

The Epistle to the Romans

A Commentary

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PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Chapter 1

1. How sensible it was in those times to begin a letter with the name of its author rather than today's custom where we have to look at the end in order to see who it is from. That name carries a wealth of meaning; the writer is Paul not Saul. Presumably he changed it himself rather than others changing it for him. It reminded both himself and others that he was a changed person. Saul, legalistic, proud, intolerant and violent, was dead; as he wrote to the Corinthians, "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" (2 Cor. 5:17) He never ceased to be a Jew but he saw his birth and the privilege it carried in a new light; he did not abandon his traditional faith but he found it fulfilled and transformed in Jesus.

However, there is a sense in which not only has Saul died, but so has Paul. "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" [Gal 2:20] He cannot, dare not, live for himself because the new life he now has belongs to Jesus. That is revealed by his immediate description of himself - "*a servant of Jesus Christ*". The word 'servant' in the Greek (doulos) is one used of a slave; one who has no rights but belongs totally to his master. I once heard of a preacher speaking of 'crossing the line', referring to the experience of willing self-sacrifice; it is when you know that for Jesus Christ you are willing to give your life. Paul had crossed that line. It is his second letter to the Corinthians that illustrates this so clearly. There he describes how he goes into situation after situation not expecting to come out of it alive; and when he does, he is so surprised that he sees it as a sort of earthly resurrection. A true servant/slave of Jesus Christ cannot complain if he is treated unfairly or unjustly, as happened to his master, for he has surrendered his personal rights, he has died to himself and lives for his Lord. This personal experience (and it is an experience, not simply a statement) underlies all the doctrine of faith that Paul is about to expound.

Paul was convinced his role was not of his own choosing. He had been "called to be an apostle." It was the Church at Antioch which had recognised that calling: While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." [Acts 13:2] In the Old Testament a prophet would be called personally and was driven by the Spirit to fulfil his ministry which would become recognised by the people as it progressed. In the New Testament the call is both personal to the individual and corporate to the Church. John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets; his parents, but no one else, were told that he was to go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah. However, with Jesus himself, not only did he hear the voice at his baptism confirming his calling, so did all those who were gathered there. Paul knew that it was not just the idea of the Church to send him out (an apostle is one who is sent), nor was it his own motivation (as his persecution of the first Christians had been). Along with every truly called minister of the Church, there must have been times in his life when Paul would have cried to the Lord, "This is your doing; I never wanted this originally, you called me and so you must see me through." The horror of wondering, "did I make a mistake? is it a delusion that I was called? was it my own idea?" is almost too painful to contemplate. Such a minister must know that he is called of God and that that ministry has been recognised by the Church otherwise, surely, he would never dare to attempt it.

"*Set apart for the gospel of God.*" Paul saw that from birth (Gal. 1:15) he had been 'separated' for the work of the gospel. He had believed that, as a Pharisee, he had been separated to preserve and uphold the law of God, but now he realised that the law

pointed to and had been fulfilled by Jesus. Often we refer to the gospel of Christ, but here Paul calls it the gospel of God. In a moment he is to relate it firmly to Christ “*regarding his Son*” (v. 3), but it relates to the whole Godhead, to the ultimate reality which lies behind all that is; it is the good news for all creation from and about its Creator. Because this is so it predates the incarnation of Jesus. It has been rightly said that, “there was a cross in the heart of God long before it stood on Calvary;” he planned the redemption of the world even before its creation. The rebellion of man did not take God by surprise; the solution existed in the mind of God even before the problem arose.

2. That is why it could be revealed beforehand in the Old Testament to those who were open to his counsel, the prophets, and preserved in those writings revered by the Jews, and therefore by Paul, as Holy Scriptures. Whatever mankind does, there is a steady, undeviating course that God is keeping through history, including the history that is being made now. That does not mean that everything that happens is what God has willed; he has given us freewill and, as with Adam, we often make wrong choices. However, just as a yachtsman will use whatever wind there is, even one which is contrary, to bring him to his chosen destination, so God keeps his course through history.

3-4. The ‘good news’, the Gospel, is centred on Jesus; it is regarding his Son. Jesus did more than proclaim the good news, he is the good news; without him there would be no good news. It is not only that he wrought the salvation which is the good news, for that would give us only a philosophy - a series of precepts and doctrines to be believed and obeyed. The wonder and joy of the Christian faith is that it is founded upon a relationship with a person. Christianity is not to know what Jesus taught but to know him.

These verses declare the two natures of Jesus, he is human and deity. All down the years some scholars have sought to differentiate between the two natures in the life of Jesus - “this aspect reveals his humanity, that his deity.” That approach is disastrous because Jesus is a whole person. When he became man he never ceased to be God; that is who he is, that is his *esse*. He could not give up his deity; whatever else he became, whatever happened to him, he could no more cease to be the Son of his Father, anymore than I can cease to be the son of my father. However, he could and did surrender certain attributes of deity. When he was on earth he had only a human body with a human brain. His supreme wisdom and his power were not intrinsic to his person in his incarnation; they were the work of the Holy Spirit within him. (See John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49 and especially 14:10 It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.) Jesus totally identified with us; the only advantage he had, and admittedly it is massive, was that he was ‘without sin’. He did not have that bias within him (technically described as ‘original sin’) which causes all the rest of us to go off course. But he had no power or wisdom which we may not have if only we were as open to God and his Spirit as he – “anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father... and I will ask the Father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of truth”. (John 14:12 & 16/17).

So Paul states that Jesus was a man with a traceable lineage. He was a descendant of David and thus fulfils the prophecy that the Messiah would be of David’s line. He was fully human and knows what it feels like to be hurt, misunderstood and frustrated. He knows the joy of human love and relationships and of doing God’s will. He knows also human limitations and what it is to be a dependent being. He had a human nature.

In addition, he was the Son of God. The phrase ‘*by his resurrection from the dead*’ has caused some to claim that Jesus only became the Son of God at his resurrection. This is

refuted by the opening of John's Gospel, *'In the beginning was the Word...'* (There never was when Jesus was not) *'And the Word was God.'* So in his nature he was God. Nevertheless, it is true that some additional position or reward was given to Jesus following all he accomplished by his earthly life and his death. Philippians 2:9 states that God exalted him to the highest place and gave him a name he did not possess previously. The analogy must not be taken too far but perhaps it is similar to the situation of Prince Charles in the Royal Family. He was born royalty; he is as royal as the Queen. However, when he was twenty-one she bestowed on him the name and position 'Prince of Wales'.

How it can be that one person can be fully God and fully man is a mystery, (he was not half man and half God) but we are faced by the reality of Jesus Christ in whom it happened.

Another ambiguous phrase is *'declared with power'*. Does it refer to the declaration? i.e. it was a powerful declaration - *'proclaimed Son of God by an act of power'* (Revised English Bible) and *'declared with power to be the Son of God'* (NIV): or to Jesus having power - *'and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'*. (New King James)? Both are true. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is a very powerful declaration that he was approved by God. If the claims of Jesus to have a special relationship with his Father (*'I and the Father are one'* [John 10:30]) were false, God would not have raised him. Jesus also had power which, as we have seen, was through the Spirit of holiness (The Holy Spirit). That power of the resurrection - the power which raised a dead body to life and took it from the earth into heaven (Eph. 1:19/23) - is now shed abroad in the lives of all who profess allegiance to him.

Our culture creates a problem in understanding the name Jesus Christ. We are used to people having a forename and a surname and so we tend to assume that 'Christ' is a surname. Scripture encourages this view because often, as here, it will drop the 'the' of 'the Christ'. 'The Christ' (Greek) or 'the Messiah' (Hebrew) is the promised and expected, appointed and anointed one of God and so it is not so much a name as a description or title of the role Jesus fulfilled.

In Bible times, the name was much more than a label of identification, it epitomised the person. 'Jesus' means Saviour and, as such, it perfectly expresses not only what Jesus did but who he is in his essential being. It is the very nature of Christ to save and his earthly life was the outworking of that nature. However, these two words, 'Jesus Christ', are without value or meaning to anyone until he or she makes Jesus Lord of their life. For each of us he has to become my Lord.

5. The 'we' here is the 'royal we', it refers to Paul himself. Indeed the Revised English Bible makes that abundantly clear: *'Through him I received the privilege of an apostolic commission.'* In v.1 he has referred to the fact that he has been called to be an apostle and again he stresses the centrality of Christ in his life. Not only did Jesus call him, but the calling was for his name's sake and it was Jesus who gave him grace. The REB translation above has 'privilege'; to serve Jesus is a privilege but the word here is *charis* which means more than that, it implies a gifting and the bestowal of benefit. The REB links the word to the task - the privilege of apostleship; the NIV sees grace as a something independent of it but enabling Paul to fulfil that role amongst other benefits. Paul uses the word 'grace' frequently in this letter and its meaning will become clearer as we progress. See note on 1:7.

Paul saw his field of work as among the Gentiles. That does not mean he did not preach to the Jews also; indeed he often sought out the Jews of a city first, and it was only after they rejected his teaching that he went to the Gentiles where frequently he was more warmly received. Jesus himself decided on a strategy for his mission, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." [Mat 15:24] and although he was sometimes persuaded to extend this to Gentiles (as with the Syro-phoenician woman to whom he made that remark) he did not attempt to widen it. Later in this letter we shall see Paul's heart for his own nation; but he was clear about his goal - a goal given to him rather than chosen by him (Gal. 2:7/8) - it was to the Gentiles. Perhaps we do not take time within the Church to discover the area of work each individual should have. The willing horse is laden with whatever task needs to be done.

With regard to obedience and faith, there is a variety of interpretations. The New King James version has, *'for obedience to the faith'*, i.e. seeing the Faith as doctrine or creed. Surely it is more personal than that; Christianity is a relationship rather than a creed - however important it may be to have a statement of belief. If, as it should be, faith is to trust God in the person of Jesus, then this must involve obedience to him. Not only is it illogical to claim to believe in Jesus yet disobey him, it is a matter of experience. Anyone can say "Lord, Lord," but only those who do his will have actually made him their Lord. If that is true then it is the obedience that comes from faith.

6. The construction of the original, following on from the statement just made, implies that the Roman Christians were 'among the Gentiles', i.e. the majority of the believers in Rome were Gentiles. The literal translation is *'called ones of Jesus,'* but *'called to belong to Jesus'* is a happy translation for it meets the deepest need of humankind. This is a vast universe and it can be intimidating. It may appear that in the West the great problem of our times is materialism, acquisitiveness, the desire to possess. But that is a form of compensation because what lies behind it is the reverse - the need, not for belongings, but to belong. We need to know that we matter to someone, to at least one other person. Without that we have no sense of security or self-worth and hence we seek to find it in status or wealth. But we belong to Jesus Christ; we matter to him so much that he died for us. And we belong, not because we have given ourselves to him (although that is true) but because first we were called of God and given to Jesus as surely as were the disciples. "They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." [John 17:6]

7. The destination of this letter is Rome and it is addressed to the believers there. Paul describes them as those who are loved by God. We must take care in interpreting such statements. John is described as *"the disciple whom Jesus loved."* But that does not mean he did not love the other disciples also; rather that there was a particular relationship between Jesus and John. God loves everyone. The alternative is to say that God loves only those who love him. That reasoning then leads to the false doctrine that we merit or earn God's love because we first love him. Scripture states that it is the other way round; *"we love because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) and, as Paul is later to point out in this letter, *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (5:8) We are not loved because we are forgiven; we are forgiven because we are loved. We must say, therefore, that God loved everyone in Rome.

Nevertheless, there is a special relationship with those who have responded to that love. I love many people (how I wish I could say that, like God, I love everyone) but I have a special love for my own family. When we respond to God in Christ we become children of God - his family and, in a special sense like the believers in Rome, we are the beloved of God.

Believers are called to be saints; to be the holy ones - set apart for God. That is what Israel was intended to be, the people set apart by and for God: but they failed, just as Adam and Eve had failed. Only Jesus succeeded and now that we are his body on earth, we must not fail. These Christians were in Rome, not heaven and now we also are in the world; but it is for so short a time. Others held the torch before us; we hold it now and, in the brief time that it is ours, we must light the torch of others. We cannot say, "Take my torch now, I am old and tired," we hold it until the end. Even in the way we die we are a witness. But the word is not in the singular. Each of us is called individually but we are a people, a community. We belong to each other and it is together that we are called to be saints. As we look at each other, with all our faults, we need to remember that we haven't achieved our calling; God has not finished with us yet. We have been set apart but we are still saints in the making.

Once again we meet the word '*Grace*'. This is usually defined as God's unmerited favour. It is that, but that definition is too vague. It is like speaking of someone's 'kindness' which is more than a general attitude, it is expressed in tangible ways, albeit a variety of ways. Grace is to God what sunshine is to the sun. Sunshine is how we receive what the sun is. It is light, warmth and power. We could not receive the sun as it is; we would perish. Yet the sunshine is so closely associated with its source that we speak of being 'out in the sun'. Grace is all that God is as he is revealed and given to us. It cannot be detached from God in the sense that we can receive some grace as a separate commodity any more than we can receive a box of sunshine. Grace is the fullness of God as far as we are capable of receiving him. Thus the charismatic gifts (the Greek word for grace is *charis*) are never detached from God, working independently from him, but are God himself working through us by his Holy Spirit (see John 14:10).

Peace. The peace of which Paul speaks is so much more than what we usually mean when we use the word. We use it in a negative way, meaning the absence of noise, panic or other disturbance. If these things are removed then what remains is peace. Paul and Jesus use the word in a positive sense. It comes from within and not only is it not dependent upon outside influences, it actually overcomes their effect.

Commentators speak of it as 'peace with God'; knowing we are accepted by him because our sins are forgiven. That is true but it does not go far enough. The peace Jesus gives is greater still and it comes through faith. It has to do with being totally committed to him in complete trust. Paul had so given himself to God that he had died to himself. *'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'* [Gal 2:20] If and when a person can truly say that, then nothing can disturb the depth of peace within him or her. If a person is burgled, he may lose his possessions but he does not rely on them he relies on God. Others may threaten his life; well, if he dies he goes to be with the Lord, so that is gain. Jesus showed that peace throughout his life until Gethsemane. At Gethsemane, for a brief time he was in agony because he knew that for the first and only time he would be cut off from his Father and so the very basis of his peace would be removed. Once he had submitted himself again to God's will - *"Your will not mine be done"* - that peace returned and he overcame all outward pressures and pain until the actual moment when he was cut off from God and he screamed, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Immediately the relationship, and therefore the peace, was restored and he was able to say, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit."* True peace depends on trust; the more fully we commit ourselves to God the more we shall experience that peace ourselves. It is peace from God.

Although Paul rightly speaks of God our Father because it is together that we make up the body of Christ, we each of us needs first to know that he is 'my' Father. It is, for each of us, a relationship between God and 'me'. The fact that God is my Father and I am his child can come only as a revelation; no one could reason this out - that the Creator of everything desires such a personal relationship. We see from other religions what humankind makes of a god or gods when left to our own reasoning and feelings. We may stumble on some truths of God's character but not that he is our Father. Although some passages of the Old Testament point to something of that truth, it is Jesus who reveals it fully. We are made for relationship. Each of us needs to be needed, to be loved for ourselves alone, just because we are. That need was never designed to be met by other human beings alone, even though that is important; God made us for himself. We are to enjoy him and, wonder of wonders, he actually enjoys us - no, that too needs to be fully personalised - he enjoys 'me'. It is that fact which unites each of us with every other believer; my Father is your Father and so we are truly brothers and sisters in the faith.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is the clearest revelation of the Father and is, himself, God, Paul sees the grace and peace as proceeding from him also. He is clear in his mind that the Father and the Son are distinct persons yet they are equally God. When a son is born to a Royal Family he is as much royalty as his parents; yet there is no doubt that they, as king and queen, have a greater authority than he and he is subject to them. So within the Godhead there are three persons equal in deity but the Father is supreme. However, there is such unity that the authority of the Father is a corporate authority; thought, will and action are all at one and so they are one.

This has become part of the doctrine of our faith. Doctrine is important to refute error and to maintain our unity - we need to have an agreement on basic belief. However, we do not experience doctrine; doctrine is a consequence of our experience.

8. Because of our insecurity we seem to have an in-built tendency to pull others down; if we can lower them in our (and other's) understanding then we feel better about our own inadequacies. We all need to be built up and Paul begins the content of his letter in that way, First, I thank my God... for all of you. He may have to set them right on certain matters as he goes on, but he begins in a warm and positive way. The words, through Jesus Christ, reveal that it has become second nature for Paul to link his relationship with God - in whom he had always believed - with Jesus. It is Jesus who has given him access to God.

Paul tells them, your faith is being reported all over the world. For this to have happened their faith could not have been only a private and cerebral matter; there must have been a change in them which was so deep that others were talking about it. That does not mean it was a constant topic of conversation but that as Paul travelled around he discovered that the news had carried, certainly within Christian circles; there were now active Christians in Rome.

9. The NIV translates the word *pneuma* as 'heart', whereas the majority of translations correctly use the word 'spirit'. It may seem that in its context there is little difference between serving God with our spirit or our heart but strictly we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength [Mark 12:30] but serve him with our spirit. The word 'heart' implies a personal desire and even effort of will on Paul's part, which is a right response of human beings to the love of God for us. But here he is speaking of presenting himself as an empty vessel, so that the Holy Spirit may fill his spirit and use him in the work of the kingdom. The Revised English Bible gets nearer to

the true meaning, “*God is my witness, to whom I offer the service of my spirit by preaching the gospel of his Son*”

However, even that translation is not strictly correct because, like the NIV, it refers to preaching the gospel of his Son. In fact, the word ‘preaching’ is not in the original, the New King James version has, “*whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son.*” The gospel - the good news - is proclaimed not only by our words but in our lives.

For a Jew, steeped in what to us is the Old Testament, it would be natural to say, ‘God is my witness,’ and Paul uses it to stress the sincerity of what he is about to say. Nevertheless, perhaps we forget too easily that God is indeed our witness to all we are and do.

Although it is very helpful for reference purposes to have Scripture divided into verses, it can sometimes be artificial; so here where the NIV in its translation has to put part of v.9 into v.10. Paul’s statement that constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times must not be taken too literally. In much the same way that we may say, “I can’t get you out of my mind,” so he prays for them regularly.

10. His prayer is that now *at last by God’s will the way* may be opened for me to come to you, which teaches us much about the purpose of prayer. There is an idea around that God’s will is going to happen anyway whether or not anyone prays for it. Eventually it will indeed be done but only with man’s co-operation; God will wait for someone (and possibly even raise up someone) to pray for his will to be done. Indeed Jesus specifically taught that - “*your will be done on earth as in heaven*”. There are two statements in the prophet Ezekiel which clarify the matter. I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none. [Ezek. 22:30] Here God is explaining that against his own will he will be forced to destroy the land because no one will intervene (stand before him) and ask him for his will to be done. The second text is even more explicit: Thus saith the Lord God: I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. [Ezek. 36:37] Here God is saying that he wants to increase the number of Israelites and so he will ensure that they ask him to do that. This is in line with his plan revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis; he has put humankind in charge of the earth, given us dominion over it, as his stewards. In spite of the fall he has not changed his plan and works on earth only through human beings - eventually even becoming man himself. Here Paul is clearly stating that his desire to visit Rome is subject to the will of God; he is praying God’s will to be realised in his life.

11-12. Paul has a right balance in his understanding of himself. He can describe himself as ‘*the least of the apostles*’ (1 Cor. 15:9) but he also has a right confidence of his standing and gifting in Christ. He knows that he is able to impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. We must avoid a false modesty if the work of God is to be done on earth because it has to be done through us and he has given us power through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). If we do not take up our role then the world is the poorer. On the other hand we need to remember that his strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)

It seems that it occurs to Paul that that statement may come across as patronising. The Christians at Rome had not been brought to the Lord by him and so he qualifies it by saying, *That is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.* God

is too big for anyone to have all the truth about him; every other true believer has something to teach us.

13. Paul explains that he planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now). Although we are always under the care of God, he does not control us as though we are robots. We have a destination rather than a route. Perhaps it is like playing chess with a chess master. Our individual moves are not laid down; we have freedom to choose. Certain moves may be dictated by his actions but our freedom of choice is always there. Nevertheless, in the end he always wins - his will is done. That is not to say that his will for every individual is done; we are all free to reject him. It is not his will that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9 ff.) but, sadly, some do.

Although Paul qualified his first desire to impart some spiritual gift by saying that they should mutually encourage each other, the passion within him to share all he has discovered about God leads him to say that he longs to have some harvest among you just as I have had among the other Gentiles. Paul is single-minded; yes, he would love to meet these Christians, but what is the point of that if it doesn't further the Kingdom in some way?

14. He says that he is bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and foolish. The word 'bound' is actually 'debtor', although 'under obligation' probably conveys its meaning better. Paul is so aware of the grace and mercy that was shown to him in bringing him from ignorance to understanding and salvation that everyone else has a right to hear the truth also. In referring to Greeks and non-Greeks (Literally 'Barbarian'), he is not thinking of nationality but of culture - the educated and the non-educated, the intellectual and the artisan. Everyone is entitled to hear the gospel; it is for all. In the west, so much of our approach is an appeal to the intellect; and where it isn't and the preaching of the word is accompanied by signs of power (which will attract those who are not so skilled in the use of words), the more intellectual tend to denigrate that as emotionalism. Once I have seen the truth I am under obligation to share it with those who have not yet seen it. Because Paul is so aware of this obligation he continues:

15-16. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome. He will have truths to share about God which they have not heard before. We have heard the word 'gospel' so often that its meaning no longer thrills us. It has become a title as in 'The Gospel according to St. Luke' etc., as though it is a book. In fact it is more like a charter conferring rights and privileges. It is indeed 'good news'.

He is not ashamed of the gospel; lesser men might have been. It made him an outcast amongst so many of his own people. So many of us believers today are fearful, and therefore ashamed, of confessing in front of our peers that we are Christians, in case they mock or shun us.

The gospel is not an ideology, a system of belief; it has and is power. There are two kinds of power; one is authority which enables those who have it to bring about change, and the biblical word which lies behind this is usually *exousia*. The other is energy where the biblical word is *dunamis*, from which we get our words *dynamo*, *dynamic* and *dynamite*, which is the word Paul uses here. When a person has a vision of something that might be, this may give him or her the will to work for it. The gospel may well do that but Paul has something greater than that in mind; it actually contains within itself a force or energy. This is because the gospel cannot be divorced from the person of Jesus (v.1). When a person responds to the 'good news' he enters into a relationship with Jesus; he is born anew, this time by the Holy Spirit, and a new spiritual power begins to work within

him; the power of God. The gospel is more than words (Thes. 1:5), it effects change in people.

Salvation is such a big word, embracing so much meaning. It involves the wholeness of body, soul and spirit. Sometimes it is used of physical healing but it includes having eternal life, being brought through death to a place in heaven i.e. deliverance and preservation. It can be used almost in a technical sense to mean accounted righteous before God, but also to mean being made righteous. It has to do with the past, the present and the future - "I have been saved, I am being saved, I will be saved." The news breaks of a shipwreck but a life boat has reached the crew who, as a result, have been saved. At this very moment the boat is bringing them to land - they are being saved. When it reaches harbour and they stand on the quay they will have been saved. So it is with us. The moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are saved, we have eternal life. As our life progresses we are being changed to be conformed to the image of God's Son (8:29) slowly we are being made Christ-like, we are in the process of being saved. When we die we pass into Christ's closer presence and, when all is complete, we shall reign in heaven - we shall have been saved.

The salvation is of everyone who believes. There are some who hold that in the end everyone will be saved because, they reason, otherwise God will have failed - part of his creation has not attained the purpose for which it was created, and that is failure. What we mean by the term 'God' is perfect; he would not be God otherwise because it would be possible to imagine a more perfect God who does not fail. Therefore everyone will eventually be in the kingdom of heaven. This view is known as universalism. Certain passages of Scripture are quoted to support this approach where it speaks of 'all' being saved without qualification. However, Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. Here Paul clearly links salvation to faith. Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement. (Heb 9:27) There is no hint of a further opportunity to believe. It is in this life that our destiny is decided.

It is those who hold the universalist position who have decided that the loss of a part of God's creation is failure on his part. Admittedly, in the eternal realm God cannot permit imperfection, that would be failure but he has decided in his wisdom to give humankind freewill. If a person uses that freewill to reject him, that does not mean that God has failed; in his perfection he took that failure of individuals into account and still decided to create. It grieves him that any should be lost but he loves us too much to force us into submission against our will; that would be of no value to himself or to us. Finally, all rebellion will be destroyed; Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power... When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. [1 Cor 15:24 & 28]

First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. This does not imply a superiority of the Jew over the Gentile - the gospel is for everyone. Paul is simply recognising the fact that Christianity is rooted in the history of the Jews. The Messiah was foretold in the Jewish Scriptures; when he came he was himself a Jew; his first disciples were Jews and, whilst others like the Syro-Phoenician woman were blessed by him, his mission was to *'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'*. "*Salvation is from the Jews*" (John 4.22) but it is for everyone,

17. The keynote of the whole of this letter is *'righteousness'*. How can a person be made righteous in the sight of a holy God? As the previous verse explained, this is the basis of salvation. Other translations say it is a righteousness of God. To our minds, that

conveys the primary meaning that it is an attribute of a holy God and this condemns us even more - I know he is holy, so how can I, a sinner, approach him? The NIV makes clear immediately one aspect of this righteousness by saying, correctly, it is a righteousness from God; i.e. it is offered to mankind.

The doctrine that God accounts us as righteous even though we are still sinners (summarised in the term 'justification by faith') lies at the very heart of Paul's theology and especially of this epistle but, understandably, it causes much misunderstanding and seems to fly in the face of both truth and justice. Even though God is the Supreme Being, Creator of all that is, if he accounts someone as righteous then we, as his creatures, have no right (unless he gives it to us) to question his decision. Nevertheless, he must be true to himself. Even he cannot state that two plus two equals five and still be true to himself and the creation he has brought into being. Similarly, even God cannot claim that what is evil is good. Humankind was created good but, having once sinned, we all have that bias towards sin within us which leads us to do wrong things. We are sinners and have no righteousness in us. That does not mean we cannot ever do anything which is right; righteousness is a state and a single sinful act can and will contaminate that state. Nor can we win righteousness or earn salvation; however many good deeds we do, that bias to sin (technically described as 'original sin') is still there. What Paul has come to understand is that whilst we cannot gain a righteousness of our own, God gives us a righteousness which is his own. At the risk of oversimplifying the situation, assume a man gives a party and stipulates that all the male guests must wear a white tuxedo. It is his party and he has a right to lay down such a condition. If I have only a black dinner jacket I cannot be allowed in. However hard I try to bleach it, it will never be white. My host cannot permit me to enter and still be true to himself and his stipulation. But if, along with the invitation, he gives me a white tuxedo, then he is not violating his conditions or himself in allowing me in - provided I wear it.

The literal translation '*from faith to faith*' is rendered in the NIV as '*by faith from first to last*'. There is more to righteousness than being accepted or accounted as righteous. We have to be made righteous - become what we are already in God's sight. The day I joined the army I became a soldier; legally I was as much a soldier as a veteran of 20 years. However, I then had to be trained to become a soldier. This becoming what we are is also accomplished by faith.

There are four aspects to the faith involved in righteousness. First there is choice. We can use our freewill to trust either in ourselves and go our own way or we can choose to trust in God and go his. By choosing the latter we reveal that we desire to be the person God designed and desires us to be. Our desires and God's desires coincide. God is then true to himself in declaring us righteous, because he looks on the heart. We cannot make it on our own, he knows that, but our 'about turn' from going our own way to wanting to go his (which is what 'repentance' means) is the ground on which he can declare us righteous. He is not calling black white; he does not account everyone righteous, only those who truly desire to be. Such know that they can never make it on their own and so they trust themselves to him.

The second aspect of faith counters our uncertainty. We know that we are not righteous and so we doubt that God really says that we are. The only way we can deal with this is to make the jump of faith; believe it and walk in that belief.

The third and fourth aspects arise out of the statement "*the righteous will live by faith*". If the meaning is, "those accepted as righteous because they have faith, shall live" then it is speaking of salvation. It is the righteous who will be given eternal life and we receive

that righteousness by faith. This is true irrespective of whether or not that is what Paul is saying here.

The fourth aspect of faith is revealed if the meaning is, “those who are accepted as righteous will live out the rest of their lives by faith,” which is similar to what has been mentioned above - we have to be made in ourselves what we are already accounted - righteous. This is a lifelong process. Not only do we start our Christian life by faith, we have to go on walking by faith; seeking God’s way every step we take. In this way we are slowly being made Christ-like.

Think of the important words Paul has packed into these last two verses: gospel, power, salvation, Jew and Gentile, righteousness and faith. All of these are to be unpacked as he warms to his task.

18. We have seen that both salvation and righteousness relate to a final state in the future when we shall have been saved and we shall be righteous in fact. It is the same with wrath; if salvation is linked with righteousness, wrath is linked with judgement. The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men. God’s wrath will not be fully revealed until the day of judgement, nevertheless it is operating now. In the previous verse Paul has said that in the gospel righteousness is revealed, here he speaks of the other side of the coin; God’s wrath is being revealed in the world and in history.

