get, they find an excuse to beg off.

You see, our minds may be committed, our spirits may be available, but, yet, not our bodies. This is where we resist the pressure of God’s Spirit, but this is what commitment is.

This is why we can publish urgent requests in our bulletin for help in very badly need areas, we can beg for cooperation, we can plead for help from a church which is made up, largely, of “committed” Christians, yet so few respond. I feel very strongly, when I go elsewhere around the country, that we have so many wonderfully “committed” Christians here at this church. Yet, it is interesting that we can ask “committed” people to help and nobody helps – it is because we haven’t given our bodies. James says, “He who is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, deceives himself,” {cf, Jas 1:22}. He doesn’t deceive anyone else, he is only deceiving himself, and his religion is vain – it is empty.

The first test of your commitment to Christ is this: *Is it an active commitment?*

Have you just stood up in a service, and said, “I give myself to God,” or, in your heart, said, “Lord, I am available whenever you want me,” and then have sat back and waited until some special call comes that drives you into a corner where you can’t evade it any longer? The test is:

- When a need occurs before you, and
- You can fill it in some way,
- Are you instantly responsive to do so?

Wasn't that the gist of our Lord's story of the good Samaritan? Here was a man in great need – wounded, bleeding, attacked by robbers.

- First a priest went by and he saw the need, but he said to himself, "I'm sorry. I'd like to help, but I am very busy. I have a special service I have to minister down here in Jericho." And on he went.
- Then a Levite came by, a lawyer. And he said to himself, "I'd like to help, but I have a special case coming up before the Sanhedrin and I can't."
- And then the good Samaritan came, and he saw the need, and that was all that was required. He responded.

That is committing your body!

2. Paul says, secondly, that it is "a living sacrifice." This is, again, a word that is much misunderstood. It simply means that true commitment is perfectly reasonable thing. You see, when we use this word "sacrifice" today, we almost always think of something that we voluntarily give up which we have a perfect right to keep. We feel a sense of satisfaction that we have been so kind to sacrifice something to God.

That concept of the word is utterly foreign to the Bible. The Jews never used it in that sense at all about their sacrifices. When a Jew brought a lamb or a calf as a sacrifice, he was simply bringing what he had no right to keep. He was bringing God's property to God and offering it to him; that is all. The farthest thing from his thoughts was that he had any right to that sacrifice. He had set it apart from the beginning as God's, and he had no right to it at all. It was God's property. Therefore, he could take no credit for doing it, and, on the contrary, he would have been accused of robbing God if he had not brought it.

Now, you see,

- When you genuinely surrender your will to God, and
- When you really mean that you intend to make Jesus Christ Lord of your life, and that
- He is to have access to every part of your life, and that
- He is to have the right to direct any part of your life,
- You are not doing him any favor – this is his right!

I wince when I hear testimonies in Christian services as to how somebody gave up their riches – or their fame, or their love – for Christ's sake, and they assume an attitude of "how lucky God must be now that I am on his side!" It is really quite the other way around – how miserable you would be in your fancied independence and folly! The only life that is really life is:

- A life that is utterly given to God,
- A life in which he is in control, and
- A life in which God rules and reigns!

And, when it calls for a *living* sacrifice, it simply means that this goes on all your life. It is no credit to you. Your life belongs to God and he alone has the right to use it. That is the unquestionable position of Scripture.

3. The third thing that Paul says is that it is "holy and acceptable to God." This simply means that true commitment rests on an awareness that the only life pleasing to God is that of Jesus Christ living in you.

We have already learned, in Romans 5-8, that the flesh cannot please God, and that God's plan of salvation has no provision in it whatsoever for the improvement of the flesh. The only thing that God does with our personal, fleshly efforts is crucify them. That is all. The only life that is acceptable to him is

the life of Jesus Christ lived again in us. As we have seen, God has put all that I am to death – my plans, my programs, my desires – are all tainted with self, and are worthless. *But*, the minute I accept this and acknowledge that it is true and right, *then* it is possible for Christ, who lives in me, to begin to work out his plans, his programs, his ideals, his desires. He does it through my conscious will, but *then* it is something *holy and acceptable unto God*. Anything else is burning false incense, false fire, before God.

4. The fourth thing is what he calls “your spiritual worship,” which means that true commitment is a satisfying thing. Man is made to worship God, and when he does so, truly, he has a sense of fulfillment and joy beyond anything the world knows anything about. There have been times when all of us who know Christ have worshipped him in such a way that we have been lifted up, strengthened beyond measure, made to face disagreeable and difficult circumstances with a new light in our face and a new hope in our heart – this is worship, and we were made to do this kind of thing.

You remember that Jesus said to the woman at the well, “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him,” {John 4:24, 4:23b KJV}.

Worship is really nothing more or less than being what you were made to be, and doing what you were made to do.

- When a flower blooms, it is worshipping God.
- When a bird sings, it is worshipping God.
- When a plant grows, fulfilling its appointed task with its leafy arms outstretched, it is worshipping God.
- When a man, right in the midst of his daily life, right where he lives and where he works, right in the midst of those circumstances is being flooded with God himself, he is worshipping God.

The worship of a Christian isn’t confined to those moments on Sunday morning when he gathers with others at church – that is just our corporate worship – we worship God all day long. When in some small, or even obscure, way we become the visible manifestation of God to someone – then we have worshipped.

A young man was asked what was his favorite book of the Bible. He said, “My favorite book is the *Gospel according to Mother*.” That mother had learned the secret of worship.

Now, you have seen in these verses what true commitment is:

- It is *active*: It is not just sitting around waiting for something. It is at work meeting the needs that are right around at the moment.
- It is *reasonable*: It is doing what is to be expected. It is nothing to your credit at all – quite the opposite – you can be accused of robbing God if you are not truly committed.
- It is *spirit and power*: It isn’t resting upon your ideas, and your plans, and your programs. It isn’t trying to do your best for God. It is resting upon his announced intention to do his best through you.
- It is *satisfying*: It is the most wonderful experience that a man can have. It is fulfilling. It makes you sense, at last, and be, at last, what you were made to be.

Anything less than that is a cheat, and a fraud, and a hypocritical act!

Now let’s look at **the results of commitment**:

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. {Rom 12:2 RSV}

I like Phillips’ version here:

Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God remould

**your minds from within, {Rom 12:2a
J. B. Phillips}**

1. The first result of a genuinely committed heart is *a transformed mind*. Here again you have this headlong clash of two philosophies:

There is the philosophy of the world – self-centered, self-pleasing, indulgent, indifferent to others, dog-eat-dog, devil-take-the-hindmost. That is the world, isn't it? Are you not conscious of the pressure to be squeezed into that mold all around you? Well, if you know Jesus Christ and you have begun to yield to his Lordship, you will be also conscious of another force in your life – re-making your mind from within so that you no longer look at people as you once looked at them, as either obstacles or helps to you. This is the trouble with what sin does to the human perception – it makes us look at another person in terms of a symbol, not as a person. We see them as either “someone who can help us” or “someone who opposes us” – and we resent them or bless them accordingly. But when the mind is transformed by the Spirit of God, you no longer look at people that way. You see a man as a person, even though he has been a crotchety, grouchy, old boss whom you thought was out to make every moment that you lived unpleasant. You begin to see that he is a person with an ulcer, that he has his own problems and troubles, and that he needs help. This is the transforming of the mind.

You begin to see that money and material things are no longer important, as they once seemed to be. The big thing in your life no longer becomes this matter of whether you can close this deal and make so much money, but whether you will do it in a way that honors and glorifies the Lord your God – whether you make money or not. That is a sign of a transformed mind. You no longer take everything that is said to you personally, but you become able to back off and look at it objectively.

I think women have a special problem in this respect. I remember Carl Thomas saying, at a meeting, that it was characteristic of women to take everything personally – even those things that were said in a general way. At the end of the meeting a lady came up to

him, and said, “What do you mean? I don't take these things personally at all!”

The transformation of the mind means that we no longer begin to take everything personally; we see it in its true perspective. This is the work of the Spirit of God, and you find a concern for others beginning to show and to grow in your life. You see more and more how utterly self-centered you've been, and you become concerned that you demonstrate that concern for someone else. This is the transformed mind.

2. The second result is *a discovery of the will of God*. In other words, you begin to experience the conscious guidance of the Spirit of God. You discover that when you have put God in his rightful place and you are willing to do his will, this in itself is the will of God.

There is so much nonsense made about the matter of the will of God in Christian affairs. We think of it as specific directions at a specific time, and we only seek it when we have some big problem to face. But this isn't what the will of God is at all. The *will of God* is *your being willing to do his will*.

As Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “this is the will of God, even your sanctification,” {1 Th 4:3a KJV}. That is, even your willingness to be available to him, this is his will. Once you get to that place, then he is free and able to direct your steps – every one of which is a fulfillment of his will.

3. It is evident that there is *a gradual growth of this awareness*, as Paul sets it forth here. He says you will discover, or prove, “what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

- That is, at first, you will learn that what God sends is *good*. When you begin to see your daily happenings, your experiences, your trials, your joys from this point of view, you begin to see that all these things are designed for your good. You learn not to murmur or complain, and, even though you still, perhaps, have difficulty in seeing how everything is going to work out together for good, you still believe it.

- Then, as you walk on with God, you begin to see that whatever he sends is not only good but *acceptable* – even the trials and the difficulties. You don't enjoy them, but you know that they are good for you – so you walk on, in faith, accepting what God sends.
- But eventually the day comes when you accept God's choice for you as *perfect*. In other words, if you had your own life to live over again, you would choose exactly the same things that came already; you would do it exactly the same way, it was perfect. You begin to rejoice in your sufferings and trials, knowing that they are perfecting the very things that you want to happen in your life, and in God's program.

That is full maturity, and this is what happens when we begin to yield our lives to God.

Now, where does this start? Well, as Paul says, it starts with your body. In other words, bearing these things in mind, begin to get involved in something. Don't be content to just *sit* and *learn*, but begin to *do*. Come to grips with life. Expect the Spirit of God to use you. Be willing to take on something bigger than you are, and *do it in his strength*.

You see, God is saying to you, as he said to Isaiah: "Who will go for us?" {Isa 6:8}. This is what God is saying about the whole world today:

- Who will go into the place where you work?
- Who will go into the neighborhood where you live?
- Who will go into the family circle where you are?
- Who will be **my** representative there?
- Who will be **me** in that place?

Will you say, like Isaiah said, "Lord, here am I. Here am I. Send me!" {cf, Isa 6:8b}.

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that we will more than just intellectually grasp this truth, but that it may grip our hearts and our souls, and release our paralyzed wills, and energize us to begin to be available to you, not in words but in deeds. In Jesus' name. Amen

The Body at Work

by Ray C. Stedman

When we come to the twelfth chapter of Romans, we come to the second major division of this book. The first eleven chapters are all devoted to what a Christian life is, and, as we have seen, it is a radically new life. It isn't an improvement of the old life in any degree at all; it isn't taking a man who has certain longings for being a bit better and helping him along until he lives a cleaner or a more moral life. It is cutting off entirely of the old life, whatever its manifestation may be, and the beginning of a new life in Jesus Christ which we continually appropriate – like we breath fresh air – by continual expectation. Just as when you take a breath you expect the oxygen to be there, so a Christian learns to depend on the indwelling life of Christ in exactly the same way. Every step he takes he expects Christ to operate, and to empower him, that it may be effective. Now, in coming to Romans 12 and the rest of the letter, we are coming to that which describes how the Christian life looks when it comes contact with the world. This is a very practical section and one that I think that we will get a great deal out of because of its practicality. In this section we see Christian living coming in contact with society, with the ordinary, work-a-day world. It begins with the church, then goes to government, and then to society in general – considering the special problems that arise out of it. So this is a very practical section.

As you have noticed from our last study in Romans 12, the first two verses indicate that the application of Christian living starts with a surrendered will: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice," as Paul puts it. This is another expression for the acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life – a willingness to seek his advancement rather than your own. This is the heart of all Christian experience. A Christian is one who rec-

ognizes the authority of Jesus Christ and loves to put himself under his control.

Somebody has well said that there are only two kinds of people in the world. There are those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good morning, Lord," and those who wake up in the morning and say, "Good Lord, its morning!"

This recognition of the immediacy of Jesus Christ all through the day, and through all of life, is the mark of a genuine Christian life. The evidence of a surrendered will, as we saw last week, is *an available body*.

Yesterday I was with 200 men up above Los Angeles, and, among other things, we discussed this very matter. One man stated it very accurately: "If I *talk* about being a Christian, and about *servng* the Lord, but I never *do* anything for him, I am just kidding myself."

The evidence of a surrendered life is an available body, a willingness to help, to put yourself out, to be expendable, to respond to the needs about you. Therefore, a Christian with a continual excuse for doing nothing is deceiving himself about his surrendered will and is resisting the rightful control of God in his life.

This is where we start in Romans 12, and the first place where this activity of service becomes visible is naturally in the church itself – in the body of Christ, in the community of believers, in the circle of God's family. This is where Paul begins in Verses 3-13 of Chapter 12.

We are not going to take all of it this morning, but I'll give you this little preview of it: He speaks about two things, activity and attitude. We are going to look at the activity this morning – the great question of the spiritual gifts that God gives his own to minister in the body of Christ. He says only two things about these. He says:

1. Don't try to do everything, and
2. Whatever you are given to do, do it wholeheartedly.

The first is the measure of our ability, the second is the mark of our genuineness.

Now let's look at these. First, **the measure of our ability:**

For by the grace given to me I bid everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. {Rom 12:3-5 RSV}

This is a picture of life in the body of Christ, the church. It is made up of all believers who share the life of Jesus Christ, and it is a living organism in the world today. When you begin to discover the true power of a Christian, as we have looked at it in Chapters 1-11 of this great letter, you discover that a remarkable thing begins to happen. I don't think the Christian life is worth a 'snap of the finger' if something exciting isn't happening from time to time. It really never begins for us until we begin to see that God intends to work through us individually, and that, when God is at work, things begin to happen. It isn't always some spectacular, outward display, but things take place.

I was privileged to speak at a Bible class in the home of Andrew Carey, the third baseman of the Dodgers baseball team, in Newport Beach last Thursday night. There were about 35-40 people at the class, which was begun by Lloyd and Jackie Johnson, who used to be here with us. Lloyd is the regular teacher of the class, but I taught it this one Thursday night. Jackie Johnson and a friend of hers picked me up in Los Angeles and drove me out to Newport Beach, and, on the way, they were telling me what had been going on in that class. They got so excited they kept turning around and talking to me – even though one was trying to drive. So, I finally suggested that I do the driving and let them talk, because they were so excited over

what God was doing in their midst in that class. Now, that is as it should be. This is the kind of excitement that prevails whenever God the Holy Spirit is at work.

Once you discover this, as a result of the availability of the life-changing, transforming character of Christ dwelling in us, life becomes an exciting thing. You can hardly sleep at night, at times. When you experience that thrill, you begin to want to do everything – you want to do it all yourself! You see how wonderfully God can work and you think, "There is nothing that I can't do!"

It is at this point that we must begin to realize what Paul brings out here:

- That we are members of a body, and
- It isn't given to each member of the body to do everything that the body does.

There is a division of labor within the church of Christ, and other members of the body are filled with the Spirit too, and need to be exercised.

Do you remember when Peter learned this? You recall that, after the resurrection, when Peter had denied the Lord and wept bitterly in the streets of Jerusalem, the Lord Jesus met him in Galilee beside the sea on a beautiful morning {see John 21:15-23}. He had spread a breakfast of fish for them – broiled fish on the coals – and, after breakfast, he turned to Peter, and said to him, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter, who had been so boastful in the Upper Room, could only hang his head and say, "Lord, thou knowest." And again the question came, "Peter, do you love me?" Three times the Lord asked, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter was driven, at last, to the only recourse, the only ground upon which he had to stand – not his own energy or ability – to say, "Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you." And then the Lord gave him his job; he said to him, "Peter, I want you to feed my sheep. Your job is to minister to those who belong to me – to teach them, to feed them, to nurture their life along. This is your job." But Peter still had some of old Peter in him. He turned to the Lord, and looking at John, he said to the Lord, "Lord, what do you want that man to do?" If you read the Scriptures carefully, you'll notice that there is indication of jealousy between Peter and John before the crucifixion. Peter evidently resented the fact that John was the one who

was always leaning on the Lord's breast, and he was jealous. So, he turned to the Lord and asked this question. The Lord's answer was quick and to the point. He said to Peter, "What is that to thee?" That is, "That is none of your business, Peter. You follow me. I'll give him a job to do." There Peter learned that the body has many members, and all do not have the same function, but all of the functions are necessary to the life of the body.

All of us will discover this. God gives us gifts, but we do not *all* have the same gifts. We need one another. We are members one with another, not just of this church, but of other churches, other denominations, other groups as well. Nothing is more heartening today than to see how the Spirit of God is breaking down denominational lines all over the country, and around the world, making people aware of how much we need each other in the body of Christ.

Here we come to this question of *the distribution of spiritual gifts*, and I think, in many ways, no question is more discussed and more appropriate than this today. The Lord, we are told, distributes gifts as he wills. That is, it is the prerogative of the head of the body. Whenever our bodies function, they never take orders from the hand or the foot – they take them from the head.

- It is the head that sends down messages; it isn't our fingers that operate on their own. You put your finger on a hot stove and a message runs up your arm and travels right up to the head that says, "It's hot down here." And the finger does nothing more about it yet; it stays right there on the hot stove until the message comes back from the head that says, "Get out of there!" Then the hand moves.
- It is the head, you see, that directs the action of the body. This is what we need to remember in the body of Christ. It is the prerogative of the head to give the gifts as he wills.

There are many who are being urged to seek some gift today. Never once in Scripture is there any exhortation to seek gifts. Oh, I know that it says in First Corinthians to "covet the best gifts" {cf, 1 Cor 12:31}, but the pronoun that is used there in the Greek is plural. It means "pray or covet that there be manifest in the entire assembly the better gifts of the Spirit" – not for any individ-

ual to seek any gift for himself. I think it is very essential to understand this.

Now, what is a *spiritual gift*? Let me give you a definition, if I may. I have been struggling with this, and trying to think it through, and this is the definition that I have come up with:

A spiritual gift is a divinely-given capacity for service.

Now, I did not say that it is a divinely given ability, because *ability* suggests power and a spiritual gift does not have anything to do with the power of it. Power can be from one of two sources: The power can either be the power of the Holy Spirit allowing that gift to be used, or it can be the power of the flesh, and the energy of the flesh, even though the gift is given by God. It is a capacity to receive power to exercise a certain ministry – that is the spiritual gift.

I think I can illustrate that to you: Suppose I had here a number of electrical appliances – a toaster, an iron, an electric fan, a hair dryer, and a few other gadgets such as we have abundantly available today. Each of them is designed to do a different thing, each has a different function, but they all used the same power – and unless they are connected to that power, they are useless. This is the way with the spiritual gift – it is a divinely-given capacity to receive power. However, that power can be:

- The power of the Holy Spirit so that the gift is exercised in such a way as to bless, to minister, to help, and to advance the cause of God,

or it can be:

- The power of the flesh so that the gift is exercised in such a way as to destroy, to injure, to divide, and to sever.

This is one of the areas that is *so* misunderstood today. We are talking about spiritual gifts, and among them the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues in which we see a revival of interest today. But people forget that the gift of tongues can be exercised in the flesh as well as in the Spirit, and we need to make that distinction clear. I am glad that this passage in Romans 12 deals with the

matter of spiritual gifts but never even mentions the gift of tongues, yet it is an authentic and accurate listing (even though partial) of the gifts of the Spirit.

How do we *recognize the gifts of the Spirit* that are given to us? If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the moment that you were born again, God gave you gifts.

Notice that I do not use the singular word. I don't say "gift" – I say "gifts." I hear people talking about how to discover "the gift God has given them." I think we are short-changing God when we talk that way.

Have you ever noticed the liberality with which God gives? He just pours out his gifts. Just think of the number of flowers in the world, the billions of stars in space, the abundance with which God gives, the lavishness with which he gives gifts!

I don't think that any Christian possesses just one niggardly gift of the Spirit; I think that all of us have several. And we need to discover what they are, and begin to use them. Paul gives us the way to discover the measure of our gift, the measure of our ability. He says it is "according to your faith" – the measure of the gift is your faith. In other words, that is what Jesus said when he said to his disciples, "According to your faith be it done unto you," {cf, Matt 9:29}. That is, "What do you believe that God can do through you?" *Start there!* What challenge of the Spirit lies before you at the moment that you really believe God can do through you? *Start right there!* When you start there, you will discover that gradually there comes a broadening and a widening of the knowledge of what gifts you have. This is why Paul writes to Timothy, and says, "Stir up the gift that is in you which was given unto you," {cf, 2 Tim 1:6}. That is, get busy and use it! And when you start with what you have, usable for God, you discover more.

There is one man in the New Testament whose gift is always associated with his name. Do you remember who it is? Haven't you ever heard of Philip, the evangelist? He didn't start out as Philip, the evangelist; he started out as Philip, the deacon. A deacon was not a highly honored, highly paid individual in the New Testament. In the sixth chapter of Acts, a deacon was a man who had the job of dividing up the common provender among the squabbling group of quarreling widows. That is where he started, for he had a gift for service – Philip, the server. And, when he was faithful there,

he discovered that God had also given him another gift, that of an evangelist. It is that by which we know him.

This is the place to start – begin where you are.

- What can God do through you? Begin there!
- Don't wait for a call. You don't need a call.
- Gifts are given to you by the Spirit immediately upon your conversion, and, no matter how humble a place it is, begin there!

Make your body available for the ministry of this gift, and, as you faithfully follow through, you will discover other gifts that are also yours. And you can rejoice in the ministry of others as well.

In the second part of this section, Paul brings before us **the mark of genuineness of a gift:**

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. {Rom 12:6-8 RSV}

This is a partial list of spiritual gifts. There are others that are listed in Ephesians 4 – evangelists, prophets, pastors, teachers, apostles – and in First Corinthians 12. But let's look at this list that Paul gives here to the Roman church:

1. There is, first of all, the gift of *prophecy*. Now, that does not mean prediction. That isn't the ability to predict some event that is yet in the future, but it is really the gift of preaching – of being able to proclaim truth with a powerful effect upon the hearers.

Do you have the gift of prophecy?

It isn't confined only to those who are pastors by any means. There are many laymen who have the gift of prophecy too. The gift of being able to speak so that you put forth the truth in a powerful way: That is the gift of prophecy.

