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# **| Romans Masterclass**

## **(Part One - Chapters 1-4)**

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# 1.0 Aims Of The Module

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This module is in essence an expositional Bible Study of Paul's letter to the saints in Rome, often referred to as an epistle. As with any sound Bible study we need to lay out some of our aims at the beginning. When coming to study the WORD of God, it is helpful for us to see it as a journey into the revealed mysteries of God. Every time there are new truths and mysteries for the Holy Spirit to show us, as well as reminding us of the truths he has already established in our lives.

When setting out on any journey if we do not have a destination in mind then we shall end up wandering aimlessly, going nowhere in particular. Likewise when we begin any journey into the WORD of God we should set course for a destination even if we expect the wind of the Spirit to take us through unfamiliar waters to get there. So what are some of the things that we are hoping to establish in our studies through this wonderful letter?

## Equip The People of God

The purpose of the EQUIP courses is to equip the people of God,

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

**2 Timothy 3:16-17**

The Ephesians Masterclass is therefore designed for the equipping of God's people in their walk with God and living out their faith in the world in which we live today.

## An Adventure

Coming to the WORD of God can be an adventure every time. Like an onion with many layers, God has invested unlimited depths in his WORD. Our prayer should be that every time we come to the WORD of God we expect something new to happen.

Every time we come together to look at Ephesians, we must be prepared in our hearts to hear from Jesus personally and be ready to break out in praise at what we learn together. Most of all we must be determined to encounter Jesus and something new from him. Let our attitude be a demanding one ... simply not willing to leave without experiencing more of Jesus - he will respond to that kind of hunger!

## **Exposition**

To learn how to expound the WORD of God for ourselves using sound hermeneutics. Although much of Scripture is written in clear instruction to us, there are some parts that are not immediately easy to understand and we shall take some time to look at these and meditate on them together.

## **More Than the Sum of its Parts**

Although there is plenty of teaching content to this module and expository teaching, it is hoped that each student will hear personally from the LORD Jesus Christ.

We have provided a notetaking facility on LRC Grow with each module, for each student to take down personal notes as and when they hear from the LORD. These are to supplement the Course notes as we progress through the course.

To this end it is hoped that each student will spend time seeking the LORD in prayer before each session they spend reading the module.

## **Contextual Study**

To learn how to study the WORD of God contextually rather than just topically. When we are brought the *rhema* or “now” Word of God in our Sunday gatherings or at other times, it is often done so drawing from various passages of Scripture, rather than from one single portion of the Scriptures, given the time constraints on us. In this module we are coming at it from the opposite angle. Instead of looking for Scriptures around a certain subject that we are looking at, we shall be spending time in one part of the Scriptures and drawing on other parts of the Scripture to help us expound it.

## **Putting Familiar Passages back into Context**

We often remember snippets of Scripture out of their original context which can sometimes lead to misinterpretation or misapplication of them. One of the aims of this module is to go back to the context of such familiar passages to see if we have learned to apply them correctly.

## Connection with the Past

Although we are not here for a history lesson, in today's modern society and with the people we read of living in such a different era it can be hard to empathise with our ancestors in the faith. As James looked back to his ancestor, Elijah and described himself like the man, so we need to learn to look back and see men and women just like us<sup>1</sup>.

## Cross-Referencing

To learn to cross-reference parts of Scripture. As we mature in the faith our familiarity with the WORD of God should grow with us, so that when we read it we are always seeing other parts of the Scriptures in our mind's eye – this enables the Holy Spirit to use them to speak to us through his WORD.

Later when we are meditating on the WORD of God throughout the day we will be like cows chewing the grass being able to bring to memory that which we read and draw it together with other parts of the WORD we already know. After all, the best tool for interpreting the WORD is the WORD itself.

“With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”

**Psalm 119:13–15**

Also, many of us have the luxury of reading the WORD of God whenever we like. For some Christians around the world they may not have this luxury at all, as Bibles can often be banned.

Detailed expositional studies of a book such as Ephesians should give us all a familiarity so that if we had no Bibles to read, we could piece together the gist of everything that God has said through part of his WORD. Perhaps many parts we will be able to recite exactly, but the important thing is that when we become *that* familiar with the WORD of God then no one can take it away from us, it becomes imprinted on our minds so that it can be written on our hearts<sup>2</sup>.