Some commentators see wrath as impersonal and not linked specifically to God. It is an in-built, automatic operation which God set within creation. He made the world to function on certain moral principles; break those principles and things go wrong. AIDS spreads particularly amongst drug abusers. It is not necessary, therefore, to see the direct intervention of God acting to punish the individual drug abuser. If he contracts AIDS it is an automatic principle of cause and effect. Undoubtedly there is truth in that view; God did create the world to work in a particular manner. However, he is not an absent Landlord who once set it all going and then left it to its own devices. He is actively upholding all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). Whatever he ‘built in’ to creation he still approves and maintains.

Perhaps those who stress the impersonal aspect of wrath fear that otherwise it could be held that God acts in passion, but that is to relate human response to God. His anger, his wrath is a steady unswerving attitude of righteous opposition towards all wrong. His kingdom is perfect love, joy and peace. That must be jealously guarded. In the final analysis everything must conform to that kingdom or be destroyed because the kingdom must not, indeed cannot, be marred or contaminated; if it were it would not be the kingdom.

The wrath is utterly just and fair, springing from judgement, and judgement involves a judge. So it is not impersonal, it is the wrath of God. However, although both righteousness and wrath are being revealed, there is a difference. Wrath was indeed ‘built into’ the creation ordinance; God created everything and it was good, but humankind was warned of the consequence of disobedience - we would die. That certain consequence was there from the start, and so when we did disobey, the consequence followed inevitably. The wrath, in that sense, is simply being revealed. To redeem the situation would require a new act of God, and that was not inevitable. The good news is a ‘new thing’ which God did. Righteousness has burst through to create a way out of the inevitability of judgement and wrath.

The wrath of God is not simply against particular sins; it is against the attitude and thought in human beings which produce those sins. The way of God is eternal reality - the kingdom - and, because that is what is real, it is the truth. To live in a way that rejects that truth is bound to result in disaster because it is not part of what is eternal; inevitably it will be destroyed. Paul's claim is that the truth has been sufficiently revealed for it to require a deliberate act for a person to reject it; he or she has to suppress the truth by their wickedness. The word 'suppress' is literally 'to hold down', and he goes on to explain -

19-20. What may be known about God is plain to them. Paul is not here thinking so much about a human being's spiritual needs or feelings as about the reasoning and understanding of facts. Since the creation of the world *God's invisible qualities* - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.

As soon as a person acts he reveals himself in some way. Suppose a sack of potatoes is left outside the door of a poor family; that implies at once that someone put it there - it could not put itself there. But it reveals much more than that. It implies i). Someone knows of the family's need. ii). He has a concern for them. iii). He is able to do something about that need. iv). He is compassionate. v). He is self effacing (the gift was anonymous). Similarly, says Paul, creation reveals much about God, in particular his power (and, as all that was created continues in a basically ordered manner, the creator and his power continue) and that the Creator must be infinitely more than his creation, which includes humankind, and so he must be far more than humankind.

Paul is not arguing that there must be a God. In his age few, if any, would doubt that. He is arguing that if only a person will think it through, he or she will discover much about God from the creation they see about them. So we are without excuse; only those who deliberately do not want to know, who suppress the truth, will not admit to that truth.

21-23. Paul states that such people knew God. Obviously he is not speaking of the personal relationship we may have with God through Jesus; we must understand 'knew' in the context of the two previous verses.

It has been rightly said that originally God made man in his own image and man has retaliated and made God in his. Paul's argument is not that humankind's ignorance of God caused us to err, but that our rebellion against what we did know of God caused ignorance. We are responsible for our own darkness and foolishness in the things of God. Instead of accepting things as they are and taking our rightful place as a creature, created by and responsible to a Creator, and giving him thanks and glory, we created a god of our own imaginings and then manufactured material replicas of these in the form of idols.

Knowing that we did not create ourselves and that we are not in charge of our own destiny humankind needs to believe in a god but prefers to have one of our own choosing rather than the one who is. This may bring us into bondage and fear as we try to placate and manipulate that god; but the paradox is that the idol is really a projection of ourselves. By our 'sacrifices' or beliefs we are seeking to get our own way; influencing the god to benefit ourselves. We are seeking power over that god; there is no question of us submitting to it and surrendering our lives to the god's purpose or plan - we do not even consider whether it has a purpose or plan. The worship of an idol is basically selfish. This is not simply a throwback to the past nor only for primitive tribes for today.

The highly organised and profitable business of horoscopes or the wearing of lucky charms and the like, is all dependent upon this deep-set desire to manipulate or tap into whatever ‘powers’ there may be for our own benefit. It is clearly a matter of “my will be done”.

24. What a thought: to judge and punish humankind, God has to do no more than allow us to have our own way; to give us what we desire! If we do not give God his rightful place we do not degrade him, we degrade ourselves. What we sinners do not see is that to seek to be free of God is not freedom but bondage. We were created to be dependent on God. If we willingly take that role we find our true freedom because we fulfil our destiny. Any other course means inevitably that we will be frustrated because we are living in a way we were not designed to live. What a punishment it is if God gives us over to our sinful desires.

25. This verse does not introduce a new thought but illustrates Paul’s argument. Believers may not be guilty of worshipping a lie but may be distracted into worshipping genuinely holy things like the Church or the Bible. Wonderful and important though these may be, they are created things and not the Creator. God uses them but is not confined to them. The Bible, the word of God is living and active and cannot, therefore, be set like a book of rules. God is greater than either the Church or the Bible, and so these things are to be used as aids to lead us closer to him but we must always look beyond them to the one who created them.

26-27. What was it that made Paul single out sexual perversion for condemnation here rather than greed and gluttony etc.? Was it simply that the Jews found the practice of homosexuality particularly offensive and Paul reflected this attitude? Possibly, but there may well be another reason. The first command God gives to humankind is to “*be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.*” (Gen. 1:28) Then he declares that it is not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18); so first he creates the animals and gives the man dominion over them (signified by naming them), but he specifically rejects animals as being a suitable companion for the man (2:20b) - thus forbidding bestiality - and then creates woman; and it is with her, not another man, that the man is to become one flesh (2:24). In the previous four verses Paul has been referring to creation, and it is in this context of the place of creature and Creator that Paul raises the matter of human sexuality as something fundamental to the creation ethic. He is not riding some personal hobby horse but sees the practice of homosexuality as a perversion of the Creator’s plan of procreation and uses it as a perfect illustration of what happens when humankind reject the knowledge they have of the true God; they put idols and themselves (see comment on v.23) in the place of God and follow their own foolishness (v.22).

What was Paul referring to when he says that those practising homosexuality, received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion? The word ‘penalty’ is literally ‘a return of wages or hire’. Are we to read into this some physical disease which Paul sees as divine punishment? We need to be careful in assuming this is the meaning. Certainly there are diseases which are spread sexually and to practise perversion may be to court these. But this is not so much the direct intervention of God as the consequence of living in a manner against (rather than with) the laws of nature set in creation. However, Paul may not mean this; the degradation of people in the eyes of others, which they bring on themselves, may be all that he has in mind.

28. For the third time (vv. 24, 26) Paul speaks of God ‘*giving them over*’ (see comment on 24). The words ‘*to do what ought not to be done*’ translate a stoic concept of what is a

man's duty. However, we must differentiate between what society expects of a person as his or her duty and what God commands as obedience. The former will vary from culture to culture and, over time, within a particular culture; the latter, relating more to principles than legal requirements, are constant. The two may overlap but often they are opposed. Paul is not speaking of failing to do what society may regard as a man's duty; he speaking here of sin against God.

29-31. Paul has already referred to sexual sin in the context of his discussion about creation (26/27) and now he lists other sins which follow as a consequence of humankind's inherent sinfulness. He is not content to speak generally of every kind of wickedness; he specifies a number of sins. It is all too easy to confess our 'sins and wickedness'; but perhaps God would ask us "which particular sins do you have in mind?" Unless we identify them we cannot truly repent of them or avoid them in the future.

Wickedness goes to the very heart of rebellion. It is used in 2 Thes. 2:10 of the antichrist who will represent Satan on earth, and in Luke 18:6 of the unjust judge. If a judge is unjust the very basis of law and order is destroyed - where can a person appeal? The depraved mind acts as though God is, or may be, wrong in what he says (the basis of Satan's first temptation of Eve). This lies at the root of postmodernism; there is no absolute truth, each individual must decide what is true for him or herself, and that will differ from person to person. Again we are back to the Garden of Eden with individual human beings laying down their own laws of what is right or wrong.

Evil. From time to time we all do wrong things prompted by a selfish motive; we hope to gain in some way from our action. That is wrong but it is at least understandable. The evil Paul mentions here is that of doing wrong for no purpose other than that it is wrong. Scripture speaks of Satan acting on the earth in fury because he knows he has only a short time left to him (Rev. 12:12). He seeks to do all the harm he can, not because it benefits him but because it is a way of hurting God. When we say something unkind or sarcastic we are doing just that. We do it, not because it benefits us but because we want to hurt someone else.

Greed. The Greek word means 'to have more', but in 2 Cor. 9:5 it is used to mean 'extortion'; so there is a sense of determination to get what we want. It includes material possessions but it is wider; embracing all forms of personal gain. It is the underlying desire to push ourselves forward, to gain position, praise and influence and it includes the ruthlessness to ensure we get it.

Depravity. This is often translated as 'malice' and is linked with the 'evil' already mentioned. If there is a difference it is that the evil of doing wrong simply because it is wrong springs from the inner drive of the depraved mind.

Full of envy. When we see the advantage which someone else has we may respond in four ways. i. Rejoicing; we are pleased for them. ii. Admiration; this may well prompt us to emulate something we see in them. iii. Jealousy; this will not encourage us to emulation but simply make us determined to get what we see they have. iv. Envy; this is lower even than jealousy. We do not strive to get what others have, we simply resent that they have it and may attempt to deprive them of it, whether it be material possessions or a good reputation.

Murder. Obviously Paul has in mind the act of killing but it is in the context of having a depraved mind. Christ similarly goes to the attitude which lies behind the act (Matt. 5:22). He warns about saying "you fool" of anyone. It isn't the utterance of the words

but the attitude of heart which the words reveal - despising someone as worthless. If we do that we are dismissing them from life.

Strife. The authorised version has 'debate'. When we do not accept our appointed place in the order of things, the place appointed by God, we are like a wheel with its axle off centre. Not seeing things from a right perspective we become contentious and express our feelings which themselves are warped. Strife is the attitude which has to have the last word. Nothing may be gained by it; the matter may be trivial but 'my' view must dominate.

Deceit. The background of this word has to do with laying a bait to catch something in a snare. It is craftiness and involves getting our way at the expense of another.

Malice; literally, 'a bad ethos' - a disposition which puts the worst construction on everything. It is so easy to put a wrong interpretation on the innocent actions of another person and then to spread that interpretation to others so that they will agree with us in our assessment of that person.

Gossips, slanderers. It is unfortunate that the division of verses comes between these two words because they go together. J.B. Phillips translates the former as "*whisperers behind doors*" and the second "*stabbers in the back*". The difference is that you cannot trace the former in order to confront them. The second group may seek to do you down and say things against you but, even if they do it when you are not present, they are more open about it. How easy it is to speak against someone, to lower them in the estimation of others; but it is even worse if we do it secretly.

God-haters. There is no doubt about its meaning. The context seems to require '*haters of God*', but '*hateful to God*' (*NEB*) may be more accurate. Certainly God is opposed to such people as Paul is describing but surely he is incapable of hating any person in the terms of our understanding of hatred because the emotion itself is totally foreign to him.

Insolent; insulting with violence. This is the person who is so convinced of his own abilities, power or possessions that he believes he has no need of anyone - God or man - and despises them. The truth is that we were created to be dependent beings, dependent upon God, and we do not function correctly if we seek to be independent. We are set within society and must work with that society.

Arrogant; literally the Greek means, 'to appear to be above', that is 'proud'. It is akin to the previous word, 'insolent', but whereas that doesn't bother about what others think and goes its own way, pride delights in being recognised as superior. The arrogant man may be equally contemptuous of others, but wants them to recognise him.

Boastful. This also is linked to the two preceding words. It contains the idea of a wanderer. The proud person shows off what he has, the boastful pretends he has what he does not; hence he doesn't stay around long enough to be found out. It is all too easy in company to try to keep our end up by exaggerating. When we are secure in the knowledge of who we are in Christ, we accept ourselves as we are and do not need to impress others.

They invent ways of doing evil. In every age are there are such people. In our own we have the terrorists who literally do invent ways of doing evil. If you do not acknowledge the true God you do not believe that there is any final judgement and you will never be held to account, so you are free to do all the harm you will.

They disobey their parents. In Paul's time fathers had great authority, especially in Roman culture. The Jews, of course, had the Ten Commandments with their instruction to honour your father and mother. In both Jewish and Christian culture the family is the centre of society, but that is no longer accepted in our increasingly secular world. Not only do children not respect their parents but parents do not take their parenting responsibilities seriously. Again, to ignore God and the ways he has planned for humankind leads to a breakdown in society.

31. They are senseless. There is an interesting nuance in the Greek which means the inability to set things together. If everything is created by one Creator and either you do not accept that as true or you ignore his instructions on how everything is to work, then there is no unifying principle and things will not make sense. If we leave God out of the picture we will never discover why we exist or where we fit into creation.

Faithless; literally, 'agreement breakers'. It is easy to relate this to nations or to international companies, but it happens within families and personal relationships. People break promises so readily and lightly. We need to guard our reputation for reliability.

Heartless. This is a terrible thing. It means 'without natural affection.' It is natural to love someone, especially parents or children. To become so self-centred that you feel nothing for your own family reveals a frightening state of depravity.

Ruthless; unmerciful or pitiless. It is the exact opposite of the spontaneous compassion Christ showed to people in need. It is the attitude of the Pharisees towards the sick whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Unmoved by the need, concerned only about the law. So often Christians show an attitude of harshness towards those who do not keep the law of God; the divorced, the unmarried mother, the thief. We should think a little more of how they must feel. This is not to lower the standard or grow lax but rather to allow the Spirit of Christ, who showed such compassion towards us, to flow through us.

32. Paul has already argued that mankind cannot plead ignorance of God and his commands (19-20); his fault is not ignorance but rebellion. Now he goes on to deal with those who think that they are spectators - those who either condone or condemn these evil things. (The division between this verse and the first verse of Chapter 2 is unfortunate and artificial.) He speaks first of those who not only do evil - and it is easy to understand that men may act from inner motives of passion, lust and greed - but cold-bloodedly delight in seeing others do the same thing. Of course, if we do wrong ourselves we feel better if we see others are no better than we are. In the presence of goodness we feel condemned - if we still have any conscience at all.

Chapter 2

Paul writes his letters thinking not only of what he wants to say but of its probable effect on his readers. Although he had surrendered his life to Jesus he never ceased to be a Jew, he simply became a fulfilled Jew. He knows that a fellow Jew will agree with what he has said about God judging the unrighteous but he is concerned at the attitude of those who consider themselves righteous.

1. Paul says that you who pass judgement on someone else... are condemning yourself because you who pass judgement do the same things. This is very strong stuff - is it true? At one level it obviously is not. We are all tempted to lose our temper at times but there is obviously a difference between those who give way to it and commit some violent act, and those who control themselves. However, there is the matter of attitude which lies behind the action. So many of the evil deeds which Paul has just condemned (and he is one of those who condemn such behaviour and so he is in danger of falling within his own criticism) arise because the perpetrators set themselves above others. No one is as important as they are; they despise other people. It is all too easy in condemning unrighteousness, to despise those who are involved in it. The moment we do that we fall into the same error.

2-3. However, Paul is more specific; he claims that many of those who judge others are in fact guilty themselves of doing those very things. God's judgement is totally fair and impartial because it is based on truth. The human heart is deceitful; it is astonishing how some in spiritual leadership can not only fall into deep sin, but somehow persuade themselves that they will escape God's judgement. Human beings seem to fall into one of two groups. There are those who believe that they are total failures who will never really be acceptable to God, and those who think that they are better than others and, therefore, more acceptable. If I miss a bus by five seconds and someone else misses it by five minutes we are both left behind and are equally failures. It is no use a person claiming murderers are worse sinners than liars in God's sight if his standard is perfection. (cf. 3:23)

Having said that, of course the state of the depraved in this life is worse than that of those who do not indulge in the same life-style. The problem is that that can give a false sense of security - "I am all right, I am acceptable, I am one of God's chosen ones; he will never reject me." This was a particular danger for the Jews who trusted in the fact that they were God's chosen people. Paul has to deal with this false belief - God's judgement is impartial.

4. The fact that the self-righteous man has not yet suffered God's wrath makes him feel secure. He does not realise that it is in his kindness God is giving him a little longer to discover his error and repent. There is the story of a reprobate who went to Lourdes for healing of some sickness. He received his cure but continued his old manner of life, explaining that God knew what he was like and had still healed him so why should he change? How many 'successful' people today believe that they are all right as they are and can manage without God?

5. The word 'stubbornness' comes from the Greek word which is used medically for forms of sclerosis - a hardening of muscles or arteries. One of the sins Paul has condemned is ruthlessness (1:31), a lack of compassion. Some of the most difficult people to deal with are not those who are wrong but those who are right. Their compassion has hardened. They judge the thief, the unmarried mother and the AIDS

victim. Christ had the wonderful ability to walk the tightrope between upholding the law (in fact his interpretation of it was on occasions more stringent than that of the Pharisees [Matt. 5:20-45]) and compassion. He did not condemn. It is all too easy to uphold the law and show total intolerance of those who break it. This lack of compassion is so alien to God's heart that unless we repent of it, we too are under the wrath of God. God is likely to be more angry at the lack of compassion and love in a Christian than he is at some breaking of the law (perhaps even murder) in an unbeliever. The point is that we know God and his heart; the unbeliever does not.

6. By putting this verse in quotation marks the NIV brings out the fact that Paul is not giving some new teaching. He is reminding his readers of what the Jew knew very well; God judges according to our deeds (Ps. 62:12, Jer. 17:10). But is this so? Doesn't Paul claim that we are justified by faith and not by works? Put like that we have to answer 'yes', but there is more to be said.

It is true that Christ has brought in a new covenant. The old said, "You must be righteous," and that is true still, but before a person can be righteous he has to desire to be righteous; it begins within him, in his heart. The new covenant means that God accepts us on the desire of the heart. He accepts us not according to the deeds we have done but on what we truly want to be. Sin is so terrible and has such a hold on us (we don't realise that, but God does) that we can never succeed in being good of ourselves, we need help. We need someone who will break the power of sin. In a word, we need a Saviour. God knows that if he accepts only those who have proved by their deeds that they are good, then heaven will be empty of humankind. On the other hand he will not violate our free will. We choose whether we want to be good or not. If we choose to be good, he accepts us and will then give us the strength to enable us to fulfil the choice we have made. Christ said, "*blessed are those who hunger and thirst (earnestly long) for righteousness, for they will be filled.*" (Matt. 5:6)

Having said that, however, if a person really does long to be righteous his or her life will change. That does not mean they will not fail but if we truly repent we turn round. We stop going in the direction we have been taking and set off in a new, right one. If we have a new goal we will move in a new direction. We are accepted on the strength not of what we are but what we want to be, and if we truly want to be good, righteous and holy then our aims and our actions will change. The change is the outward sign that our desire is genuine. Thus it is still true, albeit a reinterpretation, of the Old Testament statement that God "*will give to each person according to what he has done*".

7. Paul continues his argument. In view of his insistence in this letter that we are justified by faith and not works he cannot here mean that we win eternal life because of our effort in doing good deeds. He is coming at the matter from a different angle. Salvation is free but it brings responsibilities. We do not drift into heaven, we must earnestly desire it. Heaven is for those who value it, who so passionately long for God's will to be done that they live their lives now according to the ways of heaven. They seek his glory and his honour. In a sentence, no one will be in heaven who does not truly want to be there; and if we do want to be there, that 'wanting' will be revealed in the way we live.

Is it right to refer to it being God's glory, honour and immortality? Is it not rather for us? - We can hardly seek God's immortality because he is immortal - and, indeed, vv. 9 - 11 confirm that Paul is applying it to us rather than God. However, the paradox is that it is only by seeking to ensure that God is glorified and honoured that we can share in his

glory and honour. It is the same paradox that he who would save his life will lose it, and he who loses it for the sake of Christ and the gospel will save it (Mk. 8:35)

There is little space here to deal with the important question of immortality. Some hold that the human soul is indestructible and, therefore, those who do not accept salvation will exist in hell eternally. This verse implies that immortality is not universal and has to be sought. This is confirmed by 1 Tim 6:16 which states that God alone is immortal and so immortality (incorruptibility of the person), like glory and honour, is the gift of God.

Immortality (continued existence) must not be confused with eternal life which, although it does go on for ever, has to do with quality rather than quantity. Which is why it begins now, on earth, the moment a person is born of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 3:15/16).

8-11. This is the corollary to v.7. Eternal life is the life of the Kingdom and exists only in the Kingdom. If we are not living according to the ways of the Kingdom we put ourselves outside that Kingdom and so everything is out of balance now and, in the final realisation of all things, we will be outside the eternal order. The Kingdom is experienced now to some extent (and will be in the future to its full extent) as God's wrath and anger. From our side that is what it is but we have to balance that with the truth that his wrath is not based on hurt or the desire for retaliation as it is with us human beings. He does not put us out of the Kingdom with its peace and fulfilment and order and joy; we human beings exclude ourselves.

Because the Kingdom is eternal, the trouble and distress and also the glory and honour and peace will be experienced to some degree now, in this life, according to whether we are outside or within the Kingdom; but, of course, in the final consummation of all things, when only the Kingdom remains, the wrath or the love will be experienced to the full. Paul reiterates his argument begun in v.1 that God does not show favouritism. God revealed himself first to the Jews and so judgement (both deprivation and blessing) will begin with them. Peter makes a similar point with regard to the Church - the New Covenant people of God. For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17)

12-13. It is generally accepted that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Society could not be organised otherwise. Ignorance may possibly be taken into account when considering what punishment should be given, but it cannot influence the verdict as to whether a person is or is not guilty of breaking the law. It is this fact which gave the Jew his tremendous advantage - God had revealed his law to the Jew. The Jew would agree with the first part of Paul's statement; those who do not have God's law will certainly perish. At first sight this may seem unfair but there are circumstances where we make a similar judgement. Someone who is discovered to have an infectious disease may be barred from entering a country. The fact that they did not know they have it cannot alter the decision to bar them. In any case, Paul is about to deal with this aspect in the following verses.

Perhaps the Jew needed to be reminded of the truth that those who sin knowing the law will be judged by the law. As Paul says, it is not knowing the law which makes a person righteous, but the keeping of it. We need to remember that Paul is writing to Christians. All that he has said about the wrath of God falling on the ungodly is not written to make the ungodly repent - they will not read this. It is all written for Christians. It isn't enough to have the tremendous privilege of knowing God's will - it is doing it that counts; not hearing but obedience.

14-15. Paul has already considered the outward revelation of God from what can be seen of creation (1:19/20). Now he turns to the inner witness within each of us. He is not thinking of Jer. 31:33 where God promises to put his law in the minds of his people and write it on their hearts; that is the work of the Holy Spirit and neither the Gentiles nor the Jews can have the Spirit until they are born again. This inner witness may well be a residue within each person of the original goodness of creation before the fall, but whether or not this is so, there is within each of us a standard, a norm, by which we judge ourselves. It will be a different norm for each of us dependent on the particular culture in which we live, for things acceptable in one culture are forbidden in another, but two points should be made. First, there is such a thing as conscience, whatever name we give it. Freud recognised this, naming it the 'superego', setting it over against other parts which he named the 'ego' and the 'id'. Secondly the culture does not totally control the conscience. Surely we all know of things which are socially acceptable but which we are not inwardly happy about ourselves.

There is much misunderstanding of conscience amongst Christians. It is not set immovably within us. It can be, and needs to be, educated. It is like a thermostat or an alarm clock. It can be adjusted to 'go off' at a different point. Once a person becomes a Christian an adjustment will have to be made to the consciences in many areas - and the adjustments are by no means all tighter, many are to be loosened. *"For where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom"* (2 Cor. 3:17). Our values are to be set by God working through his Spirit as we seek him and meditate on the Scriptures. Our ideas of right and wrong need to be reassessed in the light of our knowledge of God. Mankind's first sin was to desire to be independent of God and have our own judgement of good and evil.

However, No one must violate another's conscience. We may help educate that conscience but each of us must, in the end, follow what we believe to be right. It is a danger for a spiritual director that he or she may try to assume control of the life of someone who comes to them for help. It is the fact that we are responsible for our own decisions and actions that makes us the moral beings we are intended to be. Indeed, only on this basis can 'justification by faith' be just. It is our own estimate and judgement of ourselves which alone brings repentance; it is our conscience which must condemn us, not someone else's.

16. The NIV helpfully puts vv. 14/15 in parenthesis, showing that this verse follows on in thought directly after v. 13 where Paul speaks of who will be declared righteous. There will be a day of judgement. One of the most frequent complaints is, "If there is a God, why does he permit so much evil to continue?" The simple answer is, "To allow time for more people to be saved." All the hurt and wrong in the world pains and offends God more than it does us, but when he does finally act that will be that. There will be no further opportunity to sin, but nor will there be opportunity to repent and enter the kingdom. Yet that day will come. When it does the judgement will be, as Paul has come to understand (hence 'my' gospel), of men's secrets. For the Jew it was the outward keeping of the law that mattered more than the inward disposition of the heart. It was this which so angered Christ in his dealings with the Jewish authorities e.g. when they condemned him for healing people on the Sabbath.

Of course, that does not mean that Paul does not value good works - *"By their fruits you shall know them"*. If the inner person is right then their actions will gradually be brought into line. By referring to 'men's secrets' Paul is saying something so simple yet so profound - on the day of judgement we shall be judged by or through Jesus Christ who

has himself experienced human life to the full, and that judgement will be according to what each of us is. It will not be according to our failures or successes, but who we are.

17-24. Having prepared the ground by explaining general principles, Paul now deals specifically with the Jews. Had he heard that some of the Christians in Rome were Jews who were still clinging to the privileges of birth? or was he imagining some objection for the sake of illustrating his argument?

Paul does not deny that the Jew has an advantage. He has the law; he knows more clearly than those of other nations what God requires. Compared with others, the Jew does have light; he should be able to guide and instruct others who do not have the revelation of truth which he has. The fact is, however, the Jew is not living his own life in the light of that revelation.

With regard to the sins listed in v.22 following, it is difficult to know just what Paul has in mind. No doubt there were individual Jews who did steal, commit adultery and rob temples. As in any walk of life the failure of the few brings disgrace to many. A clergyman or policeman who falls will be pilloried and there will always be those who will say, "They are all like that". But it is unlikely that those to whom Paul was writing behaved in this way, so his argument (which is leading to the conclusion that all have failed and are under God's condemnation) would lose its point. These Jews would reply, "but we do not behave like that".

It may be, therefore, that Paul has in mind a wider application of these words. God accused his people of the Old Covenant of robbing him by not giving him the tithe (one tenth) of their produce and earnings (Mal. 3:8 ff.) He accused both Israel and Judah of committing adultery against him by going after other gods (Jer. 3:8). The reference to robbing temples is particularly difficult. It can hardly refer to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, for that is the one and only temple the Jews had and these Christians are in Rome. The word is in the plural so it would appear to refer to pagan temples but how did the Jews rob these? We cannot know the exact circumstances which occasioned Paul's remarks but his point is clear; the Jews bragged that they had the law of God and were therefore superior to other nations, they should be a light to guide those who did not have this advantage but, in fact, "*God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.*"

25. Paul imagines a Jew objecting that the sign of being part of the people of God is circumcision. But Paul is in the middle of his argument that righteousness is more than the outward conformity to regulations, it is an inward disposition founded on relationship which, in turn is based on trust. The Jew was trusting in his circumcision, a sign, rather than in God who gave the sign.

It is easy for us to stand back from all this and see it as something which applies only to the Jew. But we can fall into the same trap. We can trust in our baptism, church attendance, giving money, good works. But these are like bribes, "I have done this and therefore, God, you must accept me - I have fulfilled your conditions." We are not to put our trust in conditions, not even God's; we are to trust in him. It is a matter of relationship.

26-27. Paul is arguing theoretically here because, as he will state in the next chapter, no one has kept the law, all have sinned. So he is not thinking so much of the Gentiles actually keeping the law so prized by the Jews, but going beyond that to the law's requirements. The true requirement is faith - trusting God; it is a matter of relationship.

It is not possible to mend a broken law but it is possible to mend a broken relationship. If we break a law, even if we repent that can only affect the sentence that may be passed, it cannot alter the fact that we are guilty. However, if we are in a relationship and do something to break it, if we repent and seek to restore it then, provided the other person is willing, the relationship can be totally restored. Nevertheless, if a Gentile is in relationship with the Lord or has a sensitive conscience, he may well fulfil more of the law, even if he is unaware of it, than some of the Jews and in doing so he is a condemnation of them.