Others may be helpful in helping you determine whether you have this gift, because

sometimes we don't always recognize it in ourselves. Dr. Ironside used to speak of those who thought they had the gift of preaching but to whom nobody had the gift of listening. Now, that is a tragedy. But the gift of prophecy is a God-given capacity to receive power in preaching. Though it can be exercised in the flesh (and what a deadly thing it is when a preacher preaches in the energy of the flesh), it can also be exercised rightly in the power of the Spirit.

2. Next, there is the marvelous gift of *service*. This is what is called "the gift of helps" in First Corinthians 12. This is the ability to see things that need to be done, and do them – that is all. What a blessed gift that is!

I thank God for those who have the gift of service here in this church. We have one man I think of, who, whenever an announcement is made that something needs to be done, is always there on the spot. It doesn't make any difference whether anybody else shows up or not – he is there and he gets something done. And, may I say, that is one of the most effective and powerful testimonies for Christ in this church. The person concerned may not be able to preach a sermon (I am sure that he would feel that he couldn't), but his life is a continual testimony to the reality of Christ living in him. He is one of the most effective ministers for Christ in this whole church.

That is the gift of service, and what a wonderful gift it is.

3. Then there is the gift of teaching mentioned here. This is the capacity to impart truth, or to instruct, by analysis and application.

By the way, it is not determined by your age group. You don't have a gift for teaching young people rather than a gift for teaching middle-aged folks. Incidentally, I have never run into anybody who thought they had a gift for teaching old people, yet, if this were an age matter, you would expect to find that.

It is simply the gift of teaching, wherever it is employed. It is the God-given capacity to instruct, and, thus, a very valuable gift.

It has nothing to do with the office you hold; you may be a teacher in the Sunday School and not have the gift of teaching; it is

too bad if you are. We hope that those who teach have the gift of teaching, but just the fact that you are given the job of teaching doesn't mean that you have the gift. It is up to those who can determine it to find out who has the gift of teaching.

4. Then there is the gift of exhortation. Frequently this is given right with the gift of teaching, but it is a different gift entirely. The gift of exhortation is the capacity to move the will, to warm the heart, to impel to action.

You have met people with this gift. We have some here, and we thank God for them.

But let me say something about these two gifts of teaching and exhortation especially. It is such a silly thing to blame someone for not exercising a gift that he doesn't possess.

Frequently we have someone speak who has the gift of teaching, He instructs us, our minds are illuminated, and we understand things so much better than we did before. All the intellectuals go away from the meeting saying, "My, what a wonderful speaker. That was wonderful. What I learned under that man!" But all the emotionally-oriented people go away saying, "Oh, that was terrible. So dry!" This is blaming the man for not exercising the gift of exhortation which he doesn't possess.

On the other hand, when an exhorter comes along who has the gift of exhortation but not of teaching, all the intellectuals go away saying, "That was terrible – nothing to edify me at all!" And the emotional people say, "That was wonderful. I could have listened to that man all day!"

Well, let me say that *this is wrong!* If a teacher teaches, thank God for the gift, and go and warm your own heart. And if an exhorter comes, thank God for the gift of exhortation, and go and get a book and teach yourself. You see, these gifts are given to bless and edify the whole body.

5. There is, also, the gift of contributing, or of *giving*, that is mentioned here. All Christians are expected to contribute – this is a sign that you have received: "Freely you have received," Jesus says, "freely give," {cf, Matt 10:8 KJV}. All Christians, without exception, if they really know the Lord, will give. But there are some who have a special gift of giving, and, by the

way, it is not always the rich people either. Sometimes the very poorest people have the gift of giving, and, even out of their poverty, they find ways to give. They give cheerfully and gladly to bless the heart. Thank God for these!

I think with this gift there is often given the gift of making money. If God has given you the gift of making money, remember that it is a definite gift and that it is not given in order that you might have a much higher standard of living than anybody else. It isn't given to you in order that you might enjoy luxuries that others don't have, but, rather, that you might employ it in advancing the cause of Christ and ministering to the body of Christ – that is why it is given. It is the capacity to receive the power of the Holy Spirit to give in such a way as to bless and advance the work of God. It is as much a necessary part of the ministry of the whole body as the ministry of teaching or preaching. Thank God if you have that gift. We couldn't exist, the body could not work without those who have the gift of giving.

Incidentally, I believe that there is nothing in Scripture that sustains the idea that you should leave your giving until after you are dead. Second Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body." So, as the jingle puts it,

Do your givin'
While you're livin'
Then you're knowin'
Where it's goin.'

And that is a good idea!

6. Next, Paul mentions the gift of giving *aid*, or, really, the gift of ruling or administering. Oh, what a blessed gift that is! This is what is called the gift of administration in First Corinthians 12. It is the capacity to plan or execute and organize, and it is of tremendous value – not only in the actual organizing of the church, but in planning conferences and meetings, and in setting up special projects, missionary enterprises, and so on. If God has given you this gift, by all means get to work with it!

7. Then there is the gift of showing mercy. This is the gift of what we might call consolation or encouragement – the ability, as Isaiah so beautifully puts it, "to speak a word in season to him who is weary," {cf, Isa 50:4 KJV}. The ability to encourage, to bless in time of special need, to come into a home where things are upset and difficult, and say just the right thing.

Now, these gifts are not limited to those in the professional ministry, to just the so-called "clergy." It would be horrible if they were. The whole ministry is the work of the whole body – that is what the Scripture teaches. **All of us together** have gifts of the Spirit which we must exercise – and the whole body falters and fails if you aren't doing your part in exercising the gifts that God has given you. This is only a partial list here, but I believe that every Christian has several of these gifts.

Now, you find out which gifts you have, will you?

You find them out and use them, because, if you are not using the gift that God has given you, you are robbing Christ of his right to be in you what he wants to be. You are robbing him of his inheritance in the saints {cf, Eph 1:18}, and hindering him from the work which he longs to see accomplished.

The point that the Apostle Paul is making here is not so much to give us a list of what the gifts are, but that, no matter which gifts we have, we need to put them to work for God. What he is saying is:

- Get with it!
- Wholeheartedly enter into this.
- Unreservedly give yourself to the ministry of the gifts you possess.
- Make this your calling.
- Make this your reason for existence – that you might find occasion to exercise your gifts!

Then, you see, the work of Christ will prosper.

Observe how he goes through this. **Let's go through it again:**

- “If you have the gift of prophecy,” he says, “then preach in proportion to your faith.” Or, as Phillips puts it, “Unto the limit of your vision.” Don’t hold back! Present everything that God gives you to see in the Scriptures.
- If you have the gift of service, then give yourself to serving. Don’t wait till somebody comes around and asks you to do things. Get busy and find opportunities. Give yourself wholeheartedly to the exercise of this gift.
- If you have the gift of teaching, then you ought to be teaching. You have no business sitting in the pew continually, without a ministry of your own, if you possess the gift of teaching. Find an avenue of teaching, in the home, in the Sunday School, in the church – somewhere. Call some folks together (you’ll find someone who has the gift of listening) and then start there.
- If you have the gift of exhortation, then be exhorting, Paul says. Get with it, in other words. Get involved. Start using the gifts that God has given to you.
- If you have the gift of giving, then keep on giving out liberally. Don’t just give until you have reached your quota for the deduction on the income tax, but keep pouring it out and give liberally.
- If you have the gift of ruling, do it with zeal. Do it with concentration and with eagerness.
- If you have the gift of mercy, do it with cheerfulness. Oh, that is a blessed word, isn’t it? None of us want any of these Job’s-comforters to come around when we are down and defeated, just to pour more gloom on the occasion. No, if you have the

ministry of speaking the word of help, do it “with cheerfulness,” Paul says.

The mark of whether it comes from the Spirit or of the flesh is that it be done in the wholehearted, unrelenting participation of the Spirit. That is, *it never ceases*.

Why is this the mark? Because these gifts can be exercised in the flesh, and they can be a fair imitation of the real thing – for a while. But there is one thing about the imitation: If it isn’t patted on the back and ministered to, or given full credit, or public recognition, *it stops!*

- The mark of the ministry that is in the flesh is that it just flashes up for a while, and, as long as it has the public center of attention, it goes ahead. But as soon as that fades, it quits. On the other hand,
- The mark of the ministry of the Spirit is that, regardless of whether anyone says anything or sees anything, it keeps right on going! That is because it is unto the Lord. You can’t continue with the perennial enthusiasm that you show without having discovered the secret of resting on the indwelling life of Jesus Christ. That is why this wholehearted, continual service is the mark of a Spirit-filled ministry.
- It is the mark that you have discovered the fountain of living waters, and, therefore, out of your own inner being there flows rivers of living water and blessing to others.
- It is the mark that you have the secret of a life-time of fruitful service – twelve months out of the year the fruit of the Spirit is evident in your life because you have learned how to really live in the fellowship of an ungrieved Spirit, in the smile of the Lord Jesus, and delighting the heart of the Father.

That is the secret of real, wholehearted participation in these ministries.

A friend was telling me about seeing a truck driving down the highway the other day. It was a moving van, and on the back of it was a sign. As this man pulled up behind the truck, he read:

ANY LOAD – ANY TIME – ANYWHERE

And he thought to himself, “That is exactly what the Christian life ought to be – ‘any load, Lord Jesus, any time, anywhere!’”

That is the key to the ministry of the gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

I am just praying that many will heed the Word of God we have just considered and that your heart will be saying right now, as mine is: “Lord Jesus, any load, any time anywhere – I am available!”

Prayer:

Our Father, how we need these practical admonitions. How much they touch our lives right where we live. Lord, how often we have short-changed you – we who are designed to be your instruments of expression, whose very bodies are intended to be the means by which you manifest your life on earth! Lord, how many times we have withheld them and refused to respond! Forgive us this and, by your grace, Lord, may we recognize that the whole purpose of our existence and the whole glory and thrill of life are to be an instrument of yours. We cannot do this, Lord, in the flesh, but, by that power of your indwelling life, we pray that we may sense this, and present ourselves anew to you in this moment. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Authentic Christians

by Ray C. Stedman

This last week, through the magnificent ministry of Major Ian Thomas, we heard about the indwelling life of our Lord Jesus Christ lived again through the Holy Spirit expressing himself in terms of our humanity. We learned why our Lord has moved into human life and how he has done it.

Now, as we turn again to the twelfth chapter of Romans, we are coming to a section which describes what the Christian life is like when it comes into contact with the commonplace conditions of life – when it comes to grips with the world in which we live. In this wonderful passage in Chapter 12, Verses 9-21, we have a description of a Christian life being lived.

In the words of Ian Thomas, “This is a life not explainable in terms of human personality, but it is explainable only in terms of God.” This is the only life worth living – I hope you have discovered that!

The first thing that Paul says, in Verse 9, is: “Let love be genuine.” The rest of the chapter is simply an exposition of that phrase. I hope you have learned that under no circumstances is the Christian life a matter of imitation. It is never that. It is never you trying to do your best to imitate the character of Jesus Christ. This is impossible. Yet it must be a life of genuine love. God is love, and, if the life that we live is God the Son living his life again through us, then it must be a life of genuine love. It won’t be any flabby, cheap, sentimental imitation. This is what this chapter expounds to us and there are two divisions to it: Love extended – love reaching out to those around about – and love offended – love slapped in the face, and how it reacts.

Let’s look at the first section – **love extended**:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another

in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. {Rom 12:9-13 RSV}

1. The first quality that marks genuine love is that *it is faithful*. As Paul says in Verse 9, “Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.”

Notice how that marks the balanced quality in love. It isn’t love which simply manifests itself in affection for everything – that is sentiment. Nor is it love which cuts everyone off in an attempt to be rigidly faithful to the truth and is harsh, unyielding, and difficult – that isn’t love. Love is a balance. It is hating what is evil, and holding fast to what is good.

This must begin with ourselves, and it is interesting that the Scriptures say we can only love others in terms of ourselves. The Law says, “Love your neighbor as yourself” {see Luke 10:27}. We must begin with loving ourselves in a genuine way before we can love anyone else. How do we do this? Well, it begins with hating what is evil and holding fast to what is good. The measure of what is evil must be determined, not by what we think is evil (or what our up-bringing has been, or our reaction to it), but by the Word of God. That is what determines evil. And that which is good is determined, not by the way we think or react, because the one thing that the devil does in the world is to try to make evil look as though it is good, and good to look as though it is evil. So, if we simply judge by outward appearances we can never love. It is only as we walk, think, and look at life in the light of the revelation of the Word of God that we can hate what is evil and love what is good.

This must begin with ourselves, and this means, as we think of ourselves, we learn not to justify evil in our life. Oh, how frequently we do this! We love to call it by another name, and, thus, make it look acceptable. We look at our lives and we see *worry*, but we don't call it *sin*, we call it *concern* which is simply to call it by a name that sounds more acceptable. But it isn't *concern*, it is *worry* – and worry is sin. To love ourselves as God loves us is to look at ourselves and call that evil which is evil. In this case, we must call it worry and treat it like a sin, not like a poor relation to be kept in the back room; that is, we don't actually kick it out, but we don't bring it out in the front room either. The first aspect of true and genuine love is to hate what is evil.

On the other side, love does not reject that which is good. We don't become falsely humble. We don't act, for instance, as if the body were evil, because God says that it isn't; he says it is good. There are those who try to manifest a love for themselves by rejecting what God calls good, and this is wrong. Love is always the hating of that which is evil and the holding fast to that which is good – it is being faithful to reality. Love is always eminently realistic.

Now this is true also as we move outside to the circle of family. Love doesn't spoil a child by saying that we hate to hurt it. Many parents are literally wrecking their children's lives by the fear that they are going to hurt the child in some way. Children need to be hurt. If they are not hurt it means you don't love them, because life hurts children. Either they are hurt in a small way where they learn how to adjust to a principle, or they grow up absolutely protected from all hurt till they come to a place where the barriers can no longer be maintained or upheld and they are exposed to life and are hurt in a terrible way that utterly destroys them, and breaks your heart in the process. Love is not that way. Love begins with facing small hurts now, and being able and willing to expose our children to them, that they might learn how to live.

But neither does love act in harshness, rejecting a child because there are a few faults in him, and demanding a toeing to the mark in unyielding insistence on carrying our a stan-

dard, without ever relenting or yielding to any degree. It is not that either.

Genuine love is God's kind of love, which hates what is evil – relentlessly, inevitable, and inescapably. Genuine love never varies, is without shadow of turning, never compromises with evil, never pats it own back and says, "This is going to be all right; let's forget about it." Genuine love never does that. It does not reject what is good, nor does it ever call good "evil" or treat us as though we were unimportant, or act as though there were nothing of any real value. There is real value in each one because God has made us, and what he makes is good, and he treats us this way.

This is love. What a wonderful description of it we have here. It approaches all of life realistically. It doesn't exude flabby, sentimental nonsense and gush. It doesn't deal harshly or critically because of the presence of evil. It doesn't throw out the baby with the bath water. It deals with life realistically because God is a realist and God is love. Therefore, the mark of love is to hate evil and to hold fast to what is good. That is faithfulness.

2. Then, in Verse 10, we see that the next mark is that *it is courteous*:

... love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. {Rom 12:10 RSV}

Did you wonder why it says "brotherly" affection? Some of you who remember back in the days when you lived with your brothers in the home are wondering where the affection was. Yet what this is saying is that we who are members of the body of Christ should love one another with "brotherly" affection. I think it simply means that wherever brothers have learned to be affectionate to one another (there are brothers who are like this, and you meet them quite frequently), it is because they have learned to live closely together with mutual respect. You can't have affection for someone with whom you are closely bound, in terms of living together or ties of relationship, without it being based upon mutual regard for each other's welfare, property, and so on. Brothers learn affection only when they are willing to do

so on the basis of a mutual respect for each other. That is what this is talking about. When Christians love, they are to love this way: Showing regard for someone else, “in honor preferring one another” {Rom 12:10 KJV}, asking the other one to step first, to have the preferred seat, the preferred honor, the preferred place. This is having a due regard for the welfare and the importance of someone else. That is genuine love – just simply courtesy – and it’s something that is greatly lacking today.

I don’t know how many married couples I have counseled with in which the problem would have been solved by the simple showing of courtesy, one with another, in the home, just not allowing themselves to fall to the level of speaking discourteously to each other, but to simply be respectful of each other’s person and property. That is courtesy.

3. The third mark of genuine love is that *it is available*. Look at Verse 11:

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. {Rom 12:11 RSV}

Zeal is simply “a willingness to be available, a readiness to minister.” That is zeal. The sources of it must be the glowing of the Spirit within.

Have you ever noticed that, by nature, we are all of us moody and easily grow reluctant to do things for people by ourselves. We only want to act when the mood is on us. We say, “Oh, I don’t feel like doing this.” A call comes for service, and we say, “Well, I’d like to, but I am not in the mood right now.” Or, after we have undertaken it for a while, we say, “I’m tired of it. Let someone else take it for a change.”

This is not the mark of genuine love because genuine love is *available* – it is zealous, it is eagerly ready to minister. The secret of it is that it has caught the glow of the Spirit within.

We read that our Lord Jesus on one occasion went into a city after he had spent long hours throughout the day healing, preaching, teaching, and ministering to those in need about

him. Then he went into the house to rest, but the evangelist records that “he could not be hid,” {Mark 7:24}. Why not? Because, in the next verse it says that outside there was a woman who had a daughter who was afflicted with an evil spirit, and she had come to Jesus. He couldn’t be hid because there was something that demanded his ministry, and he couldn’t be unresponsive to that. So, outside he went to minister to her. This is what you have here.

Genuine love is available. It is love that doesn’t shut itself away in a closet, or build inaccessible fences or barriers around it so that it cannot be reached, but it is always ready to minister. That is availability.

4. The fourth mark of genuine love is that *it is rejoicing in hope*. Paul says in Verse 12:

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. {Rom 12:12 RSV}

Genuine love is always rejoicing and giving thanks. Remember that definition of a Christian?

A Christian is one who is:
Completely fearless,
Continually cheerful, and
Constantly in trouble.

Why? Because he has hope.

Do you know what hope is? Hope is the anticipation of future delight because of present circumstances. Hope is the onward look which sees in the present something which, in its final resolution, is going to bring delight in the future. Hope is looking right at the present, seeing it exactly as it is, and seeing within it the seeds of something which, when they come to germination, will bring a delightful expression. That is hope.

A farmer plants his grain in hope, doesn’t he? He puts the seed into the ground, and he anticipates a harvest. Why? Because he knows that there are forces at work, in the process of which he has fulfilled, that will bring the harvest: There is life in the seed; there is power in the sunshine; there is fruitfulness in the soil; there is release in the rain. These forces combine the very things that are

needed, and are now at work, that will produce the very harvest that he is looking for. That is hope.

Hope isn't just a blind, vague, misty desire for something to come in the future – that is never real hope, that is blind hope and it is utterly worthless.

True hope is something that is based upon present circumstances, and this is what we have in the Christian. He is going through tribulation and trial, and it isn't pleasant, but there is something about it that he sees that is producing and working toward a culmination which will be delightful beyond measure. This is why he rejoices in his tribulation.

As Paul says, "We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," {cf, Rom 8:18 KJV}. "This light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us the exceeding eternal weight of glory," {cf, 2 Cor 4:17}.

And it is these very circumstances that is making the glory possible. Now that is what hope is.

5. Therefore, genuine love is always revealed in a cheerful countenance, in a face of radiant hope, being continually aware that even though the present circumstances are dark and unpleasant, yet forces are at work in them which are bringing about that which will be delightful beyond measure. Therefore, it is "*patient in tribulation*" – no murmuring, no complaining about what you are going through, no taking someone else to task or blaming them.
6. It is "*constant in prayer*" – always dependent upon the Lord, always aware that he is the vital factor in every situation, always believing that he is transforming and changing each situation to work out his way. This is the normal, natural, "plain vanilla" Christian life. There is nothing unusual about it. This is the way it should be. This is rejoicing in hope.
7. The last mark is given in Verse 13: *It is generous*. Genuine love is generous:

Contribute to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. {Rom 12:13 RSV}

It is generous because it recognizes that there is plenty more of what it has received, and, therefore, it can give liberally, gladly, and freely because the supply is inexhaustible. The one who supplied this that we have now will supply more; we don't have to hang onto it then. We can give it freely and distribute it to the needs of the saints.

This is most markedly evident in someone who doesn't have much to give – as Paul said of those Macedonian Christians, "Out of their deep poverty they gave liberally, ... first they gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave themselves to us," {cf, 2 Cor 8:2-3}. This is the normal Christian life – it is easy to live with, it is easy to work with, it is a wonderful kind of life.

When you meet people who, like this, are showing the genuine love of the Spirit of God, you find that they are delightful people –

- You love to be around them,
- You love to work with them,
- You find them pleasant and approachable.

James describes these people in his letter: "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason [i.e., approachable, easy to be entreated], full mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity," (Jas 3:17 {RSV}). That is generosity!

This, then, is genuine love – but the most revealing test of love is yet to come. It comes in the time when love is extended to someone else and is rebuffed. What would you do when your motives are twisted and perverted, sincerity is doubted, and your goodness is met with malice and with hate on the part of those you are trying to help? Here we see the real test of whether love is genuine or not.

Let's look at it in this section, **love offended**:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited. Repay no one evil for

evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. {Rom 12:14-21 RSV}

1. You’ll notice that it begins with *the attitude* first.

What is your attitude? How do you feel inside when somebody does something evil back after you have done them a favor? Is it, “Well, that’s the last time I will ever help him”? Is it a tendency to run them down, degrade them, curse them? Well, genuine love says, “Bless them – do not curse them.” It gets practical too. It moves right into the realm of activity in Verse 15: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Now, this isn’t just an extraneous thought that is thrown in here out of some other part of Scripture; it vitally ties in with what he is talking about. He is talking about these who offend us, these who have injured us in some way. He says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” That is, don’t withdraw from them, and shut yourself away from them, and say, “Well, this is the last that I want to do with them.”

This is what we do, isn’t it? Somebody does something back, and we say, “Well, that is the last time I will ever have to do with them! I’ll never waste any time with them again.” We withdraw ourselves and go our separate ways and never speak to them again. No, that isn’t right. You see, if we live on this level, as Jesus said, “What do ye more than others?” {Matt 5:47 KJV}. What is there about our life that is any different than any other life? How can we be explained on any other level than what is just ordinary human reaction to things? “What do ye more than others?” Jesus said. If you love those who love you, everyone does that. It is when you begin to love those who don’t love you, and you love the unlovely, and you bless those who curse you that you are

beginning to demonstrate a life that cannot be explained in terms of your own personality, but must be explained only in terms of *God in you*. Bless those who curse you – don’t avoid them, don’t withdraw yourself. When there is something for rejoicing in their lives, go and rejoice with them – even though they don’t like you. Send them a note and say you are glad to hear what has happened to them. If there is sorrow that comes, don’t say, “It served them right; I knew something like this was going to happen.” Rather, go and weep with them.