Finally it is our hope that all students of this module have already read through Ephesians a few times before taking this Masterclass. It is our recommendation that students also read through the book continually whilst working through the material..

<sup>1</sup> James 5<sup>17</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 8<sup>10</sup>



## **| 2.0 Background To The Letter**

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2.1 Introduction

2.2 Author And Recipients

2.3 Dating And Contents



## 2.0 Background to the Letter

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### 2.1 Introduction

#### 2.1.1 The Epistle

The longest of Paul's epistles or letters, Romans is for many his finest and most complete work. It has been said that Ephesians is the "Queen of the Epistles", in which case Romans can only be described as the King of the epistles.

For many Christians the book of Romans is simply the best book in the whole of the Word; for many if they had to choose a single book to take to a desert island then it would be the book of Romans. For no other part of the WORD of God has, for many, so much of God's truth so completely contained and expressed in the one place.

Dr Martin Lloyd Jones, who is the one of the most famous expositors of this great epistle, once described it as a *symphony*. Paul builds his argument for the gospel to a crescendo throughout the letter, like a symphony with its many parts – the problem of sin, the hopeless of man's situation, the possibility of the answer, the announcement of the gospel and the triumph of the love of God which cannot be separated from us, even by the curse of sin.

Here is what some commentators have said about the letter: -

*Paul's letter to the Romans stands like Shakespeare's Hamlet or Beethoven's Fifth Symphony: the master-work of a master craftsman. In this letter, Paul creates a tradition of Christian thought where none had existed before.*

**N T Wright, Bishop of Durham**

*... the principal and most excellent part of the new Testament ... a light and a way in unto the whole scripture ... No man verily can read it too oft or study it too well; for the more it is studied the easier it is, the more it is chewed the pleasanter it is, and the more groundly it is searched the more preciouser things are found in it, so great treasure of spiritual things lieth hid therein.*

**William Tyndale's English New Testament, Prologue to Romans – 1534]**

*In the order which ultimately became established Romans takes pride of place among the Pauline letters. Historically, this is because it is the*

*longest letter, but there is an innate fitness in the accordance of this position of the primacy to a letter which, above all others, deserves to be called 'the Gospel according to Paul'.*

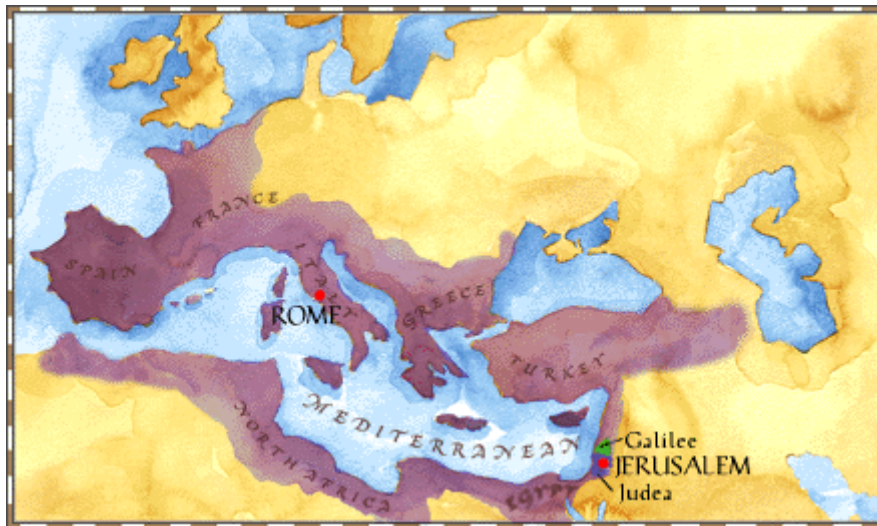
**F F Bruce**

The teachings of this New Testament letter are foundational to our understanding of the gospel and the Christian Faith. The truths hinted at in other letters from Paul, are here revealed and laid out by him for us to see. They are foundational to our experience of a victorious Christian life.

### 2.1.2 The Importance Of Rome

The empire which ruled the world at the time of Christ and the New Testament church following was named after its principal city, Rome. As you can see from the map below the city was at the centre of the Empire at the time of Christ. The empire continued to spread after this (the main invasion of Britain taking place in AD43) until the 4th Century during which it went into decline over the next hundred years or so.