28-29. Paul sums up this part of his argument. The phrase, '*circumcision of the heart*' would be familiar to Jews; it comes in Deut. 10:16, Jer. 4:4 and elsewhere. So he cannot be accused of some new and heretical teaching. It was there in the Old Testament but it was not understood. By using a capital 'S', the NIV takes 'spirit' as the Holy Spirit; it could equally well be our human spirit, meaning 'a spiritual circumcision'. It is not an important differentiation in this context because a circumcision in a person's heart must be accomplished in his spirit by the Holy Spirit.

The final phrase is a play on words. The word 'Jew' can be traced back to Judah which itself means praise.

Chapter 3

1-2. Paul has the sort of mind which, while thinking through a proposition or thesis, can grasp possible objections to it. He has been arguing that the Jews are under the condemnation of God just as the Gentiles are. That seems as though he is saying that there is no advantage in being a Jew; far from it. Paul has become a Christian, but he could never deny his heritage; he did not want to and he did not need to. With other faiths, when a person turns to Christ, he or she has to give up their old religion: not so with the Jew. Once a Jew, always a Jew. They become a fulfilled Jew. After all, Jesus never ceased to be a Jew and he is the author and pioneer of our faith.

Obviously Paul intends to give a list of advantages. He begins, “first...” but he gets carried away and does not add his other points until he returns to the matter in chapter 9. He says that the Jews had been entrusted with the very words of God. This is the difference between the people of God (the Jews in the Old Testament and the church today) and all other peoples: -we know what God is about. We do not have his entire plan but we have sufficient to encourage and to guide us. We do not value that sufficiently. So many world leaders have no idea of the purpose of creation nor the destiny of the world. No wonder they have nothing of eternal value to aim at.

Paul says that one of the great advantages the Jews had was that they knew what God wanted. The tragedy was that knowing it they did not follow it; and, of course, that made them even more guilty in their failure than other nations who were in ignorance. We have far clearer knowledge of the will of God than the Jews, but are we any more faithful?

3. Paul continues to pose questions asked by an imagined objector. The Jews’ failure has set God a double problem. He has chosen them and promised them a privileged position. Yet they are sinners and deserve to be judged and punished. God has to be true to his promise and to his innate justice. If, because of their faithlessness, God fails either to honour his promise or to judge them (because Paul has already argue God does not show favouritism 2:11) he will be failing in faithfulness on one side or the other. The question in v. 4 comes from Ps. 51:4 where David confesses his sin to God. Paul uses it to argue that in fact the faithlessness of the Jews only serves to highlight God’s utter faithfulness. He is building up his argument to reveal just how God can be both just and the justifier of the sinner, but he isn’t ready to reveal that yet; he has more to say. He continues to raise probable objections that Jews would make.

5. It is then only a short step to argue that sin is good. If our sinful actions serve to reveal God’s goodness, faithfulness and righteousness more clearly, it could be argued that we are helping God by being sinners. Set down like that, the reasoning is so ridiculous as to be laughed out of court. However, we do not always see it in that light.

Consider the case of Judas Iscariot. We know that Jesus is the Lamb of God “*slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev.13:8). Jesus said he had come, “*to give his life as a ransom for many*” (Mk.10:45). Christ’s death was planned in heaven before ever he was born on earth. It could be our view, therefore, that everyone who helped arrest, condemn and crucified Jesus, was serving God and to be commended. But Christ himself refutes that argument, “*the son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him*” (Lk.22:22). Finally God’s will will be done - that is one side of the coin. Sin is sin and each of us must bear the responsibility for our actions; that is the other side. God can use even man’s sin to glorify himself (he can use even Satan’s

rebellion and evil to the same end - what could be more evil than the cross where both Satan and man seek to put their Creator to death?) but the sinner is still guilty and condemned. Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and is judged for his free will decision to do so.

6. The argument Paul is refuting may be, “God is right to condemn unrighteousness but, as it simply highlights his faithfulness, he shouldn’t punish us in his wrath”. However, it seems more likely that the argument is, “since our sin shows his goodness and righteousness more clearly, he ought not to condemn us at all”. In fact, both arguments are false. The second is saying, in effect, that sin is good. To adopt that line leads to chaos. How can there be any justice, any fair judgement? Wrong must be revealed for what it is.

The first argument must also be rejected. Sin must be punished. This is not the place to go in any depth into the reasons for punishment - is it to deprive a person of possible gain as a result of his sin? Is it to reform him for the future? Or is it simply retributive – you’ve done this to us so we’ll do this to you? (It can, of course, be a combination of all or any of these.) One thing is clear, if you tell someone that they must or must not do something and when they disobey you do nothing about, it you lose your ability to maintain order for the benefit of society (whatever form or size of society is involved) as a whole. Should it be that you do not punish rebellion then the reasoning must not be that it is not deserved (as the argument in v. 5 would require) but that you show mercy. In which case someone else, or society itself, has to bear the consequence of the sin. Sin always hurts someone. The wonder of the gospel is that God himself bears the hurt, the consequence of our sin. His just and necessary wrath falls not on us but on himself.

7-8. These verses do not really add anything new but simply point up the objectors’ argument even more clearly. Paul will return to this matter in chapter 6 after he has completed his foundation of the gospel. Here he contents himself with the brief comment that those who slanderously state or genuinely believe this is what he is preaching deserve condemnation.

9. This verse is obscure in the Greek and we cannot be sure exactly what Paul meant. NIV hints at the difficulty by giving an alternative reading to the second sentence - “*are we any worse?*” However, the general thrust is clear. Having dealt with the question as to whether the Jew has an advantage (3:1ff.) and showing clearly that he cares, Paul goes on to the next question - has it done him any good? Is he any better than the Gentiles? To this he answers, “*not at all!*” He has argued this in chapter 2 it isn’t enough to know what God requires, we have to do it.

Paul says that everyone is under sin. In Paul’s eyes (and in his personal experience, cf. Ch.7) sin is not simply something man does, it is an independent power which does something to man. It is almost as though sin has a personality, existing apart from man and controlling him. It is not a new concept, it comes right at the beginning of Scripture; “*Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it*” (Gen. 4:7) There is a tendency today to put sin down to events which a person has experienced in the past; a broken home, deprived childhood etc.. Undoubtedly these things do have a very real effect on us, but we abandon to our peril this biblical concept of sin as an independent force or power seeking to dominate man and needing to be overcome by an act of will. Paul will argue that an act of will is not enough; the power of sin is so great we need a greater power - that of God himself - to be free; but God does not override our free will, he works along with it. We must earnestly desire to be free of sin.

10-18. At the moment Paul is concentrating on Jewish objections to his claims, so he now quotes from the Jewish Scriptures to back up his argument and show that it is not some totally new concept - even if it was not recognised or understood before.

19. Having strung together these quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, Paul completes his argument. There are two problems about this verse. The first is over the meaning of the word 'law'. Paul uses it in different ways in different contexts. It refers to the 10 Commandments; the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. It may also refer to the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament; but, used loosely, it may embrace the whole Old Testament). Sometimes Paul will use the word in the sense of a principle – *“I see another law at work in the members of my body”* (7:20). In this verse, having just quoted from the songs of the prophet Isaiah, Paul seems to use “the law” as meaning the Old Testament as a whole; although it could be argued that he regards his quotations as comments illustrating the failure of the Jews to keep the law in a narrower sense - the 10 Commandments.

The second problem is that having opened this verse with the statement that the law speaks to those who are under it (i.e. the Jews and, by implication, no one else) he goes on to say, “so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God”. Some commentators debate this problem at some length. However, it seems that they forget this is a letter - carefully reasoned indeed, but it is not a paper prepared for the theological faculty of a university. Paul has already stated that Gentiles are guilty of rebellion against God (chapter 1). He assumes the Jews he is addressing will agree with that. His concern here is to show that the Jews have also failed. Having shown that they have failed to keep the law, he says, in effect, “you are the ones who were given the law so, of course, it is to you it speaks. So that condemns you and puts you in the same situation as everyone else.”

20. There is a sort of shorthand summary of his argument here. In theory a person can be declared righteous by observing the law. In fact no person (apart from Christ) has been able to keep the law so it follows that no one can hope to be declared righteous if he trusts in keeping the law. What the law does is show us what we ought to do and to be and, because we fail to attain that, we become conscious of our sin. Paul is saying, in effect, “The law you so prize and which you think saves you, in fact simply reveals clearly and specifically exactly where you fail”.

There is a fundamental point Paul makes here which even believers who claim they are justified by faith alone often do not grasp. We have it instilled in us that we ought to be good, and we seek to be. We know there are areas where we fail and we throw ourselves totally on Christ and his offering of himself to cover our sin and justify us where we fail. But that is where we are wrong. If we rely on him, “where we fail”, then subconsciously we are relying on ourselves where we do not fail. We are riding two horses; we rely on ourselves for where we keep the law and only rely on Christ to make up what we lack. We must understand that we have to rely totally on one or the other - totally on keeping the law or totally on Christ. If we wish to travel from London to New York, we go by sea or by air. It is impossible to travel partly by one and partly by the other. We have seen already (2:7) that faith issues in and is revealed by good works, but these follow our justification; they do not merit it. There is no possibility of us gaining any merit, no possibility of justification, by observing the law. Our salvation from beginning to end depends upon Christ alone.

In order to clarify this point of doctrine, I have gone ahead of Paul as he carefully builds up his argument. Having proved that the law can save no one, he is ready to reveal the true and only way of salvation.

21. The word 'but' is very often used gloriously in Scripture, and this is one of the most glorious uses of all. Paul has built up his argument carefully and has shown that there is no hope for any man, Gentile or Jew. All have sinned and deserve only the wrath of God. Paul has led us to the precipice of destruction. Then, at the last moment, when all is lost, he writes 'but'; and that 'but' represents a U-turn. He is about to rush man pell-mell into life.

The NIV pushes the translation a little by the phrase, "a righteousness from God" when the great majority of translations speak of "the righteousness of God". We have already met this (1:17) but the use of the word 'from' clarifies Paul's thinking in a wonderful way. Martin Luther longed to understand this epistle but found the expression, "*the righteousness of God*" a barrier because he took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous. That may be true but is hardly the encouraging good news that so excited and transformed Paul. Luther wrestled with this praise night and day until he suddenly grasped the truth that this righteousness is one whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us by faith. Luther said that this phrase, which had filled him with hate, became to him a gateway to heaven. By using 'from' instead of 'of', the NIV immediately reveals the meaning and the wonder of God's love for us. This righteousness which we so need but which we can never earn or attain of ourselves, is given to us by God. It is his righteousness but it is offered to us. All we have to do is to desire it and receive it, and we do that by faith, by believing it. As it is a gift and not earned and as we receive it by faith and not by works, it has nothing to do with keeping a law. Nevertheless, the Law and the Prophets (i.e. the Old Testament) do testify to it. Admittedly it was not understood. If Luther, who lived 1500 years after Christ, did not grasp the New Testament teaching of Paul, it is little wonder that those who lived before Christ did not understand the meaning of the Old Testament. Yet the teaching is there. For instance, the whole sacrificial system whereby God was willing to accept the death of an animal as a substitute for the death of a sinner points forward to the death of the true Lamb of God, Jesus, in our place.

22-3. This verse and the next are often quoted out of context to show the universality of sin and the need of everyone for a Saviour. There is nothing wrong in doing that; they do, indeed, show this. However, Paul's argument, remember, is for the benefit of Jews who are trusting in the law to save them.

God had a purpose in creating; it was for his (God's) glory (Is.43:7). But no one has fulfilled that purpose except Jesus. The desire to glorify God in his body was constantly with Christ in his earthly ministry. It was the first thing he mentioned in his "high priestly" prayer immediately before his arrest and trial (Jn.17:1). Because man never attained that "glory of God" which was God's intention, Jesus gives us his (Jn.17:22). But note that it is not to be an individual attribute alone; it is to be revealed corporately as a people - the Church - "*that they may be one as we are one*" and that there may be "*glory in the Church*" (Eph. 3:21).

24. For 'grace' see chapter 1:7. This verse contains two other key words: 'justified' and 'redemption'. Both are linked to righteousness (cf.1:17 and 3:21). Justified is sometimes expanded to, "Just-as-if-I'd" never sinned, and that is helpful. It has to do with the final judgement. That judgement, for the Christian believer, has already taken place. The eternal God brings forward the verdict, "acquitted". We have already seen that that does

not mean that in character we have become holy, pure and virtuous; it means that no charge stands against us. It is important to grasp that. There is an idea that in some vague way God is saying, "I'll overlook your past sins - put them in a suspense account - and see how you get on. If, from now on, you live a good life, we'll forget your earlier sins." That is not the case. To continue the metaphor of accounting; the sins in our account had been marked, "paid and account close". If I am in substantial debt to a company which is about to sue me and someone else pays my debt; I am in the clear. At that moment I am not, in myself, a changed person. The astonishing generosity of the benefactor may have a profound effect on me and may change me from then on, but any such change comes later. Nevertheless, that company no longer has any charge against me. Should they take me to court, the case would be thrown out. Then I would not simply be accounted righteous in the eyes of the law (although that is true), I would be righteous because no charge would be found against me. Seen in this light, two things follow. First my "righteousness" is no fiction. No charge stands against me, so I must be acquitted. My righteousness is a fact but it must be understood as my standing and not my personal character or attribute. Secondly, if the final verdict of God on my life has been pronounced now, before I have reached the end of it, that verdict cannot possibly depend upon anything I have done; it is a free and merciful act of God alone.

All this leads us on to the word 'redemption'. Obviously, this has the meaning "to buy back". Jesus said that he had come to give his life as a ransom of many (Mark 10: 45). There is a problem here: to whom was the payment made? At first sight it may seem that as man was ensnared by Satan and is in bondage to Satan the ransom was, in some way, paid to him. But this theory must be rejected totally. Satan was not "paid off"; he was defeated, overcome by the victory won by Jesus Christ. So to whom was the ransom paid? It is almost true to say it was not paid to anyone. The following illustration may help us understand.

The story is told of ancient times when a young man was accused of some crime. It so happened that the judge before whom he was brought to stand trial was his own father. There was no doubt that he was guilty and that was the judge's verdict, but the court waited to hear the sentence. When it was announced, everyone gasped; it was the heaviest find ever imposed for such a crime. Immediately, the judge stepped down from his seat and paid the fine from his own pocket so that his son could go free. To whom was the fine paid? To the state. Yet it was the state which paid the judge his salary. It can be said that God has passed sentence on his people: "guilty and deserving death", but he has paid the price himself. It has been paid to a principle of "justice", and that principle was not only set up by him; in some way it is related to him, it is part of what we mean by the word 'God'. Nevertheless, the cost was real. It was not some book keeping entry, transferring funds from one account to another so that no payment was made. The cost was the death of Jesus Christ, Son of Man and the Son of God. That really happened. The account, my account and your account, has been paid. That is why God can say, "Acquitted". Legally nothing stands against us, so we must be declared righteous.

25-26. The first sentence contains a wealth meaning. Unfortunately, it is possible to translate the original in various ways. To a Jew the different words carry all sorts of overtones because they relate to rites and ceremonies practised under the old covenant. Remember, Paul is writing here primarily to convince Jews that the old covenant has been fulfilled and superseded by Christ playing on these overtones which are lost on us. Before giving a definition of each word, therefore, I will attempt to cut through the mass of ideas which are involved by painting in the background, and then explain the purpose of the words Paul uses.

In the Old Testament the concept of sacrificing animals was very familiar. It wasn't confined to the Israelites, the people of God. Indeed, to this day many pagan religions practise animal sacrifice with the aim of placating a god. For the Israelite, the law provided different sacrifices for different purposes. The whole system focused on one supreme offering - that made by the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement when he made atonement for the sins of the priests (including himself) and the people. On that one day he, and he alone, was permitted by God to enter that section of the Tabernacle (and, later, the Temple) known as The Holy of Holies, where God himself dwelt in his glory. There the blood of the sacrificed animals would be sprinkled in front of the Ark of God and on its covering - the Mercy-seat. Now, in the Ark, amongst other things, was the Law of God. The fact that on top of it was the Mercy-seat, showed, symbolically, that when the law had been broken there could still be forgiveness if the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled. This is not the place to attempt to explain the full significance of the blood; suffice it to say that this clearly represented the life poured out (i.e. the death) of the animal. God was willing to accept the death of the animal in place of the deserved death of the sinful people. Paul argues elsewhere that this is a sort of legal fiction which God accepted temporarily. The blood of bulls and goats cannot adequately atone for human sin. God could only accept such a ritual because it looked forward to the true sacrifice which, although in time was yet to come, is eternal and of eternal effect and significance – the death of the man Jesus Christ.

To turn now to the words of this text: “*God presented Jesus.*” There is a sense public display. This was not an act performed in the innermost sanctuary which was seen by only the high priest who performed it. Jesus was crucified in public.

The phrase, “*a sacrifice of atonement*”, is translated differently in the various versions. Some use the word ‘propitiation’ and others ‘expiation’, and these words give rise to lengthy explanations by commentators. It may be sensible to deal briefly with them as they are words which are used frequently in discussion about Christ’s death. To propitiate means to render favourable, to appease or conciliate. The problem in using this term is that it is God who is making the propitiation and it cannot possibly mean that God is conciliating man. Man is the offender not the offended. The nearest we can get to the truth if we use the word ‘propitiation’ is that God was in some way reconciling his own sense of justice (cf. the discussion on the word ‘redemption’ 3: 24). The word ‘expiation’ means to avert, to make reparation, to extinguish guilt. This is more akin to ‘atonement’ which, as the word says, is to make ‘at one’. It is the action of setting at one after discord. But it is man who needs to be reconciled to God, not God to man; he is constant, his attitude has not changed. He is always love, truth and justice and never condones sin.

The Greek word Paul uses and which, as we have seen, is translated in so many different ways, is linked to a Hebrew word in the Old Testament that has to do with covering - a covering over sin. To a Jew, this would remind him of the covering on the Ark – the Mercy-seat, where the sprinkled blood of a bull and a goat made reparation for the sins of the high priest and the people of God. To the Jew, therefore, this sentence would convey a wealth of meaning. The death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, was the sacrifice to which all other sacrifices pointed.

“*Through faith in his blood*”, is not the happiest of translations. It is a sort of shorthand. Our faith is not in Christ’s blood, but in him and his offering of himself in death. As with the Old Testament sacrifices, the pouring out of Christ’s blood is the effective sign of his

death. We must understand Paul to mean, “God showed forth Christ publicly as reconciliation by his blood, which we receive by faith”.

The final sentence of 25 runs into the next to verse and, complete Paul’s argument, showing forth the only way of salvation – faith in Christ and the effectiveness of his death on the cross. We have seen that because this was an event that happened rather than a change in the mind of God (it wasn’t a book keeping transfer cf.3:24) God is seen to uphold the requirements of his own justice but obtain the redemption and justification, the acquittal, of sinners who put their trust in this mighty act.

It may be that “*at this present time*” contrasts with God’s forbearance in the past in overlooking temporarily mankind’s sins in the past. However, it also (and this is more important) contrasts with the future; that end time when all will be judged. Wonderfully, we do not have to wait until that day because God justifies us now, in this present time. The final verdict upon us has already been passed; we are righteous, we are free to live.

27. The Jew boasted of two things. His people had been given the Law of God and they had been chosen by God to be his people. Paul deals with both of these.

If a person could be saved by keeping the law, there would be room for boasting – “I have done all this so I deserve or merit salvation”. It is still a prevalent attitude today. How often at the time of a person’s death, a relative or friend will say, “I am sure he is in heaven: he was such a good, kind, and generous person; always helping others”. But if salvation is totally a gift from God, which we can do nothing about except receive by trusting him, then boasting is obviously excluded.

28. This verse could be placed in brackets because it is a summary of the detailed argument Paul has just set forth

29. Here Paul deals with the second cause of the Jews’ proud boast, “We are God’s chosen people”. (‘circumcised’ and ‘uncircumcised’ are, of course, synonyms for Jew and Gentile).

In Chapter 1 vv18ff. Paul has stated that all mankind is guilty of godlessness and what may be known about God has been made plain. There is only one Creator of all men; and therefore he is as much the Creator and God of the Gentiles as he is of the Jews. The Gentiles had only the general revelation of God shown forth in the fact of creation; but they rebelled against this revelation. The Jews had the Law, the revelation of what God required of them (and, therefore, a greater revelation of who he is); but they have failed to keep this Law. So both Jews and Gentiles are guilty and the only way both can be saved is by faith in the finished work of Christ and by receiving the righteousness which comes from God.

31. The Jew might argue that if Paul is right, there is no need for the Law – even that God ought not to have given the Law. But Paul’s argument is not that the Law is wrong but that it cannot save anyone because no one has ever been able to keep it. It is because the Law is there that our failure, our sin, is revealed and we all can see we are justly condemned. That is why we need a Saviour.

Chapter 4

Great truths, like great inventions, become accepted and used when the first idea has been tested and amended in the light of day. No doubt the teaching which Paul set out in this letter to the Christians in Rome had been given in his discussions with Jews in the various cities and towns he had visited. Questions and objections from his hearers would have honed and sharpened Paul's thought and reasoning. As he wrote this letter so he would recall the comments made by his hearers in public debate. To the Jews, Abraham was a most important figure; he was father of the race. No doubt the majority of them believed that God chose Abraham to be the one through whom they, his chosen people, should come into being, because he earned or merited that role by his behaviour. If Paul can show that such a revered figure as Abraham was not accepted by God because of his deeds but because of his faith, he would challenge the very basis of the Jews' belief. What's more, he will endorse his claim that the law and the prophets testify to a gift of righteousness from God (3: 21).

1-3. In speaking of Abraham as "our forefather", Paul was obviously speaking primarily to the Jews. Abraham was the founder of their race, their nation and their religion. However, because, as he is about to show, Abraham was justified by faith and not works; he is also the father of everyone else who is justified by faith. In that sense Abraham is the father of Gentile believers also. Paul will live turn to this in 4:11/12.

If Abraham was chosen by God because of his good deeds he would be entitled to claim some credit. Abraham was indeed a 'good' man. He did obey God; he set out at God's command to the Promised Land solely on the strength of that promise, not knowing where he was going. But Paul's point is that Abraham trusted God first. It was this trust or faith which prompted Abraham to obey. The faith came first; the obedience was the outcome of that faith.

It is important to understand this because it is sometimes held that James and Paul disagree and confuse the issue because James in his letter (2:23) quotes the same Old Testament verse (Genesis 15:6). "*Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness*", and uses it to prove that man is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. In fact, there is no conflict; they are arguing for the same truth but from different viewpoints. Paul is saying, "You can never win or merit salvation by what you do; it is by faith alone". James is saying, "True; but anyone can say they have faith; let's see if they mean it. True faith will affect how they act."

4-5. Paul here states a very obvious fact that if a man is paid for work he has done the pay is not a gift; he has earned it and it is due to him. However, if a man receives that pay without doing any work, that is obviously a free gift. (Paul does not, in fact, spell out the argument in that last sentence, but it is clearly implied.) He rushes on to show that the reason why the man is able to receive the gift is because of his relationship to the giver – he trusts him. I must make it clear that I am not saying that the person's faith is the reason why God gives the gift – if that were so it would mean that the man merits the gift by having faith. No, the reason why God gives it is only because of his goodness, love and mercy. The gift is therefore available to all men because God loves all men. Faith is the channel which enables a man to enter into relationship with God and receive the gift.

Paul puts in a descriptive phrase about God, "*who justifies the wicked*". It is so brief and almost hidden away in the main thrust of his argument that we might miss it. In fact, it is a bombshell God justifies the wicked! That is the very thing that God himself has said he will not do. In giving Moses instructions on how to govern the people, God says of

himself, “*I will not acquit the guilty*” (Ex. 23:7). The writer of the Proverbs says, “Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent – the Lord detests them both.” (Pr.24:24) To say that God does justify the wicked would be blasphemy to the ears of a Jew. However, Paul has built up his argument carefully and has already shown that God can both preserve his own justice and yet justify man (3:26), not by whim or by violating his own ordinances, but by himself bearing the cost to cover man’s sin (3:24/5). He will spell out more clearly (5:6-9) what that cost was. Remember, Paul is not saying Abraham was righteous but that by his faith in God he was credited with righteousness. If all this seems complicated it may serve to remind us that our salvation was neither simple nor cheap; it cost Christ his life.

6/8. Having shaken the Jews by claiming that the very founder of their race, Abraham, was justified by faith and not works, Paul hits them hard again by quoting another of their great heroes, King David, who, it is generally accepted, was the author of psalm 32. In the Hebrew the word ‘count’ plays an important role in the quotations Paul uses in reference to both Abraham and David. Abraham was ‘counted’ as righteous and David refers to the man whose sin is not ‘counted’ against him by the Lord. Notice, again, that Scripture is not saying that mankind is sinless, nor that we are not responsible for our sin; it is saying that God has found a way of dealing with our sin so that we can be acquitted – ‘counted’ as righteous.

Having established how God dealt with Abraham and with what David proclaimed, Paul takes his argument another step.

9/10. The answer to the question raised in verse 10 is crucial. If it was after circumcision the Jews could claim that even if Paul is right in saying Abraham was justified by faith and not works, this privilege applies only to the Jews the circumcised, not to the Gentiles – so the Jews can still claim their total superiority. God is their God; they alone have this unique relationship with him. Paul destroys this last bastion. It was not after, but before! (cf. Gen. 15:6 and 17:10. According to Gen. 16:16 and 17: 24 there were some 13/14 years between his being accounted righteous and his circumcision.)

11. It would shake the Jews to learn that Abraham was ‘Father’ to the Gentiles, but Paul has another shock for them.

12. The Jews who trusted in their birth as physical descendants of Abraham and the fact of their circumcision, were being told these were not sufficient; they must have the same faith that Abraham had. It isn’t so very different today. There are those who claim to be Christian because they have been born of Christian parents or have been baptised or do good, but they do not have faith, and certainly do not walk in the footsteps of faith.

13-15. This is a close-knit argument, very meaningful to Jews in its detail, but with only a broader significance for Gentile believers. God promised Abraham that “*all peoples on earth will be blessed in you*” (Gen.12:3). That promise was made before Abraham’s circumcision and before he offered Isaac as a sacrifice. After Abraham offers Isaac, God reiterates and expands the details of that promise (Gen 22:16ff.). The Jews held that Abraham’s action in offering Isaac was what merited the promise, but Paul argues that the promise was the free will gift of God by grace on his part; it was not a reward for obedience. There is a tendency in all of us to revert to living under law; even in those Christians who claim most strongly to hold to justification by faith. Indeed, these can be the ones who are the most rigid and intolerant in their harsh application of the New Testament ‘laws’ of Christ. In his statements of what the law is, Christ often extended the Old Testament law; but in his dealings with those who broke it, he showed far greater

compassion than those who claim to follow him today. Verse 15 brings in a new argument about the law which Paul deals with in greater detail in 5: 13 and 7: 7ff.

16. This does not add to what Paul has said already but it sums it up. We do not earn anything from God. He is never in the position of having to give us anything. It is always a free gift springing from his generosity and love for us. In a word, it is by grace, whether it is 'righteousness' or a 'promise'; and we receive it by faith. Abraham does not belong only to the Jews; he is the Father of all who believe. Paul thrusts this home with yet another quotation from Genesis (17: 5).

17. Paul is writing in the light of the resurrection, but he had a far wider understanding than most of us today of what the resurrection life is. In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians he reveals his grasp of the resurrection life. He understands that life to be in him now. He has died to his personal desires and goes into situations which are so dangerous that he expects to die; although, in fact, he comes through each one and is still alive. It is said of Christ, "He is not the resurrection because he rose from the dead; he rose from the dead because he is the resurrection". To rise from physical death is simply the final consequence of having resurrection life within us. With that understanding, Paul applies that principle to Abraham. So far as being able to have children is concerned, Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead at their age. But God had promised them an heir. If God had said it, it was as good as done; indeed, in the eternal realm it was done. God had called into being Isaac who had been promised even when he did not exist.

18-22. It may appear to us that Paul is labouring his point, but we must remember that we read his words after the battle has been won. It would take much careful reasoning to break down the centuries of teaching and tradition held by the Jews. For us, Paul's reiteration of the doctrine of 'justification by faith' has the benefit of developing our understanding of what 'Faith' is. Here we see that Abraham was not blinkered. He faced the hard facts of the situation. He was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. Her monthly cycle would have ceased years previously. Against that he had only the belief that he had heard God give him a promise that he would have an heir through whom countless descendants would be born. He weighed the two sides and decided to trust that God would honour his promise. That is faith. A word of warning! Abraham had a promise from God. Some people today seek to show faith in God by believing for things he has not promised. It is true that sometimes they do apparently receive the answer they desire, but that is not necessarily the direct intervention of God. We need to be sure that the things for which we believe are in accordance with his will.