Then, in Verse 16, we have wonderful insight into the nature of human life, where Paul says, “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited.” Why does he put that in here? Well, if you have ever tried to fulfill this word of loving someone who has harmed you, you’ll see why. Have you ever really put this to practice, and gone out of your way to do a good deed in response to one that was evil? If you have, how did you feel when you got through? Didn’t you feel like patting yourself on the back, and saying, “I’ve really done all right – I have really shown that person what a Christian is.” And you go away feeling ten feet high, as though you had done something really unusual. That is the subtlety of the flesh. It wants to take something that God has done in you, and through you, and twist it so that you become proud over it, and, therefore, you lose all the benefit and blessing of it in your own life. So he adds this word, “Never be conceited.” As Jesus taught his disciples, “When you have done all these things which you ought to do, then say to yourselves, ‘We are but unprofitable servants. We have only done that which was our duty to do!’” {cf, Luke 17:19}.

There is nothing unusual about showing this kind of love – or at least there shouldn’t be. This is the way Christians ought to be, and there is no credit to us when we behave this way. This is just the manifestation of the normal, natural, Christian life.

2. Paul moves a step further – from the attitude it moves to *the outward act*. In Verse 17 he says, “Repay no one evil for evil.” Here is a prohibition against any kind of act of retaliation.

What do you do when somebody does something to you that you don't like? You say, "Well, I'll show him how it is." And you retaliate in some way. You don't get along with your neighbor, maybe he does something difficult, so you throw your garbage over his back fence. You'll show him!

I remember when I was a boy in Montana in the cattle country. One frosty morning, I looked out and saw the cattle in the corral. There one old cow who, in turning around, bumped another cow. That cow kicked at her, so the first cow kicked back, but she missed that cow and hit another one. Pretty soon they were all kicking one another. The entire corral full of animals was kicking at one another. What a demonstration this is of the folly of kicking when you get kicked!

Have you ever seen a family behave this way? One little act, perhaps unintended, of injury to one member of the family, and that one strikes back, and somebody else gets into the act, and pretty soon the whole family is yelling and screaming at one another. That is because we are not acting like Christians; we are acting like what we are. There is no genuine love being evidenced, and we need to judge it on that very basis.

3. Then, in Verse 19, there is a third degree of this spirit that says *never attempt revenge*: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" That is, revenge goes beyond just getting even. Revenge is excessive retribution. It is not only getting even, but it is giving him something else besides. God says:

- Never do this,
- Never try to get even in the first place,
- Never go beyond that – ever,
- Never attempt to exact vengeance.

That is God's job. When you try it, you are usurping his job without his power and wisdom, and the result is that you will inevitably make things worse.

We only have to look around us at our life, and the life of our family, and our nation, to see how true this is. Vengeance only perpetu-

ates the evil, expands it, and flings it out wider, so that it touches more lives and hurts more hearts. The only one who has the wisdom and the power to do this rightly is God himself. Therefore, he says, "You leave vengeance to me. I will take care of the individual that has injured you. You must never try to handle this yourself."

Furthermore, he says in Verse 20, "... if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink..." I wish that some of these misguided saints, who are so conscious of truth and the need to be faithful to truth in these days, but are so harsh and unrelenting to those who disagree with them, would read this verse again.

"If your enemy is hungry," what do you do? Do you cut yourself off from him and refuse to have anything to do with him? Do you refuse to talk with him and run him down on every side? Do you print up pamphlets and distribute them so that you can tear him down? No! Read the verse again: "If he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Now, don't misunderstand that verse. "Burning coals" does not mean that you will make him feel so ashamed of himself that he will finally come around, and say that you were right after all. It isn't making him so miserable that you can sit back and say to yourself, "Uh-huh, I've got you now. You are really squirming." No, that is not genuine love. *Burning coals*, here, means "the hot coals of love." You just heap more love on him because of the evil he is doing – that is what Paul is saying. Remember what love is – not sentimentality, not just gush. Rather, love that hates evil but holds to what is good is what you are heaping upon him. It must be genuine, of course, you can't have ulterior motives of trying to reduce this person to a state of shame or self-reproach – that can't be the motive.

During the war, I remember hearing of some American soldiers in China who found that life there was very delightful because they had Chinese houseboys who were assigned to them to do all the dirty work. They did all the cooking, laundry, sweeping, and cleaning; they took care of everything in the house. In certain ways, this life was wonderful because the sol-

diers had everything done for them. There was one group of soldiers who had a fine houseboy whose Chinese name they couldn't pronounce, so they called him "Charlie." They used to play tricks on Charlie. It was fun, for them at least, to nail Charlie's shoes to the floor, so that when he put them on he couldn't move. And they would put buckets of water up over the door, and, when Charlie came in, the water would fall on him. They would laugh at his expense. They would short-sheet his bed, and play all the other little, diabolical tricks that young people know. Invariably, Charlie took it with wonderful grace; instead of getting angry, he would laugh along with them, and he seemed to almost enjoy it. Finally, they began to feel ashamed of themselves. One day they said, "You know, we really shouldn't do these things to Charlie. He has been so gracious about this, and is always so ready to serve us, and then we repay him with these dirty tricks." So they felt ashamed of themselves, and said, "We'll never do this again." And they called Charlie in, and said, "Charlie, we want to tell you that your attitude has made us feel so ashamed of ourselves that we are not ever going to play these tricks on you again." He said, "You mean, no more nailie shoes to floor?" And they said, "No more." And he said, "You mean, no more bucket over door?" And they said, "No more." And he said, "You mean, no more short-sheet bed?" And they said, "No more." He said, "Good! Then Charlie no more spittee in sou-pee!"

You see, if you have an ulterior motive, you are not demonstrating love. This isn't it. This is simply a farce, an outward front. No, as the Word says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals [of hot love] upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil..."

That is what happens when we try to repay or avenge ourselves. We are "overcome by evil." We are the losers. We have lost that battle. Instead, we should "overcome evil with good."

Now, all of this, you will recognize, is simply the manifestation of the life of Jesus Christ at work. You go back through the passage and you'll notice

how parallel it is to First Corinthians 13, but even in a more practical sense. This is what love is, and all of it is Christ at work. It is impossible for *you* to do this, but it is not difficult for *him*. He can manifest this kind of an attitude and heart without any difficulty at all – he did it all the way through his life and ministry.

So don't try to imitate this. If you think you are going to go out now and try to do this kind of thing without depending on him to do it through you, you never will. If you do try, the result will be some cheap, shoddy thing that everyone will see through, except yourself. This is the sentimental kind of affection with which Christians sometimes meet one another.

Have you ever been talking with someone about a person, and the conversation has been very derogatory? Then that person has walked up, and you say to him, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! We have just been talking about you and how wonderful you are." That isn't love. That is a cheap, imitation, shoddy kind of thing.

Genuine love is the kind of love portrayed in this passage of Romans. If you don't have this kind of love, and if you are not living this kind of love, it will do no good to just try to force yourself to it. The answer is that something is blocking the flow of his life in your life, because he delights to be this kind of a person through you. He is ready. He is available. You don't have to plead with him, and beg him, to be this kind of love. You don't have to say, "Lord, give me love." He can't give love – God is love, and he can't give it. He is it. There is no use to beg him, or try to plead with him, to do this because he is ready to do it. He is eager to be this through you.

- If this isn't working in you,
- If this isn't the thing that is manifest in your life,
- Then it is because, somewhere along the line,
 - You are trying to cling to your life and show forth his life at the same time,
 - You are insisting on being unloving and refusing to give up that attitude,

- You are not facing what you are,
- You are covering up or protecting it in some way,
- You are justifying it,
- You are saying, “Well, I have a right to be this way!”

So long as you do that, you are clinging to your own natural, Adamic life, and you cannot have his life flowing through you. There is a block because, as we have been reading all through Romans, it is not “Christ and I.” It is, “not I, but Christ.” The thing to do, then, is to come to grips with what is blocking the flow of his love through you. As Jesus said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone,” {John 12:24 KJV}.

- If it isn’t willing to yield the kind of life that it has now, it never will have any other kind of life.
- If it is still determined to run its own life, be its own boss, run its own affairs, set its own standards, make its own way, it will always be exactly what it is – nothing but a corn of wheat.
- But, if it dies,
 - *Then* it will discover the hidden Lordship that is built into a corn of wheat, which takes over and begins to direct its life from then on; and
 - It becomes, *then*, abundantly fruitful, and all that it ought to be in reproducing itself in a tremendous way.

This is what Paul is saying here. All of this chapter is simply impossible, depressing, and discouraging if we have not discovered that it is possible only if Christ lives his life through us. He is quite willing to do this. When we are willing to stop living our lives on our own, *then* his life is instantly available.

Paul said this in Second Corinthians 4:10: “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.” That is the cross. That is the facing of the end of my kind of life in order that the life of Jesus might be manifest in my mortal flesh.

This life is available to me now so that I may be all that is set forth, all that he is.

Prayer:

Our Father, how thankful we are for the Lord Jesus Christ and his availability to us today. And, as we measure our lives by this standard, we see how little there is of genuine love in us. Lord, keep us from the folly of thinking that we can produce this by our own efforts, or that we try to love. Rather, help us to see that the only thing that is standing in the way is the clinging to some part of our life that has been judged at the cross – our unwillingness to lay aside the bitter spirit, the resentful attitude, our unwillingness to allow others to be blessed without any apparent reason for it, our insistence that they come and minister to our pride, or in some way grovel before us, that we might feel a sense of satisfaction. Keep us from this, Father. May we judge this evil spirit, and, thus, allow the full course for the flowing of his life through us – this wonderful life, this attractive, compelling life which makes us easy to live with, easy to work with, and returns good for evil. For we pray in his name. Amen.

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Citizen-Saints

by Ray C. Stedman

This is a tremendous passage on the subject of the Christian's relationship to government.

If we are Christians, where is our citizenship? Heaven. Do you remember Philippians 3:20, which says "our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ"? In other parts of Scripture we are told that the character of Christians journeying through the world is that of pilgrims and strangers. We are citizens of heaven, journeying through this earthly time, and heaven is our home.

If this is true, does it mean that we are not to have anything to do with the government and politics of earth? Not at all; and this is the subject that is discussed in Romans 13, because it would be easy to get an unbalanced attitude from the passages which set forth the very real truth that believers have a citizenship beyond the earth. Like all truth, it must be held in balance, and this is one area where we definitely need to see the other side.

This passage is a full discussion of the attitude of the Spirit-filled Christian toward all governmental authority.

We are going to look at Verses 1-7 as they are summed up for us in just three phrases: God's institutions, God's instruments, and God's intruders. We will explain that last word more fully when we come to it.

Now let's look together at the first section, **God's institutions:**

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. {Rom 13:1 RSV}

This declares that the authority behind the authorities is God. I feel that this is a lot easier to preach here in America than it would be in China

or Russia today, but it is still true in those countries as much as it is here. All the governments that exist are of God.

It is hard to come to grips with that, isn't it? We like to think that God is behind governments like America and England, but that he has nothing to do with governments like Russia and China. (Some of us think that perhaps India and Yugoslavia are doubtful, and a few others that we could list.) But Paul makes the flat statement that those governments that exist are instituted by God – regardless of what their nature is like.

Remember when the Lord Jesus stood before Pilate, that proud representative of Rome? When Jesus refused to answer one of his questions, Pilate asked him, "Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you?" {cf, John 19:10 KJV}. The Lord Jesus looked at him and said, "Thou couldst have no power except it be given thee from above" {cf, John 19:11 KJV}. That is, Pilate could not even lift a finger to crucify him if it were not permitted by God that he do so.

In Chapter 9 of this letter to the Romans, you remember, Paul tells us that God raised up Pharaoh, that wicked, hardhearted king, and set him on the throne of Egypt. God did that!

In the Old Testament we are told that

- It was God who gave Nebuchadnezzar power as the mightiest monarch who ever reigned on earth.
- And we are told that Cyrus, that cruel Chaldean lord, was his servant, raised up and set upon the throne by God.

All through the Old Testament God represents himself as the controlling force behind every government on earth, without exception.

So Paul is well within the authority of Scripture as he writes this word to us. In fact, when Paul wrote these words, the emperor seated on the throne of Rome was none other than the infamous Nero – and perhaps there has never been, in all the history of the world, a more cruel and malicious man to sit upon the seat of high power. Yet, when Paul wrote, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities,” it was Nero who sat on the throne. Later, when Paul wrote to Timothy, and said, “Honor the king” {cf, 2 Pet 2:17}, it was Nero that he had in mind. All of this is simply confirmation of the statement that government is of God.

Therefore, it isn't man's elections or his revolutions that determine the governments of earth. We think it is –

- We get very busy holding elections,
- We campaign up and down,
- We have election night,
- We wait eagerly at the television set for all the returns,
- Then we get up all disappointed the next morning

– but it isn't really the election that has put these men into power.

In Mexico they used to do it by the process of revolution – you never could change the government there without a revolution. I wonder if they could, even today, change the government there without a revolution. Revolution is the process of the change of government in many parts of earth.

But neither elections nor revolutions determine who sits in the seats of power – it is God who does so. These things are only the instruments by which he works his will; and the revelation of Scripture is that God puts in power the men of his choosing, whether they be good or evil, whether they are beneficent rulers or tyrants like Hitler or Krushchev, or any of the others on earth. Somebody has said that God gives to each nation the government it deserves, and there is a great deal of truth in that.

I think that God, because of his mercy and love, does better than that, and we sometimes get a

government better than we deserve. At any rate, Scripture is clear that the governing authorities, the ones who occupy the seats of power, are there by the permissive choice of God.

If you struggle with that, it is because you don't see what is behind God's purpose in the world today. I think so many of us, even we Christians, suffer from the misconception that God is really making an all-out effort to try to govern the earth properly, and that he is having difficulty in doing so because of the recalcitrance and stubborn resistance of men – but he isn't. God isn't attempting to govern the earth properly today; he never has been. All through the span of human history, God has not been trying to govern the earth. No wonder people sometimes shake their head, and say,

“Well, I don't understand what is happening. I don't understand how God can permit these things. If I were governing the earth, I would never permit anything like that – and you tell me that God is a God of love and wisdom! Why, then, does he allow this kind of thing to go on?”

This is the question that so frequently comes from the human heart. It comes because we do not realize that God is not attempting to govern the earth properly – he is waiting, he is withholding, he is restraining evil, he is governing to a limited extent, – but he is not trying to do the job as he will someday.

He could have done it well all along; anytime that God chooses he can arrest the force of evil, and cancel out all the follies and failures of men, and set up a government that is right and perfect. He could have done this at any time in past history. But the fact that he doesn't, as Peter tells us, is evidence of his love and of his mercy and of his grace, which is withholding the judgment that is necessary in order that all may have a chance to hear the gospel of his grace.

Christians should remember that God is not only here on this earth to save. (We are so aware of that – we know that he has come to save – this is the great task primarily entrusted to those who are his visible manifestations on earth today. We who know the Lord, we who are the bodies possessed by the indwelling Spirit of God, have been given the task of declaring the word of reconciliation.) We know he has come to save, but that isn't all that

God has come to do in the world today – he is also here to restrain and limit evil (to keep it from coming to the full force of its ugly development), and to maintain his power and his truth among the nations.

Do you know that, in the recent Cuban crisis, if God had not allowed Krushchev to believe, at last, that the United States really meant business about the blockade, we would have been in nuclear war right now? It wasn't our clever strategy that finally convinced Krushchev that we were ready to fight down in Cuba, because there were many other times in the past when the same sort of attempts didn't work – it was simply the fact that God permitted him to believe something that was being set before him. And, if it were not for the permissive will of God, we would have been at war. It isn't the tremendous build-up of armament, or the political intrigue that a nation goes through, that keeps it at peace (necessary as these things may be, and are), but it is the control of God in the affairs of men and nations, and it is only the part of wisdom to recognize this.

This is what we have set forth here in the first great statement of the apostle: Every government that exists is held in the palm of God's hand. It can only go as far as God wills; it is under his control; it has been instituted by him. Because of this fact, Christians should have a great concern about governing authorities, for they are specially marked out by God as his territory, and, therefore, we can expect a special responsiveness to our witness among those who are God's servants. Three times in this passage, the government agencies are called "the servants of God" – especially his. Therefore, I believe that we who are Christians ought to be very much concerned that there be a forthright, clear-cut, powerful Christian testimony going out among men who are in positions of earthly power – because God says they are especially his, and we can expect a special responsiveness.

I was interested, during our breakfast meetings last April when the International Christian Leadership men were here in town, that the ones who seemed to respond most openly and enthusiastically to the witness of the gospel were men in positions of governmental authority here in this area. The city manager of Mountain View, who is a Roman Catholic, was very interested, and, as a result, that man is today leading a breakfast meeting on Friday mornings to which, at his invitation, men in executive areas of business and government are meeting

together to read the Scriptures. I was tremendously thrilled to have one of the men who was there last week say to me:

"You know, after the meeting last week, I was going down to my office and fire a man. But, as I was driving from the meeting, I reflected on our discussion together of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and I thought to myself, "If I fire this man, this will solve the problem for me, but I won't be helping him at all." This parable had gripped my heart; Jesus had made it clear that, when we see someone in need, we are to go to their aid. I went down to the office and, instead of calling that man in and firing him, as I fully intended to do, I sat down with him and we talked over the problem and I found out what the trouble was. The result was that we worked it all out, and he is going to make a good man I believe."

That is the ministry of "the salt of the earth" {Matt 5:13}, arresting corruption and restraining evil which would otherwise be at work. It is essential, therefore, that there be a Christian witness among government agencies and authorities.

In the Scriptures {see Acts 13:1}, we are told that there was a man in the church at Antioch named Manaen who was a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch (one of the government agencies from the court of Herod the king).

Also, when Paul and Barnabas went through the island of Cyprus {see Acts 13:7-12}, they sought Sergius Paulus, the proconsul and the ruler of the island, and bore a strong Christian witness to him which was opposed by Elymas the sorcerer. It was there that Paul called down the judgment of God on that man's head, and he became blind for a season, as he opposed the witness of these two men to this leader.

In the Philippian letter, remember how Paul writes about the saints who were in Caesar's household, {cf, Phil 4:22}? Somebody had reached into the emperor's household and won some people for the Lord there.

Then, at the end of this very letter to the Romans, we read of greetings sent to many people in Rome, among whom was Erastus, the city treasurer, {Rom 16:23 RSV}.

All through the Scriptures, then, you see how these men who were in positions of power were exposed to a Christian witness because the early

Christians recognized the truth that every government is authorized and instituted by God – it belongs to him.

Now, the second declaration of this passage is that the authorities are **God's instruments**:

Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoers. {Rom 13:2-4 RSV}

Twice in this passage the man in power is called "the servant of God," either to aid or avenge. In either case, he is doing God's work; therefore, to resist human authority is to resist God.

Of course, where human authority itself resists the direct command of God it is proper to rebuke it, and, if necessary, to disobey it. We have an example of this in the incident in Acts when the authorities commanded the apostles not to preach in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter said, "Whether to obey God or man, you judge. You are God's servants. You are in a position of authority. Now you tell us, which should we obey, God or man? – for we cannot but speak in the name of the one by whom we were called, Jesus Christ," {cf, Acts 4:19-20}. They went out, then, and filled Jerusalem with their doctrine, and ceased not to preach and to teach everywhere that Jesus was the Christ {cf, Acts 4:19-31}. Here human government had overstepped its proper authority.

But, in general, governments are not a terror to good conduct, as the apostle says, but to bad conduct. If you want to have a clear conscience when you are working with the government, just behave yourself. Obey the laws and you don't need to have any fears – unless in the odd instance they come directly in conflict with some command of God, you need have no fear. Obey the laws and you can have a perfectly clear conscience, and can sleep nights. You don't have to worry about anybody coming to your door, or calling you up, or serving a warrant on you. You don't have to hide

behind doors or duck around corners, or cross the street when you see somebody coming. You can just walk through life with a perfectly clear conscience. This is what he says.

On the other hand, if you break the law, the authority is then the instrument of God to judge and punish you. It isn't the human element that is doing it, it is God that is doing it – through the instrumentality of a human being.

We were all interested to read in the paper last week about the president's sister being arrested for driving without a driver's license. Now, thank God we live in a country where the president's sister can be arrested. But, judging from the picture that appeared in the paper, she didn't enjoy it very much. She looked very gloomy as she was standing there before the judge. That judge, you see, had the authority from God to pass sentence – and a president's sister has no exemption from the law. Governments are of God.

Then someone may ask, "How far does this authority go?" Notice what Paul says in Verse 4: "He does not bear the sword in vain." That means that the authority extends to the right to take life, because that is what the sword does.

I think this puts the question of capital punishment in its right perspective. You see, capital punishment is not "legal murder" as some people call it, nor is it simply a relic of a more barbarous age (it is hard to understand how any age could be more barbarous than ours when you think in terms of the atomic bomb and so on), but it is the avenging hand of God himself operating through human instrumentality. When a criminal is executed for a crime, the executioner who pulls the switch (or drops the capsules into the acid) isn't the one who has taken the life. Nor is it even the state. It is God who has done it, and the state is simply the instrument by which God does his work and carries out his judgment on earth.

If you are driving down the street, and somebody bumps into you with their car, and smashes your fender, do you leap out and start complaining about the automobile and start beating the other car over the hood with a wrench? Are you angry at the automobile because it hit you? No! You go to work on the driver, don't you? It isn't the car that did it. It is the one that controls it, isn't it? It is foolish to blame the instrument. It is the one who controls it who is to blame.

I think we need to put this in the right perspective in regard to capital punishment because so much fog and haze has been created to obfuscate the issues. (I looked that word up especially: It means to cloud the issues and to make them difficult to see really clearly.) But Paul puts it in the right perspective, doesn't he? Capital punishment is the act of God in human society. Therefore, God is the one who must be called to account for this, if anybody is. It isn't "legal murder."

The last point that the apostle makes is that government agents are **God's intruders**:

Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. {Rom 13:5-7 RSV}

I think you will all agree that tax collectors are intruders. We feel that way, don't we?

You who are in business love to sit down and plan what you are going to do, and plan the profit that you are going to make – then there comes that disagreeable moment when you have to knock off 30% and realize that this has to be paid for taxes (or 90%, whatever the case may be). You wish that you could get out of it some way. We don't like this official arm that reaches into our business and extracts a good portion of our income, and says, "This is mine." But Paul says that these men who do this are God ministers.