In terms of its relationship to the early church, the city was as early as the second century before Christ's birth home for a Jewish colony. There was a Jewish community in Rome as early as the second century BC. It evidently grew after the conquest of Judea by Pompey, the distinguished military and political Roman leader of the late Roman Republic, in 63 BC.



Cicero<sup>3</sup>, writing in 59BC described the Jewish community in Rome as influential.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish colony suffered multiple expulsions from the city but in each case Jews would drift back to this centre of trade, finance and power of the empire. One such expulsion took place in AD49 under an edict by Emperor Claudius,

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) was a Roman writer, speaker, philosopher and politician.

<sup>4</sup> The Teacher's Commentary; Lawrence O Richards, © 1987 Scripture Press Publications Inc. Wheaton, Illinois.

wherein two tentmakers were amongst the exiles and this led to a significant meeting with another tentmaker ...

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them,<sup>5</sup>

**Acts 18:1-2**

The historian Suetonius<sup>6</sup> records the following as the cause of Claudius' edict: -

*Constant indulgence of the Jews in riots at the instigation of one Chrestus<sup>7</sup>*

The gospel was obviously causing division amongst the Jewish community in Rome, but following the death of Claudius in AD54, once again many returned. By the time that Paul wrote this letter to the saints in Rome, a large number of Gentile and Jewish Christians comprised a typical church.

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 18:1-2

<sup>6</sup> Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (AD 71-135): Roman scholar and official, best-known as the author of the Lives of the Twelve Caesars.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

## 2.2 Author And Recipients

### 2.2.1 Author

There seems little doubt, even amongst New Testament Critical scholars, that Paul was the author of this letter. It occupies the first place in the manuscripts which have come down to us, although in very early times the order was probably otherwise.

The external evidence<sup>8</sup> of the authorship of Romans is uncommonly strong and the internal<sup>9</sup> evidence is equally convincing. The style of the letter is commonly accepted as Pauline and in keeping with the style of his other letters.

The only queries over the composition have been directed toward the sixteenth chapter which contains many personal greetings, to a church which he has never visited. Some have proposed that this is still Paul's hand but was perhaps appended to the letter when it was sent onto the church in Ephesus later on. There does seem to be a clear break at the end of chapter 15, however there are many inconsistencies in this hypothesis, the detail of which is beyond our study here.

### 2.2.2 Recipients

It is noteworthy that the letter is addressed to the saints in Rome as opposed to the church in Rome, unlike other epistles. Bishop Gore theorises that Rome was perhaps considered less of an established church and more of a collection of saints.<sup>10</sup> In writing to them Paul was perhaps making an apostolic claim to this group of saints with a view to establishing them with an apostolic commission and grounding.

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<sup>8</sup> Evidence based on the readings found in the manuscripts (as opposed to internal evidence, which is based on the nature of the readings). External evidence is based on the number and nature of the witnesses supporting a particular reading.

<sup>9</sup> Evidence based on the logic of readings (as opposed to external evidence, which is based on the readings of manuscripts). Also called "transcriptional probability" or the like, it is based on determining which reading most likely gave rise to the others -- e.g. which reading a scribe would be more likely to change by accident or on purpose; which reading the original author is most likely to have written.

<sup>10</sup> St Paul's Epistle to the Romans - A Practical Exposition, Bishop Charles Gore, M.A, D.D. of the Community of the Resurrection, Canon of Westminster, Hon. Chaplain to the Queen; 1900 London John Murray.

Rome was of course at the edge of the Christian world at this time, as we can see from map below showing some of the churches to whom Paul wrote letters: -



According to Guthrie<sup>11</sup>, next to nothing is known about the origin of the church in Rome. Paul had not visited at the time of writing. It is highly unlikely that another Apostle had established it because Paul talks in this very letter about building on someone else's foundation<sup>12</sup>, and yet he regards this church as under his remit.

<sup>11</sup> The Pauline Epistles - New Testament Introduction: Guthrie, Donald; © 1966 The Tyndale Press, London

<sup>12</sup> Romans 15:20



## 2.3 Dating And Contents

### 2.3.1 Date Of Writing

Estimates vary on when Paul wrote this letter. The consensus seems to be that it was his during his stay in Corinth on his third missionary journey sometime between AD55 and the Spring of AD57. Paul was preparing to take the offering taken up for the believers who were in need in Jerusalem<sup>13</sup>. Since the issue of this collection had not yet been resolved at the time of his writing the letters to Corinthians (dated AD55) then Romans must have followed it.