Obviously, if it is true that Abraham was justified by faith, that is a principle by which God works. It would be foolish to try to claim that God applied it to one man only. For us, the mighty working of God is not revealed in the birth of a son in extreme old age, but in the raising of Jesus from the dead

The word 'for', which comes twice in this verse, is literally 'because of'. We must not take the way Paul expresses this too rigidly, as though the death is related only to our sins and the resurrection only to our justification. We have seen already that God could not overlook sin and maintain his own righteousness and justice. Sin had to be dealt with and humankind could not do that, only God could do it. It cost the life of his Son. So Christ's death is an essential part of the atonement. But the death without the resurrection is incomplete. It is simply the death of a man. To die for another maybe a noble act, but all that does is to delay the death of that other for a while. Not only must the power of sin be broken, so must the power and bondage of death. The death and

subsequent resurrection of Christ cannot be divided. There could be no resurrection without death first; but that death is powerless without the resurrection.

Chapter 5

1-2. There is considerable doubt as to whether Paul wrote “we have peace” or “let us have peace”. One thing is clear; he cannot be uncertain as to whether or not we do have peace. If we are justified and are accounted righteous, we do have peace. It isn’t a matter of feelings but of fact. Maybe we find it difficult to take that in. If that is what is in Paul’s mind perhaps he means, “We have peace in fact, so let us believe it and walk in it”. Similarly, “we rejoice” may be “let us rejoice”.

Our faith is to be a living, practical experience; it is not a set of precepts. We need to have the facts, the precepts; it would be foolish to set our hope on lies. But Paul isn’t seeking to win an argument; he is seeking to set his readers free to live life; to find the LIFE he has found. Having spent so long convincing them that we are justified by faith and not by works of the law, he now spells out the consequences of that truth.

The first consequence is that we have access into grace. Paul sees Jesus ushering us into this grace. If it is true that ‘grace’ is “all of what God is as he is revealed and given to me” (cf.1: 7) then to speak of God’s grace is to speak of God himself; for his grace cannot be detached from him as though it is some commodity he has produced. In fact, therefore, “*this grace in which we now stand*” is the very presence of God himself. Paul hasn’t yet reached that stage in his argument. The writer to the Hebrews spells it out most clearly (cf.Heb.10:19-22) and Paul will explain it in a slightly different form in chapter 8. Meanwhile, let us make sure we not only believe it but experience it. So many Christians believe in theory that they have direct access to God the Father, but they do not experience it in their lives. The word translated ‘rejoice’, is a strong word, meaning to boast or to have confidence. Of course, Paul means more than rejoicing in the fact that God is glorious. He means the believers share in God’s glory.

The word ‘hope’ is used in a special way. To the world at large hope implies uncertainty. It refers to something we would like to happen in the future but we are not absolutely sure that it will. The Christian hope is sure and certain. It is as much a fact as an event of history which has happened in the past. The only difference is that it lies in the future and so it hasn’t yet happened. Christian hope is simply a future historical fact.

3-4. Let no one think that Christianity is a soft option; something for weaklings but not real people. When a person becomes a Christian that does not mean that their troubles are over. Rather, it makes sense of troubles; it gives purpose and meaning to them. Jesus warned that, “*in this world you will have trouble*” (John 16: 33) and the disciples echoed that warning (Acts 14: 22). ‘The world’, particularly as John used the term, signifies human society organised (or disorganised) with God left out. No wonder then, that a person who means business as a Christian will experience conflict. It is like trying to climb a down escalator in the rush hour. The Kingdom of God is against the way of the world. So, to experience trouble can be a confirmation that we are moving in the ways of the Kingdom; we are following the path which Christ walked. Paul doesn’t refer to that aspect here but deals with the effect trouble and conflict can produce if these are used correctly.

Bear in mind that we have little control over what happens to us. Most of us spend much of our energy in trying to do just that, especially in the realm of personal relationships. We withdraw from situations where we might be hurt or where we might seem to fail. Alternatively, we seek to dominate others to ensure we get our own way. But it doesn’t really work. The only area where we have total control is over the response we make to

what happens to us. For some, trouble and conflict cause them to go to pieces or to become bitter. For others, it is the occasion for growth. That is how Paul sees it.

The word translated ‘sufferings’ in the NIV and as ‘tribulations’, ‘trials and troubles’ and ‘afflictions’ elsewhere, has to do with pressing and pressure. Extreme stress for any length of time is dangerous. But, like a violin string, we are designed to work under some degree of tension. There is a right and necessary degree of stress. We all know of people who have changed for the worse almost overnight on retirement from a busy and fulfilling job. It is James who expresses this truth most clearly, “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance*”. (James 1: 2-3).

The word ‘perseverance’ in the original is made up of two words meaning ‘to abide under’. It is the decision not to give up. This, in turn, produces character. The A.V. has ‘experience’. The word which lies behind this has to do with proving. N.E.B. conveys this by using a phrase rather than a single word, “*proof that we have stood the test*”.

We have already considered the word ‘hope’ in the previous verse, as confident expectation. So Paul continues:-

5. The word ‘disappoint’ is to do with being ashamed. If we trust someone and they let us down we are made to look a fool. That never happens with God. But, as the future has not yet happened, how can we be so certain that our faith is not an illusion? Paul introduces the concept which he will develop more fully in chapter 8 – the work of the Holy Spirit. To Paul, the Holy Spirit is very closely identified with the kingdom of God and the future. In his letter to the Ephesians he writes, “The promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph. 1: 13/14). That word ‘deposit’ obviously comes from the commercial world as a first or down payment in the certain intention that the rest will follow. One commentator points out that in modern Greek the word is used of an engagement-ring. Of course, this description is inadequate as an explanation of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, but it is a vivid picture of one aspect of the effect of the coming of the Holy Spirit. What Paul is saying in this verse in Romans is that he (and all who will give themselves to Christ) become aware of God’s love in a new way. There is some debate over the meaning of the Greek (literally ‘the love of God’). Should it be our love of God or God’s love for us? The context implies the latter, but it is more than that. It is not simply the love of God but that God is love (1Jn. 4: 8). As we open ourselves to that unconditional love which God is (and so we open ourselves to him) so we find in ourselves a new openness and love towards others, indeed to all creation. Paul speaks of an experience within him; he knows he has changed on the inside and the only way he can describe it is to say that God’s love has been poured into him. So his faith is not a theory, something has happened to him. He is becoming more Christ-like, more fitted for heaven. That is why his certain hope of heaven will not prove to be false; he has a first instalment of heaven within him already.

6-8. The crucifixion has so much significance, such a wealth of meaning, that we cannot fully plumb its depths. Paul has spent much time in explaining something of its legal aspect – what it accomplished from the viewpoint of justice and righteousness. Now he appeals to his readers’ hearts as well as their minds. The cross is a demonstration of God’s love. He has just referred (v.5) to that love being poured into our hearts; that is an experience. The cross is a visible expression of God’s love.

Paul has also just referred to the Holy Spirit. He cannot think of the Holy Spirit without being reminded of the power he brings (Jesus told his disciples they would receive power

when the Holy Spirit came upon them [Acts 1:8]), and he will deal with this in chapters 7 and 8. So, knowing the power he now experiences, he refers to the time before he knew Christ and was, therefore, ungodly because he was seeking to live by the Law which could never make him righteous. He, like all of us, was powerless to save himself.

Paul says that very, very few people are willing to give up their own lives for anyone else. But possibly there could be someone who would be willing to die for a person they admire and respect tremendously. What Paul cannot get over, however, is this: in God's eyes we were total failures; rebellious, proud, selfish – the list is endless. We were in a worse state than the alcoholic or the drug-taking dropouts, filthy and degraded, who can be found lying in odd corners of our cities; useless to anyone and to themselves. There may be a few men and women of great and wonderful compassion who will work to help these people but surely not to die for them. While we were in that state - not knowing we needed help and not wanting it – Christ gave his life for us.

This act illustrates the special sort of love which Christ commands us to have for one another. The word he uses (and which Paul uses here) is 'Agape'. Perhaps the best way of explaining what is so special about it is to say that normally we use 'love' to express an emotion or feeling. Agape love is an attitude and act of will; feelings may or may not follow – we do the loving thing quite apart from feelings. Normal, human love is drawn from us by the personality, character, disposition or acts of the person we love. 'Agape' love does not depend on the sort of person they are, but the sort of person we are. God loved us not because there was anything about us to attract or deserve that love, but because he is love. All this is not to say that because it is an act of will, a decision, to love, it is coldly clinical. No; it springs from the warmth we feel when we know, really know, God's love for us. But we love others because of the person we are, rather than it depending upon the sort of person they are.

This verse clarifies one other matter. The gospel of justification can be explained wrongly as though a loving Jesus had to die to placate a wrathful Father. Nothing could be further from the truth. If we are going to use a worldly-human picture at all, we need to think of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit contemplating together how they can possibly set right sinful humanity, yet remain just. We need to imagine the Father saying that a perfect atonement must be made and the Son saying, "I will do it". Never could Father and Son with the Holy Spirit be closer in thought and action, united in love for each other and for humankind. As Paul says, it is *God's* love for us, demonstrated in Christ's death when there was nothing lovable about us.

If the action of God in Christ was such a powerful and effective event, we may want to ask, "Why did he delay for so many centuries? Why didn't Christ come earlier?" We may set forth all sorts of reasons why, to us, it seems God delayed but in the end we have to say, "because that was just the right time in God's plan".

9-11. We have already considered the 'wrath' of God (cf. 1:18), and the past, present and future aspects of 'salvation' (cf.1:16). Paul's argument here is that if God loved us even when we were rebellious and in enmity against him, now that we have been reconciled by his action, of course he will not abandon us because there is now far less reason to do so. Notice the change in the words Paul uses. He moves from 'justified' to 'reconciled'. 'Justified' has legal overtones, 'reconciled' is far more personal. It may help to illustrate it in this way. A father may be so offended by the reprehensible behaviour of his son that he disowns him and cuts him out of his will. Later, he has second thoughts and, simply because of his blood-relationship, he includes him again in his will. If that is all that happens, there is reinstatement but not reconciliation; personally the two are still

estranged. Paul is stressing (and in chapter 8 will explain it clearly) that the death of Christ not only fulfils the requirements of the law, so that God can both be just and justify the sinner (3: 26), but that death has removed the barrier between himself and humankind. We take our place as children, drawing close to our heavenly Father.

We have seen already (4:25) that the death and resurrection of Christ are bound together; each takes and gives meaning from and to the other. However, Paul may be making a deliberate and meaningful difference here between the two. In Chapter 6 he will develop this thought. Christ's death made atonement; justified and reconciled the sinner to God. So, with the past dealt with, he is now free to live a new life for God. That new life is the working out of the salvation he has been given. However, left to himself he will fail: but he is not left himself; the resurrected Christ is with him and in him. Paul has not yet reached this stage of his argument, but he is preparing us for it.

Having looked at it from God's viewpoint (he has drawn us back into loving fellowship with himself so, of course, he will keep us) Paul looks at it from our side; we enjoy the new and restored relationship with God which is due entirely to Christ.

Paul, at this stage, brings in an entirely new argument. To understand it, it will be helpful to explain the background in some detail.

God's plan set out in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 is to rule this world through humankind. *Let us make man in our image, in our likeness and let them rule over... all creatures. God blessed them and said to them, "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it".* The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen.1:26, 28. 2:15). Man was to be God's steward, fulfilling God's will on earth. God is spirit and has no physical body, but man has a physical, material body perfectly designed and fitted to work in and upon a material world. The intention was that men would be in constant spiritual relationship with God to learn his will; we would align our own will in perfect obedience to God's will and then use our bodies to carry out that will. However, man used the freedom he has over or of his own will to disobey God's will. Until that moment man had not appreciated that the state in which he had been was 'good' because he had nothing with which he could contrast it. He would simply have experienced joy or well-being. The moment he disobeyed he knew he had offended against God. He lost his sense of well-being; he experienced separation from God. He now had a new state – 'wrong' – to compare with his previous state and could appreciate that that had been good. To put it another way, he had tasted good and evil. He had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Mankind was now in a state of sin. That state which separated man from God and which Paul has been talking about at such length – explaining how God effected the reconciliation between man and himself.

Adam, which is the word for the material substance of the earth itself, dust, which God used to create the purely physical part of man, his body, became subject to death. (Just what means God had planned to get man off this earth and into heaven we do not know. He took Enoch and Elijah without them dying; perhaps that was his plan for all mankind. It is irrelevant because men did sin and thus became subject to death.) Although Paul does not here develop the argument that once 'man' had sinned and entered into this state of alienation from God, all his offspring were similarly born into that state of alienation, that is a truth stated elsewhere in Scripture; notably by Jesus himself, *"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit... you must be born again"* (John 3: 6/7). We will see that Paul goes straight to the effect of that first act of disobedience – all men are subject to death: physical death – the cessation of life in, and

the destruction of, the body; and spiritual death – the separation of the person from God. We will develop the explanation of man's spirit under Chapter 8.

Two points must be borne in mind; first, it was man who sinned. Secondly, God works on earth through man. This means that although God alone can effect reconciliation he has to do it through man. Paul presents Jesus as the reconciler. He contrasts Jesus with Adam. Elsewhere he actually calls Jesus "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15: 45). Cardinal Newman takes this up in his hymn, 'Praise to the holiest' and writes, "A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came".

Jesus never ceased to be God. That is what (who) he is in his essential being, so he could never be anything else. However, when he became man he made himself nothing (Phil. 2:7); he limited himself to the confines of a human body, giving up any divine power he had which is not available to man, and lived life fully as a human being. The miracles he worked were not in his personal power but his Father worked his works through Jesus (John 14:10, Acts 2:22). Jesus was totally open to God, aligning his will with his Father's will: "*A body you prepared for me... I have come to do your will, O God*" (Heb. 10:5/7). In other words, the last Adam came both to show and to be what the first Adam was intended to be (even to subduing the earth e.g. stilling the storm) and also, by his perfect obedience, to undo the effect of the disobedience of the first Adam. Thus if, following Adam's sin, all men are subject to death so, for all who follow or are 'in' Christ, there is life. One man brought death, one man brought life. With that background we can now turn to the text itself.

12-14. This is another instance where Paul begins a sentence, gets sidetracked and never completes it. However, we can follow his train of thought. Paul sees the Solidarity of humankind. His point is that when one man (Adam) sinned, that contaminated all humankind. From then on, no one except Jesus has been born into this world in that state of innocence the original man had. This is what lies behind the doctrines known as 'original sin' and 'total depravity'. No one is able to live a totally sinless life. We all have a bias towards sin; sooner or later we all fail. That is because we are not innocent or perfect from our conception. The phrase "*in sin my mother conceived me*" (Ps. 51: 5) does not mean the writer was born out of wedlock or that sex is sinful; it simply refers to the fact that humankind has fallen and all have sin in them. There is 'original sin', the effect of the first disobedience, in all of us.

Total depravity, does not mean we are all as bad as we can possibly be, unable to do anything kind, loving or beneficial. It means that everyone, without exception, is blemished. The total human race is marred because each has sin in him or her.

Paul recognises the fact that the law was not given until Moses received the Commandments and delivered them to the people. So it can be held that they cannot be held responsible for breaking laws they did not know. Nevertheless, they were still subject to death even though they had no specific command to break – unlike Adam who was clearly instructed not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam, in his original innocent state, was the type or pattern of Jesus who was to fulfil perfectly on earth God's plan and intention for men.

15-17. It may be helpful to clarify different aspects of sin in Paul's thought. First, there is the sin-principle; the contamination we spoke of in considering vv. 12/14. This is the bias or disposition to sin in all of us. The outworking of this inner tendency causes us to commit sinful acts. Paul uses two different words for this but, in practice, there is little between them; "*breaking a command*" in v.14 and "*trespass*" in v.15. It isn't enough to

forgive or cover over our past acts of wrongdoing, our sins; if we are ever to be fitted for heaven, the sin-principle within us must be dealt with also. Paul will refer to this in chapters 7 and 8.

Paul says that the gift (of reconciliation and of new, eternal life) which we have in Christ is not like the trespass and its effect that came to all humankind through Adam. It seems that Paul has three thoughts in mind. First, death is, by its nature, totally limiting; it is an end, and everything finishes. But the life which Christ brings constantly expands; the potential is unlimited, there is always something more, the possibility of something new. So the gift of Christ is infinitely greater in its effect than the trespass of Adam.

Secondly, Adam only had to break one command for all humankind to be contaminated and commit many sins. Christ therefore had to do something to deal with not just one sin by one man, but countless sins by countless people. His act of redemption was therefore infinitely greater than Adam's act of trespass.

Thirdly, Paul sees death as reigning over humankind as a result of our rebellion against God. There is nothing man can do about death; sooner or later it defeats every man. But Christ has broken death's power. It still comes to us all but no longer can it hold us. He defeated death, not by removing it but by going through it and overcoming it. That power, which was in Christ to accomplish this, is now available to us. And because it is available now, we do not have to wait until we die to experience it. We can begin to reign now, in this life. It is a double contrast: - death reigned over us, but now the change is not that life reigns over us, but that we reign in life.

Although we have already discussed the grace of God in some depth (1:7) we need to dig deeper to understand it more fully. It cannot be separated from God as though we can give someone a slice of grace. It is like 'mercy'; if you owe me money and ask for mercy either as time to repay or even to forgive the debt, you are asking me to act. Mercy is not something that can be automatically dispensed without me being involved in a personal decision in every act of mercy I show. Paul is overwhelmed by the fact that God behaves as he does towards humankind. There is no reason why he should be so generous, merciful and loving. In fact, if we talk about reason, then God's action and movement towards humankind is totally unreasonable. This is God being himself; it is God godding, and that action of him being God reaches out, affects and is received by me. That is the grace of God. In fact, of course, it is there, reaching out, whether I receive it or not; but only as I receive it (and thus receive him) can it benefit me.

18-19. There is a difficulty in verse 18 over Paul's reference twice to "*all men*". In a single breath he is saying all men are condemned and all are justified. But the two terms are mutually exclusive; logically you cannot be condemned and acquitted at the same time. Taken in isolation this verse is self-contradictory. However, in the context of all that Paul has argued previously we can understand his meaning as follows:

Because Adam rebelled against God by disobeying his specific command, not only Adam himself but all humankind lost the state of innocence. It is not simply a theory that there is a bias towards sin in all of us; it is a fact of experience. We may like to claim that some are worse than others, but we are none of us absolutely perfect. When it comes to the matter of who is able to qualify for a place in perfect eternity, therefore, we have to admit all fall short of God's requirement. We are all under condemnation.

Christ's mighty act of redemption (which Paul has spelled out so carefully) enables God to open a door for all men to return to him and participate in his life. There is a

difference, however, between the universality of condemnation and the choice of justification. All are born into condemnation because all sin as a consequence of this bias to sin in all of us. Justification, however, is not automatic; to use biblical language, we have to be born again. As Paul has been arguing, it is a matter of faith; we have to choose to believe, to put our trust in Christ. Justification is available to all men, but not all men, by any means, choose to avail themselves of it.

In v.19 Paul contrasts the act (and the effect of the act) of each man, Adam and Christ. Adam's disobedience set all humankind out of relationship with God. Christ's obedience made it possible for all humankind to be in a restored relationship with God.

20-21. These verses do not really add anything new. They strengthen and complete Paul's argument about how much greater Christ's act of redemption is than Adam's act of trespass. Being a Jew himself, he would know how much store his Jewish readers would set by the law, so he reiterates the explanation he began in 4:14 and continued in 5:13. To go against what God desires and requires is sin, whether or not we know what he desires. A little child who pulls the heads off all the flowers in his parents' garden has done wrong whether understands it or not. However, once the law is given, sin is exposed. We can no longer say we do not know what God desires of us. The more clearly we see what God requires, the more clearly we see our failure and our guilt. This is the purpose of the law, to reveal a hopeless state and, therefore, our need of redemption – a Saviour, for us who cannot save ourselves.

At once Paul returns to his great theme of God's grace which is sufficient to deal with all sin. In v.17 he has said that death reigned but, because of Christ, we shall reign in life. Here he goes one stage back. The reason why death reigned was because of sin in us; the reason why we reign is because of the grace of God reaching out to us in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 6

1-2. There is often a distinction between human logic, instructed by the ways of the world, and spiritual reality. Paul returns to a matter he raised in chapter 3 vv. 5-8. He has just said that the more the sin then the more the grace needed to overcome and annul it. So, it might be argued, if grace is so wonderful let us have more of it. The way to draw more grace from God is to go on sinning, then God has to offer more grace to overcome the sin.

Paul refutes this and raises a new issue. He says we have died already. What does he mean by that? In a literal sense we are not dead; we continue to exist. Nevertheless, to Paul it is more than a figure of speech. Something really did happen the moment we became a Christian. For some people that moment can be recognised clearly; they can put a date and time to it. For others it happened during an on-going process but, nevertheless, it happened. Paul sees it as the death of a personality and the resurrection of a new one. The person we used to be is dead. We are a new person. This immediately leads him to speak about baptism with all its vivid symbolism of a person going under the water. Of course, there is the idea of washing clean, but also there is the picture of drowning – the death of the old person and the rising to life of the new.

3-4. It would not be right to attempt to deal here in any depth with the complex issues of baptism and the different views held by the various denominations and even by different individuals within the denominations. The main issues relate to whether infants should or should not be baptised and whether it must be administered by immersion or whether sprinkling with water is sufficient. There is no doubt that the symbolism of death and resurrection is conveyed more vividly by immersion, but we must bear in mind that it is only symbolism; the candidate does not actually drown and come back to life. We can put ourselves back under a “law” of how baptism must be administered as much as any other “law”. It is the fact of baptism that is important, and whether it is understood.

Scripture is clear that baptism is required; for the Christian it is not an optional extra. It is a sign, but it is an effective sign; that is to say, it effects something, something happens spiritually. On the other hand, for baptism to be effective there must be faith; it is not automatic in its effect. Whether we hold that faith must come first and then the baptism, or that the baptism may be administered to children of believing parents and that this becomes fully effective only when the child comes to faith, the two aspects are essential – the act and the faith.

Paul has taken great care to explain his doctrine of “justification by faith”. He has shown that we are all under condemnation but God can acquit us because the price has been paid. We deserve to be excluded from God’s presence and eternity i.e. we deserve death. But Jesus has won our redemption by his own death.

How do we receive this redemption – the benefit of his self-sacrifice? The answer is by faith, by believing it, by trusting in Christ and his act. But it is more than mental assent; it requires identification (cf. the note on 3:25). The death should have been our death. So when we are baptised it is not simply a symbol of washing clean from sin and then we start off our life again; it is identification with Christ. We are joined or united with him. We claim Christ’s death as our death; the person we were, the sinner, has died. Going down into the water, like a body lowered into a grave, was our funeral.

There is more yet. Just as Jesus rose from death to a new life, no longer confined to the limitations of a physical body on earth, so that same resurrection life is in us. We are

identified not only with his death but with his life. Physically, materially, we await the redemption of our bodies (8: 23) but already there is new, spiritual (resurrection) life in us so that we are no longer confined to the way of the world.

5. NIV shortens the original which reads, “In a death like his” (i.e. in baptism); but the meaning is clearly conveyed. At this stage Paul does not develop the point he has just made about us leading a new life (the resurrection life) now. He will do that in vv. 11ff. At the moment he seems to speak of our sharing in Christ’s Resurrection in the future – after our own physical death.

6-7. Although Paul is using pictorial language in speaking of us dying with Christ, even being crucified with him, we must remember that it is not purely symbolic; a change really does occur in the unseen, but nevertheless real, spiritual area. This change is more obvious and dramatic in some people than others, as when a drunken wife-beater changes overnight after his conversion. But Paul’s point is that the change happens to every believer. The old self, the person we were with all that we inherited from Adam, is finished with; has been put to death. That person died with Christ. So that inherited bias to sin has been destroyed, its power is broken. We are no longer dominated by sin because once a slave has died he is free from the authority of his master.

8. Having explained the negative side (the old self is dead), Paul now begins to develop the positive – a new life with Christ is available to us if we believe.

9-10. At first sight the argument here seems obscure. The key lies in the phrase “*he died to sin once for all*”. What does that mean? Surely Jesus was without sin, so how could he die to it? In 2 Cor. 5:21 Paul explains, “*God made him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us.*” Jesus identified himself so completely with us who are sinners that the judgement that should have fallen on us fell on him. He died bearing the sin of the world. Although it happened at a particular time, a date in history, it had eternal effect. In eternity it is complete, never to be repeated. In eternity it does not affect the situation whether the sins were committed before or after the historical event of the crucifixion. Living in time we cannot envisage eternity, but it is a sort of eternal ‘now’. So it is sufficient that Christ died accounted a sinner, and died to the whole situation of humankind since the rebellion of the first Adam – the state of sin. He had only to die once and that was for everyone, even for everything, contaminated, fallen from its original, intended state.

He died, but death could not hold him. He was raised to life; death was defeated and lost its power over him. Death came because of sin (Gen.2 17, 1 Cor. 15:56). With death defeated and sin overcome, Christ lives now only to do the will of God (in fact, he always has done that) even his being ‘made sin’ was in obedience to God. The point is that he died once but he lives for ever. The one death was a sin offering, the eternal life is totally available to God

11. This brief verse contains the secret of how to begin to live the Christian life. The important words is ‘count’ or ‘reckon’. Suppose I am penniless but someone pays into my bank account a large sum of money. If I choose to ignore or not believe this fact I will go on living in the same old way. To experience a new way of life two things are necessary. First, I must believe that the money is there even though I cannot actually see the cash. Even if I go to the bank, they will not open a box with my name on it and show me lots of notes or coins; they will simply show me a statement of account with figures on it. I have to believe that that is the situation, to take account of it, reckon that to be

the truth. The second thing is that I must act on what I believe; I must draw on the account and make use of it.

So, Paul explains, when you identified yourself with Christ by faith and by baptism the 'old you' died and a 'new you' was born. You may not see it, you may not feel it – just believe it! Then, believing it, act on it; live the new life you have been given. Live as a man or woman of God. This is not just the power of positive thinking, because something really has happened in the spiritual realm. You are a new person because you are identifying yourself with Christ; not simply re-playing the acts of someone who lived years ago, but with a person who is alive now. A new dimension of living is available to you – Christ's dimension.

What many people overlook is the need to account or reckon (that is believe) that this is the situation. Some teach an 'instant holiness' doctrine that it is all automatic and that now we cannot sin. That is false. To go back to the illustration of the bank account; the person can choose not to believe the money is in his account and go on living the same old way, or he can believe it, draw on it and live a new way. So we can choose not to believe that we have died with Christ, or we may believe it for a while but then resurrect the old person we were and return to our former way of life. God does not override our free will. He, and he alone, has made a new life available to us but we are free to choose a) to believe it and b) to live it.

12-14. With all the strength of his conviction that something has truly happened to the believer when he puts his trust in Christ, Paul recognises that this is a spiritual, internal event. The 'new man' has to live his life in the same mortal body as the 'old man' he was previously. He may have entered the resurrection life, but his body is still subject to death and is very much tied to this world. We have our freewill and can choose what we will believe and what we will do about our belief. We can use our body to continue in sin or to serve God. Before, we were under law and we thought we had to strive to do certain things to win God's approval. Now we understand that God knows all about us and our sin, but he loves us and accepts us. Instead of living under guilt and condemnation we can hold our head high; we are God's children. So the hold of sin is broken. I am not under the law which towers cold, impersonal, unmoving above me; I am under the grace of the warm, loving, embracing God.

15-16. Paul returns to the question of verse one which he has been answering and he develops a point he touched on in vv. 6/7. A slave belongs totally to his master. The point Paul is making, therefore, is that if we accept the forgiveness of God in Christ we can do so only by putting our trust in Christ. Our baptism marks a change of ownership. We have been 'bought' by a new master. In 1 Cor. 6:19/20 Paul actually spells this out; we have been bought at a price, the price of Christ's death. We are owned totally by God so we have no 'rights' to do what we want – there can be no question of us continuing in sin; we must obey our new owner. Although this picture helps to explain the truths Paul seeks to convey, it falls down in the fact that normally slaves have no say in who owns them. It is true that we have no say over the fact that we are all born as descendants of Adam and are, therefore, in slavery to sin, but we have a very real part in the decision to make Christ our master. He has paid the price to own us but he allows us freedom to choose whether to serve him. If we do then his ownership is total. Once we have recognised the situation, however, that is to say that we have the opportunity to choose Christ, that means that if we do not do so we are also exercising the choice to stay as we are and serve sin. Paul recognises that by speaking of a person choosing to sell himself into slavery.

17-18. It is interesting that Paul says these believers were entrusted or handed over to a form of teaching rather than the teaching being entrusted to them – which is what we might expect. His point is that the teaching is the truth and it is the truth that can save them. It is the truth whether they accept it or not. It is up to each of us whether we accept and live under the gospel or not.

Notice also the word ‘wholeheartedly’. Paul is here referring to the very heart of our being; the person we are. That part of us which thinks, feels and decides – the soul. It is a conscious, planned, deliberate act on the part of a person to believe that teaching and act on it. The old person died with Christ, the new was raised with him to new life. It is essential to believe this and act upon it. The depths and power of evil within each of us is immense. We ignore that fact at our peril. Christ has offered us a new life, his life; but it is all received by faith, by what we believe. We must never forget that at any moment we may relax our faith, our hold on Christ and resurrect the ‘old man’ and sin.