This word *ministers* is an interesting word. It is the word employed everywhere in the New Testament for priests – "ministering priests." In fact, in Chapter 15 you have the same word. Paul uses it in Verse 16:

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister [same word] of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, {Rom 15:15-16a RSV}

In the Old Testament, one of the duties of the priests was to receive tithes and offerings and sacrifices from the people. They were acting as God's

agents in receiving these tithes and offerings and sacrifices. Paul simply transfers that ministry and that work to the government, and says that governments have this right given to them by God to collect taxes, and that, in paying your taxes, you are paying properly authorized revenue to God – for these are his agents in carrying out this ministry. In other words, the power to tax is a God-given power.

Now, this doesn't mean that all taxes are just – I don't mean to claim that – but the principle of taxation is right, and, if there needs to be correction, machinery is usually available for the correction of unjust taxes.

Notice that this matter of paying taxes, among other things, is put under the matter of the realm of conscience. That is, Christians (for this whole passage concerns the attitude of Christians to government) are under a higher law than the world in regard to the demands of government. The worldling pays his taxes and obeys the laws largely because he fears the penalty, or he realizes that this is the only way that law and order can be maintained. But the Christian is put under a far higher responsibility; he is told to pay these things for the sake of conscience. That is, he knows that to fail to do this will affect his own relationship with God:

- If he cheats on his income tax, he has grieved the Holy Spirit and can no longer manifest the indwelling life of Jesus Christ in that ministry of power and conviction that glorifies God and makes the invisible God visible to man,
- If he is unjust in his treatment of government authorities, rude or crude in his dealings with them, or disrespectful (not giving "respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" even through he doesn't like the man or his motives or methods) he is affecting his conscience and is under the disapproval of the grieved Holy Spirit within.

I think that this makes it clear that, ultimately, Christians pay taxes not to the government but to God.

Now, don't try to deduct them from your income tax on that basis – the Internal Revenue doesn't understand theology in this respect, but the Christian is expected to do so.

Not only do you pay taxes for your conscience sake, but for others' conscience sake as well:

- The way you treat government officials is a testimony of whether you are a Christian or not.
- The way you pay your taxes, if you pay them, and the way that you pay other revenues, custom duties, and fees of various sorts, is a testimony – one way or another – of your Christian life.

When I was in England, a man told me about an American speaker who came over there to speak. He was a prominent American Christian and he had been scheduled for a series of meetings. This man said that he met the speaker at the plane when he came in. As they were riding in from the airport to town, the man looked at his watch to see the time, and this fellow noticed that he had three watches on his arm. So he said to him, "What is the trouble? Do you have trouble telling time by one watch? Do you add them all up, or what?" And the man said, "No, I'll tell you: I found out there is a customs duty on the import of watches, so rather than put them in the suitcase where they would be found, I simply slipped them on my arm, and nobody noticed that they were there, and I came right through." The Englishman said, "You know, from that moment on, that man's ministry was a dead thing as far as I was concerned, and I noticed that there was nothing of blessing in his meetings all the time that he was here." You see, this sort of thing immediately touches the spiritual life of a believer and renders him inoperative as far as a testimony and a witness for Christ is concerned.

A great many Christians have been greatly blessed by the reading of books by Bishop O. H. Hallesby of Norway. I have been challenged and blessed by them myself, and Bishop Hallesby had a great ministry of writing that was a help and a strength to Christians around the world. His books were sold in many countries of the world. But, a few years ago, he was brought into court because of an income tax discrepancy, and it was proved that he had cheated on his income tax. As a result, his ministry absolutely ceased. Few of his books were sold any longer. Only those who hadn't heard of this bought his writings, but it was

publicized in *Time Magazine* and around the world, so that one act of attempting to evade his justified responsibility absolutely cut off his ministry; and he was placed on the shelf for the few remaining years of his life. He is dead now, but this is such a sharp testimony of what happens when we cheat, or don't play fair, in this area of life.

Again, all of this is placed in the context of the Christian's responsibility as he touches life around him. As we have been seeing all through Romans, especially in this last section, a Christian is simply a body in which Christ walks through this life.

When our Lord Jesus was here, he paid taxes. You remember he sent Peter down to the seaside to catch a fish once to take the money out of the fish's mouth to pay his tax {Matt 17:24-27}. He didn't have any money of his own, so this was the way his need was supplied.

On another occasion he took a penny and asked, "Whose is this superscription? Whose is this picture?" {cf, Matt 22:17-21, Mark 12:14-16, Luke 20:21-15}. And they said, "It is Caesar's." He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

Now, when he was paying taxes,

- Was he not just as Spirit-filled and Spirit-empowered as when he raised Lazarus from the dead, or did any of his other miracles? Of course he was.
- Did he not need the fullness of an indwelling Father for that task as much as he needed it for anything else? Of course he did.

We also are to do all the necessary tasks of our life in the fullness of the indwelling life of Jesus Christ. We need the Spirit of God for everything that we do:

- If we pay our taxes and fill out our income tax report,
- If we treat government officials with respect,
- If we pay our fees and so on, and
- If we do this in dependence of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within us,

this becomes a powerful, potent testimony that will have eternal effect in the lives, not only of these officials, but of those who observe us in our acts and our relationships to them. Thus, it becomes a powerful instrument to transform and change the society in which we live, and arrest the corruption and dispel the darkness that is about us.

The Christian, as we have seen here, is called to God-likeness. That is, as Major Thomas said, “making God visible in human life through the outworking of his indwelling life.” As we, even in little things, display honesty, and respect, and honor, and carefulness (not for the sake of some better relationship between the government and us, but because we are God’s men from head to foot), this thing becomes an instrument and a channel by which the Spirit of God opens doors, right and left. Thus, the influence of a Christian becomes a potent, vibrant, powerful testimony – a vigorous thing in the life of his community and beyond to that of the nation as well.

Prayer:

Our Father, we have been looking at these words of such intense practical import. There is little here to challenged the heart and lift up the eyes in spiritual vision, but, oh, so much of intense practical application of the truths that we have been learning and hearing out of the Word. We pray, therefore, as ones who are indeed citizens of heaven and walk through this world, that we may remember also that those men who sit in the seats of power, and who exercise authority in our cities and in our nation, are your servants. We pray then, Father, that our testimony, our experience, our relationship to them will be one in which your Spirit will find opportunity to be a channel of testimony and of transformation in their lives and in the lives of those who observe our relationship. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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The Demand of the Hour

by Ray C. Stedman

A Christian faith that doesn't change your life isn't worth a 'snap of the finger,' but when Christ changes a heart and a life, the change that he makes is going to affect everyone around you! This is really the theme of what we have in Chapters 12-16 of Romans. It is a picture of a Christian 'up to his ears' in life. The result of a truly Christ-like life, lived out in the world, is going to be that some around you will be upset by the way you act. You will be upsetting some and comforting others. As someone has said, "The ministry of a Christian is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable."

We have already seen in this section the true attitudes that a Christian life produces:

- First of all, there will be an eagerness to minister among the body of Christ, to other Christians, according to the gift that God has given you. Of course, every believer in Jesus Christ is given gifts; to withhold the ministry of those gifts is to rob Christ of his right to be available and ministering to men through you, and to rob him of his inheritance in the saints. I think it is interesting to face the implications of that.
- Then, also, there comes an awareness and a readiness to accept and to love others just because they are brothers in Christ – not because they are nice, or lovable, but because they are Christians. No matter where they are, what the color of their skin, or the background of their life, we love them because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is brought forth beautifully in the twelfth chapter. In the latter part of Chapter 12 we saw the attitudes and changes made in our life as we relate to the sometimes hostile world around us. In this relationship, the attitude of a Christian is to return good for evil; he overcomes evil with good, and he

doesn't give back in kind or, if he does, he is not living a Christ-like life.

- The third aspect, you remember, was the effect of Christian faith on our attitude toward government. We recognize that government is an institution of God, and that government agencies are servants of God deserving our respect and obedience. We realize, further, that our own fellowship with Christ is affected by the way we behave as citizens, and that our conscience can be very vitally disturbed if we do not give to government, and to those who represent the government, the rightful respect and obedience that they deserve as servants of God.

This brings us to Verse 8 of Chapter 13. In the rest of this chapter, Paul flings back the boundaries of life to include all human society, and, in this section, you will find the people that you rub shoulders with every day. What are you going to do with them? How do you treat them?

Paul summarizes the Christian outlook here in one great tremendous word, and it is brought before us as **the demand of the hour**:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. {Rom 13:8-10 RSV}

Now, I think that many people have questions about this opening sentence, "Owe no one anything": They ask themselves, "Is it wrong for a

Christian to contract a debt, or to buy on the installment plan, or mortgage his house. Is this wrong? Is it prohibited by this sentence, ‘Owe no one anything?’ Well, the answer is, “No!” It is not wrong because a contract, of course, is really just a mutually agreed upon arrangement by which the money is to be paid. It is mutual, and it is never a debt unless you miss a payment; then you come under the enforcement of this passage.

But, of course, if you deliberately go out and contract for more than you are able to pay for, this is dishonesty in the extreme. Paul is pointing out that no Christian must do this because, if you live on this basis, what you are really doing is living on another person’s money without his permission, and that is simply a glorified form of stealing. So he urges, “Owe no one anything.”

But there is a debt that you can never fully pay, and it is a continually valid debt – the debt of love. You remember, at the beginning of this very letter to the Romans, Paul says, “I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians,” {cf, Rom 1:14}. I owe every man a debt; I owe him the obligation to love him; I owe him the necessity of love. The reason Paul gives here, you will notice, is because law is fulfilled by love: Love alone fulfills the Law. In other words, love makes a good citizen out of you without any need for a police force, without any need for enforcing agencies, because no man who loves his neighbor is going to injure him. If you love your neighbor:

- Whether he lives next door to you or across town from you,
- Whether he works in the shop next to you or at the desk next to you,
- Whether you have any other relationship with him,
- If you love him, you can’t injure him!

You will never commit adultery with his wife, or kill, or steal, or covet something that he has. You won’t envy his brand new car, or his fine green lawn, or anything else that he possesses because, if you love him, you are concerned about his welfare. But the man who hasn’t learned to love is merely forced to wait until he can find a good op-

portunity to do some of these things that are unlawful and injurious. That is why love alone fulfills the law.

I was reading just the other day a report in which Chief Justice Warren said that laws are not enough to preserve order in our land. He is right. We need a widespread desire to keep the law, first of all, and, if we don’t have that, law alone is insufficient to control life. This seems to be the missing element today in so much of life. Just this week I heard of a young lawyer across the bay who was prosecuting a couple of men in a case. He had just obtained a conviction when, right in the courtroom, as soon as the sentence was pronounced, these two young men arose, and ganged up on him, and beat him so seriously that he had to be sent to a hospital. This happened right in the very presence of the judge, the bailiff, and the other agencies of law in that courtroom. This attorney has now discovered that the wife of one of these men is threatening to kill him. This is a criterion of the lawless spirit that has seized our age, and the reason is because men are losing their ability to love, and their capacity to love, and law is being relied upon alone as sufficient to keep order – but it isn’t! As Paul points out here, it is impossible to maintain government if you just have law alone. Love fulfills law. As a result, in our present situation, the Chief Justice felt the situation is so desperate that he is calling for the formation of what he calls “ethical counselors” – that is, men who can really teach other people how to love. This is the great need – love alone can fulfill law.

If this is true, then I think you will agree that the great and overwhelming demand of our day is to find a way to create love in men’s hearts, to find a way to teach us how to love.

The other day at a breakfast meeting of executives, one of the men brought up the passage in which our Lord quotes these words: “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” {Lev 19:18, Matt 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31 KJV}. It was agreed among all those men present that, if men would do this, this would solve all the problems of our lives. Everybody nodded his head very sagely, and fully agreed, but somebody had the temerity to ask, “How do you do this?” And no one had an answer. You see, this is the great demand of the hour.

Now, I think it would be easy to leave this right here, but I am not content to do so because this isn’t the whole picture of love, and I don’t want

you to get a false and distorted emphasis. It is true that love will keep a man from ruining or harming his neighbor, but love goes further than that. That will satisfy the law, but that will never satisfy the heart of God if that is all that you show. I think it is easy for Christians to be very smug right at this point. So many of us pat ourselves on the back, and say, "Well, I have never done any harm to anyone," and we expect to be commended for that position. I have found that kind of an expression usually doesn't stand very close examination when you analyze it carefully. But, even if it did, this isn't the full expression of love. Look at Verse 20 of Chapter 12 of Romans, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." That is love. Not just an attitude that says, "Well, I've never done any harm to anyone. I won't hurt anyone." But a positive approach that says, "I will do good to someone." You see, the Golden Rule is not "Don't do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." It is positive. That negative way is the pagan form of the Golden Rule. You'll find it in the writings of Confucius and Buddha, but it is always in the negative form, "Don't do unto others as you have them not do unto you." But that isn't what Jesus said. Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," {cf, Matt 7:12}. This is a positive approach.

Now, I think that we will never begin to manifest this kind of love, which is so needed today, for lack of which society is simply coming unglued, coming apart at the seams – we will never begin to manifest this outreaching love, illustrated by the Lord in the parable of the Good Samaritan, until we first become aware of how pitifully we Christians often lack it.

I picked up in the bookstore this week a very delightful little book. It is called *He Sent Leanness*. The subtitle is *Book of Prayers for the Natural Man*. It is a very engaging little book in which are set forth prayers as men are really praying them – not the words that we usually hear, but the thoughts that are usually behind them – the way we would pray if we prayed honestly what is in our heart. I want to read a portion of a litany which is written in this book setting forth that kind of prayer. This is the way it reads:

From a universe where things can be extremely unpleasant,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From everything that calls from us courage and endurance,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all ignorance, insecurity, and uncertainty,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all personal needs that give the love of others a chance to find expression,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From suffering the balloon of our pride to be pricked,
From suffering the castle of our self-satisfaction to be attacked,
From suffering the thunder of our egotism to be stilled,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all vicissitudes and deprivations that throw us back upon You,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

We miserable owners of increasingly luxurious cars, and ever-expanding television screens, do most humbly pray for that two-thirds of the world's population which is undernourished;
You can do all things, O God.

We who seek to maintain a shaky civilization do pray most earnestly that the countries which suffer exploitation may not be angry with the exploiters, that the hungry may not harbor resentment against those who have food, that the downtrodden may take it patiently, that nations with empty larders may prefer starvation to communism, that the "have not" countries may rejoice in the prosperity of those that have, and that all people who have been deeply insulted and despised may have short memories;
You can do all things, O God.

We who prosper through the work and patience of others pray that we may have the sense not to drive them too far;
You can do all things, O God.

The Demand of the Hour

We pray that our statesmen may do everything they can to promote peace, so long as our own national history and honor and pride and prosperity and superiority and sovereignty are maintained;
You can do all things, O God.

That the sick may be visited, the prisoner cared for, the refugee rehabilitated, the naked clothed, the orphan housed, and the we may be allowed to enjoy our own firesides, evening by evening, in peace;
You can do all things, O God.

O Son of God, we beg, we beseech, we supplicate, we petition, we implore You to hear us.
Lord, be good to us.
Christ, make things easy for us.
Lord, deliver us from the necessity of doing anything.

This is written with tongue in cheek, but there is much truth in it, isn't there? How this points up the need of the hour – the supreme need for men and women who have learned how to show the simple grace of love in action.

We will see in a moment how this is to be done; but now, from the demand of the hour, Paul asks us to take a look at **the hour that demands:**

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake up from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. {Rom 13:11-12a RSV}

Do you notice what he says here? He says you know what hour, that is, what season it is. Do you know that?

- Do you know where we are in the great program of God's redemption?
- Do you know where the events of our day are taking us?
- Do you know what lies ahead?
- Do you know what God is doing today?

- Do you know that?

Well, if you know these things from the Scriptures, then you know that from the appearance of Christ in the manger at Bethlehem to the present time is what is called in the Scriptures "the last age" or "the last hour" of human history. And, if you know that, then you know, as Paul says, that it is the time to wake up! I submit that this is the word we need to hear today. I am afraid that we often hear men preaching who are aware of the fact that the age is drawing to a close, but their word to us is not to wake up, but to hurry up. Yet, as I turn to the pages of the New Testament, I never find that word "hurry" occurring. It isn't "hurry up," it is "wake up" that the Lord is continually saying to us. It is not hurry that is needed. Back in Isaiah, Isaiah says, "He that believeth need not make haste" {cf, Isa 28:16 KJV}. That is a wonderful word: "He that believeth need not make haste." Did you ever see Jesus Christ in a hurry? In all the record of the four Gospels, there is no account of him ever hurrying. He didn't need to hurry because he knew. What the hour demands of us today is not to hurry up, but to wake up. It is not hurry that is needed, it is awareness. "Watch," Jesus said over and over to his disciples. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," {Mark 13:37 KJV}.

- Act intelligently,
- Don't act in panic, but in knowledge,
- Be aware of what you are doing,
- Act purposefully and intelligently,
- Wake up!

If we look around us, with our Bibles in our hands, I think we can see that the long, dark night is beginning to lighten. This long, dark night of sin began at the fall of man, at the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, when man, through disobedience, passed from life unto death, and was plunged into the dark depravity of fallen human life. Thus he introduced the world into the darkness of night which has been running through the course of history from the very beginning. But now, the dawn of God's day of "peace on earth, good will to men," that was first announced by the angels when Jesus came to Bethlehem {cf, Luke 2:14}, is very near at hand. That is what Paul is saying, and "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," {Rom

13:11 KJV}. Of course, these Romans already had salvation in the personal sense, but here he is speaking of salvation in the ultimate sense – the fact that God is going to save the world and the earth, deliver it, and bring it into a place of blessing.

“But,” somebody says, “these words were written two thousand years ago, and if Paul expected the end in his own lifetime, as it implies here, then he must have been mistaken, because it has been two thousand years since these words were written.” No, he wasn’t mistaken. Suppose we were driving down a freeway together, and I looked at your speedometer and it was registering 85 miles per hour, and I knew a sharp curve was ahead, and I said to you, “Be careful. Watch out for that curve up there. Death is near.” You would know what I meant, wouldn’t you? You would know that I wouldn’t necessarily mean that we were going to die in the next few moments, but that there was a very real possibility that we might if you didn’t adjust the speed of your car. But, of course, it is true, isn’t it, that death is always near to us. The minute that we are born, death is near. Though you live for seventy-five, eighty-five, or ninety-five years, death has been near all that time. The older we grow, the more we realize, and the more certain it is, that death is nearer than when we were born. Paul is saying the end of the age, the last age, is near. It has been near all along because no one knew when the end would come, but it is certainly much, much nearer now than when Paul first wrote – since we can look back across the span of two thousand years of human history.

It is interesting that thoughtful men (not necessarily Christians) are becoming more and more aware of an approaching climax in human history. You can’t read the newspapers without being aware that there is an air of sober experience on every side. You travel about, as I have been privileged to do this last summer, and you get the feeling, as you visit various nations, that things have gotten beyond men’s control. We sort of stumbled onto a treadmill which is carrying us with frightening rapidity toward an event from which we cannot escape. Men no longer are in control of their own events. Governments are no longer able to govern by advice and consent; they are governed by crises, muddling through, doing the best they can as each crisis develops, and they never know what is coming.

Charles Malik, president of the United Nations for a while, said recently,

The important thing to learn today is that we are living, as the Germans say, “Zwischen der Zeiten,” that is, “between the times,” when demonic forces can quickly soar very high and can take possession of the world in very short order. The one thing that we must remember is that there is no security between the times – no security whatever.

I think that you will agree that one of the most evident characteristics of the present hour in which we live is this growing spirit of lawlessness, and utter disregard for authority and order. This is the age of the goof-off in industry, the pay-off in sports, and the buy-off in politics. It is evident also in the mounting cruelty of our times.

Winston Churchill said,

While men are gathering knowledge and power with ever-increasing speed, their virtues and their wisdom have not shown any notable improvement as the centuries unroll, and under sufficient stress, starvation, terror, war-like passion, or even cold intellectual frenzy, the modern man we know will do the most terrible deeds, and his modern woman will back him up.

Yet, coupled with this, is the most pathetic confusion and blindness that I think the world has ever seen. Men and women today are like children lost in a haunted woods. Every pastor hears the most pitiful stories of people who live like very clever animals, but they have no idea what life is all about, and they are restless, and bored, and they don’t know why. I am sure that you are aware of this as much as I.

Now, what is the word for an age like this? What does this kind of an age need? Judgment? No, that is God’s work. God is going to speak that word in his own time, and perhaps very shortly, but that isn’t the word for today. What is it? Well, we have already looked at it – it is love. This is the demand of the hour. On every side this is a great hunger in human hearts, and we are living in a love-starved world where men have forgotten how to show simple concern for one another. The great need, then, is for men and women who can love.

That brings us to the key question: How do you do this?

- How do you love these crazy, mixed up, hard-eyed, hate-filled, offensive people that are so common today?
- How do you love these confused, pathetic, shameless folk who live in moral apathy around us?
- How do we meet the demand of the day in which we live?

Paul gives us this in this last section. Here is **the hour fulfilled and the demand met:**

Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness [anybody can do that], not in debauchery and licentiousness [that is common on every hand], not in quarreling and jealousy [that is what you find in the church]. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. {Rom 13:12b-14 RSV}

I like that expression, “Put on the armor of light.” Now, what does it mean? Well, you remember the words of John in his Gospel about the Lord Jesus: “In him was life and the life was the light of men,” {John 1:4}. His life is the armor of light that we are to put on. So, when he says here, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he is saying the same thing as when he said, “Put on the armor of light.” That is, live in continual dependence upon the risen life within – this is the only way to love. This is the only possibility of love for this kind of person.

You read the four Gospels and all the way through is a manifestation of our Lord loving this kind of people. How did he do it? Well, he said himself, “The works that I do are not mine, the Father who dwelleth in me, He doeth the works,” {cf, John 14:10 KJV}. It is the Father who loved, and, as Jesus sent us forth, he said, “As the Father has sent me, so send I you,” {cf, John 20:21}. As the indwelling Father loved through the Son, so the indwelling Son loves through the Christian, through the believer.

This is why we are taught that the secret of loving is not to struggle after it, not to work up some affection for somebody, but simply to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* {see Col 3:10-14}, make his life available to you, appropriate all that he is, and cast away the works of darkness – then you begin to love. Do you see how this agrees with what we had in Romans 6? – “yield not your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God ... as instruments of righteousness” {see Rom 6:13}. And in Ephesians, “Put off the old man with his death and put on the new man which after Christ is created in true righteousness and holiness” {see Eph 4:22-24}. This is the same exhortation.

In other words, you *have* Christ,

- Now count on him,
- Appropriate him,
- Use him!

Don’t sing,

I need thee, Oh, I need thee.
Every hour I need thee.

Sing,

I *have* thee, Oh, I *have* thee.
Every hour I *have* thee.