### 2.3.2 Purpose Of The Letter

As with Paul's other letters various theories have circulated concerning the purpose of his letter to the Romans: -

- **Polemic** - A desire to provoke Jewish Christians, but this found little favour amongst scholars.
- **Conciliatory** - Some have considered that Paul felt the need to vindicate his Gentile commission and to reconcile Jewish and Gentile elements. However it is likely Gentiles were in the greater majority in the church in Rome.
- **Doctrinal** - A full statement of Paul's doctrinal position, however Guthrie<sup>14</sup> argues that there are some theological avenues left to pursue by Paul and also the personal greetings are integral to the letter.
- **Summing Up** - Summing up his experience to date, perhaps because of his position and his concerns about his future. He may have sent it to Rome because he foresaw its strategic importance for the future.
- **Needs of his Readers** - Much weight has been given to this theory. It is likely that Paul received a comprehensive report of the church from Aquila and Priscilla, and others. Possibly therefore Paul wished to lay out the Christian principle of righteousness contrasted with the Jewish approach, turning then to the historical problem of Israel's failure and her relationship with the universal Christian church.

Perhaps the real answer is contained in Paul's own hand in the expression of wish to come and minister among them, for which for now the letter he send must suffice in the fulfilment of.

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 15:25-27

<sup>14</sup> Ibid



### 2.3.3 Contents

There are many different outlines of the book of Romans, but in the main they carve the letter as follows: -

- Theme - The righteousness of God
- Romans 1 to 4 - The problem of universal unrighteousness
- Romans 5 to 8 - God's solution and means of victory over sin
- Romans 9 to 11 - Israel and the sovereign grace of God
- Romans 12-16 - Righteousness worked out



## **| 3.0 Apostolic Greetings**

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- 3.1 Paul, the Bondservant
- 3.2 Christ, the King
- 3.3 The Beloved Saints of God
- 3.4 An Apostolic Harvest





## 3.0 Apostolic Greetings

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In this opening Greeting from Paul we can see that it follows the standard greeting of the Roman world at the time: X to Y, Greetings. Except that Paul fills out each part to provide us with a dynamic description of who he is, who has sent him and to whom he is writing. Even in this opening greeting Paul made for himself an opportunity to bless his readers and to impart to them vital truths.

Perhaps when we greet each other we should consider our words carefully, not as throw away remarks but words that can bring great blessing and confirmation to each other? Let us begin our study by looking at Paul's descriptions and his reasons for doing so.

### 3.1 Paul, the Bondservant (1')

Following his own name, the first word Paul writes describing himself is *bondservant*. This word was full of meaning at the time and worth us looking at more closely.

#### 3.1.1 A One Word Epitaph (1')

If you could choose one word for your epitaph<sup>15</sup>, what would that one word be? In what Paul most likely knew was to be one of his most important letters, he chose this word to describe himself with great care; above all other descriptions of himself, notably his Apostleship.

Paul's choice of this word *servant* before anything else tells us something fundamental about the man. It was as if Paul were saying to his readers '*Look, before anything else, I want to be known as a servant of Christ*'. Let us take a look at meaning of this word ...

***Doulos*** - Bondservant, the word designated one who was born as a slave, one who was bound to his master in chords so strong that only death could break them, one who served his master to the disregard of his own interests, one whose will was swallowed up in the will of his master.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to this word *doulos* we have the word *kurios*, which was Paul's favourite title for Jesus. It is often translated Lord in the New Testament and describes someone who has undisputed possession of a person or a thing. It is the opposite of *doulos*.

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<sup>15</sup> An epitaph (literally: "on the gravestone" in ancient Greek) is text honouring the deceased, most commonly inscribed on a tombstone or plaque.

<sup>16</sup> *Romans in the Greek New Testament - Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*. Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

### 3.1.2 A Worthy Epitaph (1')

There is another side to this word *doulos*, for we find it used in the Septuagint<sup>17</sup> to refer to other men of high calling, like Paul. So the word itself had a heritage to which Paul perhaps also sought to lay claim. Paul knew his place amongst his forefathers in the faith: -

**Moses** my servant (*doulos*) is dead.

**Joshua 1:2**

After these things **Joshua** the son of Nun, the servant (*doulos*) of the LORD, died, being 110 years old.