19. Many commentators interpret the first sentence as meaning that his readers could not grasp abstract truth in their minds and so Paul uses the illustration of slavery to help them understand. No doubt there is truth in that; certainly such illustrations are helpful. But it may be that Paul is explaining something deeper. We can all intellectualise our faith; it can become theories to be discussed. Paul wants to ensure that our faith affects our living. We are weak in our human nature. Many years ago a popular radio philosopher with a keen brain was convicted of deliberately travelling on a train without a ticket. He is intellect was keen; it was his nature that was weak. We need to learn our faith in vivid, every-day illustrations if it is to affect the way we live.

In speaking of “parts of your body”, we need not confine this only to our limbs. Our brain and thought processes are surely included in what Paul has in mind. We are to offer them to righteousness; but would it not be better to offer them to God himself? Yes, indeed, and Paul has just said this in v.13. But we need reminding that to do this does indeed involve righteousness. Our faith should lead to specific righteousness in our daily lives.

20-21. C.K.Barrett points out that a minor and perfectly allowable alteration in punctuation gives better sense of v.21 – “*What benefit did you reap from that? – only things of which you are now ashamed; things that result in death*”. Whichever meaning Paul intended, if we are honest with ourselves we all know that however sweet sin may taste in the mouth, it turns sour in the stomach.

22-23. Paul adds little to his argument here but rounds it off with the contrast between sin which, surprisingly, does not accept payment, it makes a payment (although that is playing with words) and the payment is death. God does not ‘pay’ man. We have seen already that a man cannot do anything to deserve or earn eternal life; it is a free gift which only those who belong to Christ receive.

Chapter 7

Paul has dealt with the subject of sin and righteousness in some depth but he has more to say, and to understand his meaning we need to be aware of two things. First, whereas he has been speaking about the power of sin he now turns to the place of law in promoting sin. Secondly, we must bear in mind that there is a difference between the manner of reasoning of the Western and the Jewish mind. In the West we have been taught to reason logically where each step leads and is attached to the next. The Jewish manner of reasoning is different. It will argue logically, step by step, to establish a principle, but once the principle is established it may make a sudden jump to apply that principle in a totally unexpected way or in a totally different context, which offends the Western mind.

1-3. It is obvious from the way Paul begins his reasoning here that he is about to argue that we are no longer bound to the law. That is a dangerous thing to do, particularly as Jesus himself said he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it (Matt.5:17). To have no law would lead to chaos and anarchy. Later, Paul is to state strongly that the law is good (v.12); the problem is that whilst it is good in itself it has no power to make us good.

To show that we have been set free from the law Paul uses the illustration of marriage. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive; but if he dies she is free to marry another. Having established that principle, Paul now makes a jump in his reasoning. In his illustration the woman represents us and the husband represents the law. So, logically, if it is the husband who dies in the illustration, it is the law that should die in the reality. But the law does not die, we do. If the illustration were correct, it would be the woman who dies – but then she would not be able to marry anyone else. So the illustration breaks down; it does not correctly represent the situation. To the Jewish mind, however, this creates no problem; it is a valid argument which Paul now applies.

4. Paul is building on his argument set out in the previous chapter that we are identified with Christ by our faith and baptism. The law shows up our wrong but has no power to produce righteousness in us. However, united with Christ, a new life is in us which does produce the fruit of righteousness.

5. Here and in the next verse, Paul makes statements which he will explain in the rest of the chapter. The words “*sinful nature*” replace the older translation “*flesh*” which Paul uses frequently in contrast to the Spirit. To understand what he means it is necessary to look into the matter in some depth and an explanation is given in the introduction to chapter 8.

6. The full depth of meaning will be revealed in the remainder of this chapter and the following one. Here Paul is laying a foundation. We are no longer bound to an external written code but to an inner witness working in our hearts. It is the time of the new covenant God promised Jeremiah he would make with his people, “*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts*”(Jer.31:33); and Ezekiel, “*I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws*” (Ezek.36:27).

7-8. It is important to remember that in speaking of “The Law”, Paul is thinking in particular of the law of God. In its narrowest sense this is the 10 Commandments, but it embraces the whole known will of God as revealed in the Scriptures revered by the Jews. In a word, it is the Jewish religion. Paul never rejected this. He was himself a Jew and remained proud of that all his life; but he had found the Messiah and was therefore a fulfilled Jew. Paul was convinced that the law is good. It was the law which showed him

his failure and his need of something more than law – a personal Saviour. His point here is that once a man knows what God requires, then things he did previously without a second thought become sin.

In fact it is deeper than this. The particular illustration he gives goes beyond the strict letter of the law. He quotes the last commandment, “you shall not covet”. The original (Ex.20:17) specifies various things you are not to covet; Paul deliberately does not specify anything. It is the act of coveting that is wrong. It is the attitude of putting our own desires first – not before those of other people, but before God. This was his burden in chapter 1 and it is what underlies all his argument. We are here to do God’s will not our own, because he is in the Creator and we the creature. It is the revelation of that fact contained in “The Law” that has shown Paul his sinfulness. It is the battle between self-will and God’s will which he finds within him.

Paul speaks personally because this is not some philosophical argument; this is something he has experienced. Nevertheless, he knows it is an experience common to all who seek to discover the purpose of life and its Creator. Paul knows that we are not born into this world in a neutral state; there is a bias towards sin in all of us. The law therefore creates a conflict; by revealing what we ought to do it stirs up that rebellion within us – a point Paul now makes.

9. It seems that Paul has clearly in mind the description of the fall in Genesis 3. “*You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*” (Gen.2:17) “*then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked.*” (Gen.3:7) ...“*and they hid from the Lord God.*” (Gen.3:8) Paul links the experience of Adam and Eve to his own. As a child, with no meaningful knowledge of the law, he lived freely following his own desires. Once he became subject to the law he saw his own desires caused him to break that law; his sense of freedom was gone. He felt guilty and likens that to death: indeed, if nothing can be done to redeem him he is guilty and he lies under God’s judgement, and that is death.

10. The commandment, in showing the way we ought to live, should lead to a full life. However, our rebellious nature (sin) leads us to break the commandment so we stand condemned by the very law intended to help us.

11. Paul still has the story of the fall very much in mind because this verse echoes the words of Eve, “*the serpent deceived me, and I ate.*” He is reiterating the point made in v. 9. The Genesis story is not a fairytale to amuse us, it is a painful fact of experience for each one of us.

12. Paul, as a Jew, knows how much “The Law” means to his race. It is this which distinguishes them above all other races;-they have been singled out by God and given this revelation of who he is and what he requires. If Paul were to disparage the Law he would lose all credibility and, therefore, all chance of winning them. In any case, he does not wish to disparage either it or any individual commandment within it; he genuinely values the Law himself. What he has come to see is that a blind, unthinking allegiance to and trust in the Law is insufficient. His fellows have not understood the purpose of the Law which, to put it briefly, is not to save them (for it can never do that) but to reveal their need of salvation. He goes on to clarify this.

13. Paul has reached a conclusion in this stage of his argument. He is able to show that the problem is not the Law (even though indirectly it produced death in him) but sin. Indeed, it is the Law which brings sin to light in its full sinfulness. The Jews have

nothing to fear in Paul's teaching; he is fully upholding the Law as good and holy. However, whilst it reveals sin, it cannot deal with it. He now turns to the next stage in his argument – the power of sin.

14. It is all too possible to regard Paul as a thinking machine. His brilliant brain can analyse and marshal arguments, but this passage is a personal cry of despair about himself. The careful argument is still there but it is an argument hammered out on the anvil of his own life. He changes (perhaps without realising it) from the past to the present tense because this is his own painful experience.

He has no problems with the law except one. He accepts it is of God; he approves it, values it, and knows it is right. The one problem is that he cannot keep it. The fault does not lie in the law, but in himself. There is a principle at work within him, just like the bias in a wood in the game of bowls; sin. He describes himself as carnal, of the flesh. As he uses the word it is a technical term. We shall go into it in greater detail in chapter 8. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to understand that whilst the law expresses the will of God (and so is spiritual) he does not. This is because he is operating in the flesh and cannot be free of it anymore than a slave can be free of his master.

15. This is surely a common experience. For instance, before a difficult meeting we determine that we will remain calm and not mention some fault or failure in the other person. Yet, in the heat of argument, we do the very thing we have told ourselves we will not do.

16. Paul's point is not simply that he wants to obey the law whatever it says. That is right – just as a child must obey its parents for its own good even if he or she does not understand the reason for their commands. But Paul has grown up. The person he would like to be – the way he must live his life to be that person – agrees with the instructions he finds in the law. So when he acts in a completely opposite manner to what he wants to do and knows he ought to do, he is agreeing that the law is right and wholesome.

17. He pictures sin as a separate personality. Whilst it would be wrong to take this too far, because we are responsible for our actions, Paul has good grounds for adopting this explanation; in Gen.4:7 the Lord himself describes sin as crouching at a man's door waiting like a lion to spring on him. Nevertheless, there is the command, "*but you must master it.*"

18-20. These three verses are taken together because the conclusion simply reiterates the statement of v.17. However, v.18 raises an issue which has been argued by theologians down the years: the doctrine of 'total depravity'. Is it really true that there is no good thing at all in Paul or, indeed, in anyone? No, put like that, it is not true. The doctrine of total depravity does not mean that humankind is as bad as it can possibly be. Adulterers may deeply love their children; thieves may help the elderly across the road. What it means is that the whole of humankind is affected by sin; not one is free of it. The effect is total.

Paul qualifies his statement that nothing good lives in him by explaining "*that is, in my sinful nature*" – literally, "*in my flesh*". (See the introduction to chapter 8.) The trouble is, sin cannot be isolated and cut out like a bruise in an apple. It affects all that Paul does. He determines to do right, what the law and his own conscience and will desire; but he finds that he actually does what he does not want to do. Every parent who has taken time to sit down with his child to discover why he is continually naughty will know

the experience of that child saying in all sincerity, “I don’t know; I don’t want to be”. Unfortunately this is not something we grow out of, as Paul knew only too well.

21-23. Strictly speaking, Paul is here using the term ‘law’ in two different ways. We can speak of a law of science e.g. the ‘law’ of gravity, by which we mean an observable principle by which creation works. Or we can speak of the ‘law’ of the land by which we mean the rules or legislation by which a government decides its people shall order their lives. Although these two meanings given to the term ‘law’ are very different, when we relate them to God they come together. This is because he is the Creator of all things, humankind and the universe in which we live. Thus it is God who set the scientific laws or principles by which creation works and who also set the commands or rules by which man is to live. It is not surprising, therefore, that the instructions by which we are to live (the ‘law’ of Moses which the Jews so valued) should dovetail into the principles (the scientific laws) which govern the working of the universe. Nevertheless, in seeking to understand the meaning of these verses we must bear in mind that Paul switches effortlessly from one meaning of the term ‘law’ to the other. The meaning alternates exactly each time the term is used: in v.21 it is principle, in v.22 it is command, in v.23 it means first principle; the second use is command and the third principle.

What does Paul mean by his “inner being”? Obviously it must include his mind and his desire. It is the person he is; the person that no one can see. Observers can only guess at who that person is from the outward behaviour – *“by their fruits you shall know them”*. The agony for Paul is that his outward behaviour does not really reveal the person he is (or rather, wants to be) because he does the very things he does not want to do. If that leads others to misjudge him that is bad enough, but the real agony is that he is not the person he himself longs to be.

24. He has reached the stage of passing judgement on himself. His judgement agrees with that of God (and so he proves his argument that the law of God is good), he is a wretched man, a sinner, unable to do anything to help or save himself. It is not easy to define what Paul means by “this body of death”, although we can recognise in our own experience what he is getting at. It is not literally the physical body Paul is complaining about, as it might be if his problem was the pain of, say, arthritis. The problem is deeper than that, yet he cannot call it the “inner man” because he has already used that term to express the part of him which delights in God’s law. There is part of himself which is related to physical life which constantly holds him back from being what he wants to be and he longs to be free of it.

25. This statement strictly does not answer the desperate cry of the previous verse. We would expect something such as, “our Lord Jesus Christ will do it” or “has done it”. So why does Paul write as he does? We cannot know for sure. Perhaps we need to remember that Paul is writing a letter, not a book. However carefully he set out his reasoning, it is still a personal letter. The cry of v. 24 is not inserted simply for dramatic effect. He is a man whose emotions are stirred and excited by the words he writes. He feels again the wonder of his salvation. He relives the agony of his helplessness to do anything about overcoming his sinfulness and then bursts forth with the joy that there is a way out provided for him by God himself through Jesus. He is about to explain just what that way out is (chapter 8) – and, remember, he is no longer dealing with the question of how we can be accounted righteous (he dealt with that in chapters 3-5) but how we can become righteous in fact. In his enthusiasm to get to this explanation so that his readers will understand, it seems that he lets out this burst of praise and thanksgiving without bothering over the fact that he has not given a direct answer to his question in v. 24.

Before going into the explanation which will, in fact, serve as the answer, he pauses to restate the problem – in his mind he is a slave to the law of God but he finds that in what he does he is a slave to the law of sin. Once again, the first use of ‘law’ refers to the command and the second to a principle.

Chapter 8

Introduction

Theologians differ as to whether human beings are made up of two parts or three. Those who hold we are bipartite see us as outer and inner. The outer being the body and the inner as soul/spirit; the latter two being so close and intermingled that it is easier to regard them as one rather than try to define or allocate particular functions to each. Those who hold that we are tripartite separate the three elements and define their function in some such way as this:-

- The body is that part of us with which we contact the material world and it contacts us. It operates by the five senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch. My body enables me to communicate with others by speech and action. In a word, the body is world-conscious.
- The soul is the person we are; the ‘me’ of each of us. It comprises mind, emotion and will; I think, I feel, I decide. It is the personality and character, which makes me ‘me’ and you ‘you’. If the body is world-conscious then the soul is self-conscious.
- The spirit is that part of us where we contact God and God contacts us. It is where worship, fellowship and revelation may operate. The spirit is God-conscious.
- We may say the body is material, the soul personal and the spirit spiritual.

Scripture would seem to point to the fact that human beings are tripartite. *“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless...” (1 Thes. 5:23)*. *“The word of God is living and active... it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit” (Heb. 4: 12)*.

As far as we can discover God’s original intention before man’s fall – and remember, we have only two chapters of the Bible which describe this; by Genesis chapter 3 humankind has sinned – he planned to rule the earth through humankind. By his Holy Spirit he would reveal his will to our spirit and then, through our spirit, to our mind. Because of our unbroken fellowship and communion with God we would delight (emotion) to will God’s will. Thus our soul – mind, emotion and will – would be totally involved. We would then perform that will through our body which, being material and made from the earth, is perfectly suited to functioning on the material earth.

That was the intention but when humankind sinned the contact with God was severed. That does not mean that mankind ceased to exist immediately but his link with eternal life (God himself) was broken. Man’s spirit, no longer inhabited by God’s Spirit, began to fall into disuse and withered. Whereas humankind should have functioned by motivation from the inside to the outside – from our spirit to our soul to our body – we functioned on only two ‘cylinders’ instead of three, and the order was reversed – from our body (what we hear and see etc.) to our soul. It is interesting that the devil, in the form of a serpent, tempted humankind in this way. He said to the woman (her sense of hearing), she saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye. This affected her soul through her emotions and her mind (it was desirable for gaining wisdom) and her will (she took some and ate it). Each one of us born into this world now operates only in body and soul. We take our advice and instruction from other people, what we hear them saying or see them doing. Our spirit is there but it does not function. Possibly it gives an occasional flicker, so to speak, but it is basically non-

operational. Certain aspects which we tend to describe as spiritual, such as the composing of great music, or writing poetry are, in fact, simply the working of the soul – emotion and intellect. They are not necessarily inspired by the Spirit of God. In passing, it should perhaps be mentioned that it may be that the human spirit can be made to function in some degree by evil forces in those who practise witchcraft and satanism, but this is a misuse of the human spirit.

Because humankind functions on only two cylinders – body and soul – these two have fused together, as it were. It is this fusion of the two that the New Testament describes as “the flesh”. Instead of being guided by the Holy Spirit of God we have to take our direction from what others tell us (received via the body) or from our own fallen desires. This is what lies behind the discussion Jesus had with Nicodemus regarding the necessity of being born again. Ordinary, natural birth gives us the ability to live on the two ‘cylinders’ of body and soul. In many ways we can get by on this in our day-to-day life. It is not how we were designed to function, but we can just about get by. However, this is totally inadequate to enable us to live the spiritual or kingdom life on earth and it completely disqualifies us from living it in heaven. Jesus tries to explain it to Nicodemus, *“unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Jn. 3: 3) ... “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth spirit.” (3:6).* That is, natural birth gives life only to soul and body; the human spirit is latent. Human beings need a re-creative act on the part of God similar to his original action of breathing his breath or Spirit into the formed dust of the earth. The Holy Spirit accomplishes this at what is in effect a second or new birth at which the human spirit comes alive. Once the spirit is alive the Holy Spirit has somewhere to dwell in that person.

Nicodemus cannot understand what Jesus is talking about, but it is so fundamental that Jesus expresses astonishment that someone who is a teacher does not know this. In order to be born again or anew, a person has to die to his old self and rise again to new life. It is this that Paul has explained in chapter 6. Our death and resurrection are attained by faith; by what we believe happened to us in Christ. We identify with him; his death is our death, his rising to life is our rising to new life in him. Baptism is the sign of this identification.

When a person surrenders his life to Christ (surrenders his rights over his own life to Christ, that is, makes Jesus his Lord) that new birth which Christ spoke about to Nicodemus takes place. A human being can now operate on three ‘cylinders’, spirit, soul and body, instead of just two, body and soul “the flesh”. However, although this has truly happened, we are so used to operating as body and soul that we do not know how to use our spirit and, although we are believers and already have eternal life, we may still operate in “the flesh”. This is what Paul calls being ‘carnal’ (1Cor. 3: 1, 3, 4). The NIV translates this as a ‘worldly’ but the Greek word is literally ‘fleshly’. We have to learn how to use our spirit in communicating with God; worshipping him in spirit and truth (Jn.4:24). We need to learn to live under the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit working in our spirit and not under what the NIV calls our “sinful nature” (Gal.5:16/17) but, again, the Greek is ‘flesh’.

To sum up; by natural birth we are born fleshly. We operate according to what we see around us; to what others tell us and teach us; according to what we think and feel and to the passions of our bodies. We need to be born again, (the technical word for this is ‘regeneration’) of the Holy Spirit. He, for he is a person and not an ‘it’, works upon us – upon our spirit. Remember, our spirit exists but it is inoperative. It’s designed function is to be our contact with God, but that was lost when humankind first sinned and we separated ourselves from God who cannot tolerate iniquity. It isn’t simply the decision

of God not to tolerate sin; it is a matter of the nature of God and the nature of sin. Sin cannot exist in the presence of God any more than darkness can exist in the presence of light. So, by his sin, the first man cut himself off from God and his spirit withered for lack of use.

However, in his love, God came after humankind to draw us back to himself. The Holy Spirit seeks to bring our spirit to life by applying the truth, the reality of things, to our spirit. Jesus Christ is the Truth (Jn.14:6) and because the work of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus (Jn.16:14) he is the Spirit of Truth (Jn.15:26 & 16:13). When a person responds to that truth by turning to Christ and accepting him as Saviour and Lord, his flickering spirit bursts into life. He has been born again, he is regenerate. The Holy Spirit who has worked upon the person's spirit now has somewhere to dwell within him or her, that is in their spirit. Jesus explained this to his disciples, "*he lives with you and will be in you*" (Jn.14:17). So, now a believer is able to function as God has always intended, with his body controlled by his soul which is controlled by his spirit which, in turn, is controlled by the Holy Spirit who reveals the things of Christ whose will is always to please the Father. So, by or through the Holy Spirit, both the Father and the Son actually come and take up residence within the believer (Jn.14:23).

With this background, we can return to the text.

1. The word 'condemnation' means more than judgement. It isn't only the verdict; it is the sentence. It is being condemned to something e.g. condemned to death or to prison. Remember the context. Paul has been saying that he cannot break free from the law of sin at work in him. He feels condemned to sin for the rest of his life. He is about to reveal the glorious truth that because of Jesus and his work on the cross it isn't he, Paul, who is condemned to sin and death, but it is sin itself that is condemned to death.

The note attached to this verse in the NIV states that later manuscripts add, "Who do not live according to the sinful nature (the flesh) but according to the Spirit". This was possibly a note to clarify what it means to be "in Christ Jesus" written in the margin by a scribe which became incorporated in the text by a later copyist. However, in fact it interrupts Paul's argument because at the moment he is not talking of what man does (how he 'walks') but of what God has done for man in Christ. To be 'in Christ' is to be united with him so that what happened to him happened to us. We, that is the person we were who lived by the flesh, was crucified with him. We have been raised to new life in him, to be the Church, his body on earth.

2. We have seen already (cf. note on 7:21-23) that Paul sometimes uses 'law' to mean a principle, and sometimes a command. Here, in speaking of the law of the Spirit of life, it seems that he is thinking primarily of a principle. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit is a person, not an influence. The Christian life is not so much what we do but what we allow God to do in us and through us. We are not robots; we have a mind and will of our own. It is when we use our mind and will to yield to God, to put ourselves totally at his disposal, that he can work his work in us. Curiously, this surrender of ourselves, far from dissipating our individuality and personality, enhances it. No one could claim that Jesus Christ had no character and personality yet he claimed he could do nothing of his own accord, but only what he saw the Father doing (Jn.5:9). If we allow (and this preserves our freedom of will and decision) the Holy Spirit to direct us then, although he is personal, there is an inevitable principle at work similar to the law of gravity, which will keep us from the 'law' of sin and death. The latter law is overcome not by effort on our part but by allowing a higher law to dominate. That higher law is the Holy Spirit working out the will of God in us. This is the power Paul was seeking in chapter 7.

3. We have seen how time and again Paul has stressed the fact that the law, so prized by his Jewish brethren, is good. Its weakness is that it has no power to enable fallen humankind to keep it. Therefore, God acted in a new way. He sent his Son. Jesus was not simply another man born into the world who discovered more than others about the truth of God. Jesus was sent by God. There was a preconceived plan and purpose in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Paul chooses his words very carefully because he has to avoid two opposing errors. If he goes too far in stressing Christ's sinlessness he could appear to be saying that Jesus did not really become man; he was only pretending to be man and had some power denied to us which enabled him not to sin. If that were the case then he cannot really be our Saviour; he did not really identify with humankind. On the other hand, if he over stresses Christ's identifying with humankind, he could give the impression that Jesus is a sinner like us. Somehow he has to convey the astonishing truth that Jesus was fully human and experienced temptation to the full, yet remained sinless (*"one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin."* Heb. 4: 15) He does this by saying Jesus came *"in the likeness of sinful man"*, (the Greek text says sinful 'flesh' which, if we understand the technical use of the word flesh explained in the introduction to this chapter, is more meaningful).

The phrase *"he condemned sin in sinful man"* is a confusing translation; it is better to use the more literal *"he condemned sin in the flesh"*. God cannot contact sin; he cannot even look at it (Hab. 1:13) let alone touch it. Sin finds its expression in or through the flesh. So Jesus, who is himself God, becomes a fully man in the 'likeness' of sinful flesh. On the cross the sin of mankind is laid on him or, in the words of 2 Cor. 5: 21, *"God made him who had no sin to be seen for us"*. In that moment, when Christ in the flesh became sin, he was separated from the Father. He had to be because God cannot have contact with sin. It isn't that God withdraws from it in some display of fastidious dismay; rather, it is sin that is consumed and destroyed as a sacrificial animal was destroyed by fire as a sin-offering. The moment sin touched Christ he was separated from the Father and screamed, *"my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Sentence was not only passed on sin; it was carried out. No wonder, therefore, Paul begins this chapter with the words *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"*.

4. Whilst it is true that the requirements of the law, being the law of God, are, of course, righteous, Paul is going deeper than that. The requirements of the law are that we should be righteous. We have already noticed that Paul is no longer arguing the need for justification – being accounted righteous by God – because he dealt with that in chapters 3-7. Now he is concentrating on our need for sanctification – being made righteous. Once again, as in justification, this is the action of God. We cannot accomplish this in our own strength. The only, but important, action which lies with us is an act of will, a decision; and the will is part of the soul, the person 'I' am. We accept, by faith, the reality of what God has accomplished in Christ. We believe (and therefore act on the fact) that our old self who lived in the flesh – the fusion of body and soul – has been crucified with Christ. We are, if only we decide to accept and believe it, a new person who is free to follow the promptings and guidance of the Holy Spirit working in and through our own spirit.

5. This verse highlights humankind's responsibility to make the decision where to set our minds. Prior to Christ's death and resurrection we were not free; we had no chance. We might desire to live righteously but were powerless to do so (7: 15-18). Now, the

power is available so the responsibility lies with humankind to decide to, to set our mind on, following the Spirit.

6-8. As explained in the introduction to this chapter, the mind is part of the soul – the person we are. If that is controlled by the impulses of our bodies and our selfish desires we are not living the life God requires and we are alienated from him. Therefore, to live like this does not lead to death; it is death. To Paul, this is the crucial point: are we following the flesh or the Holy Spirit? If we are controlled by the flesh we are moving against God and cannot be pleasing to him, but if we allow the Holy Spirit to direct us, then we have his life in us, which is true and eternal life and which gives a sense of being at one with all creation as it was intended to be and hence this brings peace.

9. We need not seek to differentiate between the Spirit of God and Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit who came upon Christ at his baptism was the Spirit of God and was the Spirit by whom Christ performed his mighty works. This same Holy Spirit indwells the Christian and so may be described variously as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit. Paul is being encouraging in saying that his readers are controlled by the Spirit; they certainly could be and they should be. We have just seen that the crucial decision is ours. We are not robots; we have free will. The Spirit longs to direct us, but we can quench the Spirit.

No true believer need doubt that he does have the Holy Spirit. He could not have recognised Christ as Lord and surrendered to him except by the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3). However, we need to allow the Spirit to direct our lives. Every believer has the Holy Spirit but needs to ensure that the Holy Spirit has him or her.

10. This is one of the verses where it is difficult to know what Paul is saying let alone what he is meaning. Is he talking of our spirit being alive or of the Holy Spirit being life-giving? The NIV translation opts for the former and actually inserts the word ‘your’, which is not in the original. Also, strictly the original says, ‘*is life*’ rather than ‘*is alive*’. However, the overall meaning is clear. Left to ourselves humankind is subject to death because we are all sinners. Our physical bodies will return to dust. But when a person puts his or her trust in Christ a new life enters them. It is the life of Christ imparted by his Holy Spirit. The person’s own spirit comes alive and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell there with all his life-giving power.

11. Paul takes the matter even further. Once the life-giving Holy Spirit enters a person, not only does his own spirit come alive but this permeates through his being to his body. The culmination of this will be after our physical death when our mortal bodies will be exchanged for spiritual bodies, just as Christ’s physical body, laid in the tomb, was transformed into his resurrection body. However, it seems that Paul is not looking only to that culmination in our receiving the resurrection body; there is a sense in which our present bodies are being renewed. The power of the Holy Spirit, emanating from our own spirit, spreads within us to our physical bodies. Elsewhere Paul speaks of the life of Christ being revealed in our mortal body (2 Cor. 7: 11). The power of the Holy Spirit affects our mortal bodies here and now to use them to glorify Christ.

12-14. By referring to our obligation Paul has in mind our responsibility to exercise our wills. There are those who open themselves to the occult and seek guidance from spirits. These spirits dominate the person. In the case of mediums, they allow the spirits to take over their bodies and by-pass their minds. The Holy Spirit never does this; he seeks our cooperation. He desires to guide and, indeed, to be Lord of our lives, but always by our

permission and conscious agreement. We can choose at any and every moment whether to follow our sinful nature (the flesh) or the leading of the Spirit of God.

To live by the flesh results in death; it must do, for eternal life is not in ourselves but in God alone. We need to die to the flesh; but we cannot do this in our own strength, its desires and pull are too strong. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to do this, but he will act only if that is our will – by invitation. In John 1: 12/13 it is those who believe on or into Jesus who are the children of God. But that is only the start. Life is not static; we are not only born, we grow. That is what life is. If we do not grow we have died. So, having been born of the Spirit, we must be led by the Spirit (Gal. 5: 25).

15-16. Paul has now come to a totally new concept, something which would be beyond the experience of the Orthodox Jew of his time. Until now he has been dealing with the difficulties of living as God requires and how to overcome them. He has explained the wonder of a new power available to human beings within them – the Holy Spirit. But now he makes a tremendous leap. He says, “You are family; you actually belong to God’s family. This great and almighty Creator of all that is, is your Father and you are his child.” Instead of living in fear, seeking to placate a righteous and holy God, we have been brought into a deeply loving and personal relationship with him. The word ‘Abba’ is the term used to this day by a Hebrew child. Much as we would say “da-da” or “Daddy”, so they say “Abba”.

When we were ‘born again’, as Jesus put it to Nicodemus (Jn.3:3), our spirit came alive and the Holy Spirit came to dwell there. He is the one who reveals the truth to us that we are God’s child and our spirit intuitively recognises that this is the truth. As we see this there is a leap of faith, of understanding, and it is as though everything within us cries out in response. Perhaps it is too much of a shock actually to use the word “Daddy” in speaking to God. But that is the force of what Paul is saying (For ‘sonship’ [literally ‘adoption’] see note on v.23).