And *love* – that is what he has come to do!

As Paul points out, there is only one thing that is necessary to this – the desire to break with the old life of lovelessness, selfishness, greed, ambition, and all the other things. It must be a clean-cut thing; there can be no mental reservations about this or any subtle subterfuge. You take him in all the fullness of his overwhelming adequacy for all your utmost needs, but you are to make no provisions for the flesh to gratify its desires along with it.

You remember when Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda, he found lying there a man who had been bound with a disease for 38 years {see John 5:1-9}. Without ceremony, Jesus walked up to him, and said, “Do you want to be made whole?” {cf, John 5:6}. It was a startling question, and I’m sure the man was taken off guard for a moment. But he looked up in his confusion, and said, “Well, Lord, there isn’t anybody here. I have no man to help me

get into the water.” Jesus cut him short, and just simply said, “Arise and take up thy bed and walk” {cf, John 5:8}. The man, looking into his eyes, saw that here was one whose word was with authority, here was one who had all the resources to supply all that his word inferred; so he arose, took up his bed, and walked. Now, what was it Jesus said? He said to him, “Take up thy bed and walk.” Now, why “take up thy bed”? Have you ever wondered about that story? Why did Jesus insist that the man take his bed with him – the little, dirty pallet that he lay on? Why didn’t he just have the man leave it behind? It was a filthy enough thing after 38 years, I am sure. Why did he have the man take it? As someone has well said, “Because he desired that he should make no provision for failure.” If the man had left the bed there, he would have been back on it within 24 hours. When Jesus says, “Arise,” in the fullness of deliverance, then he also says, “Take up your bed.” Don’t make any provision for failure, or, as Paul puts it, “make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Let this be a complete appropriation of all that he is, which means a total renunciation of all that you are.

- I heard of a man who was delivered in his Christian experience from smoking. He had the habit of smoking that bothered him, and he was delivered from it. He took all his paraphernalia – his pipes, his tobacco, and his cans, and everything – and dug a hole in the back yard and buried them there. Then he put a stone over the spot so he would know where to dig in case he couldn’t hold out! You see, that is making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.
- You say, “Because I died with Christ, I see that I no longer need to permit this hot temper to rule my life, and I will appropriate him. I will count on him for continual victory in the hour of temptation – except when someone does me dirt! If they go too far, I think that is justification to loose my temper.” Well, that is making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires, you see.
- You rest on the flood tide of his indwelling life to keep you free from lust and passion – but occasionally you read a sex magazine just to

see if you can resist it. That is making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

I had a friend who was a printer, and one day a man brought to him a pornographic card to be printed, one of those filthy, lewd things, which he wanted printed for his personal use. He handed it to my friend, the printer, and he said, “I would like you to print this for me. I will pay you extra well for it.” The man looked at the card, saw the nature of it, and handed it back, and said, “No, thank you. I don’t print this kind of stuff.” The other fellow said, “Oh, come on now. Don’t try to pull this pious stuff with me. You know that you really enjoy this kind of thing. Just be honest.” And the printer looked at him, and said, “You’re right. I do. I have a nature which likes to feed upon this kind of thing, but I don’t feed it!”

That is what Paul is saying here. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, take his life, take all that he is and all the fullness of his being to be all that you need, but, along with it, be sure that you are not making some subtle little provision for the flesh to gratify its desire, because you can have all of his life, all that you need, but you can’t have it for your program. That is what he reminds us of here. “No,” he says, “clothe yourself with his life.” Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, but remember it is never “Christ and I” – it is “not I, but Christ.” This is what the world is waiting to see.

Some of you have read the little booklet entitled *The Need of the Hour* that Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, wrote. He delivered this message shortly before he died, and it has been printed and circulated around the world. In that message, Trotman comes to this conclusion:

I believe that the need of the hour is an army of soldiers dedicated to Jesus Christ who believe not only that he is God but that he can fulfill every promise that he has ever made and that there isn’t anything too hard for him.

I think he is right.

I like Phillips’ rendering of this fourteenth verse:

**Let us be Christ’s men from head to foot,
give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.
{Rom 13:14 J. B. Phillips}**

Do you know what will happen if you begin to do that? All around you people will begin to see Jesus Christ in you, and *their lives* will be changed. They will begin to feel his love and his concern for them burning out through your heart

- to touch them,
- to help them,
- to pray with them,
- to weep with them,
- to rejoice with them,
- to love them!

You'll always be finding yourself, somehow,

- at the right place,
- at the right time,
- with the right people,
- saying the right thing.

You will discover, as you look back, that *your life* has become what God *asks us to be*: A light in the midst of a dark and perverse generation.

Prayer:

Our Father, as we look at the world around us, we are so aware of the truth of these words. How desperately the world needs to see this kind of life lived; and the only place, Lord, that this kind of life can be seen by other people around us is in the lives of men and women like us where your life dwells. We pray, then, that these words may come home to us with increasing meaning. May we see that the secret is not the struggle of our own life to do something, not some effort to approach men through some knowledge of psychological principles, but rather the simple effect of a life and a heart that is filled with the presence and the person and the glory of Jesus Christ. May we feast upon him, thank him, dwell with him, live with him, put him on, and appropriate the fact that he indwells us and is ours. Then, Paul tells us, our own life will be changed from glory to glory into the same image, and people will begin to see Jesus Christ walking in the midst of this twentieth century. Lord, we pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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By: Ray C. Stedman
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About Doubtful Things

by Ray C. Stedman

In this chapter of Romans, we come to grips with the problem of religious scruples. This is a very practical section, as you have noted in our previous studies.

In our Bible classes in the homes, we have found that the most frequently asked question by non-Christians is, "What about the heathen who have not heard the gospel?" And the most frequently asked question by Christians is, "What is wrong with such-and-such activity?" Both of these questions, I think, are in the nature of a defense mechanism which reveals a sense of guilt to some degree.

This section deals with the question of doubtful things, religious scruples, that area of life where the Scripture does not directly specify an answer, and about which we have many questions. This whole chapter is summed up with three words, and I hope these words will remain fixed in our minds as the key of the teaching of this great section:

The first word is **a word to all Christians:**

As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. {Rom 14:1-3 RSV}

The important word here is the word *welcome*, or *receive* as you have it in the Authorized Version: "As for the man who is weak in faith, *welcome* him." Receive him. Make him welcome. Whatever else may be done, this must be done. This is the one word that governs our relationship to the man weak in faith.

I think you can see already, from these verses, that the subject of this chapter is one of scruples. Here is a man who is called "weak in faith." Notice that he is not called "weak in *the* faith," as you have it in the Authorized Version. It is not a question of weak doctrine, it is a question of weak practices. It is not that he is "weak in *the* faith," but that he is "weak in faith." He doesn't have much faith, and he is facing the problem of taboos or doubtful things. Here is the section that deals with how to handle someone who is a legalist in the matter of eating meat, drinking wine, or observing days.

It is interesting that, in the early church, in the first century, these were the only areas of doubtful activity that are mentioned in the Scriptures. These doubtful things are mentioned in several of the letters of Paul, in Corinthians, in Galatians, in Colossians, and here in Romans, but it is always about these three areas – observing days, drinking wine, and eating meat. You can see the progress that we have made in twenty centuries: Now we have a much longer list – smoking, wearing lipstick, improper clothing, doubtful recreation, going to movies, playing cards, watching television – we have a long, long list, all the way from eating onions to wearing buttons!

Paul says that the one thing that we must not do with such a person is argue with him. You notice that Paul says, "welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions." That is, don't have doubtful disputes to try to settle his mind or make up his mind for him. You are not to have disputes over opinions, and opinions are all that you can have in this area because, in these matters, Scripture is silent. The rule is that, where Scripture is silent, conscience rules. There are areas where Scripture does not speak.

On the other hand, there are some things that are always wrong, no matter when you do them or where they occur. They are always wrong, and Scripture speaks very plainly and precisely about these areas:

- It is always wrong to steal.
- It is always wrong to lie.
- Drunkenness is always wrong.
- Gossip is always wrong.
- Jealousy and slander and bitterness and all these many things that we find in Scripture are always wrong!

There need be no question about those things. When we are guilty of them, we are *wrong* because Scripture says so. This is apparent even in our own conscience, as well as in the Word of God. But there is another vast area where things are not wrong in themselves, but the consequences following their practice frequently make them wrong, and this is the area that we are considering – the area of doubtful things. I think that it is important to notice that Scripture is deliberately silent in these areas. It is not that it couldn't have spoken about many of these things, but it is that the writers, inspired by the Spirit of God, are led to be deliberately silent about them.

When Paul received the letter from the Corinthians, they wrote to him about some of these things and asked him to give them direction upon how to act in regard to some of these things. It would have been very simple for the apostle to have written back, and said, "As an inspired apostle, my judgment is that you must not eat meat offered to idols," or "you should observe days," or "you should not observe days and holidays, Sundays and Saturdays, and so on," but he didn't. Instead, he spent several chapters explaining the *principles* upon which these matters must be decided. Here in Romans he does not settle these matters with direct authoritative words – as he has in other places about other matters – rather, he leaves it deliberately inconclusive, but clearly gives us the *principles*. This is very important because it means that we must follow the same rule.

We must not be presumptuous in judging someone else in these areas. This is not for others to settle but for each man to settle himself, as we will see. The one thing that we must do is to wel-

come them and receive them as a brother or sister in Jesus Christ, as one who shares, with us, life in the body of Christ. The reason is, as Paul says, because "God has welcomed him." That puts things in the right perspective, doesn't it? And what a blow this is to all forms of exclusions in the church of Jesus Christ –

- To closed communion and all such attempts to separate among the people of God, and
- To shut out those who don't act in exactly the way we think –
 - Who don't subscribe to the same minor variations of doctrine, or
 - Who carry out an ordinance in a different way than we do!

All of this is regarded as *unscriptural* in the light of this passage.

The one thing that we must do is to *receive them*, because *God has received them*. If we reject them, we are in danger of becoming holier than God. I am afraid this is a great danger today. So frequently we meet this attitude. Somebody says,

- "We don't want them here in *our* church.
- "They are not *our* kind of people.
- "Yes, we recognize that they are Christians, but *they are just not our kind of people!*"

But, you see, we have no right to think that way, or to talk that way, because it is the Lord who determines the make-up of his church – not the people of the church. And Paul insists upon this here. The one thing that must be extended to all who come in the name of Christ is a free and glad welcome, simply because they are believers, because they are Christians, because they know him. We are not to get them in just with the hope that we might be able to back them into a corner and argue them out of some of their "quaint" beliefs, rather it is to

- receive them,
- love them,
- welcome them,
- make them feel at home,

despite their quaint beliefs! This is the clear-cut teaching of these opening verses. This is the word for all Christians in this area: Welcome them!

In the next section Paul gives **a word to the weak Christian**, in Verses 4-12:

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand.

One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. {Rom 14:4-7 RSV}

The word here is judge not! This is for the weak Christian, the one who is bothered by what other people do in the realm of doubtful things.

Now, remember, it is right for the Christians to judge one another in the areas where Scripture speaks. Where someone is engaged in an activity that, in the light of the Word, is clearly wrong (some of these things we have mentioned), it is the responsibility of other Christians to:

- Go to that one and point out his fault, between you and him alone,
- Then, if he will not hear you, take another with you, and
- If he will not hear them, tell it to the church.

But, in these doubtful areas, we are not to judge one another. I want to make that clear because so many are confused about this. Many think that when Scripture says “Judge not,” it applies to everything. No, it applies only to these doubtful areas where Scripture does not speak precisely on these lines.

The word *judge* means “to condemn” – to say about that person that, perhaps, he is not a Chris-

tian, or that he is a worldly or a carnal Christian. That is what it means to condemn or judge in this sense – to regard him as not being all that he should be as a believer, or being unspiritual, because of these doubtful things in which he engages. Paul’s word is: Judge not! Of course, if these things lead to outright evil, they need to be judged; but, until they do, you are not to judge.

There are two reasons given for not judging one another:

1. First of all, *judge not in view of the Lordship of Jesus Christ*. That is, you have no right to judge. “Who are you,” Paul says, “to judge another’s servant?”

Now, this is an interesting relationship, isn’t it? A believer in Jesus Christ is not regarded as answerable to the church in these areas, but answerable to the Lord. The church hasn’t a shred of authority to set up any rules or regulations in these areas. This is an area which the Lord reserves to himself, and the man stands or falls before him, and not before anyone else. Paul’s question is, “Who are you to sit in judgment over somebody else’s servant?” After all, they are not your servant, nor are they the church’s, they are the Lord’s servant. You have no right to judge them, and you have no authority to do so.

Furthermore, it is no help for you to judge in this area. Look at the latter part of Verse 4: “he will be upheld, for the Master is able to make him stand.” I like Phillips rendering of that clause. He says:

God is well able to transform men into servants who are satisfactory. {Rom 14:4b J. B. Phillips}

Now, you leave it to him. He is well able to do it. This is an area where God assumes the right to correct, and he alone. If correction needs to be done, it is up to him to do it; and he is well able to do it!

It is interesting to watch people in this respect. We always seem to want to judge other people, but we forget that we have taken sometimes ten, or fifteen, or twenty years to learn the same things. What it took the Lord thirty years to teach us, we want somebody else to learn in thirty minutes! As soon as we learn it,

we expect everybody else to conform to our standard; but it sometimes has taken the Lord a long, long time to teach us these things. Paul says that you can't help somebody else in this area. This is an area where only the Lord can help, and he is able to do it. Leave it to him.

Moreover, there is no merit in abstaining from these things – any more than there is merit in doing them. This is a very important note in Verses 5-6: “One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike.”

Does this mean that a man who observes a special day for the Lord is any holier than the man who doesn't? No, it doesn't. Nor is the man who doesn't observe it any holier than the man who does. They are all alike.

I think that, in this area, we have to put the question of the way we observe the Lord's Day, and the way we observe special days through the year, e.g., Christmas, Easter, and other days. There are some Christians who object very strongly to an observation of Christmas; they think it is wrong. All right, they don't need to do it. They object to it, and they feel it is wrong because they feel that God is not pleased – they do it unto the Lord. They fail to observe Christmas because of their regard as to what the Lord would have, but there are other Christians, perhaps a majority, who feel that the observation of Christmas is a wonderful thing. They also do it unto the Lord. Paul says that, in either case, there is no merit for one or the other. The observation of a special day doesn't add anything to you, or make you any holier, it is what the heart says with regard to the Lord that is important.

Again, he says, with regard to the question of eating, one doesn't eat meat because he thinks it is only right to eat vegetables and that he would be defiled, or in some way injured in spiritual development by eating meat. All right, he gives thanks over the vegetables and he thanks God for the supply of it. But the other man, who eats meat, gives thanks for his meat and therefore his heart is as perfectly right before God as the first man. There is no merit, therefore, in abstaining from one or the other.

It is interesting to see that Paul doesn't try to legislate here. He doesn't put down a rule and say, “It is wrong to eat meat,” or “it is

wrong to drink wine,” or “it is right to drink wine,” or “it is right to eat meat.” He doesn't say this at all. He says, “Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind.” And leave the other person's mind alone. It is up to them in these areas.

Then the fourth point under this is that there is no proper ability to judge.

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. {Rom 14:7-9 RSV}

There is only one Lord, you see. None of us live to ourselves. No man is an island – no Christian, especially. We all have a relationship to the Lord, and whatever we do touches that relationship, whether we live or whether we die, it makes no difference. We do not live all to ourselves and according to our own desires; everything we do is related somehow to him. Then he alone has the right to be Lord and to rule in these areas of our life; he won that right by his death and resurrection.

This is a helpful passage to remind us that the Lordship of Jesus doesn't start when we die. I think that a lot of Christians act as though it does – that we only really become subject to him after we die and go to heaven. No, his Lordship begins now! He won the right to be Lord both of the dead and of the living. His Lordship is true of us now, and, in these areas, he alone has the right to be Lord. If he says to you, through conscience or through some sense of conviction, “Stop this thing,” then you'd better stop it because he is Lord. If he says that you should eliminate some practice, or begin some other practice, or change your attitude, this is his prerogative.

But Paul's word to all others is: “Don't judge in this matter. If you are troubled by what someone else does in these doubtful areas, remember that the Lord is able to make him stand. He is the one who taught you, and he can teach him. Pray for him. If you feel this is a weakness in his life, pray for him, but don't

talk to him about it because we are not to judge one another in these matters.”

2. Now we come to the second reason for not judging one another: *Judge not in view of the judgment seat of Christ:*

Why do you [the weak one] pass judgment on your brother? Or you [the strong one], why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; as it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

So each of us shall give account of himself to God. {Rom 14:10-12 RSV}

Now, we have many references to this in Scripture. You know we are told that the day is coming when the Lord shall come and judge the secrets of men’s hearts, the hidden motives which will then be revealed. This is the problem now; this is why we can’t judge each other: We don’t know the motive for our participation, or non-participation, in some of these things, but God does.

The only one, therefore, that we are free to judge is ourselves, because we must stand someday, each of us, before the searching eyes of the Lord himself, and all the secret things of our hearts will be exposed to him and to all those present. Then we must give an account of what we have been, how we have acted, and what our thoughts have been. But we won’t judge anyone else in that day. Therefore, “don’t judge anyone now,” Paul says, “because we do not know the facts, and we have no ability to judge in this respect.”

Now comes **a word to the strong Christian**, in Versus 13-23:

Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling-block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean. If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer

walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. {Rom 14:13-15 RSV}

This word is *hinder not*, – don’t cause another to stumble. This is addressed to the one who thinks he has liberty to do these things. It is true that you do have this liberty, and the weak one is not to judge you, but, remember also, that your liberty is to be exercised within the bounds of love. If you make it difficult for someone else by your liberty, then you are not walking in love. Therefore, *hinder not in view of the nature of love* – that is his first argument here.

I remember Dr. Ironside used to say to me on many occasions, “Remember, Ray, don’t ever insist that other people walk in the light of your conscience.” That is a good rule.

Don’t try to get somebody else to walk in the light of what you feel free to do, or feel restrained from doing. In these areas we stand as individuals, alone, before the Lord. Every man stands or falls before his own master, and the Christian who insists on exercising his liberty at the expense of somebody else is turning liberty into license. The action of love, you see, is to restrain yourself, deliberately.

Did you ever see a father walking down the street with his little boy? –

- How he walks slowly?
- And takes small steps?
- And goes along adjusting himself to the little one at his side?

He has perfect liberty to walk out in full, free stride if he wants to, but, if he did, he would walk away from his little boy and leave him alone. So love limits. And love limits in these matters.

You may have perfect liberty to go into some these places of amusement and to participate in things that you would feel perfectly conscience-free to do, but you won’t do them if you feel that they are becoming a stumbling-block to someone else – not if you love them, because love limits in this respect. The greatest right we have as Christians is the right to give up our rights. This is what our Lord manifested, wasn’t it? The right to give up his rights – this is the mark of love.

Paul says, “Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.” I might point

out that the word *ruin* here doesn't mean "perish." It doesn't mean ruin in the sense of eternal perishing (that he will be lost), but, rather, it refers to the wasting of his life. It is quite possible for Christians to feel free to do something themselves which, if other younger believers see them do it, will lead them into an area beyond their control – where they are beyond their depth. They are not strong enough to handle it, so they get involved in an activity that sweeps them along and sometimes wastes years of their life – this is what Paul is talking about. Don't let it ever have to be said of you that someone else spent years in a wasted relationship, wasting his life, because of something he saw you do or heard you say. This would not be the activity of love.

I think the most searching words that ever came from Jesus' lips, perhaps, were those words when he spoke to his disciples and said about little ones, "If any man offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him if a millstone be hanged about his neck and he be cast into the depth of the sea," {cf, Matt 18:6 KJV}, not because he has brought about the eternal damnation of that one, but because he has caused that little one to waste much of his life by something he has seen in another.

Hinder not, therefore, in view of the nature of love.

Then Paul goes on to another point, Verses 16-21:

So do not let what is good to you be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything indeed is clean, but it is wrong for any one to make others fall by what he eats; it is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble. {Rom 14:16-21 RSV}

That is, *hinder not in view of the nature of truth*, for, after all, what are the important things of life? Are these things that are of a doubtful nature the great issues? Is it so important to you that you eat meat, that you drink wine, that you go to movies, that you dance, that you smoke, or whatever it

may be? Is that the important thing? Is that the thing for which Christ has indwelt your life? Oh, no! The kingdom of God doesn't consist of these things – pro or con. Rather, the kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. These are the important things of life!

We were having a Bible class some time ago and were discussing, in a question and answer session, some of the principles concerning the Christian life when somebody raised the question of the Christian smoking and drinking in society – at parties, etc. This became the subject of discussion; others contributed to it, and soon it became apparent that the impression was being given that to be a Christian is not to drink or smoke. I felt disturbed enough about it that I interrupted the class and tried to bring it back to the point, because these are not the issues. Whether you drink or smoke has nothing to do with whether you are a Christian or not. I think that we need to make that crystal clear in these days. The important things are righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, because of these important things, don't demand that you have the right to exercise your liberty at the expense of somebody else. It is not that important to you, really. If you have righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, that ought to be enough. These other things you can let come or go, as they will.

I think this is a clear-cut example of what we call *consequential evil*. Is it wrong to eat meat? Is it wrong to drink wine? No, of course not. But, in Verse 21, Paul says,

It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble. {Rom 14:21 RSV}

We just said that it is *not wrong* to eat meat or drink wine, but Paul says that *it is wrong* to eat meat or drink wine. Why? – if it makes your brother stumble, then it is wrong. There is nothing wrong in the thing itself – this a consequential evil. If it is a hindrance, a drawback, or a stumbling block to somebody else, then it is wrong.

This is beautifully brought out in First Corinthians where Paul says, "If eating meat makes my brother stumble, then I will never eat meat again as long as I live," {cf, 1 Cor 8:13}. It is not that important to me; I can live very well on vegetables. If it is going to bother somebody, then I will not eat

meat. That is love in action, isn't it? That is awareness of the nature of truth.

Then Paul makes a third point:

The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves. But he who has doubts is condemned, if he eats, because he does not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. {Rom 14:22-23 RSV}

That is, *hinder not in view of the nature of sin*. Sin is lack of faith, but faith is the attitude of dependence upon someone or something.

We have a wonderful example of this in our home. We have a new baby – and what a baby – little Laurie! She is ten months old and has developed a marvelous feat: She leaps from the refrigerator. We put her up on the refrigerator, which is a tall one, higher than my head, and she sits up there and looks all around and beams at everybody. But she also notices the tremendous chasm around her and is a little bit frightened. We have found that, if we hold up our arms to her, and ask her to leap off, she will. But she closes her eyes, and shakes and trembles, and then finally squints her face up, and leaps off, expecting you to catch her. Now, that is faith:

- She is afraid, very much afraid;
- She shakes and trembles before she throws herself off the precipice;
- She is quite willing to do it, but not willing to look –
- Yet she jumps off into our arms!