**Joshua 24:29**

For the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants (*doulos*) the **prophets**.

**Amos 3:7**

From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants (*doulos*) the **prophets** to them, day after day.

**Jeremiah 7:25**

Paul knew the meaning and history of this word he used to describe himself; he knew the history of his ancestry, as we shall see later in this letter when Paul talks about Abraham. We, like Paul, need to know our place in this great line of faith which runs from the heart of the father in eternity, like a great wave through history picking up men and women in its wake. So the writer of Hebrews concludes after listing such great heroes of faith: -

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Septuagint (sometimes abbreviated LXX) is the name given to the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The Septuagint has its origin in Alexandria, Egypt and was translated between 300-200 BC. Widely used among Hellenistic Jews, this Greek translation was produced because many Jews spread throughout the empire were beginning to lose their Hebrew language. The process of translating the Hebrew to Greek also gave many non-Jews a glimpse into Judaism. According to an ancient document called the *Letter of Aristeas*, it is believed that 70 to 72 Jewish scholars were commissioned during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus to carry out the task of translation. The term "Septuagint" means seventy in Latin, and the text is so named to the credit of these 70 scholars.

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 12<sup>1</sup>



In other words, there is a destiny marked out for us, like our forefathers in the faith, so we need to throw off anything that stops us from responding to this call of God on our lives – that usually means “the old self” <sup>19</sup>.

### 3.1.3 Called (1<sup>1</sup>)

This leads us to Paul’s next word to describe himself, “called”. Is that a description we use of ourselves? If you talk to people about what they do for a living, you will find that some will talk about their vocation, that is, something they set out to do from a young age, pursued through the necessary training, often for years, before they were able to do it. Sometimes it will be all they thought and hoped it would be and sometimes it will not meet their expectations.

Others will talk about drifting or falling into what they are doing now – it does not mean that they don’t enjoy it but it wasn’t what they set out to do and often it pays the bills and can be interesting at times. Most people fit into the latter category, whilst some fortunate ones fit into the former.

However there are some people who will come across our paths who can describe something that seemed to take hold of them! Some people talk about what they do for a living, unable always to explain how it happened but that somehow something one day almost seemed to find them, as if it had sought them out! Those are the very fortunate amongst us, for they were taken by surprise by something that often they did not realise existed, or was possible to do for a living. Invariably such people love their jobs and almost feel it was their destiny.

In some respects *calling* is similar to the experience of this latter group. It is not something that you set out to pursue, nor is it something that you drift into. Instead it is something that takes hold of you by the scruff of the neck. That is what happened to Paul: -

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, ...<sup>20</sup>

A few years later, when writing to the Philippians Paul would describe this calling which pulled him heavenwards, causing him to leave behind all that hindered him and press into all that God had called him into: -

... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 4<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Acts 9<sup>3-4A</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Philippians 3<sup>13-14</sup>

### 3.1.4 Set Apart for the Gospel of God (1')

Paul knew that he was set apart and he knew when this had happened as well: -

... he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,...<sup>22</sup>

Later on we see Paul referring again to God's act of separating Jacob from Esau, whilst they were still in their mother's womb<sup>23</sup>. You see we are not set apart once our calling has taken hold of us, but we are set apart before we are even born. Once we have heard the call and responded, we are simply taking those first steps which God destined for us before we took our first breath. Once we have a revelation of this great truth it can free us from the feelings of doubt and inadequacy that plague many Christians.

What was Paul separated unto? It is the "Gospel of God", which is the great theme here laid out by the Apostle. We should note here that Paul was not called to be an Evangelist, but an Apostle. We can easily think that evangelism as something that is meant for evangelists whereas we have all been called to the work of the Gospel of God.

We shall come back to all that is meant by this phrase *Gospel of God*; however the first essential thing we must understand about the gospel is that it is an announcement of something that God the Father has done. It is not an appeal for us to do anything, because this would not be good news. Many in this world think that the gospel is an appeal to them to live a good life, but that would not be good news would it?! Dr Martin Lloyd Jones: -

... it is not primarily an appeal for us to do anything. It is an announcement, a proclamation to us of what God has already done.<sup>24</sup>

We are called primarily to serve God by proclaiming to all what God has already done for us – plain and simple!