17. Paul continues to expound the implications of our new relationship. A servant may live in a household and receive many benefits from that – a roof over his head, food, clothing etc: but he can never enjoy those things as an owner in the way in which the children of that family are able to do. We must remember that from one aspect we are all servants, slaves of Jesus Christ. That is exactly how Paul introduced himself at the very beginning of this letter. However, God is too great, and our relationship with him too rich, to be confined to one or even two or three descriptions and analogies: we need to hold several in balance.

Christ is heir to all that the Father has. That does not mean that one day in the future it will be his when his Father dies; God is eternal, he will never die. Admittedly, there is a very real sense in which there is to be a consummation of all things – we do not yet see all things put under Christ’s feet, and Paul is just about to mention this. But there is also a very real sense in which a child, growing up within a family home, already enjoys the benefit of his inheritance. Because of our relationship to Christ we are children of God and we inherit what he inherits; we are co-heirs with him.

Paul has already explained in chapter 6 that we identify with Christ’s death through baptism and so we shall share his resurrection. But in speaking of sharing in his sufferings he is dealing with a different issue. It isn’t that the Christian is tortured or martyred as Christ was – although that does happen to some; rather that we are living in a world which has rejected God. This must inevitably bring suffering and such suffering is common to all humankind, not specifically Christians. However, the Christian

experiences a particular form of suffering in that instead of being carried along by the mainstream of the way of the world, he or she turns round and seeks to go God's way. Not only does that immediately cause conflict with the world and with those who are going its way (they may mock and deride and, if our walk in and towards the light challenges them too much, they may actually oppose and attack us) but we suffer inwardly in our spirits as we see and experience all the wrong there is in the world. Our spirits experience something of Christ's hurt and suffering when he faced and opposed evil.

18. The sufferings we experience, both as a consequence of living in a fallen world (e.g. sickness, famine, war and injustice) and as a consequence of following Christ (mockery, attacks, imprisonment, martyrdom etc.) were well known to Paul. He was so totally convinced, however, not only that there is a life after this, but that it is a glorious one, that he dismisses the sufferings as unimportant. Note that he does not say that the glory will be revealed to us, but in us. He is working towards a tremendous statement of God's intention that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ (v.29). When that happens we shall reveal the glory of God as Christ does.

19. A Christian song captures the wonder of this verse, describing creation as "on tiptoe just to see the sons of God come into their own". When humankind rebelled, creation was affected as well as human beings – the ground was cursed (Gen.3:17/19). However, it was not humankind's sin alone which caused the creation to be in a state of frustration or unfulfilment. God told man, "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Because the earth still needed to be subdued, obviously it was not in the state of completion that God intended. There was nothing wrong with it, it was very good but it was not perfect. A 'do-it-yourself kit' may be totally good in that all the parts are there, but it is not perfect until it has been assembled to become what it is designed to be. Humankind was entrusted with the task to complete, under God, the subjection of the earth and bring it to completion. Humankind failed but has now been restored. The completion of creation is, therefore, awaiting human beings to come fully into the state prepared for them so that it can also be complete. That is the thought Paul now expresses.

20-21. Paul has taken his readers into a difficult area. Difficult because we know so little about the state both of humankind and the rest of creation over which we are to rule, before the fall. For instance, what would have happened had humankind eaten of the tree of life in the garden and not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? If men had so eaten and lived for ever (Gen.3:22) how would God have taken him off the earth to heaven? Would it have been as he took Elijah? (2 Kings2:11/12) Much of creation's being in bondage to decay was due to humankind's sin and how much was involved in its being "subject to frustration" dependent upon humankind's rule to bring it to completion? We cannot know. What we can be sure about is that the restitution and the fulfilment of all creation is somehow bound up with the destiny of humankind. When humankind, or rather that part of it which in and through faith in Christ has become children of God, enters into the freedom of the glory prepared by God for all who truly love him and obey him, creation itself will be set free.

22. Thinking of God's purpose and plan for creation which has not yet been realised, Paul likens the situation to childbirth; the child is there, ready to be born, and the mother in labour pains but the birth is delayed.

23. Believers have an advantage over the rest of creation; we have within us the very Spirit of God. Paul here refers to this as the "first fruits" – the first fruits of the kingdom. Elsewhere (2 Cor. 1:22, 5:5, Eph.1:14) he speaks of a surety, a deposit or pledge; it is the

word used for an engagement ring. Even though we have this, the promise it guarantees has not yet been fulfilled and so we, like creation, yearn for it. He says that we await our 'adoption'. In verse 15 he said that we have already received the Spirit of adoption (NIV translated it as 'sonship', but it is the same word in the Greek). It may be likened to taking possession of a house; the price has been paid, we own the property but we haven't yet moved in. So with us; we are now the children of God, we have his Holy Spirit in us as a foretaste of heaven, but we await the full realisation of his plan for us. That will happen when our bodies, which are subject to death and decay, are redeemed by being transformed into spiritual bodies like Christ's resurrection body.

24-25. In linking 'hope' and 'salvation', Paul is building on truths he has already explained. For the Christian, 'hope' is certain and sure. It is as sure as a fact of history; it is history which hasn't yet happened but its certainty depends upon God who is utterly reliable. The believer was saved the moment he threw himself utterly upon Christ and his finished work in dying and rising again. But that salvation will be fully realised only when everything in creation fulfils its destiny and is as God intends it to be. So we await that consummation of all things with patient endurance, knowing it is inevitable because God is working his purpose out.

26. Paul has already referred to the whole of creation groaning (v.22) and we, ourselves, doing the same (v.23). The unbeliever, the unspiritual person, does not know there is anything more than he or she sees around them. They do not understand that there is a plan and purpose; that history is going somewhere. But we who have the Holy Spirit know that there is more and that that 'more' is better; it is the fulfilment of the purpose and plan of creation. We know it, we sense it. Scripture tells us something of what it will be, but not much and not in detail. Therefore it is difficult to pray intelligently. We long for it because we know it is there and that is good, but we know little of what it actually is.

God longs for and waits for humankind's cooperation in bringing in his will on earth. Now that we are born again, spiritual beings, humankind can cooperate – to some degree at least. We can desire God's will even if we cannot fully understand what that will is. So the Holy Spirit is able to use those longings we have and interpret them, as it were, to God as meaningful prayers even though we do not understand them enough to put them into words. Paul now completes his explanation of this process.

27. In 1 Cor. 2: 10/11 Paul describes the Spirit as searching all things – even the deep things of God. Here he says it is God who does the searching. We must not become dismayed if we find it difficult to grasp in detail the different functions of the Trinity. If we could understand God fully he would not be God, for surely he must be greater than the limit of human understanding. That does not mean, however, that we are not to seek to comprehend all that he has revealed of himself. What Paul is saying here is very comforting. Just as Jesus identified himself with humankind in order to bring us to God, and is still interceding for us, so the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us, intercedes for us, interpreting our longings, and God (being in such close affinity with the Spirit) accepts and understands what the Spirit is doing.

Additional note: this verse, taken with 1 Cor.2:10/11, clarifies the function of the Holy Spirit. Because he is part of the Godhead himself, he knows the thoughts of God. God expresses himself; he is constantly expressing himself – not with words (we have to explain it as God 'said' because that is how we express ourselves) but by thought and intention. The Holy Spirit expresses that intention or, rather, he selects from God's ever acting, all-embracing intentions those aspects relevant to a particular person (or church

or nation etc.) at a particular time. This may be by prophecy, vision, words of knowledge or gentle leading in our spirit which we receive intuitively. Similarly he works in reverse. He knows our longings, our hopes, even if we cannot fully comprehend them ourselves and, provided they are Godward, he brings and interprets them to God. He intercedes for us.

28. This verse is often quoted by Christians without any understanding of its context. Usually they quote the AV which says, "All things work together for good to them that love God". They use it with a sense of despairing resignation when things go wrong or the going is tough, as though to say, "This is frightful, but I suppose some good will come of it somehow". NIV improves the sense by stating that it is God who is working in all things for our good. However, it makes even better sense to take the verse in context with the preceding verses which are all to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. Then it means that God in the person of his Holy Spirit cooperates with those who cooperate with God (those who love him) so that whatever happens, whatever their situation or circumstance, it can be made to serve his good purpose.

Viewed in this light, it does not mean God sends or plans every event (although as he is in ultimate control, it can be said he allows it) rather that if we take the right, Christlike attitude, then every event and circumstance can be used to work for our good or the good God intends for us. In much the same way a yachtsman will use even a contrary wind to achieve his goal. So many who quote this verse, stop there; they do not go on to state or even understand what that goal or good purpose is. That is explained in the next verse. Notice that this is not universal; it does not apply to everyone but to those who are the called (see chapter 1: 6) and who have responded to that call by loving him.

29. This verse embraces many truths. First it reveals the purpose or goal of God for each individual. It is that we shall be made Christlike. That was the plan from the very beginning – "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness*" (Gen.1:27). That plan was marred when man fell. The whole of Paul's argument in this letter so far has been leading to this goal. Man had to be redeemed from sin, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, giving him a new life and empowering him to live it. Everything that happens can be used by God, dependent upon the way we respond to it, to make us more like Jesus, so that the God-like image in which and for which we were created may be fulfilled.

Then Paul raises the question of predestination and foreknowledge. The two are linked but, if pressed to their ultimate meaning, are profoundly different. The doctrine of predestination is that God chooses which people out of all who are born into this world will come to know him and will accept and follow Jesus Christ as Lord. The doctrine of foreknowledge does not imply that God does the choosing – only that, because he is eternal and all knowing, he knows before time began which individuals will use their free will to follow Jesus and come to faith. The issue, debated down the years, is this: - does the fact that a person is a Christian depend ultimately upon the fact that God destined him or her so to be, or upon that person's free will choice? As so often in the understanding of the Christian Faith, the answer does not lie somewhere between the two, rather both are true. We cannot reconcile them with our finite minds. The Christian can say, "I know I chose to come to Christ. It was a decision I made; an act of will". Yet also he or she will ask, "why me? How is it I have seen the truth while others have not? From my experience, I realise I was chosen by God". The Christian chooses to come, but finds he or she is expected; a place is reserved for him or her bearing their name.

A word of warning: in accepting the doctrine of predestination we must hold to the positive side – God chooses those who are to find it. It is unhelpful to try to reason out what, to our minds, is the natural corollary – that he elects some to damnation. God does not want anyone to perish, but desires all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). We must admit that there is a mystery here due to our ignorance of the whole.

Finally, Paul refers to Jesus as “the firstborn”. We must not take this to mean Jesus had to be born before he existed in eternity. Again we meet a mystery. Jesus is part of the Godhead. If we would ask, “where did he come from?” that is the same as asking, “where did God the Father come from?” We do not know. What we do know is that each of us can say, “I know I am, I exist; yet I did not create myself. I must have come from somewhere. The universe in which I exist must have come from something. What was the ultimate beginning from which all things have come?” The Christian answer is that the beginning was not a gas nor a big bang but a Being and we call that Being God. But we do not know how he came to be any more than an atheistic scientist knows how the first gas came to be.

There never was when God was not, so there never was when Jesus was not. Doctrinally we try to explain this by saying, in the words of the Christmas carol, that Jesus is “begotten not created”. That preserves the truth that Jesus was not born into existence, but it does not explain how he came to be. Like God he just is; he is the ‘I AM’.

So what does it mean to say that Jesus is the “first born”? The firstborn is the heir, the one to whom the Father gives all that he has. He is also the senior, the eldest, the first amongst his brothers. Jesus is the heir, but he has made us children of God also. He who is God is also our brother and we inherit with him – a point Paul has already made in verse 17.

30. Remembering that here Paul is not developing the doctrine of our free will, but rather how God has provided all we need for our salvation, he continues to develop the consequence, the outcome of God’s act in choosing us. Having chosen, he calls us and, when we respond, he justifies us (3: 24). We would expect Paul to go from justification to sanctification: that is to say, from accounting us as righteous to the life-long process of making us righteous. Instead, he jumps straight to the consummation of sanctification which is glorification – we shall be holy. With regard to predestination, calling and justification, Paul speaks of these in the past tense because they have already taken place. Yet he uses the past tense also in speaking of our glorification, which lies in the future. The probable explanation is that he is caught up in his vision of God’s overwhelming plan for all creation – a purpose which Paul is utterly convinced will be completed. We are part of that purpose and so our glorification is so certain and sure that he speaks of it as though it has already happened.

31. Having explained the greatness of God’s plan and purpose for creation and the key role of humankind in that plan, Paul encourages his readers by saying that the final and supreme power and authority, God himself, is for us. So what is there to fear from anyone or anything? We know the final outcome of all things and we shall be there. He imagines, as it were, a court of law where we are on trial and before anyone presents any evidence the judge says to us, “I have already decided this case; I have a plan for you and I am on your side. Nothing can change that”. In the face of that the case collapses.

32. Jesus, God’s own son, must be more precious to the Father than anything else in creation. He existed with the Father before creation and was involved with the Father in that creation. (Jn.1:1-3). Yet the Father was willing to give him up on the cross for us.

What does that say about how much we mean to God? How much he must love us. If he was willing to give up that which is most precious to him – his only begotten Son - is he going to withhold from us anything else? No! All that Christ inherits, we inherit.

33-34. Paul is seeking to allay any doubts or fears. His readers, and certainly the Jews amongst them, have come from a background where keeping the law was the absolute essential. As they learn of their place in the plan of God for all creation they might easily feel that they would never attain to that – they are not good enough. So Paul briefly refers to all he has taught so carefully earlier in this letter.

Whatever any human or spiritual being might seek to do to charge or condemn a believer, Paul reminds them, “but God has chosen you”. Jesus has died for them so God can justify them (see 3:21-5:1). But more than that, Jesus rose again and is now at God’s right hand. The judge we have to face is none other than Jesus (2:16), the very one who gave his life for us and he is actually interceding for us. We have a God who has chosen us and a judge who is interceding for us –what are we afraid of?

35. Believers are in the world and are subject to all the problems, afflictions and hardships common to humankind in a fallen world. In addition, following Christ brings persecution and even martyrdom. Indeed, Christ warned that this would be the case; Christians must be prepared for it and so Paul continues...

36. He quotes Psalm 44: 22 to illustrate that this has been the lot of God’s people down the years. We should not be surprised, therefore, if we suffer – but that does not mean God has forsaken us; none of these things can separate us from Christ’s love.

37. Far from cutting us off from God they are the means of drawing us closer to him (v.28). They make us the overcomers who are bringing in the Kingdom of God.

Having dealt with the physical dangers and afflictions we face, Paul turns now to the unseen, the supernatural and less tangible powers.

For Paul, the resurrection of Christ guarantees our resurrection. He has argued that if we die with him we shall be raised with him (6:5). Therefore, far from separating us from Christ, death is a gateway which brings us nearer to the Father (Phil.1:21).

Paul had an acute awareness of evil forces in the spiritual or heavenly realm. He gives a more detailed description in Ephesians (6:12). However, this understanding is not peculiar to Paul. The Scriptures (especially Daniel and Revelation) give a consistent view of a hierarchy of angelic powers and authorities. Each nation or principality has its ‘prince’ in the spiritual realm (Dan.10:13, 20/21). The word translated “*demons*” in the NIV refers more correctly to these principalities. Some of the princes are good, but others follow Satan who is not confined to a nation but is prince of the whole world in which we live (Luke 4: 5/6, Jn.12:31, 14:30, 16:11 & 1 Jn.5:19). Paul is aware of these powers in the spiritual realm but is convinced that they cannot separate us from God.

In speaking of “*the present or the future*”, Paul was probably referring to the Jewish division of the present age from the age to come. “*Height and depth*” were technical terms in astrology. Many believed in the influence of stars on human beings; when a star was at its height it exerted its greatest influence. Paul is saying that man’s destiny does not depend on the stars. They have no influence over his relationship with God.

In case he has missed anything Paul sums up, “*nor anything else in all creation*”. Should there be any undiscovered worlds or alien beings – what ever anyone may have as a fear - there is nothing that can snatch us away from the protective love of God. He sent his Son to find us and draw us to himself. If a person has responded to that love he will never let go of him or her; we are safe for eternity.

Chapter 9

Paul has set out his understanding of the gospel – the good news of mankind’s free salvation; free because Christ has ‘paid ‘the cost. We would expect Paul to go on to say, “if these are the facts, what effect should they have on us? What sort of people ought we to be? What should we do with our lives?”

He does, in fact, do that very thing, but not until chapter 12 which begins, “*Therefore*”. In between (chapters 9-11) he inserts a section about his own people, the Jews. Why? Of course, we can never be sure of the motives and workings of the mind of another person. However, Paul must often have thought over the problem that if what he has come to understand is the truth, why have the great majority of Jews, God’s chosen people, not seen it also? It may be, in addition, that he was accused by his fellow Jews of apostasy; of rejecting not only the teachings of Judaism but his own identity as a Jew. It may even have been said that he was ashamed of being a Jew and wanted to cut himself off from his race.

1-4. The opening words are not to be taken lightly; they are not simply by way of introduction. Paul has disciplined himself, as should every Christian, to speak the truth in Christ. Once we have made him Lord, we must answer to him for what we say. Paul has searched his own attitude and motives and, under the inner searching of the Holy Spirit, his conscience is clear in the matter he now raises.

He is heartbroken that his own race, his very brothers and sisters, the Jewish people, have not seen and will not accept the truth that he has seen. This anguish is so genuine that he would be prepared to lose his own salvation if, by so doing, this would enable them to be saved. In this Paul echoes the desire of Moses (Exodus 32:32) who asked that God would forgive the sins of his people and, if not, would blot him also out of the book God had written. In fact, of course, both Moses and Paul here reflect the heart of Christ himself who was willing to give his own life that we might live.

5. What makes the rejection of the truth by the Jewish people so terrible is that they have been given so many privileges compared with other nations. God had chosen them to be his own (Exodus 4: 22, Hosea 11:1). They were shown and given God’s glory – as with the pillar of fire and cloud to lead them in the wilderness. That glory dwelt, in particular, in the Tabernacle. God had made a number of covenants with them. There was the one with Abraham, the Father of their race, and on Mount Sinai, in particular. It was to them that God revealed his law; they alone of all nations, knew what God requires. It was they who knew how to worship God – the system preserved in the temple. It was to them that God had made wonderful promises for their future welfare. The patriarchs, Abraham and his immediate descendants in and through whom God blessed the nation, were theirs. Finally, Paul comes to the greatest privilege of all – the promised Messiah, the Christ, in his humanity was a Jew.

Without going into details of a problem debated at length by scholars, there is some doubt about how to translate the final words of praise in this verse. NIV goes straight at it and calls Christ God – “*who is God*”. Other translations avoid this and make a separation by saying something like, “*May God, who is over all, be praised*”. The point at issue is that if the NIV and similar translations are correct, this is the only place where Paul uses the term ‘God’ of Christ. That is not to say Paul denied the divinity of Christ; it is more a matter of terminology. It is part of the problems we all meet in holding to the fact that Jesus is truly a member of the Trinity, truly God; yet at the same time acknowledging that the Father is greater than the Son (Jn.14:28).

69. Paul appreciates that someone, in particular a Jew, might argue that God has made many promises to the Jewish nation, calling them his chosen people who are to inherit his blessing. If all that Paul has said in the first eight chapters is correct then the majority of the Jews have missed the truth and the blessing. Therefore God's promises (his word) have failed. Paul refutes this by pointing out that it does not have to be the whole nation which is blessed for God's word to be fulfilled. Indeed, God has always selected a group, a remnant, from the whole. He gives illustrations which would be readily recognised by a Jew. Abraham had a child, Ishmael, by a servant girl, Hagar. Later he had Isaac by Sarah. Both sons were equally descended from Abraham but Isaac was the one God had promised long before he was conceived. The promised blessing was to come via the promised child – the one God had selected.

However, maybe someone would come back at Paul and say, "But Hagar was only a servant girl. The promise had not been made of her but only of Sarah. The two boys had the same Father but different mothers". So Paul gives another illustration.

10-13. Jacob and Esau were twins; they had the same Father (Paul stresses that point) yet even while they were in the womb, before they had had any opportunity to reveal their respective abilities or merits, God chooses Jacob to be the one through whom the blessing will come, and he rejects Esau.

The quotation from Malachi 1:2 "*Jacob I loved but Esau I hated*", raises a moral problem for any thinking Christian. By the time Malachi wrote Esau's descendants, the Edomites, had acted in such a way as to incur God's wrath. So it was not so surprising that Israel, Jacob's descendants, should be in his favour and Esau's rejected. But Paul's point is that the rejection came at the outset, before the twins, and the nations which sprang from them, were born. How much of the Edomites' behaviour was a consequence of this prior choice of God? It seems so unfair. What chance did Esau have?

Paul is aware of this and he continues...

14-16. In fact, Paul's response does not answer the moral problem at all. According to him God acts in a totally arbitrary manner. Nevertheless, it stresses a fundamental point which everyone is reluctant to admit – God is sovereign. We are only creatures and God is the Creator. However just our objections may be, we need to be silent in the face of two facts: i) we would not exist had God not created us. In the light of that what can we say? If he creates me and then chooses immediately to kill me what right do I have to complain? In fact there is no moral problem in that at all unless and until I am told that God is loving and just. Were he a despot there would be no problem. Paul will deal with this aspect in verse 19.

ii) The other basic fact is that everyone is a sinner. Thus God is not unjust in condemning everyone. We all deserve to be rejected. In fact, the injustice we complain about, when we reason it out, is not that God rejects some people but that he saves some. All are equally guilty (3:23) so why does God choose to save any? Paul's answer is that God is merciful; he chooses to have mercy on those on whom he does have mercy. Of course, we want to come back and ask, "On what grounds does God make his choice?" The only answer we receive is "himself".

Paul does not here bring in a principle which underlies the whole of Scripture and which we need to grasp as we wrestle with this problem. God is not only sovereign; he is totally loving and just. However arbitrary his election of one and rejection of another may seem

to us; in fact it is perfect, because he is perfect. If it depended upon anything else – the apparent good works of a person according to our view – there is a very real possibility of error. It depends upon the will of God alone. That is perfect, and in the light of that we are silenced. However, Paul has not yet produced that argument and he continues to develop his theme.

17-18. Paul is relentless in the way he presents his argument in order to demonstrate the total supremacy of God. He presents only one side – God’s over all control. He does not here balance it with humankind’s free will. Pharaoh is presented only as a puppet. He was raised up by God so that God’s power over opposition to himself might be revealed, and that recognition of his sovereignty might be recognised by all nations. This did happen. Other nations feared the Israelites and their God because of what they had heard (Joshua 2:10, 9: 9 and 1 Samuel 4:8).

We would want to soften Paul’s statement that Pharaoh’s attitude was solely due to God’s action of hardening his heart, by explaining that Pharaoh also had responsibility for his behaviour. God’s hardening was a highlighting of the way Pharaoh had already chosen to take. In the narrative of the actual event, Moses recognises Pharaoh’s responsibility for his attitude – *“You... still do not fear the Lord God” (Ex. 9:30)*. But Paul’s purpose at present is to show God’s omnipotence. He is aware, however, that this will raise an objection:-

19-21. The objection of the questioner is a genuine objection: Paul states what it is but does not answer it. It is all very well to use the illustration of clay and a potter (which Paul takes from Is.29:16. 45:9) but man is not clay; he is made in the image of God. However much that image is marred, he still has some sense of justice and God does seem to be unjust if Paul is right.

It seems best to regard this section not so much as a reasoned theological argument but a debating technique Paul uses to silence the opposition. There are people who are vociferous in their unbelief – “if God exists why does he allow suffering?” etc. It isn’t that such questions should not be faced but that some of the questioners do not want an answer. They are not genuine seekers after God; they are looking for reasons to bolster their unbelief. Should it seem one of their objections is about to be answered, they will change tack and raise another. Paul’s aim, it seems, is to reduce such a person to silence by asking, “If God is the sole Creator does he not have a right to do as he likes with his own creation?” We may want to answer, “Only if he is a despot”. But for the moment Paul is not arguing about God’s character, he is asking, “Does he have the right to do as he likes?” When he has the submissive reply, “yes”, Paul is ready to return to reasoned argument and explain, “What, in fact, God desires is to have mercy. Now that you are prepared to listen I will show you how he plans to do it”.

Paul, as a scholar and Jew, would know full well that Abraham argued with God over this very issue of justice and mercy with regard to the destruction of Sodom (Gen.18:16ff.). But Abraham was no truculent objector. He was a believer who could not understand how the God he knew could act unjustly. His argument sprang from God’s own character: - *“Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked... will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen.18:25)*. Abraham delighted God by his protestation for it was based on the very point Paul is labouring – mercy. So it would be wrong to take this passage in Romans as forbidding believers to question God. It is by questioning that we mature. Paul is seeking to silence the man whose mind is closed and does not want to listen.

22-24. There are grammatical ambiguities in the original text which cause doubt as to how best to translate this passage. However, these are minor compared with the moral and theological problems which remain whatever the variation in translation. The greatest problem is the suggestion that God creates some people for the purpose of destroying them in order to show first, his patience in not destroying them immediately and, secondly, his wrath and power in destroying them eventually. Man is not a pot; he is not even a plant or flower, nor even an animal; he is made in the image of God himself. There is enough of that divine image left in us to sense, deep down, that a moral and, especially, a loving God cannot create persons with the intention of them being objects of his wrath and planned for destruction. Paul had the keenest of brains and he must have recognised the weakness of his argument.

Perhaps the best way of approaching the problem is, as already suggested, (see comment on verse 19) to see this as a legitimate debating technique to silence a truculent questioner rather than a reasoned theological argument. Nevertheless, there is a great doctrinal truth preserved in this passage – God is sovereign; he is in control. In all our attempts to comprehend God and his ways we need to remember he is far greater than man. If we could comprehend him with our finite minds he would not be the God he is. In order to grasp one aspect of his being our minds have to set aside a second aspect which may appear to contradict it. On another occasion, we will have to leave the first in abeyance while we develop our understanding of the second. Over all we need faith to believe that the various aspects which appear to contradict each other in our present limited understanding, in fact form a perfect, unified whole which we shall comprehend in that day when *“We know even as we are known” (1 Cor.13:12)*.

A further point to bear in mind is that Paul does not dwell on the side of wrath and destruction, but uses them only to highlight his main theme – God’s mercy. In fact, his argument is positive throughout. God’s glory is the prize he will give to all whom he has chosen and that choice is not confined from amongst the Jews but includes those he has called from the Gentiles also.

25-26. To clinch his argument Paul quotes two of the prophets. First, two passages from Hosea (2:23 and 1:10) which he uses to show that God foretold he would embrace the Gentiles. Those who were not designated as God’s people would become God’s loved ones.

27-29. These passages from Isaiah (10:22/3 and 1:9) confirm Paul’s assertion that God has always selected a group from the whole (see note v. 6).

30-31. It would be more accurate to say “Gentiles” rather than “the Gentiles”. The word ‘the’ is not in the original and Paul is certainly not claiming that all Gentiles are saved. The astonishing fact, from a Jewish viewpoint, is that any Gentiles should receive what the majority of Jews had missed. For they were the chosen people. This point is enhanced when we remember that Paul is not thinking so much of moral righteousness but rather of being right with, and acceptable to, God. Gentiles were not even seeking this but the preaching of the gospel, the news of a God who died on a cross because he so deeply loves the people he created, had won them to relationship with him.

The Jews, on the other hand, were concentrating on a law of righteousness; that is on what they did for God rather than on what he had done for them. To put it bluntly, they were seeking to dominate God; by performing certain acts they would put him in their debt and he would have to save them. So they missed the relationship which they were seeking.

32-33. Here, and in the previous verse, Paul balances to some extent the doctrine of God's total control of humankind and their destiny. Israel does bear responsibility for choosing the wrong path to attain righteousness. The two doctrines of election and free will are brought together, if not reconciled, in the reference to a stumbling stone. God set it there for men to stumble over, but Israel is responsible for its own stumbling over it.

What is this stumbling stone? Paul's quotation is from two passages in Isaiah (8:14 and 28:16). The first makes clear from its context that the stone is God himself, although there it refers to God being a sanctuary for his own people but a stumbling block for their enemies. However, Paul uses the passage to make it refer to Christ. Without the eyes of faith, the Christian religion does appear ridiculous and offensive. A man condemned to death as a criminal is the Saviour of all mankind down all the ages. To the Jews the claim was even worse; to them a man hanged on wood (a tree) is accursed (Deut 21:23, Gal.3:13). To ask a Jew to abandon his trust in the law given to his nation alone at Sinai, and simply to put his faith in such a man for salvation, and to discover that that way of salvation was available to all men, Gentiles as well as Jews, was just too much to take. But the fact is it is true. Those who trust in him are kept for ever. So Christ is a stone which both causes some men to stumble and provides eternal salvation to those who trust.

Before moving on, we should note that Paul knows what he is talking about. Originally he stumbled over this stone, persecuting the church and, therefore, Christ himself (Acts 9:5). But now, in Christ he had found his salvation.