She has confidence that we will catch her; she is dependent upon us – that is what faith is.

Faith is a leap against the circumstances. It is a trust, despite some of the apparent dangers around, trusting in a force or a person who can sustain. This is what we have been getting all through Romans: Faith is the attitude of dependence upon the indwelling Lordship of Jesus Christ to meet all our needs for any occasion. Anything that doesn't come from that – any activity or action of our life that does not proceed from this attitude

of dependence upon him – is sin. “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” And, as the writer to the Hebrews says, “without faith it is impossible to please God,” {cf, Heb 11:6}. Not that it is difficult, it is impossible, without faith. We cannot please him without this attitude of our conscious dependence upon his indwelling life.

As you see from this, it is not the *nature* of an action that makes it wrong, it is the *origin* of it. Does it originate from an awareness of Christ within? Well, if not, it may be very sincere, it may be religious, it may be costly to yourself, but it does not please God. It cannot please God. Therefore, it is sin, because whatever does not proceed from an attitude of faith is sin.

If we try to get somebody to act beyond his belief, or we force some young Christian into some activity, or we lead them on by our example into something that they feel conscience stricken about, we have caused them to commit sin. Or, if we ourselves move into an area where we feel very ill-at-ease and conscience-stricken, we are not ready for that. Perhaps sometime later, after we have learned more of the reality and the liberty of the Spirit of God, we can come to that activity, but we can't yet. So, “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

Thus, the word to the strong is: *Hinder not*, do not cause another to stumble –

- First, because of the nature of love,
- Second, because of the nature of truth, and
- Third, because of the nature of sin.

Ah, but there is another word in Scripture that says, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,” (2 Cor 3:17 KJV). And the one way that we will be delivered from bondage, from being bound to observation of days, and things, and events, and restrictions, is by our continual role in the awareness of the presence of God in our life. When we learn to accept this relationship, we find that his presence doesn't limit us, it enhances. It doesn't narrow us, it enlarges our life. It doesn't inhibit us, it inspires us. And we can take on far more than we did before.

How beautifully this is seen in the life of our Lord Jesus. He did all those things which pleased the Father, and “without faith it is impossible to please him,” {Heb 11:6}. Everything that he did was out of faith, in relationship to the Father. He did everything out of an awareness of the indwell-

ing life of the Father in him. He did always those things which pleased the Father. Yet, there was never a freer man who ever lived than Jesus Christ! Have you ever noticed that, in reading the Gospels? He was bound by no one. He was limited by no one. He was in control of every situation into which he came. He had perfect freedom to eat with the publicans and the Pharisees and others, even though his enemies scolded him because of this. He had freedom to go down into the haunts of the lowest, vilest sinners, and sit and eat with them, and talk with them, and mingle with them. He did everything in relationship with the Father, and he had freedom such as men have never had.

This is what Paul is bringing out here. It is the indwelling life of our indwelling Lord who delivers us from all restrictions, but we must walk in realism in this respect and go no further than we have been taught by the Spirit of God. As we walk thus, we discover that we have entered into life at the small end, and the result of it becomes a continual branching out into greater and wider freedom and liberty. After all, isn't that what Scripture says? "I am come that you might have life and that you might have it more superlatively, abundantly, with peace that passes knowledge, joy unspeakable and full of glory, and love that passes knowledge" {cf, John 10:10, Eph 3:19, 1 Pet 1:8}. All these things are to be part of those who walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for your awareness of our life, and for the fact that you are very concerned and aware of these areas that are doubtful areas in our life. Thank you, Father, for the liberty that we have in this. Thank you also for the love that limits us in our relationships one to another so that we are willing to wait for someone else – willing to help along the man or the woman who doesn't yet see things quite as fully and freely as we do. Lord, teach us to walk in this relationship. What a marvelous manifestation this is! That we, who learn by grace to be set free of all inhibitions and all bondage, and to walk through this world enjoying everything as you have made it, also have the grace to limit ourselves for the sake of another, and to inhibit our actions, restrain ourselves, and control the impulses of our life that we may live in such a way that we may demonstrate the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for this in his name. Amen.

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Power to Please

by Ray C. Stedman

Do you remember the prayer of the little girl who once prayed, “Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice”? This is really the subject of Romans 14-15 – making good people nice! One of the problems of the Christian church is that we may be quite correct in our doctrine and practice, but very irritating about it. How do you live with people like that? That is the problem of these chapters, and it is a problem that abounds everywhere – how to live with other Christians who persist in looking at things differently than you do.

Someone has well said that Christians can be compared to porcupines on a cold winter night, they need to huddle together in order to warm each other, but, as they draw together, their prickly spines dig into each other and they have to pull apart, so all night long it is a process of huddling together and pulling apart. Many churches, I am afraid, fit that description very aptly. This is the essential problem that Paul faces in the application of all the mighty doctrine that we have had in Romans thus far – the practical matter of getting along with other Christians.

The first thirteen verses of Chapter 15 deal with two major causes of division among Christians. There are those **divisions that arise from a difference of conviction**, of point of view. Then there are those divisions that arise from difference of background. These two factors are at work today to divide Christians all over the world.

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him. For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me.” But whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the en-

couragement of the scriptures we might have hope. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. {Rom 15:1-6 RSV}

Now, please, don’t look around and be glad that so-and-so is here this morning, listen patiently *yourself* as we look at this.

The first two verses give us the problem and the answer: The problem is those weak (or we might call them legalistic) Christians who have the irritating habit of differing with us about certain points of view. They are rather short-sighted, perhaps, in their outlook, and they grow offended at the liberty others feel they have in participating in actions and activities that the first group depletes.

May I just plunge in and take an example that will sort of give us a flavor of what this is about? I think the fact that Christians differ in the matter of the use of the Revised Standard Version as compared with the King James Version in public reading and teaching is one example of a different point of view which can create divisions among Christians; and there are others of this nature, some far more serious than this.

What is Paul’s answer to this problem? Well, he says to the strong (to those who feel at liberty to do these things) to bear with the weak, don’t get angry with them, don’t defy them, don’t cut them off from your love and concern, but try to please them, patiently instruct them, and edify them to their own good.

This is Paul’s answer. They don’t need criticism, they need instruction. They don’t need neglect, they need attention. It is easy for us to please ourselves in these things and do as we like regard-

less of what they think, but don't do that, he says. No, give some attention to what they feel and try to please them, if possible; but at least please them by trying to edify them. Try to instruct and help them to see the reasons why you act the way you do about these things, but don't cut them off. Don't treat them as something inferior in the way of Christians, but love them and please them in this sense. The illustration that Paul gives is that Christ himself (though he was Lord) did not please himself, but, rather, lived in such a way as to edify those around him. He didn't come to live for himself, and proof of it is that he continually met with reproach.

In Verse 3 he uses the quotation, "The reproach of those who reproached thee fell on me," {cf, Psa 69:9 KJV}. That is from the 69th Psalm, which is one of the Messianic Psalms pointing forward to Christ, and those are the words that the psalmist puts into our Lord's mouth as he faces the continual criticism from the Pharisees and the Sadducees in his ministry. In this prophetic passage, he says to the Father, "The reproaches of those who reproached thee fell on me." That is, Jesus says, "I didn't come to do my work, but yours. But, in the doing of it, I have met reproach. That reproach belongs to you, but it has fallen on me."

This, I think, is very indicative of the radical character of true Christian conduct. It moves quite contrary to our natural inclinations. We all like to please ourselves by nature, but, if we are living in the full strength of the indwelling life of Christ, we discover that it is quite possible to live to please our neighbor in this sense of edifying him to his own good. The result will be that we demonstrate a life that is upsetting and disturbing to people. They don't like it, and sometimes we are reproached for the very liberty that we engage in and the attitude we show of wanting to live for someone else. Have you ever noticed that?

People who are genuinely unselfish bother other people; they bother us sometimes. We don't want them around because they make us feel uneasy. They are a little bit too thoughtful of others, and they bother us. That is because the animal in us is very strong and altogether self-centered, and our initial reaction to someone who challenges our liberty is to say, "What do I care what you think," and to go ahead and please ourselves. But if we do this, we are just following the philosophy of the

world, because this is the way that the world lives and thinks.

There are three ways that I have noticed in which you can go about trying to please yourself:

1. There is, first of all, *the outright egotist*: The man who is openly selfish, who obviously doesn't give 'a snap of his fingers' what people think about what he does, who is selfish and doesn't care who knows it, who says, as the rhyme goes,

I live for myself, myself alone,
For myself and none besides,
Just as if Jesus had never lived,
And as if he had never died.

Their philosophy is, "Me for me, and the devil take the rest." There are lots of folks like that. In a way, you sort of respect them, because they are at least openly honest about what they feel. You know exactly where they stand, even though they are very irritating to have around at times.

Well, that is the outright egotist, and he is the most honest of the groups because he is openly being exactly what he is, and he intends to live and do exactly as he pleases.

2. But then there is what we call *the reciprocating egotist*. This is the man who looks at the first individual, and says, "I can see that being openly selfish creates quite a bit of difficulty; after all, it makes people strike back and creates enemies." So his approach is to say to someone, "Now look, I know that we both have our own interests at heart, but I'll tell you what we'll do: You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." That is, "You do a favor for me and I will do one in return." He is very careful to see that he always keeps his accounts in good balance, and, if someone does something for him, he immediately feels that he must by all means do something back and return the favor. It also works the other way, of course. If somebody does something evil to him, he insists that he pay him back in kind. This is the man who is saying, in effect, "As long as I get something for what I give, well, then I don't mind giving a bit." But, really, he is just as self-centered as the first one.

I think the majority of us tend to live on this level. We don't like to be openly, clearly, unmistakably selfish. We like to have it look as though we are doing good things, but we want it carefully understood that there is a reciprocating pattern expected. We want people to give back to us in some manner.

3. Then there is the third kind of an egotist that we might call *the deceived egotist*. He is the one who thinks he is very unselfish. He tries deliberately and honestly to please everyone, and he is always in hot water because, of course, he can't please everyone and he is honestly bewildered by his failure. He, too, is really just as self-centered and interested in self-pleasing as the others, because the thing that he wants above all else is to be popular or accepted. This is what pleases him, and he knows that the way to get it is to try to be as nice to others as he can, so his whole aim in life is to please everyone.

The result is that he really ends up pleasing no one, and he can't understand why his philosophy fails. It is because, basically, he is really still pleasing himself.

There are these various ways in which the heart deceives us in the philosophy of self-pleasing, and we attempt to look as though we are doing something else, while behind it all is still the same old basic drive of the unredeemed flesh to do as I please and to get what I want.

Now, if, as a Christian, we are behaving in any of these ways, then we are on no higher level than the world around us. We need to hear our Lord's words in that searching question that he voiced to his disciples, "What do ye more than others? If you love those who love you, what have you more than anyone else? What do ye more than others?" {cf, Matt 5:47 KJV}. This is not a Christian response. Rather, the Christian response is a radical thing, and, because it is radical, it is always disturbing. It upsets people, and it oftentimes results in reproach of one kind or another. A Christian is so anxious to please God, to give him his heart's desire, that he is no longer concerned about himself, and his concern is honestly for another because that is the person that God is interested in. This is what we have reflected here.

Isn't that the way that Christ lived? Remember, it was said of him on the cross, "He saved others, himself he could not save," {Matt 27:42 KJV}. It was true, wasn't it? He couldn't save himself *and* save others. He could have saved himself and not saved others, but he saved others and himself he could not save. This was said to him in reproach, and it was true. But, in the mighty mystery of resurrection, not only did he gain all the others, but he gained himself back again as well. *There* is a principle of the Christian life: We give up in order to get. This is what you will find reflected again and again throughout the Scriptures. Jesus said, "If a man save his life, he shall lose it," {cf, Matt 15:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33}. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it dies [if it gives up its rights, loses itself], it shall bear much fruit," {cf, John 12:24}. This is the principle that we have here. I think it was C. S. Lewis who said,

If the Christian aims for heaven,
then earth will be thrown in as well.
But if he aims for earth,
he loses both earth and heaven.

That is simply the reflection of this same principle.

This is further illustrated, not only in the life of Christ, but, also, as Paul says in Verse 4, by the whole of the Old Testament. All these men of old teach the same lesson, for "whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." Who of you who heard that wonderful message of Ian Thomas' on Moses and the rod, and his repeated affirmation "drop it," will ever forget the power and the searching quality of that message? These Old Testament stories are designed to teach us, by graphic and lucid illustrations, the very points the New Testament sets forth in this respect; and all of the Old Testament is simply a record of how God taught men to live not to please themselves, but to please him.

- There is the story of Jacob, that scheming, shrewd operator (we would call him a BTO today – big time operator) who was always looking for his percentage in everything that he did, and scheming to get his own self-interest

satisfied. As you read that account {in Gen 25-32} you see how God dealt with that man through years and years of his life, until, at last, he brought him to the place where he wrestled with the angel alone beside the brook of Jabbok. There God touched him and rendered him helpless, and, in his helplessness, all he could do was cling to God, to the angel that wrestled with him, and it was then that his name was changed from Jacob (the usurper, the supplanter, the impostor) to Israel (the prince of God). What a wonderful picture that is for us of the way God is at work in our lives to teach us self-centered creatures the same truth!

- Take the story of Abraham {Gen 11-25} and his long pilgrim journey, and how God led him through crisis after crisis. Each crisis reflects something that you and I go through, and, out of it, we see the working of God in the ways of human affairs.
- Take Joseph and the time that he languished in prison {Gen 40-41}, when it looked as if all hope had failed and that he would spend the rest of his life in that dungeon – there was nothing but darkness in the days ahead. Yet, out of it and through it, God worked to bring him, in just a short time, to the very highest and exalted throne of Egypt.
- Then there are the stories of Samson, of David, of Hosea, of Daniel, and of all those men and women of God of the Old Testament.

Paul says that all of these were written down, not only to give a historical account of what they did, but, more than that,

- To show us how God teaches us how to turn from a life of self-pleasing, and
- To tell us what he has done to cut it off and render it invalid, and
- To make us able to lay hold of the indwelling life of Jesus Christ, and
- To walk in the way that will be not pleasing to ourselves but pleasing to him.

The Old Testament is really the richest commentary ever written on the New Testament. If you are coming to a place where faith is beginning to fail and your heart finds itself in the grasp of doubt, then turn to the record of God at work with men of the Old Testament. You will find, as you read thoughtfully, that your faith will begin to flame up again because “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God,” {cf, Rom 10:17}. It’s as the Word of God rings in our ears that faith is created in our hearts to lay hold of the truth we hear, and to make it available in our lives.

Verses 5-6 give us the result of living this kind of life, and the secret of it: “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement [of patience and comfort – that is kind of a God he is, one of reliability and encouragement and comfort] grant you to live in such harmony with one another [even though you have different points of view], in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, that is the end and aim of human life, to “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Every Christian heart wants that. Is there any Christian who, deep down in his heart, does not want the glory of God in his life? Well, then, the way to produce it is to live in harmony with one another. That is the procedure. It says that even though Christians:

- Hold different points of view (they do not come to some universal agreement on doctrine – that isn’t what is necessary),
- Despite this, they can be so interested in one another and so concerned about one another that they can live in harmony,

and the result is that they glorify God. What is the key to it? It is tucked away in one little phrase which, if you miss it, you will want to live in harmony with others but you will find yourself quite incapable of doing it. The key is this little phrase, “in accord with Christ Jesus.” You see, when Paul mentions that Christ did not please himself, he is not holding him up as an example to follow, *he is lifting him up as a life to appropriate!* That is the big difference! We are not just to try our best to live the same way, because we can’t. Our own natural inclinations of self-pleasing rise up and ref-

use to permit us to do that. But we must never forget that these exhortations that we read in these last five chapters of Romans rest solidly and squarely on the teachings of Romans 5, 6, 7, & 8. It is back there that we learn that God has done something about this old Adamic life which naturally moves to evil –

- Has cut it off, and
- Has given us, in place of it, the indwelling life of the Son of God himself, and
- It is his purpose and desire to live that life again through us!

In the doing of it, we find it quite possible to do all that he does because *he does it through us*. This is what it is speaking of here when it says, “in accord with Christ Jesus,” that is, in *fellowship* with him.

Biting your lip, and trying to keep your temper is not the secret of living with difficult people; that is never it. The secret is a thankful heart which continually looks up to the Lord Jesus. It says, “Thank you, Lord, for the quietness and the calmness, the purity and the love which is available to me through you continually. Thank you.” A thankful heart and an obedient will that seeks to please another for his own good is the secret of living with difficult people. You try that and see if it doesn’t work.

The second section, in Verses 7-13, is that of **harmony despite differences of background**. The apostle handles it along the same line. He begins, first of all, in Verses 7-9a, with the problem and the answer:

Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. {Rom 15:7-9a RSV}

That is, there were two groups in the Roman church, as in most of the churches then, the Jews and the Gentiles. They were both Christians but they came from varying backgrounds, and the

problem of the divisions in the church arose over these varying backgrounds. I think it is difficult for us to comprehend how different these backgrounds were because, today, we don’t see it quite as strongly as they did then. To a Jew of Paul’s day, a Gentile did nothing right –

- He ate the wrong foods,
- He read the wrong books,
- He followed the wrong leaders,
- He observed the wrong customs,
- He even talked the wrong language;
- He did nothing right!

So, when these two come together in the church, there was considerable friction that arose between them – not because of any difference of their acceptance of Christ and their appropriation of his life, but because of these different points of view that came from their background. But Paul says, “Welcome each other, nevertheless. Receive one another because Christ has received you.” That is, all racial and class distinctions are to make no difference whatsoever among Christians. All these things are merely superficial, surface points of view. The important thing is that God has received a man; therefore, we must receive him because he is a brother in Jesus Christ.

This is a greatly needed truth these days. I think that if the Christians of the South had believed these words and grasped this truth, and had practiced it, all this tragic and heartbreaking story that is going on now in Mississippi, and in other places in the South, would have been avoided completely. I believe the fault of it lies squarely with the Christian church in the South because the Christians did not practice what the Lord himself had made so crystal clear. But yet, even here in the North, we are hardly above criticism in this respect – along either racial or social lines. There is a great danger of Christians becoming *class* conscious as well as *race* conscious.

I was reading *Eternity Magazine* this week, the January issue, in which there is a review of all the world events of 1962. William Peterson, one of the editors, comments about the national scene in this way:

Christianity became in 1962 more of a class religion. For those who couldn’t afford a second home but who didn’t feel uncomfortable

in a white shirt, church attendance was still fashionable. The labor movement peacefully coexisted with the church and neither bothered each other very much.

There may be a great deal of truth in that. We tend to be cliquish, and to think of our church as being restricted only to those in our income group, but we must always remember that, within the church of Jesus Christ, there are no distinctions at all. There cannot be, for God has received a man, and this must be our basis of our receiving him as well.

I had a couple introduced to me one day with the words, "This is our kind of people!" It made me wince when I heard it because the clear word of God is to welcome all who come in the name of Christ, because God has received them.

Again, the illustration of this is Jesus himself:

- He became a servant to the Jew and the Gentile alike.
- He came to the Jews in accordance with the promises given to the fathers.
 - He went about doing good and ministering to Israel, healing the sick and raising the dead, and ministering good throughout the length and the breadth of the land of Israel exactly as the fathers had foretold, as the patriarchs had promised.
- But he also came to the Gentiles.
 - Remember he said, on one occasion, to his disciples, "Other sheep have I which are not of this fold, them also must I bring," {cf, John 10:16}. He was looking out from the borders of Israel to the Gentile world, and, in accordance with Scripture, on the day of Pentecost the gospel began to go out to the Gentile world.

Paul says, as he quotes Scripture to prove what he said here, that all this was in line with what was promised when Christ came – both for the Jew and the Gentile. Then, in Verses 9b-12, he gives us these quotations:

As it is written,

**"Therefore I will praise thee among the
Gentiles,
and sing to thy name";
and again it is said,
"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with the people";
and again,
"Praise the Lord, all Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him";
and further Isaiah says,
"The root of Jesse shall come,
he who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him shall the Gentiles hope."
{Rom 15:9b-12 RSV}**

Perhaps this doesn't strike us now with the importance that it did then, because, then, the question was hot as to the differences between the Jew and the Gentile. But, in application, it covers all the problems of racial, and creedal, and political differences that we find in our churches today.

You see, no Christian has the right to refuse fellowship to another Christian because of the color of his skin, or his national background, or his political creed – even if he comes from a communist country. (I know that it is not possible to be a convinced communist and a true Christian, but it is quite possible to be a true Christian in a communist regime.) I think we need to remember, in these days, this word of the apostle: "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God," {Rom 15:7 RSV}.

Now again, in just one verse, Verse 13, we have the result and the key for making this possible:

**May the God of hope fill you with all joy
and peace in believing, so that by the power
of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
{Rom 15:13 RSV}**

The result of Christian harmony is abounding in hope, the conviction of the final victory – that is what hope is. You remember that, earlier in our studies, we saw that hope really is a look at the present and an extension out into the future. Hope is:

- Looking at your present circumstances,
- Seeing forces at work in them that will change the whole picture in some coming day, and

- Rejoicing because, by looking at the present, you see the possibilities of change and the blessing of the future.

That is what hope is.

If you can't see anything in the present that is working that way, you have no hope. But hope is really a look at the present moment. Paul says that as Christians begin to overlook and bear with one another in these differences of background and outlook, and thus live in harmony, they then "abound in hope" because they see in the present circumstances the possibilities of unheralded blessings in future days. They see that this ability to love, in spite of differences, as it is applied to the eternal ages, is going to mean a wonderful blessing throughout eternity. That is hope, the abounding hope, and the procedure of it is in the power of the Holy Spirit: In other words, this is not a natural thing – to have hope in these days. It is not natural for people to live together in harmony when they have different backgrounds. It is not natural for us to expect to see blessing coming out of differences. No, it takes a unique power to do that. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit of God. And the key to the release of that Holy Spirit is given in the one word, *believing*: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing."