## 3.2 Christ, the King (1<sup>2-4</sup>)

Now here we find right at the beginning of Paul's letter he does something that is very characteristic of him; he makes a detour! We could by rights put verses 2-6 into parenthesis, for they depart from his basic greeting, *Paul ... to all those in Rome*.

These departures are never without purpose and here Paul takes an opportunity to give us the bones of this gospel of God for which he has been set apart. When someone mentions they've been called to bring some good news to the world, your first question may well be, *what is this good news about, in essence?* Paul

<sup>22</sup> Galatians 1<sup>15</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Romans 9<sup>13</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Romans" by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Book One: - The Gospel of God (Romans 1)

anticipates the question and is saying, *in short this is what it is about*, before moving on to complete his opening greeting.

It is a quick qualification, just a mention of the good news, but oh such a mention! There is much wealth for us to mine here in these few verses ...

### 3.2.1 Son of the King (1<sup>3</sup>)

Jesus of Nazareth came from the seed of David the King of Israel. He was a son of King David and as such represented the people of Israel, the people of God ... he was King of the Jews. This was the human ancestry that Jesus stepped down into when he became a man.

The first thing we learn here is the absolute centrality of the trinity (Godhead) in the gospel...

- **The Promise to Men Fulfilled** - Paul has just told us that the gospel of God was promised through the prophets. The Father announced his plan to send a saviour into the world to deal with the curse moments after man fell in the garden of Eden. What unfolded when God the Son descended into human history was already laid out in his Word, as only God can do. Jesus came from the Davidic line. God kept his promise to King David: -

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.<sup>25</sup>

- **Descent into Flesh** - Jesus' birth marked an incredible feat as the Holy Spirit made the WORD of God into Flesh - The verb Paul uses here *to become* is the same verb used by the Apostle John in his gospel<sup>26</sup>: -

*Ginomai* - *to become, i.e. to come into existence, begin to be*

The word signifies entrance into a new condition<sup>27</sup>. The incarnation, by the power of the Holy Spirit had never happened before, to the Son of God, or to any member of the Godhead! It was a unique and unprecedented experience. The unchanging God became something that he was not before! This is a mind-blowing thought. Like all truths, we do not yet see the ultimate meaning or implications of it; we can only ever understand this great condescension from Godhood into manhood by faith and then only by the degree of which our hearts can take in this all consuming truth! We have of course all of Eternity for this.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Samuel 7<sup>12-13</sup>

<sup>26</sup> John 1<sup>1</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Romans in the Greek New Testament* - Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Jesus gave up his position as Son of God and descended into the human condition; from the supernatural into the natural; from heaven to earth. It was the Holy Spirit who made this possible – how he did it is still a holy mystery!

- ***Into the Likeness of Sinful Man*** - Jesus' role in all of this was his mission on the earth, central to which was conquering man's greatest enemy ... sin. It is a common misconception that the devil has always posed the greatest danger to men. He is overrated and has only even been able to manipulate men using man's own greatest enemy ... the sin that beats within his heart. Remember the words God uses to warn Cain of this great enemy: -

... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.<sup>28</sup>

Later on in Romans Paul talks about sin in the same way, almost as if it has a personality of its own, when he talks about it taking advantage of the law to propagate itself. However God had the upper hand on sin itself,

For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ...<sup>29</sup>

The Greek word Paul uses here is *Homoioima*, which means to take on a resemblance to something. Jesus took on the likeness of the sinful flesh yet was sinless. He took on the flesh without becoming polluted by it; almost as if he had fooled sin, turned the tables on it and on the devil, who himself thought that Jesus' becoming flesh would be an opportunity for God himself to be tempted into sin when he pursued him through the desert. Both sin and the devil were fooled and defeated when God condemned sin in this sinless man.

### 3.2.2 King of the Sons of God (1<sup>4</sup>)

As Paul does in his letter to the Philippians, he here cannot describe the descent of the Son of David, without then describing his ascent into the Heavens. His humiliation necessitated exaltation. Again we find the agency of the Father, Spirit and Son at work here ...