Chapter 10

1-4. Some world religions make their adherents fatalists – what will be will be. Whatever Paul has just explained about God’s election and sovereign will in no way inhibits his heart’s longing that his own nation should find the salvation they seek and which he has found. He speaks of their zeal, and no one could have been more zealous than he who actually persecuted Christians in his devotion to the law of Judaism. He has spent so much time arguing that no man can obtain the righteousness God requires by his own efforts to keep the law; God offers it is a free gift.

The great sin of humankind is what it has always been – the desire to be independent; to be his own master, and that springs from pride. But we were never created to be independent. Our essential being is designed to be dependent. To seek to establish our own righteousness is a consequence of humankind’s initial rebellion against God; an unwillingness to submit to him.

To say that Christ is the end of the law must not be taken to mean the law is abolished; rather it is fulfilled. It is not needed any longer because its purpose to make men righteous (which, in fact, it could never fulfil) has been attained in a different manner. The word ‘end’ should be taken in the sense as when we ask the reason for something – “to what end?” Note that Paul stresses that the righteousness of or from God is for everyone, not just the Jews.

5-8. In explaining his passion to win the Jews to Christ Paul is reminded how a Jew thinks; how he, himself, once thought. His argument in these verses is not easy for those who are not Jews. It was generally believed that the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, were written personally by Moses. Paul quotes from Leviticus 18:5 to illustrate the teaching of the old covenant – “keep God’s law and you will obtain the life of righteousness”. He also goes to the Pentateuch (Deut.30:12/13) to illustrate the teaching of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ. To do this he changes the context. Originally the words come from Moses’ final charge to the people of Israel shortly before he dies. He tells them that the law of God, what God requires, is not some mystical secret which no one can understand. They don’t have to send someone up to heaven nor to some distant place across the sea in order to discover it. It is near them - in fact it is within them - this understanding of what God requires.

Far from having to send someone; someone has already been sent from heaven – Jesus Christ. Paul changes the allegory of crossing the sea to rising from the depths; Christ has done that too. Christ is the fulfilment of those words of Moses. Christ, or rather faith in Christ, is the requirement of God. That is available to them; it is near them in, in their mouth.

9-10. The statement “*Jesus is Lord*”, was probably the earliest creed of the Christian Church. It is no glib formula; in the Roman world it was to lead to persecution and martyrdom of those who gave the title “Lord” to Jesus and not to Caesar. It is simple but all embracing for it involves all creation and also the personal will of the one who makes that profession. It requires the submission of the individual. It is the corollary of the word Paul uses of himself at the outset of this letter – “*a servant (or slave) of Christ Jesus*”. It is not enough to say it; it must be believed utterly in the depth of our being. Nor is it enough to believe it privately; it must be spoken – the confession strengthens and confirms the faith. It would be wrong to associate too literally justification with belief, and salvation with confession. They are all of a piece.

Paul singles out the resurrection as a particular aspect of our faith, for it is this that sets Christ apart from and above every other human being. Others had died for their ideals and inspired many, but by raising Christ from the dead God validates, approves and accepts Christ's ministry and sacrifice.

11-13. Paul quotes again from Isaiah (28:16) the text he has just used in chapter 9 v.33 but he makes a minor alterations – 'everyone' instead of 'the one'. The latter implies a former, but Paul wants to stress that God's salvation is available to all, not just the Jews; a point he develops in v.12. He clinches his argument by a further quotation from the Jewish Scriptures, Joel 2 v.32.

14-15. Paul has explained the way of salvation; but how can anyone take that way if they do not know it? How can they call on Jesus if they don't believe in him? And they cannot believe in him until they have heard of him. They cannot hear unless someone tells them and (and this brings it back to God's sovereignty) a person has to be sent to tell them. Evangelists and apostles are sent by God. The process of calling us to believe in him begins with God. Again, Paul quotes from the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:7) to support his point.

While it is true that a person has to be called to the office of evangelist or apostle, everyone who has seen and experienced the truth has a responsibility to share it with those around them who do not know it. If we have no yearning, such as Paul has expressed towards his fellow Jews, then how real is our own experience of Christ?

16. This follows on from the text from Isaiah which Paul has just quoted. He is about to argue that the Jews have certainly heard the good news. The problem is that they have not believed it.

There is a problem in the manner of Paul's argument for those who are not Jewish. He makes leaps in his argument which to the non-Jew appear illogical (see introduction to chapter 7). The greatest problem is that Paul is speaking of the good news about Christ but is using Old Testament texts (i.e. before Christ came) to back up his argument that this good news has indeed gone out into the world. It may not carry much weight for us today, but what cannot be refuted is that whilst the Jews may be rejecting the gospel, Gentiles are believing it. They are hearing it and accepting it, so it cannot be argued that the Jews have had no opportunity.

17-18. The quotation in verse 16 is from Isaiah chapter 53:1. The passage relates to the suffering servant and, above all passages in the Old Testament, foretells the passion of Christ. It could not mean to the people of that time what it meant to Paul. Older versions of verse 17 refer to the word 'of God' rather than 'of Christ', but the NIV is probably accurate and does not mean so much the word spoken by Christ as about him i.e. the 'good news'.

The quotation in verse 18 comes from Psalm 19:4 and its use by Paul is a typically Jewish form of argument. In its original context it refers to the stars and planets revealing God's glory; poetic imagery picturing them as 'speaking' to humankind. It does not directly apply to the gospel. Nevertheless, the stars are part of creation and witness to a Creator.

19. By quoting from Deuteronomy 32: 21 Paul's reasoning is more easily followed by non-Jewish minds. To the Jews (especially of ancient times) Gentiles, being outside God's covenant did not count, and were regarded as unenlightened. Of course, Moses spoke more than he knew; the Church, the company of believers, is not a nation but is

made up of individuals from many nations. The theme of Israel being provoked to envy will be developed in the next chapter.

20. Isaiah, says Paul, (Is. 65:1) is even more bold than Moses. People outside the covenant which God had made with the Jews, were discovering him even though they were not looking for him.

21. Paul continues the quotation (Is. 65:2). If the Gentiles were coming to God having discovered him almost, as it were, by chance, Israel was guilty of turning away from a God who was actively seeking to draw them to himself.

Chapter 11

1. Following on from the previous verse Paul voices the question, “Why have the Jews failed to respond? Is it because God has rejected them?” Not at all; Paul himself is the living proof of that for he is a Jew who can trace his family tree right back through the tribe of Benjamin to Abraham yet he has seen the truth. Becoming a Christian did not mean Paul ceased to be a Jew.

2-5. Paul is addressing the problem that the Jews are God’s chosen people but, as a nation, they are the very ones who are rejecting the way of salvation God has provided. He tackles this by quoting a historical precedent (1 Kings 19). In the time of Elijah the nation as a whole had forsaken their one true God and worshipped Baal. Elijah believed he was the only one who remained true, and soon he would be dead. But God had a group of 7000, a faithful remnant. The original (1 Kings 19:18) does not include the words “*for myself*”, although Paul is not changing the intention or meaning by including them; but by doing so it adds weight to his statement that there is a similar remnant at the present time chosen ‘by grace’. That is to say, those Jews who believe are chosen by God according to his will and not because they are particularly worthy. A point Paul spells out.

6. The NIV corrects some older versions which include words which almost certainly were not in the original. The verse is a comment by Paul made as an aside. He returns to the thrust of his argument.

7-8. Paul does not think it necessary to spell out what it was Israel sought – to be right with God; to have a relationship with him. In the previous chapter (10:19/20) he has referred to the Gentiles finding this relationship. Here, the elect Paul has in mind are probably ‘the remnant’, such as himself, amongst the Jews, who have responded to the message.

Paul takes us once again into the difficult area of God’s sovereign rule and man’s free will. He is quite clear that it is God who hardened their hearts, gave the stupor, unseeing eyes and unhearing ears (Deut. 29:4 and Is.29:10). Yet he does not go as far as saying he elected them to damnation as he does in saying he elects some to salvation. Humankind does have free will and we are responsible for our rejection of God’s truth (see note on 8:29).

9-10. This quotation from Psalm 69: 22/3 is to do with undeserved suffering and is seen by Christians as looking forward to the passion of Christ. Once again, Paul uses an Old Testament passage out of context, to press home his point; the link being a reference to the eyes been darkened.

11. Paul has almost been diverted in seeking to develop his argument and pulls himself back to his theme by repeating in a slightly different form the question he raised in verse 1. His argument has been that often in history Israel has been preserved only as a remnant. So does that mean that the failure of the nation as a whole is permanent? No! Here Paul turns from history to the future which he sees with eyes of faith. He is sure that Israel’s blindness is only temporary. In spite of their sins in rejecting Christ, they are still God’s people and his covenant with them still stands. He is about to develop the argument he introduced at 10:19 – Israel is to be provoked to envy as they see the Gentiles entering the blessings they had assumed belonged to them.

Perhaps we need to ask what was God's plan had Israel received the gospel? Was it intended to be for them alone? We may be sure it was not. In Old and New Testament alike, God's ways are revealed to his people so that they may be a witness to all nations. The blessings of Israel were intended, in Paul's language, to make the Gentiles envious and seek God for themselves. Because of Israel's failure to recognise their Messiah, the roles are reversed.

12. There is a difference of opinion amongst scholars as to the exact meaning of individual words in this verse, but the thrust of the argument is clear. If the error of all but a minority of Jews has meant that the rest of humankind has gained such benefits, how much greater will be the benefit when all the Jews see and accept the truth. Paul sees the present situation as a sort of substitute plan of God because of the failure of the majority of Israel. So how much greater blessing will follow when the original plan can operate once that majority believe.

13-14. The argument has been complex and very Jewish but the point he is about to make in the following verses is important for Gentiles to appreciate. Paul reiterates the point he made in verse 11 but takes it further by explaining that whilst his calling is to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, a secondary and underlying aim is to provoke his own nation to envy as they see the Gentiles respond. In that way he can save some of his own people also. Here we see Paul balancing God's election with man's responsibility. Whatever he may have written about God's sovereign will being done, he knows also the need for man's cooperation in that will. He works hard to preach the gospel so that others may have the opportunity to hear it and respond. This striving to "*save some of them*", will be announced later (vv.25-29) by stressing the fact of God's election.

15. This statement is similar to verse 12. For an explanation of 'reconciliation' see chapter 5:10. We cannot know what was in Paul's mind in referring to "*life from the dead*". Is it simply a vividly descriptive phrase of what it will be like when all Israel believes, or does he mean that when Israel as a whole believes that will be the final act of history to bring the return of Christ and the consummation of all things?

16. Paul here draws on Numbers 15:17ff. The Israelites were instructed that the first fruit of the cereal harvest must be offered to the Lord. This was to be a reminder to them that the whole harvest was dependent upon the Lord and is in fact his, although given to them. In its context here (Paul's argument about the remnant) he is almost certainly thinking of the few Jews who, like himself, have believed in Christ. They are the first fruits of the harvest to come. He changes the metaphor to that of a tree. Again, in the context, it seems that the root must be the faithful believers, although it could refer to Abraham and his immediate descendants. Indeed the latter may well be in Paul's mind as he develops the allegory of a tree and its roots.

17-18. As he has said (v.13) Paul is addressing the Gentiles. Israel has been chosen by God to be his special people. Some of them, like branches of the tree, have been broken off because they did not believe the revelation of God in Christ. The Gentiles who do believe it are like wild olive shoots, but they are not in isolation; they have been grafted into the tree which is the people of God, and this people have a history in God's purpose. So the Gentiles must not boast, as though that history counts for nothing; they are far more dependent than they know on the purposes of God in history. And those purposes had been worked out hitherto through the nation Israel.

19-21. Paul is using the allegory of an olive tree as an illustration. However, he may be more accurate than we may expect of a tent-maker theologian. It was the custom to

reinvigorate a failing olive tree by grafting in a cutting from a wild olive. This would fit in well with Paul's hope to make his own nation jealous when they see the Gentiles enjoying God's blessing. However, the Gentiles must not boast or take God's graciousness towards them for granted. They are blessed not because they deserve to be but simply because they believe. The Jews had missed the blessing because they did not believe. If the Gentiles begin to boast, that will show that they think there is something special about them to win God's favour – and that is the opposite of faith. So let them beware. If God was willing to cut off the 'natural branches' because of their unbelief, he will certainly not hesitate to do the same to 'wild branches'.

22. Whilst it is true that God is personal and not an impersonal force, his kindness and severity do not indicate changes in his attitude; God is constant, and so how we experience him is not dependent on a change of mood on God's part but upon how we respond to him. If we do not believe we experience God as stern and severe; if we believe we experience him as kind and merciful.

23. Because God is constant, if Israel comes to faith, they will experience God's mercy and be grafted back into God's eternal purpose.

24. We may find it easier in our day, when the transplanting of human organs is common, to use the illustration of the tendency of the body to reject a 'foreign' organ. If it is possible to get the body to accept a foreign (or 'wild') organ, how much more easily it would reaccept its own 'natural' organ again, if that were possible.

25-27. The word 'mystery' has a special meaning as Paul uses it. We use it today as something that cannot be understood viz. "It is a complete mystery". For Paul, the word means almost the opposite – something hidden but now revealed. The revelation is, of course, made by God through his Holy Spirit. Man could never discover it by himself.

Paul is concerned lest the Gentiles pride themselves on their achievement and good sense in believing in Christ. He explains that this is all part of God's merciful plan. It has been revealed to him what the plan is.

Once again we are involved in the apparent conflict between the sovereign will of God – which will be fulfilled – and the responsibility of humankind to exercise our free will. Paul has already attributed Israel's hardening to an act of God (vv.7/8); now he implies that God has an election from amongst the Gentiles. He has chosen a certain number from amongst them and when that full number has been reached his plan for Israel will also be fulfilled.

To speak of "*all Israel*" does not necessarily mean every Jew who ever lived or will live; it probably means, "Israel as a whole", i.e. in contrast to the few, the remnant, like Paul himself, who believe now. Each individual, Jew or Gentile, is free and must make his or her own response.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 59:20/21, 27:29 and with reference to Jeremiah 31:33/34. These verses refer to Jacob (Israel) repenting of sin and to the new covenant God will make with his people. The quotation is thus helpful to him in showing that God has not finished with Israel but will make a new covenant with them.

28-29. Earlier in this chapter Paul has argued that Israel's blindness and disobedience has benefited the Gentiles (v. 11ff.). Because they will not accept the good news of the salvation won by Christ, the Jews are enemies of God. Nevertheless, God still carries

them on his heart because they are his chosen people descended from the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob etc. who first received God's promise). Care must be taken in understanding just what Paul is saying. The Jew would claim some merit in being descended from the patriarchs and thus being a member of God's chosen people. Paul is not saying there is any merit in it; it is entirely a matter of God's choice. He decided to bless Abraham and his descendants and he has not gone back on his word or changed his mind.

29. God is constant. It must be allowed that God, being God, would know the future history of the nation when he chose Abraham to be the father of it. He knew the pain they would cause. Nevertheless, he decided to make them his chosen people and, having done so, that choice is constant because he is constant.

30-31. Having just stressed the election on God's part, Paul now puts forward the choice of the people of Israel to reject God's way of salvation. Again we meet the apparent conflict between predestination and free will. It isn't made easier because he goes on to say that even their free will choice to be disobedient is within God's sovereign will.

32. Paul wants to impress upon his readers that salvation is due solely to God's mercy. When we think about it we see that only if there is disobedience can there be the opportunity for mercy. Obedience does not require or attract mercy (although it may attract favour). Further, mercy highlights love. A righteous person may hope he is loved, a forgiven sinner knows it; for why else should he be shown mercy?

Paul is not preaching universalism (that everyone will be saved), rather that because everyone has rebelled against God the only way everyone may be saved is through God's mercy. People must still respond to the offer of salvation through faith in Christ.

33. Paul has been concentrating on a carefully reasoned argument to explain God's plan. Having reached its end, he is struck again with the wonder of it and his mind yields to his heart in a spontaneous outburst of praise. No human being could have thought of such a plan of redemption with all its ramifications.

34. Paul is reminded of a passage in Isaiah 40: 13. As he thinks of the central theme of his argument – that salvation is totally dependent upon God's mercy and we can do nothing to earn or deserve it, his mind recalls Job 41:11...

35-36. We have seen, time and again, the apparent conflict between the sovereign will of God, which will be fulfilled, and man's free will, which has resulted in disobedience and for which he must bear responsibility. No full resolution of this apparent conflict is possible to us in this life; not until we know even as we are known. But Paul is overwhelmed with joy in the knowledge that finally everything is in the hands of God so all will be well. He gives him all the glory.

Chapter 12

Paul has now completed his explanation of why the Jews had not accepted the way of salvation provided for them by God in Christ, which he had explained so carefully in chapters 1-8. That important digression has taken the three chapters 9-11. He now turns to the response humankind must make to God's provision of the way of salvation.

1. Although chapters 9-11 are something of a digression, this verse follows on naturally from the previous chapter, for Paul has been stressing that man's salvation depends solely upon the mercy of God. However, we must respond to that mercy. The first response, of course, must be to accept it but then, as God has offered himself to mankind in service (by dying on the cross) and fellowship, so we must offer ourselves in return by fellowship and service.

The Old Covenant, based on law, provided a detailed system of sacrificial offerings of animals slaughtered on the altar. It was a covenant of death. The New Covenant, although its foundation is the death of Christ, is dependent upon his resurrection and is a covenant of life. No longer is man to offer the body and life of an animal to God, he is to offer his own body – a living sacrifice. In this way God's will can be done on earth as it was in Christ when he lived on earth in a human body. Just as the animal sacrifices were set apart, so the living sacrifice of our bodies must be set apart – holy and pleasing to God. This is described as our "*spiritual worship*" (The AV translation is "reasonable service"). The meaning Paul seeks to convey is the offering of our inner being, our soul and our spirit, as well as our body which he has just mentioned. (The meaning becomes clearer in the light of the introduction to chapter 8.)

The problem about a living sacrifice, as someone has mentioned, is that it keeps getting up off the altar and walking away.

2. We are all influenced deeply by what we are taught; by how others around us conduct their lives, particularly by what we received and perceived from our parents. We live according to the ethos or culture around us – the pattern of this world or age. But there is a new age to come, the Kingdom of Heaven; indeed, it exists already and the Christian has entered it. The word 'transformed' is the one translated 'transfigured' of Christ on the mountain. We have already seen (8:29) that we are to be conformed to the image of Christ. We are to see everything including our present life and circumstances, from a new perspective – God's. So we need to think in a renewed way.

Paul's understanding is that the believer receives the Holy Spirit who, as Christ explained, would lead his followers into all truth (Jn. 16:13). With his mind now instructed by his spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a person would be able to discern God's will which, being his will, must be perfect and pleasing. It is interesting that Paul understands this guidance of the Holy Spirit to be dependent upon our first offering God our bodies. That is to say, we are to be willing to do God's will. We cannot expect him to reveal it to us if he knows we will not act on it.

3. Although salvation requires a personal response from each individual, the Kingdom involves fellowship and no Christian is to be an isolated believer. God's purposes are to be worked out corporately. In the Old Testament it was by a nation, Israel; in the New, it is the Church. It is important, therefore, that each person has a clear understanding of his or her role and abilities. We all tend to over or under estimate ourselves. With minds renewed by the Holy Spirit, we are to make a sober or realistic assessment of ourselves and the gifts we have been given. Paul has done this and, understanding his

gifting as an apostle (the grace given to him), instructs other Christians to judge themselves. The reference to 'faith' here does not mean that the judgement is to be made according to how much faith a person has, that would be nonsensical. Rather, the gifts are received by or in response to faith. Paul is using a sort of shorthand here and makes the word 'faith' mean the actual gift, ability or power which each person has been given.

4-5. To illustrate the corporate nature of salvation Paul likens each individual believer to being a member or limb of a human body; because, by faith in Christ, we are linked to everyone else who has faith in him and we do form one body. What we do or do not do affects others in that body and so we belong to each other.

6. Paul develops this theme in more detail in 1 Cor. 12. Prophecy is not the same as preaching; it is to declare God's will in or about a particular situation. A person may prophesy without necessarily having the office of a prophet. The latter will be given an understanding of what God is doing, he will interpret events from God's viewpoint. A person who prophesies, as Paul means in this context, may simply declare a message given by the Holy Spirit to his own spirit and thence into his mind. The phrase "*in proportion to his faith*" probably means "let him use his gift to the full".

7. It is interesting how high service is placed in Paul's list. Not all will prophesy, not all will teach, but we can all serve one another. It would seem, however, that Paul has some particular form of service in mind as he implies it is a specific gift.

In several places in the New Testament the role of the teacher is mentioned. The Christian faith is simple but profound, affecting the whole of life. The word 'disciple' means 'learner'. As disciples of Christ we all have much to learn and the role of the teacher is very important, carrying great responsibility.

8. Because most people are insecure, the way of the world is to pick fault and disparage others. In this area, perhaps more than any other, Christians need to be renewed in their thinking (v.2).

As with several gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are all of us to have them in some degree; so we should all be generous. However, some seem to have a special gifting in this way. The word lying behind "give generously" implies simplicity. No doubt it refers to the person who is free from the materialism so prevalent in an acquisitive society and who, living simply, is mentally free to give to others.

Leadership in the Church is crucial. There are many references in Scripture to the need for shepherds of the flock. It is a difficult task because it requires authority in order to fulfil responsibility. In the world that authority is imposed to a greater or lesser extent on those who are to be led. The employee obeys the manager or he may lose his job. The soldier obeys the officer or he will be disciplined. Within the Church, although the leaders are chosen ultimately by God, their authority is dependent upon others recognising and respecting that authority. Obedience to a leader in the Church is free-will obedience. The leaders, therefore, must 'earn' the respect of the people by the person they are and the care and zeal they exercise in leading.

In speaking of mercy our thoughts, in the context of Scripture, usually go to forgiveness, but it is wider than that. It has to do with need. A person may be in distress for any number of reasons. If we care for a sick person we may do so only from a sense of duty which may make him or her feel that they are a burden. The manner in which we show mercy is as important as the deed itself.

9. The instructions which follow are so clear and right that little explanation as to their meaning is required. Furthermore, they are to apply to all humankind, not just to believers. The difference is that Christians are to live by these instructions as a witness to all others of the benefit of keeping them.

Although these injunctions may appear obvious, the fact that Paul has to spell them out reveals that in his time as in ours Christians did not necessarily practise what they believed. He commands us to hate evil. Few of us do that; we may dislike it or prefer to avoid it, but we do not hate it. Barclay comments profoundly that most of us hate not evil but rather the consequences of evil; but that is not enough.

10. Paul applies his teaching first to fellow believers and secondly to those outside the fellowship. Believers are children of God and hence every other believer is our brother or sister. True love does not seek its own welfare but the welfare of others.

11. There is some doubt as to whether Paul is speaking of the Holy Spirit or our human spirit. RSV has the descriptive phrase, "*be aglow with the Spirit*". However, it is all too easy to indulge in debate and avoid the clear meaning. We all need constantly to take our spiritual temperature. Are we as full of fire for the Lord as when first we believed?

12. Once again, there is little problem in understanding Paul's meaning, the difficulty comes in putting these things into practice. No matter what happens to us, our future is both glorious and certain and therefore we can and must have a different attitude towards suffering from that of unbelievers. Prayer – communion with God – is our lifeline. How can we allow this to be squeezed out of our day?

13. Christian charity must never be exclusive; it is to embrace all. Nevertheless, it must begin within the Church, the household of faith. As a priority we must get the Kingdom going amongst ourselves. There must be a community living out the laws of God which will be the demonstration model to the rest of the world what it means to live in the Kingdom. However important it is to aid those who are outside the Kingdom, it is even more important to encourage them to join us and be cared for within the Kingdom.

14. This is an instruction which it is easier to keep in the teachings of our religion rather than to remember to put into practice when we actually meet persecution. It goes entirely against all natural feelings and reactions, and yet it is the way of Christ himself. Paul himself, before his conversion, witnessed this same action by Stephen (Acts 7:60). Maybe this was in his mind as he wrote, for it must have had a profound effect upon him.

15. Perhaps some to whom Paul wrote had been affected by Stoic philosophy, which advocated suppression of, or separation from, feelings. That is not the way of Christ who could weep over Jerusalem and also with Martha and Mary. To permit and even encourage feelings brings vulnerability because it allows the possibility (even the certainty) of being hurt. Barclay points out that it is easier to mourn with those who mourn than rejoice with those who rejoice. The former are in weakness and are no threat to us; but those who rejoice probably have a success in some field which we may not experience ourselves. It requires a generous heart to rejoice in the success of another, especially if we are struggling with failure ourselves.

16. Just because we are accounted righteous in God's sight by reason of the death of Christ, that does not mean we are already perfect, yet, if we are a child of God, every other Christian is our brother or sister. We will have to get on with each other in heaven

and so, as we are already in the Kingdom, we must be in harmony now. We cannot control the behaviour of others, but we are responsible for our own, and for our attitudes. Our own thinking must be that of Christ (cf. Philp. 2:1-5).

17. This echoes the teaching of Christ himself in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5:44) where he states such behaviour is a sign that we are in the children of God. It is interesting that those who are of the world expect a higher standard of behaviour from believers than they adopt for themselves. By this they are admitting, even if they do not realise it, that their own behaviour is wrong even though they persist in it. If we are to commend the Kingdom we need to demonstrate it.

18. Human life involves relationships and at least two people are involved in every relationship. For there to be peace, all parties in each relationship must desire it and work for it. Any one may disturb it or prevent it. As far as it depends on us we must ensure we preserve peace, whatever the action of the others.

There may be occasions, however, when the actions of others are so wrong that we must speak out or take some action which may well cause resentment in those others. Paul is aware of this and inserts the phrase "*if it is possible*". Peace is not a virtue to be put above other virtues such as justice and righteousness. However, we must be careful we do not act out of personal pique or pride; and so Paul continues...

19. Revenge not only perpetuates and increases evil; it also contaminates the one who seeks to practise it. In an interview in which a widow was asked about her attitude to terrorists who had murdered her husband, she replied, "I have decided the person I want to be in this life. I do not intend to allow such people to alter that". The believer trusts in a God of absolute justice who does not act in personal passion but in righteousness. He will avenge injustice in his own way and his own time. It may be left to him (Paul quotes from Deut. 32:35). He goes on to show a better way of dealing with those who act towards us in enmity.

20. This is a quotation of Proverbs 25:21. The intention obviously is to turn your enemy into a friend. To us the reference to burning coals conjures up a picture of retribution but that hardly fits the context. It is not part of Christian teaching to pretend to be kind if the intention is to cause greater punishment when God avenges. In Bible times, when there were no matches, it was difficult to light a fire. By far the easiest method was to use already burning coals from the fire of a friend. One of the easiest ways to carry a loaded is to balance it on the head. The idea behind this verse may well be that goodness and kindness are catching. Assisting your enemy in the time of need may be the spark that will set his own compassion ablaze.

21. Paul sums up his teaching on this matter which, in fact, is based upon God's dealings with us.

Chapter 13

1-5 this section expresses a view point and to seek to expound each verse separately might cause us to miss the wood for the trees. The teaching itself is very clear – uncomfortably so. Paul is saying that Christians must obey the governing authorities whoever they are because they have been put there by God (whether they know it not). But is this teaching binding on Christians in all circumstances? What if the governing authorities are themselves corrupt and even actively evil? It must be recognised that that Paul does not deal with that situation here. In the trials of those charged with war crimes defendants have claimed they were simply obeying orders of those above them; but this is not accepted as a defence. Peter and John refused to obey the ruling Jewish authorities when ordered not to preach Jesus, claiming that where there was conflict between obedience to the will of God and the will of man, God must be given precedence (Acts 4: 19/20) So Paul’s teaching here is not all that Scripture says on the subject.

We must remember the experience from which Paul was speaking. In a world where justice was scarce the Roman legal system was a stabilising factor. He himself found protection from the Jews and pagan mobs by appealing to the Roman authorities. It is true that imperfect governors are preferable to no governors at all when chaos and anarchy ensue.

Also, those Christians who today have the benefit of living in a democracy are in a different situation from Paul. We have the opportunity to make our views known and we ought to exercise our right. So the issue is not simple. Christians have to exercise judgement as to when the laws of men do conflict with the laws of God and what they must then do in the particular situation. Do they simply elect to obey God and accept the consequences, or do they seek actively to change the situation in some way?

A further point is that in Paul’s time Christians were the cause of violence and unrest; not because they promoted it but by preaching Christ they provoked attack from Jews and pagans alike who saw their way of life to be threatened. It was important, therefore, for Christian to show that they were good citizens and no threat to the state. Nevertheless, even when all the particular circumstances of Paul’s experience and situation are taken into account, his instructions about obeying the ruling authorities cannot be dismissed or ignored. Many down the years, beginning with Christ himself, have been willing to accept suffering and persecution rather than rebel against their rulers. A general guide in many cases for the Christian is to defend the rights of others as far as is possible, but to leave to God the defence of our own rights.