I want to stress that briefly because I think that we have gone astray in this respect. Oftentimes people come to me, and say, "What is the matter with my Christian life? I have come to a plateau where I seem to be so bored, and nothing interesting is happening, and I have lost all vision and joy and victory in my life. It seems to be so dull and lifeless. What can I do?" For years I think I gave a wrong answer to that. I said to them, "Well, are you reading the Bible?" And usually it turned out that they weren't. Or, "Are you having times of prayer?" And I gave the pat answer which is so easily given by most of us, "What you need is time for prayer and reading the Scriptures – prayer and the Bible." But I have come to see that this isn't the answer. What they need is to *believe* what they read in Scripture, and *believe* what they pray – that is the answer. These other things are merely mechanics which make possible the believing, but *believing is the real answer*. It isn't Bible reading, or prayer, or Christian fellowship that unlocks the power of the Holy Spirit. It is *believing* what you read or what you pray:

- When you believe that Jesus Christ indwells you,
- When you believe that he is all that you need,
- When you believe that he intends to act through you,
- Then you can act!

You discover that all that he is becomes visible through you and accomplishes all that needs to be done. The result is power and joy and peace, as Paul prays here.

This is the way I learned to drive a car, didn't you?

- I believe that, when I get into a car, there is gas in tank (and usually I am right) and there is an engine under the hood, and
- I believe that these are fully adequate to take this car over any road I choose to drive it, and
- I believe that all of it was designed to be responsive when I turn on the key and step on the gas.

So I do it, and it works. I don't get into a car, and say to myself: "I believe there is gas in the tank, I believe there is an engine under the hood, I believe that it will work," then get out and start pushing! No! I do it, I try it, I step out on it, and it works!

That is exactly what Paul is talking about. The God of hope cannot fill us with joy and peace if we don't believe – which means to act on what we know. But it is when we *believe* and *act* that the power of the Holy Spirit begins to work through us and causes us to abound in hope – for all around us are the evidences that God is at work accomplishing his purposes in our lives.

Let me read these two brief prayers of Verses 5, 6, & 13 again, because they are prayers that the apostle closes these problems with:

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice

glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. {Rom 15:5-6 RSV}

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. {Rom 15:13 RSV}

Isn't that a wonderful prayer for 1963?

Prayer:

Our Father, we can but echo the words of these prayers. How they sum up all that we need, as a body of believers together, in the understanding of one another's differences, and to be ready and concerned with each other, and ready to help and bless one another. We pray that we may begin to believe thy word, and act upon it, and, thus, discover the power of the Holy Spirit to make our lives such that we may abound in hope. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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The Minister of Jesus Christ

by Ray C. Stedman

You may not have realized it, but we finished the book of Romans last week as far as doctrine is concerned. From the 14th verse of Chapter 15 to the end of the book, we are now in matters that are a personal postscript that the apostle added to this letter. He wrote this letter to Rome, probably from the city of Corinth, and said all that was on his heart – and what a tremendous and full message this was! Then, as he came to the close of the letter, he added certain personal words. It is this section that we enter into now. It is almost as though we have been listening to Paul teaching these Romans, and class is dismissed, and we get a chance to meet the teacher a bit in these last sections.

In this autobiographical section, Paul speaks of four aspects of his ministry and reveals here the heartbeat of a true minister of Jesus Christ.

Since every believer in Christ is in the ministry, in the sense that the ministry of the gospel is committed to them (and not to some special class called “the clergy” who wear their collars backwards and don long robes), the words that we read here of Paul as a minister apply to each one of us. Therefore, this is a very relevant passage for us.

The first ministry that Paul speaks of is what we might call **the ministry of reminding**. That is a blessed ministry, the ministry of reminding other Christians:

I myself am satisfied about you, my brethren, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. {Rom 15:14-16 RSV}

In a sense, everyone who reads the letter to the Romans is taking a self-examination of his own spiritual effectiveness. I don't think a Sunday goes by but that someone says to me after a message, “You know, you were talking just to me this morning. In fact, I noticed that you kept looking right at me all the time you were talking.” I must say that I have no awareness of picking out individuals at all as I am teaching through this book, but this is the phenomena which often occurs when the Spirit of God is taking the truth and bring it right home to the heart. You can't listen to the book of Romans honestly and openly without having this sense of being under examination yourself. I am sure that these first recipients of this letter had that feeling as the letter was read in the gathering in Rome.

Now, as we come to the close of the letter, Paul gives them their grade. And, although he has been saying things that sound rather penetrating and that get right underneath their skin, he says to them, “I myself am satisfied with you.” That is a wonderful grade to have from such a man as this!

He said, “I am satisfied.” That is, “I have never been there to Rome, but from all that I have heard, I believe that you are in good shape spiritually.” There are three things that convinced him of this:

- First of all, they were full of all goodness, that is, their hearts were right. Paul could sense that their motives were true – that the Spirit of love and truth and goodness was at work among them – otherwise he couldn't say something like this. This is an admission and recognition on his part that their hearts were right and he acknowledged that.

- Second, they were “filled with all knowledge,” that is, their heads were right as well. This doesn’t mean that they knew all things, that there was nothing that they needed to be instructed in, but, rather, that they acted intelligently – they acted from knowledge. They weren’t, as he wrote to one of the other churches, “tossed about by every wind of doctrine” that came along {cf, Eph 4:14}, but they acted out of an intelligent comprehension of what God wanted them to know. They acted purposefully. He commends them for that. They were not like many Christians, even today, who seem to spend their whole Christian life just trying to muddle along and do the best they can, hoping that it will all turn out all right in the end. No, these Romans didn’t do that. They knew something, and they acted from that knowledge. They didn’t act apart from it. Paul recognizes that, so their heads were right as well.
- The third mark was that they were “able to instruct one another.” That is, they were beginning to show signs of real maturity. This is such a wonderful mark of growing up in Christ, of beginning to take on full stature as a believer, when you are able to help someone else with what you have learned – “able to instruct one another.” Remember, he wrote to the Hebrews, “You have need that some teach you again what be the first principles of the doctrine of Christ; for when you ought to have been teachers, you were in need of being taught, and as such you were as babes and you were uninstructed in the word of righteousness – you needed to grow up,” {cf, Heb 5:12}. In other words, you have never passed beyond babyhood in your spiritual development until you have come to the place where you can genuinely help another person in some aspect of their life. Now, I don’t mean just teach them. I mean really help them, deliver them, bring them out of difficulty by a word of counsel, or advice, or opening of Scripture that helps them to see something that they have never seen before.

This is the mark of maturity, and I think here is one of the great problems of the American church, particularly. Most of us suffer from what someone has described as

“prolonged adolescence merging into premature senility.” We never grow up – that is the problem.

One of the great admonitions the apostle continually makes is that Christians begin to grow up into Christ so that they are “able to instruct one another.”

Despite all this, they still needed the ministry of reminding – they needed the apostle. No matter how much their hearts desired Christ, no matter how much they knew of him, they were still subject to the very human failing of being apt to forget.

When I was traveling with Dr. Ironside, I saw in action what I had heard of previously – an exhibition of the marvelous memory that he had. For instance, he could read a poem five or six stanzas long through just twice and he would have it memorized. He demonstrated in many ways a remarkable facility for memory. (His wife used to say that his memory was so remarkable that he could even remember some things that didn’t happen at all!) But most of us are not equipped like that. Most of us have wonderful “forgetters,” don’t we? No matter how many times we hear truth, we still have difficulty remembering it, and putting it to work when we should. We need, therefore, each other to remind one another of what we have learned.

This is the ministry that Paul engages in by writing the book of Romans. “I am simply reminding you of those old things that you need continually to know.”

One point especially concerned him: He said he is concerned “that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” That is the supreme thing. In saying this, he recognizes the clear possibility

- that there is service which is not acceptable,
- that it is quite possible
 - to labor diligently as a Christian, and be engaged in many forms of activity, and
 - to do so out of earnestness, faithfulness, and even costliness in terms of time and effort,
- and yet have it totally unacceptable to God,

because the one thing that makes service acceptable is that it is sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

I think you remember when Major Thomas was here, he told us that the word *sanctified*, which I think has theological overtones that frighten us, really means, simply, “to devote something to the intended purpose for which it was made.”

- You sit on a chair and you sanctify it; you use it for the purpose it was intended for.
- When you play an organ, you sanctify it; an organ was intended to be played. You don’t attempt to type a letter with it – that would be to use it in an unsanctified way – but you play it.
- When you sanctify your shoes, you put them on your feet; that is what they were intended for.

This is the simple meaning for *sanctification*: “to put to the intended use.”

What Paul is saying here is that, if we want our lives to be acceptable to God:

- Then the only possible way in which this can be done is for our human personality to become available to the indwelling life of Jesus Christ,
- That, through the Holy Spirit, his transcendent power may be continually manifested through us to accomplish the purpose and the program that he has set before us.

He wants us to do the thing which is right in front of us – that is what we were made to do. We were not made to sit down and decide how to please God, and to work out a program of our own, and bring it to the Lord, and say, “Now, Lord, this is what I have decided I’ll do for you.” This is *un-sanctified service*. Sanctified service is to say, “Lord, here am I. Send me,” {Isa 6:8 KJV} and to present yourself to be used for the fulfillment of his program, and to the carrying out of his purpose, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, using his power and depending on his indwelling life. That is acceptable service, and this is the thing that concerned the Apostle Paul.

This is what man is made for. We have it carved in letters at the front of our platform here,

“You are not your own ...” – you were never made to be your own, and, if you think you are your own and can run your own life, you are defeating the purpose for which you were created. “You are not your own, you are bought with a price.” Therefore, acceptable service is simply to allow yourself to be available and at the disposal of the One who has the right to use you –

- As he pleases,
- In the place that he pleases, and
- Under the conditions that he chooses.

That is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and this is what Paul was concerned about.

We continually need this reminder because the philosophy of the flesh, the Adamic theory, is that we can do all things ourselves – that we don’t need God. We find this philosophy underlying almost all the activity of the world today. We get so proud over what we have created:

- All the missiles and the marvels of modern scientific life,
- All the gadgets and the gimmicks that are available to us,
- All the tremendous knowledge that we have ferreted out during the centuries.

We become so proud of it that we think we can do everything. And when we come to the place where we think that we can do everything, then we discover that God lets us go ahead on that basis, and we have no one upon whom we can rely except ourselves. It is a very disconcerting experience to suddenly find that we are alone on the bridge of the ship and that we have no one else to seek advice from. We have to control this tremendous vessel as it makes its way across the sea of life, and it is a frightening thing. That is why men who think that way always have, underneath, a sense of uncertainty and an awareness that they are not equipped, they are not able, they are not capable. We never were made to be – that is the whole point. And the Christian life is simply one that has recognized what we were made to be, and is willing to be that. Paul says that this is “sanctified by the Holy

Spirit,” and the Spirit is ready to put that into practice.

Now, this is further illustrated in what Paul says about **the ministry of reconciling**, Verses 17-24:

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ, thus making it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on another man’s foundation but as it is written,

**“They shall see who have never been told of him,
and they shall understand who have never heard of him.”**

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little. {Rom 15:17-24 RSV}

Here is a man who yearns to preach Christ in the farthest corner of the earth. He is a debtor, as he says at the beginning of this letter, to the Greeks and to the barbarians, no matter where they are. He owes them something, and, in this brief reference, he reminds us how he journeyed up and down across Asia Minor, and he crossed into Europe, and he preached in Philippi and Thessalonica, in Berea and down in Athens, then in Corinth and the city of Ephesus, and in all the little villages in between in western Asia and eastern Europe.

Now he longs to go on to Rome where he has never been, and see these Christians whom he has never seen but whom he greets by this letter. But his eye looks even beyond that – it looks on to the farthest western regions, to Spain, and wherever men have never heard the saving name of Christ. His ambition is to preach Christ where he has never been named before. He hasn’t any desire to build

on another’s foundation, but his is the heart of a pioneer. He found in Isaiah, the 52nd chapter, a verse that has seemingly become his life verse: “They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him,” {cf, Isa 52:15}. Throbbing in his heart is this passion and yearning of the apostle to reach out to all men everywhere who have never heard – that was his calling. He was called to be an apostle (a sent one) to the unexplored, the untouched regions of earth, carrying the name of Christ.

That was his calling. Yours may be very different.

This week we are going to begin a Missionary Conference, and, as the conference goes on, we trust and pray that the Holy Spirit will be continuing his work of thrusting out laborers into the harvest. We hope and pray that God will speak to the hearts of some young people here in our midst, and say to them, “I want you, and I want you out there, or there, or there” – some place in the far corners of the earth. But we are also praying and hoping that the Holy Spirit will say to others, “I want you to stay here, and work for them, and send these others out – that is your calling, your part of the work.” All of them are together in fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation which has been committed to us – that we declare to world, wherever there is a need for it, that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, and that *anyone who will* may come and receive him.

But the imperative note in what Paul says here is (and I want to stress this so we won’t get this out of focus) that, in any case,

- whether you fulfill the pioneer ministry of going out to the regions beyond, or
- whether you stay home and teach a Sunday School class and work here,

it might be Christ at work in you and through you, – not you trying to do your best for him – that is the important thing.

You notice how Paul puts it. He says, “If any part of my ministry does not stem from God’s work through me, I don’t even want to talk about it. I have nothing to say about it. It isn’t even worth mentioning.” He says, “I will not venture to speak

anything except what Christ has wrought through me.”

I want to say that this was a difficult truth for the Apostle Paul to learn. It was a long and weary way before this man, this brilliant young Pharisee, who had sat at Gamaliel’s feet, and had risen quickly to a position of high prominence in the councils of the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, ever really came to the full realization of what he says here. Even after he met Christ on the Damascus road, if you read between the lines of all the autobiographical references that he gives in his letters, you see that he didn’t immediately begin preaching Christ and allowing Christ to work through him, but there was, at first, the very great consciousness that he seemingly had so much to offer Christ. There was his background –

- He was a Pharisee.
- He had been raised a Hebrew.
- He knew all the Law – had been trained in it.
- He had standing and prominence in the school of the Sanhedrin, and he had authority.
- He knew everything!

At first there was reliance upon these things to make him an effective and profitable minister. As you trace the story through, you see how the Spirit of God was at work to show him that this wasn’t true:

- He led him off into Arabia, then brought him back into Damascus.
- There, when Paul tried to reason from the Scriptures and prove that Jesus was the Christ, the Jews wouldn’t have anything to do with him. They rejected all the brilliance of his ministry, and, finally, he had to be let down over a wall in a basket to escape the city – as though he were a common criminal.
- Then Paul came to Jerusalem and tried to join himself to the disciples there. Since the Jews wouldn’t have him, he thought that the believers would. But he found that even the disciples

wouldn’t receive him, and it was only when Barnabas came and took him by the hand and spoke for him that they would even let him in.

- Crushed and heartbroken, he went into the temple, and, there, the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and said, “Paul, get out of this city.” Paul said, “Lord, I came here to preach to these Jews. I am the one who can reach them. I was the one who held the garments of the young men when Stephen, the martyr, was slain. They will listen to me. I was on their side and now I am on the other side. They will listen to me.” But the Lord Jesus said to him, “Depart and get out of this city, for I will send you far hence to the Gentiles.”
- Paul had to go down to his home town – the hardest place to go – and, there, for some seven to ten years, he never said a word. He didn’t minister. There is no record of his doing a thing. He was simply learning that the strength and power of the ministry did not rest in his background, or his training, or his abilities in any sense. At last he began to reckon upon the indwelling life of Jesus Christ and to know that God can use any man, any woman, any person, any human being, that all God wants is a vessel, no matter what it may be like, and that God can, if that vessel is available to him, manifest through it all the marvelous power of his ministry and life. This is the secret!

When Paul learned that secret, the Spirit of God sent Barnabas back to Tarsus to bring Paul over to Antioch. There he began the marvelous ministry that is recorded for us in the pages of the Word. It was only after years that he could write these words: “I will not speak of anything in my ministry until I learn the truth that it is Christ who works through me.” This is the only thing that amounts to anything.

Who does the work, then? Well, who did the work when the Lord Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount? Who was doing the work there? When he healed the sick and cleansed the temple, and when he washed the feet of the disciples, who was it who does it? “The Son can do nothing of himself. The Father who dwelleth in me, he doeth the work” {cf, John 14:10 KJV}.

Who does the work when you try to serve Christ? When you witness to somebody? Who does the work through you? Do you? Well, then it is not worth speaking about.

- Do you only take on what you feel capable of doing because of your background, your training and education? Is that all you undertake for Christ? Well, then you won't do much.
- Do you feel that God cannot use you because you haven't been to Bible School and you don't have all the training that others have had? Or are you still trying to do your best and just thinking, "Well, if I just do my best, that will be all that is necessary." Have you become content with God's second best, as you call it, without realizing that there isn't any such thing as *second* best?

That which is not "gold, silver and precious stones is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble," {cf, 1 Cor 3:12}. There are only two kinds: It is either that which comes from the indwelling Spirit working through you, or it is that which comes from your own self-effort trying to serve the Lord in the best way that you can – one or the other. It is either "gold, silver, and precious stones" {cf, 1 Cor 3:12}, or it is that which is only to be burned. This is the great secret.

- Do you have trouble obeying the Great Commission? I find so many Christians who are seemingly ineffective in this matter of being a witness. They hear, over and over, the words of Christ, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" {Mark 16:15 KJV}, and yet they are never able to witness to anyone.
- Do you have that trouble obeying the Great Commission? It is quite possible that you have had that trouble because you have never realized that the motive that drives us out to seek the lost is never the imperative of a divine command – that isn't enough. That is enough authority, but it isn't enough motive, it isn't enough ability. The motive that drives us out to seek the lost is *not the imperative of a divine command*, it is *the impulse of an indwell-*

ing presence. It isn't the world's need that calls us out to the regions beyond, it is the love of Christ which constrains us; that is what Paul says {see 2 Cor 5:14}. This is the ministry, you see, that is effective, and that which will indeed make us become witness of his grace.

"We cannot but speak of what God had done for us" {cf, Acts 4:20}, the early disciples said: "We can't do anything else – we have become so filled and captured by what he is to us, by all the ability that he can give to us, and by all the adequacy that he is through us to meet every situation that comes to us – we can't help saying something about it!" That is the impulse that makes us witness.

Paul speaks next of **the ministry of relieving**:

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go by way of you to Spain; and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ. {Rom 15:25-29 RSV}

These words date this letter as having been written just before those stirring events that are recorded for us in the closing chapters of Acts when Paul was in the city of Corinth on his way to Jerusalem with the offering that had been taken up for the saints of Jerusalem. We read in Acts that there had been a great famine in Judea and many of the Jewish Christians there were in danger of starving to death, and there was great suffering among them. When the word that their Jewish brethren were suffering came to the Gentile churches outside Judea that had been raised up under the ministry of Paul, they took up an offering for them, and appointed Paul and several of the other men to travel to Jerusalem to deliver the offering. Paul speaks of this considerably in his letter to the Corinthians {2 Cor 8-9}. He says that the Macedonians delighted his heart by the way they gave

– they first gave of themselves to the Lord, and then out of their deep poverty they gave liberally to his cause. So it wasn't just wealthy people who were giving – it was those who didn't have much themselves – but they were sharing together with those who were in need in Jerusalem. And Paul counted it a very high honor to be appointed to deliver this offering to the church of Jerusalem. He didn't feel it was beneath him. He thought it was a great honor. He was on his way to this ministry of relief, with gladness in his heart over the generosity of the Gentiles, and also with a great yearning that he might somehow reach unsaved Israel, as the letter shows. His heart went out, he said earlier in this letter, for those who were his “kinsman according to the flesh” {Rom 9:3 KJV} who hadn't yet known Christ.

Paul little knew what lay ahead of him. He could not foresee that the very longing of which he spoke, that was born of the Holy Spirit, would be twisted by the flesh to trick him into the only act of disobedience that is recorded in the Scriptures against this mighty apostle –

- He would end up in Jerusalem besieged by a mob thirsting for his blood,
- Spend two long, lonely years in prison in Caesarea,
- At last depart for Rome in chains as a prisoner of Caesar aboard a ship, and
- Suffer shipwreck and hardship all along the way before he would at last arrive in Rome.

Paul couldn't foresee this, but thank God for the honesty of Scripture. One of the delightful things about the Bible is the way we can trust it to tell us the truth about its heroes. It doesn't hide the blemishes of even the best of saints. Here it tells of Paul, who was so overwhelmingly desirous of being used as the instrument of God to reach Israel, even though God had sent him to the Gentiles, that he gladly undertook this ministry of relief for needy saints and went up to Jerusalem when the Spirit told him not to. As a result, he stumbled into great difficulty.

How much, therefore, he needed the ministry with which he closed this section – **the ministry of restraining:**

I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. The God of peace be with you all. Amen. {Rom 9:30-33 RSV}

Here is a record of how God answers prayer. Paul asked that these brethren would strive together with him. It is a word taken out of an athletic contest, i.e., a wrestling contest. He asked that they exercise the ministry of prayer in restraining evil. That is what prayer is so oftentimes – a way of putting a barrier around someone and protecting them in their ministry. This is what Paul is asking for.

You'll notice that he makes three requests:

- He asked, first of all, that “I be delivered from the unbelievers” in Jerusalem. And God answered that request in his own way and time. In Acts we are told how Paul's nephew “accidentally” overheard a conversation of those men who had determined they would put Paul to death, and carried the word to Paul. Then, after being sent to the centurion over him, Paul was able to thwart that plan and escape out of Jerusalem, and out of the very jaws of death, by means of that “accidental” over-hearing of a conversation. That was an answer to prayer as these Roman Christians prayed that he would be “delivered from the unbelievers” in Jerusalem.
- Second, he asked that they pray that his service might “be acceptable to the saints.” Well, God answered that. You remember that when Paul came, James stood up and said to the believers that this was “our beloved brother, Paul,” who had come to them, and he welcomed him {cf, Acts 21:18-20}. Thus, through that intercession, the service that Paul brought to Jerusalem was accepted by the saints there.

- The third request was that they pray that he might come to Rome “with joy and be refreshed in your company.” You know how, through painful experiences, and after several years of waiting, God answered that prayer and brought Paul to Rome – even though it was in chains. But, as he came and landed on the coast of Italy, the believers in Rome came all the way out of the city and down to a little village they called “The Three Taverns,” and there they met Paul. His heart was overwhelmed with joy as he saw them – and that prayer was answered.

I wonder what would have happened if this passage had never been written and Paul had never asked them to pray for him? I wonder if the record of Acts would have been different if he had never thought to ask these believers to pray? What if the Romans hadn’t prayed for Paul? Would it have been different?

I remember Dr. Ironside telling of visiting up in northern Idaho, years ago, a little group of Christians who didn’t believe in prayer. They lived in a remote region around St. Mary’s, Idaho, and, in order to get to them, he had to cross a river where there was no bridge or any way to cross except a little boat that was rowed across to pick him up. He used to go up there once or twice a year, ride his horse down to the edge of the river, and then stand on the bank, and yell across, “Le bateau sil vous plait.” They spoke mostly French, and this meant, “Bring the boat, please.” So they would row the boat over, pick him up, and row him back across the river. Then he would have a ministry there with them for a week or so, and then he would go on. He said that, on one occasion, he had a blessed week with them.

At the close of it, he said, as he was leaving, “Now, I do wish you would pray for me. I have a heavy schedule ahead.” They said, “We don’t pray for anybody.” He said, “How is that?” They said, “We don’t believe that there is any necessity for prayer.” “Well, why is that?” he asked. “Well,” they replied, “we believe God meets our needs. God had promised that he would take care of us, so we don’t have to pray for ourselves. We believe that this promise applies to every other believer in Jesus Christ, so we don’t feel we have to pray for them. Why pray, when God has promised?” “Well,” he said, “have you ever noticed that the

Apostle Paul asked people to pray for him?” “Yes,” they said, “we have noticed that, but perhaps Paul didn’t understand all the truth in this matter.” (There are some folks who always feel they have a higher theological degree than Paul had.) Dr. Ironside said, “At any rate, I wish you would pray for me.”

Then he left and went to Minneapolis, where he contracted a very serious sickness, until he was almost at the point of death. After weeks, he recovered, and, after several months, he visited these people again. When they met him with the boat, and took him across the river, they said, “Oh, when we heard you were sick, do you know what we did? We remembered that you had asked us to pray for you, so we gathered our people together and we had prayer for you.” Dr. Ironside said, “Well, thank you, but, you know, if you had prayed for me first, I might never have been sick.”

Prayer is a mysterious thing that none of us really understands. But we do know that the apostle, with all the marvelous insight and understanding he had into the ways and purposes of God, nevertheless highly valued the prayers of others for him.

I know you are wondering if Paul ever got to Spain. Well, we don’t know for sure. There is some evidence that perhaps he did. I personally think so. But we do know that, after several more years of ministry here and there, he was taken once again as a prisoner to Rome. This time, instead of having his own private house where he was free to minister to those who came to him, he was thrust down into the dank darkness of the Mamertine Dungeon. From that deep, dark, sodden hole in the earth, he wrote his second letter to Timothy, in which he says those unforgettable words: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith,” {cf, 2 Tim 4:7 KJV}. Sensing that his departure was near, because he was soon to appear before Nero, and he knew the cruelty of that implacable tyrant, he wrote these marvelous words: “Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing,” {cf, 2 Tim 4:8 KJV}.

What a wonderful encouragement to faith this man is!

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for the example of the Apostle Paul. We pray that we may catch the emphasis that he emphasized. May we realize and discover in our own lives this marvelous secret; and, touching the well-springs of the hidden resources of deity within us, may we minister in the name of the Lord Jesus. We pray, Father, that we may stop fighting a battle that is already lost, and begin to fight one that is already won, in his strength. We pray that you will turn us from our continual tendency to move in our own fleshly efforts.

May we, instead, reckon upon his indwelling strength to meet every situation and remember that he is fully adequate and overwhelmingly competent to do through us all that needs to be done. May we reckon upon that, and thank you for it. We pray that you will teach us that there is no such thing as 'second best' in your work, but that whatsoever is not gold, silver, and precious stones is nothing more than wood, hay, and stubble. We pray that we may minister in such a way as to be acceptable in your sight. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Former Day Saints

by Ray C. Stedman

This closing chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans is a very personal one in which he simply commends his greetings to many of the saints, Christians that he knew in the city of Rome, yet it is a very instructive passage.

I jotted down the notes for this message while I was in Mexico City in my hotel room, and the paper that I was using was the letterhead of the Overseas Ambassadors group. I picked up the paper and saw the words "Overseas Ambassadors," then I wrote underneath it the heading for this study, *The Former Day Saints*. I was struck by the correspondence between the two titles. Here, indeed, Paul was writing to some "overseas ambassadors" in his day and generation.

Many of the names that appear in this chapter were friends of his whom he had met around the Roman Empire. The apostle was writing this letter from the city of Corinth, just south of Athens in Greece. Far across the sea to the west was the city of Rome, the great capital of the empire. Although he had never visited it, he had a great host of friends there because, among the Christians of that day, there were many who considered themselves "overseas ambassadors" and thus carried the gospel of Christ out to the far corners of the earth. It is some of these that Paul writes this letter as he addresses them in a personal way in this closing chapter. These are "the saints which are at Rome" to whom he addresses this letter.

They are called *saints* because they are sanctified people. Now, as Major Ian Thomas so beautifully taught us when he was here, the word *sanctify* simply means, "to put something to its intended and proper use." Here were people who,

- by coming to grips with Jesus Christ,
- by having received the fullness of his indwelling life, and
- by believing the message of the gospel,

had now entered into a relationship in which their whole lives were put to their proper and intended use. That is why they were saints. They were sanctified – being used, at last, in the right and proper way.

Among the many thrills of this week that I have just spent in Mexico City was an opportunity to visit with the Catholic bishop of the city of Cuernavaca, south of Mexico City. I went out there hardly knowing what I might find, but I was tremendously amazed to discover a bishop of the Catholic Church whose heart was as genuinely evangelical and committed to Christ as any Protestant that I have ever met. I was also amazed when I saw the church in which he ministered – an old Catholic cathedral in the city of Cuernavaca. It was built in 1576 and is one of the oldest cathedrals in the western world. When we went inside I was immediately struck by the difference between this and any other Catholic cathedral in which I have ever been:

- All the saints were gone from the walls.
- There was no Virgin Mary.
- All the rich and ornate gold trappings which are usually behind the altar were gone.

For the altar there was simply a plain marble slab around which the bishop and his priests gathered in celebration of the Lord's table. They had simple

stools around the table. There were Scripture verses everywhere.

I learned that this bishop had personally seen to it that copies of the Scriptures were distributed to every one of his people in the Spanish language, that they might read them. And he urged them to carry on worship in their homes. As several of us talked together, the entire subject of our conversation was our Lord Jesus Christ. What a wonderful time of fellowship we had there together!

I also noticed inside the church that there were none of the plaster saints around. I said to him, "Bishop, where are the saints?" He said, "Well, I have taken them down and locked them in the cupboard – now the saints come walking in through the door."

I thought that was a tremendous expression of exactly the truth that Paul is getting at here in Romans 16. Here are the saints at Rome. They were not plaster; they were common, ordinary, plain vanilla people like you and me, but they had been put to the proper use in their lives by an encounter with Jesus Christ. Therefore they were sanctified; therefore they were saints.

In this chapter there are three general divisions which we can briefly note. There is long list here of greetings to the saints at Rome, references to the saints who were with Paul at Corinth, and then it closes with a wonderful dedication from the apostle.

Paul begins the greetings **to the saints at Rome**, Verses 1-16, with a reference to one of the women who had been with him but who had gone to Rome:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well. {Rom 16:1-2 RSV}

We judge from this introduction that this lady was the bearer of this epistle to Rome. They didn't have post offices and mailing systems in those days; they sent letters by the best means possible, by private individuals who were traveling here and there, and this woman was entrusted with this priceless document – to deliver this letter from Paul to the Romans. She carried it from the church at

Cenchreae, a little village south of Corinth, over to the great capital of the Roman Empire.

As she come to Rome with this letter, the apostle urges that they receive her because, he says, she is a deaconess. Don't be confused by that – it doesn't mean that she was an officer of the church. A deacon or a deaconess in the Scripture is never an appointed officer holding office in the way we use the term today. It was, rather, simply a person who was selected to do a specific task – someone who had a job to do – one whom the church had asked to undertake a specific mission. Whoever they were, they were called "a servant" – that was the meaning of the word *deacon* or *deaconess*. She was the one who bore the letter to the church at Rome.

Then he moves on to greet Priscilla, or Prisca, and Aquila:

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; {Rom 16:3-4 RSV}

If you have read the book of Acts, you know this couple. Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers whom Paul had met when he came into the city of Corinth. They had been driven out of Rome by an edict of the emperor ordering that all the Jews must leave Rome, and they had come to Corinth and settled there.

When Paul came into the city of Athens, he arrived penniless, discouraged, temporarily defeated in spirit – as he tells us. As he went about this great heathen city, he realized that if he were going to preach he would have to eat. So he sought out the area of the city where the tentmakers lived and arranged to enter into a business relationship with some and made tents – which was his trade. While he was engaged in the business of making tents, he used his profession as his pulpit, and preached Christ. The fruit of that ministry was this couple, Priscilla and Aquila.

We don't know exactly what he refers to when he says they "risked their necks for my life," though later on they lived in the city of Ephesus and it was there that Paul went through the traumatic experience that he later refers to as "having fought with wild beasts in the city of Ephesus," {cf, 1 Cor 15:32}. It was at Ephesus, you remember,

that the whole city was brought to a riot and Paul and the other believers barely escaped with their lives. Perhaps it was at such a time that this couple had risked their lives for him.

They were a mighty influence for Christ wherever they went. Do you notice what Paul says about them here? Greet “also the church in their house.” I think that is remarkable. Wherever this couple went, they soon had a church meeting in their house. (This, by the way, is the proper place for the church to meet.)

In Mexico this week, after the Tuesday morning breakfast at which Ambassador Thomas Mann, the United States Ambassador to Mexico was present, he very graciously invited our entire team over to his house for tea one morning. We went over, and sat down with the ambassador, and talked about the problems of Mexico and the United States. Then he began telling us something about the church in Mexico. He spoke about how the church dominated the landscape and politics in certain areas, but how weak and ineffective it was in its ministry. I said to him,

“Mr. Ambassador, is it not true that when the church is confined to a building, and thinks only of services within a specific center, it is never anything or of any influence at all? But, when the church begins to move out into the homes, and when the gospel is preached in the homes, this is what makes for a powerful and effective ministry?”

And the ambassador said, “Exactly. Unless Christianity is lived in the heart and the home, it is of no use at all.”

This is what spread the gospel throughout the whole of the early world. Christians were not interested in trying to get people to come out to church, but, instead, invited them into their homes. In their homes they talked to them about Christ, and there it was that they won their neighbors to the Lord – and, so, there began to be churches meeting in the homes. In the city of Rome there were probably half a dozen churches meeting like this throughout the city. No doubt they all got together on occasion, perhaps on Sunday in meetings such as we have today, but the rest of the time the church was carried on in the home.

Now Paul goes on, and says:

Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. {Rom 16:5b RSV}

You know, there is something precious about a first baby when it comes into the home. All the preparations that are made for it and the expectation of weeks and months – everybody is holding their breath waiting for the baby to come. With the coming of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth, it gets rather commonplace – but the first one is wonderful.

Here was the first convert that Paul won to Christ in the province of Asia, where the city of Ephesus is located, and he never forgot him because he was the first fruit of Asia for Christ.

Then we read:

Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you. {Rom 16:6 RSV}

That is all that is said about her, but what a testimony, and what a remarkable epitaph for her!

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. {Rom 16:7 RSV}

That is rather a wistful note, isn't it? We learn of these two, Andronicus and Junias, probably brothers, who were related to the Apostle Paul, and they had become notable Christians, but he says, “I will never forget when I was a young Pharisee, breathing out threatenings and slaughterings against these Christians, how angry, how terribly disturbed I was when I learned that my own kinsmen, Andronicus and Junias, had become members of this hateful thing.” Yet, it was probably the prayers of these faithful ones, praying for their brilliant kinsman, which was used of God to bring him to that position on the Damascus road whereby he came to know Jesus Christ, himself. Then his attitude toward Andronicus and Junias was tremendously changed.

Then we have a group that are individually characterized for us, in Verses 8-10. He says:

Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. {Rom 16:8-10a RSV}

That is a remarkable word there. I think if I had a choice of something written on my tombstone after my death, it would be those words – “approved in Christ.” Think of that! And, for each one, he selects a special word concerning them that is characteristic of them.

Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. {Rom 16:10b RSV}

These ones that he speaks of were doubtless Christians, but what about Aristobulus? He doesn't send greetings to him, only to his family. Perhaps he was not yet a Christian.

And then he speaks of another relative of his:

Greet my kinsman Herodian. {Rom 16:11a RSV}

And that is all he says. It is suggestive here that this man is not yet a believer, and all Paul can say of him is that he is a relative.

Then:

Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. {Rom 16:11b RSV}

Again, here is a group of unnamed Christians whom he greets as a body, but the family head to whom they belong, Narcissus, is not included.

Then we have a delightful duo in Verse 12 that have always fascinated me:

Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. {Rom 16:12a RSV}

These are female names, and I always imagine these to be old-maidish twin sisters. Tryphena and Tryphosa (you'd never name anybody that but twins), who loved the Lord and labored for him, were among those who had never married and yet had devoted themselves wholeheartedly to Christ – and what workers they were for him!

Then he greets the beloved Persis, who is another lady who has worked hard in the Lord. You know, the interesting thing is that, as he goes through this letter, all the women he greets he characterizes as hard workers. I think this is very significant. What would we do without the ministry of women in the church? The men, you know, are of the “executive” type, mostly. They love to plan.

It is the women who do the work; and it was so in the early church. In the first century, these women labored hard carrying out the work of the Lord.

In Verse 13 is another interesting note:

Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine. {Rom 16:13 RSV}

In the Gospel of Mark you will find a mention of this man, Rufus. As our Lord was carrying his cross down from Pilate's judgment hall to the scene of the crucifixion at Golgotha, he made his way through the streets of the city in the heat of the day, and, with the great burden of the cross on his back, he stumbled and fell. The soldiers impressed a man, a bystander, into the job of carrying the cross. His name was given to us as Simon of Cyrene, and this Simon became the father of Rufus. Most Bible scholars feel this is that Rufus mentioned here, the son of the man who bore the cross for Jesus. Simon never forgot that day. It drastically altered his life. Though it was but an incident on that morning, it was the transforming incident of all his life, and his children were raised in the Lord. Evidently Paul knew this home and had often visited it, and Rufus' mother, Simon's wife, had been like a mother to Paul.

Then you have a group of men together that sounds like a businessmen's association. They must have come from the islands of Greece because all their names are Greek. He says:

Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren who are with them. {Rom 16:14 RSV}

I don't know what this was. Perhaps it was another of those small churches in a home, or it may have been a business organization – the first Christian Businessmen's Committee, here in Rome!

Then he gives us another series of greetings:

Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. {Rom 16:15 RSV}

Here again is probably another small church in a home that contains both men and women, and it is headed very likely by this man named Philologus. I wonder if perhaps this was his true name. It may have been a nickname because the meaning of his name is “a lover of the word.” Here is a man who

loved the Word of God, and, as such, he has become the center of a group which constitutes a church in a home in Rome. Paul sends his greetings to them, and says,

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. {Rom 16:16 RSV}

Having just come from Mexico, I was struck by the difference in the way people greet one another there. You don't just shake hands, you embrace. This is a carry-over from the custom that Paul refers to here, of "greeting one another with a holy kiss," and, among the Christians of Mexico, this is very common. When two greet each other, they have an *abrazo* (embrace), and sometimes I think we have gotten too far away from this kind of greeting. It was such a wonderful expression of true Christian love.

In Verses 17-20, there is a reference to "false saints" who were in Rome:

I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simpleminded. For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I would have you wise as to what is good and guileless as to what is evil; then the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. {Rom 16:17-20 RSV}

This is not a reference to Christian believers who had differences of opinion. You remember, he handled that when he wrote in Chapter 14: "Him that is weak in the faith, receive him, but not to the settling of his doubts for him," {cf, Rom 14:1}. There was to be the manifestation of love despite the differences of background, outlook, and conviction over doubtful matters. They were to receive one another and love one another, even though differing.

But, in every Christian church, there are those who outwardly, and perhaps in many other ways, appear to be Christians, but are not. They are counterfeit saints. Wherever you find the true, you always find the counterfeit; but Paul says that the

counterfeit are evident by three remarkable distinctions:

- First of all, they are busy creating dissension and divisions contrary to doctrine (i.e., contrary to the Word of God). They are preaching and teaching things that are different from what you find in Scripture, or in addition to Scripture. This is always the mark of a counterfeit believer, or a false teacher. They were busy at Rome – as they have been busy in every church in every century since.
- Second, they could be recognized by speaking fair and flattering words:
 - They did not come and speak roughly or so boldly as to disturb people;
 - they came speaking very sweetly;
 - they seemed to be such lovely people;
 - they seemed to have such a desire to advance the knowledge and the welfare of believers;

but there was always something wrong about what they said; it didn't quite ring true. Paul says that this is a mark of the false.

- The third mark was that they served their own appetites. If you look at what he says here in contrast with what he says about these true believers beforehand, you will notice one remarkable thing:
 - In the case of all those who were true believers, he speaks of their abundant labors for Christ and for one another – they love each other and they serve each other.
 - But the one who is counterfeit is only busy serving his own interests. He is not interested in doing something for someone else, in giving himself or herself completely for the advancement of a cause for Christ's sake.

- They serve their own appetites and live for their own interests, whatever they may be.

This is the three-fold mark of a false believer – the counterfeit saint.

What did Paul say to do about them? Excommunicate them? Burn them at the stake? No, just avoid them. Don't listen to them. Don't pay any attention to them. Don't give them an audience. Don't let them take your time with their false ideas.

I think this applies well to those zealous cultists who come around so frequently to our doors with books under their arms that claim to be explanations of the Scriptures, but which are so contrary to it in teaching and doctrine. They usually require that you join some organization, or take your counsel from some inspired teacher or center somewhere else. Paul says avoid them – that is all.

As he puts it, I want you to be “wise as to what is good and guiltless as to what is evil” – that is, uninformed, simple-minded (almost), as to what is evil. Don't investigate it. Of course, this doesn't apply in every circumstance; God leads some to investigate some of these sects so that there may be answers given to some of their claims. But, for the usual Christian, he says just don't bother to waste your time with what they have to say. When you do so, the God of peace will crush them under your feet very shortly. God will take care of them.

Remember, when the disciples came to Jesus very disturbed because they had found somebody who was preaching in his name and didn't belong to their group, they asked, “What shall we do with him? Shall we call down fire on his head?” Jesus said to them, “Every plant that my Father has not planted will be rooted up. Let them alone,” {cf. Matt 15:13-14}. Don't worry, God will take care of them. Be concerned with the positive affirmation of that which is true. Give yourself to that which is good in the Scriptures, and never mind these others. God will take care of them.

In Verses 21-23 we have the references **to the saints who were with Paul at Corinth:**

Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.

I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.

Gaius, who is host to me and the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. {Rom 16:21-23 RSV}

This gives a little insight into how Paul wrote his letters. He evidently was dictating his letter to a man whose name was Tertius. Others were in the room as well, perhaps many of the church at Corinth were there with him. As Paul came to the close of his letter, they said, “Paul, will you send our greetings along with yours?” So Paul sends them here.

We see that Timothy, his fellow worker greets them. And there are three of Paul's family there. What an amazing impact the apostle had on his own family! How many of these did he win to Christ himself personally? He sends greetings from Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, all of them his relatives.

Then we have the writer of the letter, the secretary, who, after all has been said, takes his pen and writes, “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, the secretary, greet you too.” The word “Tertius” simply means, “the third.” His brother was there, Quartus, which means, “the fourth.” They had a very simple way of solving the problem of names in those days. The first one that arrived, they called him Primus; the second one, Secundus; the third, Tertius; and the fourth, Quartus; and so it went. They were probably slaves, because this is the way people referred to slaves – they just numbered them.

Then we have Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth, a man of high position and one who had been won to Christ. He sends his greetings too.

The letter closes in Verses 25-27 with a **wonderful dedication from the apostle:**

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about obedience to the faith – to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ. Amen. {Rom 16:25-27 RSV}

Very likely this was written in Paul's own hand. It was his custom, when he came to the end of dictating a letter, to take the pen and write the final words in his own hand. Because he was troubled with dim eyesight, he wrote in large letters, as he tells us in the letter to the Galatians. So he scrawls across the bottom of the letter this beautiful dedication to the only wise God who can strengthen them.

It is God who does the strengthening in our lives, and, Paul says, it will always be along three lines, or by three particular means:

- First, "according to my gospel," Paul says, "and the preaching of Jesus Christ." That is, it will be right along the lines that the Holy Spirit has led me to set before you, and no other way. God will not move in different ways in your life than he has recorded in the Scriptures. If you want to know how God will work for you, study your Bible – that is how he will work with you. It is according to the gospel, and along these lines, and above all, "according to the preaching of Jesus Christ, because he is the one whose life, indwelling us, makes possible strength in our experience.
- Then, too, strengthening will be "according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret." What was the mystery? Simply the mystery that God would call out from Jew and Gentile alike the people who would belong to him and to each other. This is important because, if you are going to be strengthened in your Christian life, it means that it will be in connection with other believers as well. It is impossible for a Christian to grow strong all by himself. We need each other, and we need all the others who belong to the body of Christ. This is the great mystery – as we share together in the life of our Lord Jesus and in each other, we grow strong in the Lord.
- The third principle of strengthening is "according to the command of God to bring about obedience to the faith," i.e., the final great foundation upon which all our Christian growth and strength rests is the fact that God has set about a task which he will perform. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "being confident

that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," {cf, Phil 1:6}.

Yesterday morning in Mexico City we gathered as a team together and asked dear old Dr. F. J. Huegel, well-known author, to bring us a Bible study. Dr. Huegel brought us a masterful summing up of Romans, Chapters 5, 6, 7, & 8, all in the course of about 45 minutes. When he finished, he was commenting upon the closing words of Chapter 8: "We are more than conquerors through Christ."

Lt. Gen. Silverthorn of the U. S. Marine Corp in Washington was a member of our team during the week, and was sitting just a few places down the table from Dr. Huegel. Dr. Huegel turned to him, and said, "General, perhaps you can give us a little help on what this means – to be more than conquerors. To me it means:

- That, in Christ, we triumph despite everything,
- That even though we fail and stumble, and
- Though there is much of folly and weakness in our experience, nevertheless God has set about the task, and
- That He will bring us through to the place where we are indeed more than conquerors in Christ!

Now, General, can you help us with that?"

I had been watching General Silverthorn as he had been listening to this, and watched his face light up as these truths came home to him, and he just said: "Help you? No, I can't help you. I just want to shout, **Hallelujah!**"

That is what it means to be more than conquerors, because, you see, after all, the work that God has begun does not rest upon our feeble efforts to carry it through successfully, but upon his unchanging grace and his eternal commands that he has set about to bring together those who fulfill all the desires of his heart.

Prayer:

How we thank you, our Father, for this word which renews our confidence in you, and reminds us again how wonderfully adequate you are to fulfill in us all that we long to see and all that you long to have. We thank you for the Lord Jesus who in-

dwells us and imparts to us all that he is. We pray that we may be reminded anew of the love which he has shed abroad over us, and of the blood that he has shed for us, all as a guarantee that he will perform all that he has promised in our lives. May we enter into it, Lord, and experience this in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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