6-7. Jesus laid down a principle, “*Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and God what is God’s*” (Mark 12:17). Christians are already citizens of heaven and are to live according to its law – the all-embracing law of love. But each of us also lives as a member of a nation and has a duty to support the government. Paul’s statement that the authorities are God’s servants (v.6) and that the authorities that exist have been established by God (v.1), do not imply necessarily that each and every ruler has been picked by God. Tyrants and evil dictators frequently oppose God’s purposes (although God may very well use them to carry out those purposes). Rather, it is that ruling authorities are better than anarchy and thus are serving God’s over all plan, even if they are unaware of this. This is why a Christian must submit to the authorities as part of his or her service to God.

8. The Christian is so used to hearing the word ‘love’ that he or she may easily overlook what love involves; particularly if our idea of love is soft and sentimental. The Christian should be scrupulous in paying bills. Small-businessmen and self employed odd-job

men may be in financial difficulty because someone delays payment. Borrowed articles must be returned. Paul (and God) intends his instructions to be followed. Love is not simply a feeling; indeed 'Agape' love, to which Paul refers, may not involve feelings at all, it is active goodness.

9. By saying that love fulfils the law (vv.8 and 10) Paul does not mean that a person in fulfilling the law by loving is acceptable to God and that it wins him or her salvation. Such reasoning would be justification by works and that is the very doctrine that Paul has spent so much time refuting in this letter. What he means is that the intention of the law, the commandments, is to promote good relationships between people with justice and righteous dealing. If a person follows the requirement of love, then the purpose of the law is fulfilled. Indeed, he will do more than the strict letter of the law can ever cover. He will fill out what the law was intended to effect.

11. It is often said of Paul, and sometimes as a criticism, that he expected Christ to come again in his own lifetime, and so he was wrong about that. Yet in his own earthly ministry even Jesus did not know when "*the day of the Lord*" would come (Mark 13:32). The fact is, Paul was ready for it. What is more, although this is not Paul's point here, none of us knows when our own life will end. His point is that this world order is doomed. God has a plan of salvation; a new order – his Kingdom – is to be set up. That time is nearer to us than it was the day we first believed. We must be alert and ready for it.

12. Paul swings easily between allegory and reality. The Kingdom of God is often presented as light and the world and evil as darkness. This present age, the world order with Christ left out, is coming to an end. That end is near. So we who are even now living in the Kingdom must give up the ways and habits of the world and adopt the ways of the Kingdom, which Paul summarises as the armour of light. The picture of Christian virtues as an armour against the evil of the world order is popular with Paul - he uses it in Ephesians 6:13ff. and 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

13. Paul slips from allegory to reality. Most orgies and the like take place at night rather than in daytime. Christians must not become embroiled in such things.

14. Immediately he returns to allegory but, whilst the instruction to put on or clothe ourselves with Jesus is allegorical, it is nevertheless practical. When a policeman, a waiter or a nurse puts on a uniform he or she becomes something rather different. It is not that they are hypocritical; they are not pretending to be something they are not. In fact, they are exhibiting and being more clearly what they are. Elsewhere (Eph. 4:22/4) Paul speaks of putting off our old selves and putting on the new. It is a helpful way of thinking about ourselves. If we think of ourselves as new creations, we will live as new creations (being transformed by the renewing of our minds [Rom.12:2]). Again, this is not hypocritical because in Christ we are new creations (2 Cor. 5:17).

Because the way we think dominates the way we live, it is important that our thoughts are good and wholesome (Phil. 4:8). It is dangerous to adopt the idea that it is all right to think of sinful deeds provided we do not actually do them, for the thought is father of the deed. (See Matt. 5:27/8.)

Chapter 14

1. Paul is using the word 'weak' in a specialised sense. There is always the danger of making religion a matter of laws and regulations. In the case of the Jews, of course, the old covenant was actually founded on law. Paul has spent much time in this letter explaining that salvation is not a matter of keeping the law but of faith. He had seen this truth so clearly himself that he was free of the law. We can only imagine the initial internal conflict he must have experienced. He, a Pharisee, eating pork and regarding all days as equal with the Sabbath! But he was now free, and strong in his freedom. However, some were not yet as free as himself and could not with a clear conscience break certain laws and regulations. It is in that sense that they were weak in their faith. Paul says, "welcome them into the fellowship and don't do it in order to 'set them right' by disputing with them".

In the following verses Paul will concentrate on two particular areas – the two already mentioned; not eating certain food and the observance of special days. He also touches on drinking. For us, in our different denominations, cultures and environment, the issues may be different – avoiding cinemas, theatres, dances, gambling, smoking etc. But, remember, in Paul's eyes the 'weak' are not those who do these things but those who say that the Christian must not do them, as though these things are a Scriptural law. Having said that, however, our freedom is not a freedom to sin. There is a law (although that is almost the wrong word to use) of love. It is a law to be written on our hearts rather than the rulebook, whereby we desire to do what is pleasing to God. For the Christian perhaps the guideline is not a written law but, "can I do this and still have Christ at my side?" There is a world of difference between being free of the law and lawless.

2. Paul illustrates what he means by 'disputable matters'. He deals with what the Christian may eat in 1 Cor.10:23ff. There, however, it is with regard to eating food purchased in pagan markets and possibly offered in sacrifice to idols. Here, it is a different issue; may we eat meat or should we be vegetarian? Paul reveals his own view by referring to the vegetarian as 'weak' in faith. Nevertheless, Scripture states clearly that originally God gave man only plants and fruit for food (Gen. 1:29). It was only after the fall and the flood that God gave humankind the right to eat meat – when the trust between humans and the animals had been broken (Gen. 9:1-7). It seems also to point to a future when neither man nor beast will harm each other and both will be vegetarian again: "*the wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox... they will neither harm or destroy in all my holy Mountain,' says the Lord*". (Is. 65: 25). Meanwhile, it is a matter of individual choice, and so Paul continues...

3-4. The danger which lies behind judging people on whether they do or do not observe certain rules of behaviour set by human beings is that we may, without recognising it, be returning to a doctrine of justification by works rather than faith, i.e. God will only accept us if we do certain acts, or avoid doing them. The criterion is, "does this person belong to the Lord?" If so, they are answerable to God and not to us. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the Lord calls and appoints shepherds of his sheep who must one day give account to him of their shepherding (Heb. 13:17). Such leaders have a duty to point out the dangers of particular behaviour to the spiritual life of individuals who are in their care. Finally, however, each of us is responsible for our own walk with God. Our leaders may advise us but, in the end, we must live according to our own conscience; a point which Paul now makes.

5. The 10 Commandments include an instruction to keep the Sabbath day holy. However, Christians felt free to change the Sabbath (a time of rest or ceasing from work) from the last to the first day of the week in order to celebrate the day on which Christ rose from the dead. Paul, apparently, was not tied to a special holy day but regarded every day as holy to the Lord. There may well be a value today in keeping Sunday special. However, we need to guard against a view that it is all right to do something on any day except Sunday. Right is right and wrong is wrong, irrespective of the day of the week. We need to think through our attitude to keeping Sunday special – why and how, and to be clearer in our own minds what is right for us.

6. Paul is not referring to unbelievers but to Christians who seek to glorify God in their lives, and so he continues his argument. There is obvious reference here to the Jewish custom of ‘saying grace’ over a meal. The Christian is similarly called to be thankful to God that he has food to eat.

7. If this verse were taken in isolation, as it often is, it would be taken to refer to the fact that no man is an island; what we do affects others. That is true but it is not the point Paul is making here, as the following verse makes clear. He is thinking still of our duty to glorify God. We live our lives for him.

8. With all his learning and keen intellect, Paul had come to a simple understanding – without Christ we are all heading for destruction. Our only hope is to join ourselves to Christ who has won for us a way of salvation. The cost he paid is incomprehensible to us human beings. If we choose to go with him, then we belong to him; there is no middle way. He can therefore do with us as he wills, choosing whether we go on living our lives on earth or die and live with him. He has bought our lives at the price of his own – as Paul now goes on to state.

9. As a verbal exercise it may seem good to link Christ’s death with the dead and his resurrection life with the living, but Paul cannot mean this to be the truth. We cannot separate Christ’s death from his resurrection. Had he not been raised then his death would be meaningless – just another human death with nothing in the future. Had he departed this life without dying (like Elijah) he would have had life in heaven but we human beings would die in our sins with no hope of salvation. By his death and resurrection Christ established his lordship over those who have died and those who live.

10. We must recall what this argument is about – those ‘weak’ in the faith whose conscience is still deeply influenced by legalistic attitudes and who may judge other Christians who do things which they, being ‘weak’, believe it is wrong to do; and the ‘strong’ who, being free of such legalism, tend to look down on those still bound by it. These attitudes are still prevalent today. Christians judge and despise each other according to whether they do or do not drink alcohol, attend discos, watch television and so on.

11-12. One day we must each of us stand before God. Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23. Although he is clear that believers in Christ will not come into condemnation, we will, nevertheless, have to give account before God of how we have lived our lives for him. So we are free of the views of our fellows but we are responsible for God for our attitudes and behaviour.

13. There is a little play on words in the original – “let’s stop making decisions about other people and make the decision about ourselves not to make unnecessary difficulties

for our fellow Christian's". The criterion is not to push our views on others but to concentrate on what will most encourage them in their Christian walk.

14. What a depth of change has been made in Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, to abandon the strict Jewish law is about 'clean' and 'unclean' meat. Yet he is only echoing the teaching of Christ in Mark 7:14-20.

However, he inserts an important proviso. No man must violate his own conscience; to do that is to make him less than a moral human being. Conscience is like a spiritual alarm clock. It is 'set off' when we are about to cross over into a forbidden area. Like an alarm clock, however, it can be adjusted to go off at a different time. Our conscience is set initially by our culture, our families and our peers. We learn from others what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Initially we do not set our consciences ourselves. As we mature we have to question many things we have been taught and make up our own minds as to whether they are correct. Some actions, regarding which we have given no thought, we may come to believe are wrong; others, which we assumed were wrong, we may come to believe are good and right. So we will reset our alarm bell. But until we are personally convinced of a matter and deliberately reset our conscience, we sin if we override its warning.

15-16. Paul has reset his own conscience. Many things he once considered forbidden (by the law) he now regards as acceptable and good. He has been set free from the law by his bondage to Jesus Christ. However, he will not use his freedom to bring distress to a fellow believer. He will not use his rights if that might damage another. A 'weaker' brother, seeing a more mature Christian doing something which his own conscience condemns, may be tempted to follow him without reasoning out whether or not he should reset his own conscience. But if he ignores his conscience over that, why should he not ignore it over other things also? And it may be that those other things are indeed evil. To violate conscience is to put out the light that guides us. Paul is concerned lest his own freedom should destroy a fellow Christian in this way. Love of our fellows must override our personal rights. We must not allow what we have come to see is good and acceptable behaviour to be misunderstood.

17-18. Here Paul is echoing the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, "*do not worry, saying, 'what shall eat?'... Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness... (Matt. 6:31, 33)*". Our freedom from living under the law is not a freedom to do as we like for our own benefit but a freedom to please God by living out his Kingdom. The welfare of others, fellowship with them (the fellowship of the Holy Spirit), which brings peace, benefits our fellows and brings true joy.

19. Paul's concern is not only for individuals but for the Church, the body of Christ on earth. If every member is concerned only with his or her own views and rights it will cause discord. So each must think and work for peace, which in this context must involve unity. It is not simply our personal growth or building up (edification) but the mutual building up of the whole Church; for it is the Church that is to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in action on earth (v.17).

20-21. In this context "*the work of God*" must refer to the Church and its witness. Other translations are more specific and state that evil comes upon the person who causes another to stumble.

We need not take it that Paul is arguing that because someone on some occasion may be offended, a Christian must never eat meat or drink wine. His argument is not that these

things are wrong in themselves; it is a matter of conscience (not our own but respecting someone else's) in particular circumstances.

22-23. At the beginning of this chapter Paul has said we are not to pass judgement on other Christians on disputable matters. Here, he echoes that by saying that our views on such things should be a matter between God and ourselves. If our understanding of the truth has sent us free from many 'religious' prohibitions, then we are blessed indeed. However, if we are not fully persuaded in our own minds (v.5), if in our conscience we still have doubts, then we are under condemnation if we go against our conscience (see note on vv.14-16) because our action is then not based on our faith – what we believe. We may be following the example of someone else, so it is their moral judgement which controls us, not our own. We may be acting out of fear of rejection by others. It may be that our conscience is unnecessarily oversensitive on a particular issue; but until we are convinced of that and 'reset' it, we sin if we violate its leading.

Chapter 15

1-2. Paul did not write his letters with numbered chapters and verses (these were introduced centuries later) and the division here is, perhaps, unfortunate. He is continuing his explanation begun in the previous chapter. He stresses that the welfare of others in the fellowship is more important than the exercise of our own rights even if those rights are fully justified. However, the aim is not just to keep the peace; it is to build up our fellow believers. That may mean that we do not just say nothing, for then he might not know that there is another viewpoint. Perhaps we should say, "I have come to see things differently, but if I have upset you I am sorry and I won't do that again". Provided we are not patronising he may learn the importance of tolerance and unity.

3. It is interesting that in reminding his readers of Christ's example he does not refer to specific incidents in Christ's life. Rather, he quotes from a Psalm written hundreds of years before his earthly ministry. Thus, the way Christ walked was not something he thought up at the time but was a fulfilment of the preordained plan of God. Paul sets it in a wider context and so he continues –

4. Because Christ was fulfilling the eternal plan of God revealed in Scripture, that same Scripture encourages us to endure and have hope. The way Paul commends (not seeking our own rights but the good of others) is the way ordained by God; it is built into creation. Those who live like this will be vindicated.

5-6. Whilst Scripture both encourages and inspires us to endure, these attributes are also given directly by God to the believer through his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of unity and fellowship. Underlying Paul's admonition to put the good of others before our own rights is his concern for the unity of believers in the one body. In deed and worship, in faith and action they are to be at one so that God may be glorified.

7. Paul continues this line of thought. As believers we may find other believers difficult, especially if on certain issues they do not believe exactly what we believe. But remember, we didn't believe what Christ believed when he accepted us.

8-9. Verse 8 is difficult in its construction and it is easy to get lost in seeking to understand its details. Incidentally, the word translated correctly as 'the Jews' is in the original, 'the circumcision'. The thrust of Paul's argument, however, is clear. He still has in mind the need for unity within the Church which embraces both Jews and Gentiles. He reminds his readers that Jesus was born a Jew. God had promised Abraham that it would be through his descendants that all nations would be blessed. The fact that the Redeemer was a Jew confirms God's faithfulness to his promises.

However, Jesus did not confine his salvation to the Jews. He welcomes all who will come to him; he has mercy on the Gentiles also. Since the beginning of the previous chapter Paul has argued that the strong in faith should accept fellow believers whose faith is not as strong as theirs and who have different views about various religious laws. As an illustration of this he points to Christ who opened his arms so wide that although born a Jew he welcomed Gentiles. Indeed, this was in God's plan all along, as he demonstrates by quoting various Old Testament Scriptures.

Perhaps some of the believing Jews, knowing themselves to be God's chosen people, were offended that salvation should include Gentiles also. Paul reminds them that this was foretold in their own Scriptures (2 Sam. 22:50 and Ps. 18:49).

10-12. In the Old Testament, which Paul quotes, the reference is actually to 'the nations': Paul uses the term 'the Gentiles'. It may be that in Rome the friction is not only between the strong and weak in faith, but also between the Jewish and Gentile believers. He is concerned that there should be unity in the Church. Jesse was the father of David and the promised Messiah was to be descended from him so far as human genealogy was involved (1:3).

13. Paul has spent some time dealing with possible conflict within the Church and he concludes this section with a prayer for those to whom he writes.

Hope, remember, in the New Testament is certain and sure; it is as much a fact of the future as history is a fact of the past. There is no doubt about it, it just hasn't happened yet. There is a glorious future for every believer; the resurrection life in the eternal Kingdom of God. If that certainty abides in our hearts there will be a deep, sustaining joy – far deeper than happiness – within us. There will also be a peace which transcends the desire of our fallen nature to try to force our particular views on our fellow believers. We will accept them as Christ accepted us. If we have indeed been born again of the Holy Spirit and he is dwelling in us, then his power will enable us to live out now the life of that Kingdom to which we already belong and which we know we are to inherit. The unity of heaven will be reflected on earth (14:17).

14. Paul is drawing his letter to a close. Most of what remains is about his personal plans and conveys greetings to friends. Some of what he has said has been very strong and so, as a wise teacher, he now encourages his readers. Whilst he had a clear understanding of the need for leadership in the Church there is no hint of the tendency which has developed down the centuries of expecting one or two leaders to do all the work of the Church. He expects the members of the fellowship to instruct one another. To say they are "*complete in knowledge*" does not mean they know everything about everything, but they certainly know all they need to know in order to lead the Christian life.

15-16. The people of God in the Old Testament were instructed to bind the word of God to their foreheads and attach them to their door posts. Devout Jews follow this practice to this day; though maybe they never open the little boxes actually to read the words. It is a fact of human nature that we need to be reminded of truths and so St Paul tells his readers he has been reminding them of things they already know. The reason for this is his burning desire to fulfil the task laid upon him by God. As a servant or minister of Jesus he sees himself as a priest. A priest makes offerings to God and the offering Paul has is the Gentiles who believe in Christ. If any Jewish believer still has doubts about non-Jews being acceptable to God Paul states that they (the Gentiles) are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In these two verses Paul speaks of each member of the Trinity; God the Father who gave him grace to be a minister of Jesus to the Gentiles who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He continues his reference to the Trinity in the next three verses.

17-22. Every person born on earth needs a purpose. Each needs to feel, "I matter, I count". This is not wrong: if God went to infinite lengths to create us and then went to the cross to redeem us, we must have a value and a purpose. Paul has found fulfilment in his life. He has seen Gentiles won to God through his ministry; he has seen the Spirit's power in him work miracles. He has been of some use in the world. But he has the balance right; it is all of Christ. The power and the glory belong to Christ, not to him; nevertheless, it is he whom Christ has been willing to accept and use as a servant. Fulfilment for each of us is found in our surrender to Christ and our service of him.

There is no account in the book of Acts (which records three missionary journeys of St. Paul) of his visit to Illyricum. We must assume, therefore, that the written record is selective and there are many adventures of Paul of which we know nothing.

Paul's concern not to build on someone else's foundation is not due to any jealousy on his part, it is a very positive attitude. With regard to churches which he had himself planted, he returned to them if it were possible in order to strengthen and encourage them (Acts 14:21/2). He was happy for others to build on the foundation he had laid (1 Cor.3: 10). His burning desire was to reach those who had not yet heard the good news of Christ. He quotes Isaiah 52:15 in support of his desire and explains that it is this work which hitherto has prevented him from visiting the Roman believers

23-24. Apparently Paul feels that there are no more strategic places which are not reached with the gospel in the region where he has been working and so he plans to visit to Spain. We do not know whether he ever did so. If he did, we have no record of it. However, his desire is to visit the Christians in Rome on his way.

25-27. Before going to Spain, Paul returns to Jerusalem with an offering from some of the new Gentile churches. This was dear to Paul's heart. When he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem some years previously to seek a ruling from the apostles as to whether Gentile believers had to be circumcised (something Paul vehemently opposed), they had been encouraged and won their case (Acts 15:1-29). However, the apostles had asked, "*that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do*" (Gal. 2: 10". If there was still any doubt or hesitancy on the part of Jewish believers to accept Gentiles into the Church it would obviously be of benefit for Paul to bring an offering for the poor amongst them from their Gentile brethren.

Paul also sees it as right that the Gentiles, who were now sharing in the blessings of the Faith first given to the Jews, should share their material blessings with their Jewish brethren in need.

28-29. It isn't entirely clear what Paul means by the phrasing of v.29. He is probably referring to a mutual blessing whereby both he and his readers will be blessed by each other in their faith in their common Lord and Saviour. This echoes his remarks at the beginning of the letter (1: 11/12).

30-32. These verses give an insight to the person Paul was. It has been said that the truly brave man is not one who knows no fear but one who, knowing fear, still does what he is called to do. Paul asks for prayer because of the double conflict he feels he has to face. There is the possibility of attack from the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem. In fact, of course, that possibility became an actuality. They sought to kill him (Acts 21: 31) and he was rescued by the Roman guard. He also fears that the believers may reject him. This proved unfounded; they were, however, concerned for his safety and suggested how he might seek to appease the antagonistic Jews (Acts 21:17/25).

It is interesting that Jesus faced a similar internal conflict when he set his face to go to Jerusalem for his death (Mk. 10: 32/34). Like master, like servant.

33. The main burden of the whole letter has been how mankind can have peace with God. It all depends on the initiative of God who has made it possible and so Paul concludes by commending them to God who gives this peace.

Chapter 16

This final chapter is mainly, but not entirely, given over to personal greetings. Some scholars claim that it was not part of Paul's original letter to Rome but was in another letter, possibly to Ephesus, and that down the years as Paul's writings were gathered together it became attached to this one. However, there is no necessity to accept this view; it can perfectly well be part of the original.

1-2. Paul is sometimes described as a male chauvinist but, in fact, he valued the ministry of women greatly as this commendation of Phoebe makes clear. The word translated 'servant' is literally 'deaconess', but in Paul's time there was not the clearly defined office that such a description would carry today. Obviously this Christian woman was about to travel to Rome and it may very well be that she was the one who actually carried the letter for Paul – certainly no other messenger is commended or mentioned.

He is concerned for her welfare. He isn't asking simply that Phoebe should be welcomed as a member of their congregation; he is speaking of practical help, possibly in providing accommodation – indeed any help she needs.

3-5. Priscilla and Aquila (it is interesting that Paul names the wife before her husband) must have had a fascinating story to tell but of which we know so little. Aquila came originally from what is now Northern Turkey but went to Rome. He and his wife had had to leave there when the emperor Claudius banished Jews from the city. Paul first met them in Corinth (Acts 18:2ff.). Aquila, like Paul, was a tent maker and Paul stayed in their home. When he went to Ephesus they accompanied him and remained there when he travelled on (Acts 18:18ff.). Some time later a Jew named Apollos arrived in Ephesus. He was a believer and preached Jesus but his understanding of the gospel was incomplete. Priscilla and Aquila took him home and explained the way of God more adequately (Acts 18:24ff.). When the decree of Claudius fell into disuse the two of them must have returned to Rome because here Paul is sending his great friends his greeting. We do not know how or when they had risked their lives for him. Obviously this couple were still on fire for the Lord because the news had reached Paul that a group of believers met regularly in their home. (The early church, of course, had no buildings and often met in homes.)

We know nothing of Epenetus; was he part of the household of Stephanus at this time? (1 Co. 16:15).

6. We have no information as to when Paul met this Mary, nor how he knew of her work for the Christians in Rome.

7. Again, what history lies beneath this greeting? When were they in prison with Paul? There is some question as to whether Junias was a woman. If so, that would mean the early church accepted a woman as an apostle – one sent out by the Church with the gospel. If these two were believers before Paul they were indeed early converts. The translation 'relatives' is probably rather strong for our day and age. It may well mean no more than kinsmen in the sense of fellow Jews.

8. An elaborate tomb bearing the name Ampliatus has been found in one of the oldest Christian burial places in Rome. However, it was a fairly common name and we cannot know if it is the same man whom Paul knew.

9-15. There are many interesting theories to link these Christians with people mentioned in secular writings of the time, but we cannot be sure just who these people were who meant so much to Paul. What this list does reveal is that the record of Paul's ministry in the book of Acts is selective. What stories and adventures lie behind these names? And how many others were there whom Paul met, loved and valued whose names are missing here but recorded in the Book of Life?

16. To us it appears strange for Paul to order these Christians to kiss each other. In later years the holy kiss was to form part of the liturgy of the Church. Today many churches exchange a greeting of peace before receiving the bread and wine in the service of Holy Communion. It is helpful to remind ourselves that we must be at peace with our fellow believers if we are to enjoy true communion with the Prince of Peace. Perhaps Paul's intention was similarly to promote unity within the Church in Rome. "*All the churches*" presumably refers to those founded by Paul and which he knew so well.

17-18. Having sent his own greetings and that of the churches and before completing the list with the greetings of other individuals, Paul suddenly inserts a further exhortation. It seems strange because he had apparently completed his letter already. Maybe further information arrived about the Church in Rome, or perhaps someone in the room (Tertius? v.22) made a comment about some troublemaker. Whatever the reason, Paul is prompted to make this further appeal. Although he did not found the Church at Rome, he uses his apostolic authority to some extent to warn them of a possible source of trouble. In the churches which he did plant and which he visited later he had met problems with false teachers who spread dissent. There are people in the church today, as there have been down the ages, who seek to impose their own will and pet theories on others rather than seeking the will of Christ, the common good and unity and peace in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. There are people who seek to use religion to their own ends, even amongst those who claim to follow Christ.

We all need encouragement and in a world where so many are put down and made to feel failures and unwanted, it is the duty and joy of the Church to welcome all and build up their self-worth. If Christ died for them their value is incalculable. However, our words must be sincere and genuine to build up others in the Lord; not to persuade them into false doctrines.

19. Paul wisely uses the gift of encouragement in telling these Roman Christians that word of their faithfulness has spread and what joy that has given him personally. He uses a lovely phrase to describe his desire for them. Surely every loving parent desires this for his or her child – to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. This simple statement reflects creation before the fall. Adam and Eve knew only good; they did not know what evil was until they experienced it by their disobedience. Unfortunately we cannot return to that state because evil is now in the world. How difficult it is to recognise evil yet not to experience it. It is dangerous to be too naïve, yet we are called to be pure.

20. It is interesting that Paul can link a God peace with an act of crushing. Had he said "The god of vengeance" or even "of justice", it would be more understandable. Yet it is the cross which conquers. It is a man hanging helpless of a cross, one who takes the evil of the world upon himself, who is the victorious King. Love like that is not passive; it involves a powerful act of will. Peace is not an absence of conflict, it is holding the truth (final reality) whatever the outward circumstances, and being confident that it will triumph. But that final reality is not an ideal, it is a person whom we know as God. At the very end, when the eternal reality of the Kingdom is revealed, then anything which is

unwilling to accept that state, that Kingdom, must be destroyed; for there cannot be eternal opposition existing in a Kingdom of peace. So Satan and all who rebel with him against what finally and eternally is must be crushed in order for there to be peace.

Paul speaks of this happening soon. In fact the Christians in Rome were to suffer terrible persecution and Satan to this day has still not been crushed. Perhaps Paul expected the promised return of Jesus to this earth to take place any moment; if so, of course, he was proved wrong. The important point, however, is that he was both looking for it and ready for it. When Christ does return will the Christians of that time be equally prepared? And, remember, that time may be ours.

The words about the grace of our Lord Jesus are used so frequently today – especially by those in churches where set prayers and liturgy are customary – that we may forget this was not a formula or tradition when Paul wrote it. Perhaps we need to hear it in different words: “May you receive all that Jesus is as he gives himself unconditionally to you”.

23. The greetings are now resumed but whereas before (with the exception of the end of v.16) Paul had named the people in Rome who were to be greeted, now he gives the names of those who send greetings. Timothy was particularly dear to Paul (Phil. 2:19-23) and worked closely with him like a son with his Father. We cannot be sure exactly who the others are, although many guesses and suggestions have been made. It seems that on his travels Paul was often accompanied by others (Acts 20: 4ff.).

22. Paul often dictated his letters to someone else to write down. There were professional letter writers at that time. Whether Tertius was one of them we do not know but the phrase “*in the Lord*” shows he was a Christian. No doubt such scribes would sometimes suggest to those employing them, improvements in phrasing their ideas. Whether Tertius made any such suggestions to Paul, and whether they were adopted by him, we cannot know.

23. No doubt Gaius would have been astonished to learn that his name would be read worldwide all down the years because he used the gift of hospitality which God had given him. Very likely Paul was writing this letter from his house. Erastus illustrates that men of influence in public affairs were also among the believers.

(At this point some manuscripts insert v. 24 May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. It is unlikely that Paul would repeat what he had just said in verse 20. Some texts have it in one place and some in another; yet others, no doubt due to scribes making copies, included it in both places. Some manuscripts place it after v.27.)

25-27. Paul ends his letter in a similar way to how he began it (1:1-7). He refers to ‘my’ gospel. In fact, of course, it is the good news of Jesus; but Paul has grasped it and made it his own. It isn’t just words or an ideal; it has power to strengthen and give purpose to all who receive it and who, therefore, trust God. But in order for people to hear it, those who have experienced Christ for themselves must proclaim him.

In New Testament usage the word ‘mystery’ has a special meaning; not, as we use the word, something that is incapable of being understood, but a truth kept hidden but now revealed. It appears confusing at first that Paul says this secret was made known by the prophets; certainly they did not know the full manifestation of God that Jesus was to reveal. Nevertheless, Jesus himself was to explain “*what was said in all the Scriptures*

concerning himself (Lk. 24: 27). It was God's intention and command that this revelation should be made.

Paul is clear that this revelation is for all mankind and not just for his own race, the Jews, and it is not only to produce belief in God but obedience also.

The letter ends on a high note. This great God, who has acted in the manner Paul has been so careful to explain, is glorious and, as he is eternal, so all creation must eternally give and reflect that glory. But the way to render that worship is not through the law, nor through animal sacrifice, but through Jesus Christ.

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