- ***The Promise to Son of Man Fulfilled*** - When Jesus faced the judgment of God and became for us the object of divine wrath, he did so trusting that because of his innocence his Father would raise him up again to exalt him to the highest place. When we humble ourselves we come to God with the same trust in him to do the same for us: -

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 4<sup>7b</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Romans 8<sup>3</sup>

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.<sup>30</sup>

- ***Raised by the Spirit to Sonship*** – The Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead so that all may know that he was sinless and vindicated before God; First had come the natural birth of the Son and now had come the supernatural rebirth of the Son. Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God and the Holy Spirit now demonstrated that in power to the world.

What an amazing thing it must have been as Jesus ascended into the heavens, where thousands upon thousands of angels gathered around the throne as the King of Kings took his place of glory and honour.

In his letter to the Philippians Paul tells us that when Jesus ascended he was given a name, by the Father, above every other name. He was not referring to the name Jesus, but instead to a rank, akin to a military style rank, denoting responsibility, authority and honour. This rank is higher than any other – such was the honour bestowed upon the Son for all he had done. The words of his Father had been fulfilled throughout his life but now were never so more publicly voiced: -

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.<sup>31</sup>

- ***Into Newness of Life Everlasting*** - All that Jesus had gone through was forging a way for us to follow him, not into physical death but into spiritual death and rebirth. His resurrection, Paul tells us later in this letter, is our guarantee that the Spirit will too raise up from the dead when our mortal flesh perishes. His Resurrection too showed us how to live our lives on this earth, in the Spirit. If we live by the Spirit putting to death what is of the flesh then we shall surely live! It is through this process of rebirth that we become sons of God. Jesus, our king who was crowned in the heavenlies became our pattern, our mould: -

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.2.3 From the Natural to the Supernatural (1<sup>3-4</sup>)

The reason why these short verses represent the essence of the gospel of God is that they point to the key elements in it: the *Incarnation* and the *Death & Resurrection*. When Paul here writes about Jesus being raised from the dead, he uses a curious phrase that is often not translated into our English versions, *the resurrection of the dead*. So the words Paul uses to describe Christ's resurrection

<sup>30</sup> James 4<sup>10</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 3<sup>17</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Romans 8<sup>29</sup>

actually refer to the coming general resurrection, because his resurrection pointed to and guaranteed the future resurrection of the saints.

- **Natural Seed of David** – As David’s heir, Jesus represented natural man, mandated to rule over the earth. Jesus came to earth with the limitations that we have in our human bodies. He did what his Father told him to, not by his own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained to his disciples what must happen to this seed of David ...

Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me’<sup>33</sup>

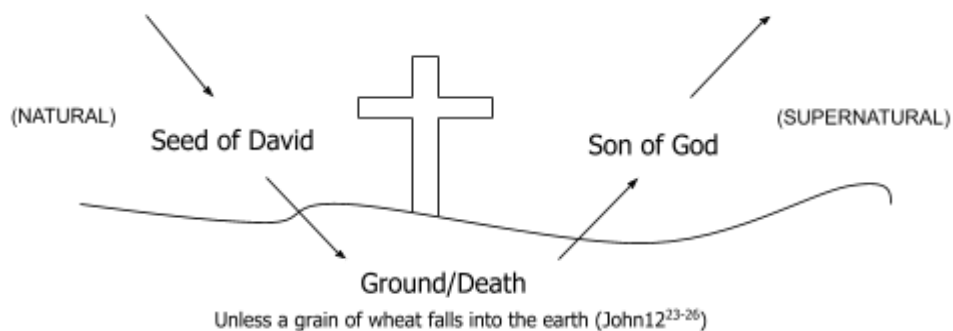
This natural seed had to be buried in the ground in order that it could be raised up as supernatural seed. We are invited to follow Jesus into death to be raised supernaturally to life.

- **Supernatural Seed of God** – What was raised to new life was transformed and empowered to reproduce itself through the Holy Spirit. Jesus became the firstborn of a new breed of people, the redeemed and holy people of God.

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<sup>33</sup> John 12<sup>23-26</sup> (NIV)





### 3.2.4 First the Natural, then the Spiritual

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul writes to them about Adam and Christ. Adam came first and then Christ. The former is described as the man of the dust and the latter as the man of heaven. Paul reveals a fundamental principle in how God has chosen to reveal spiritual truths to us: -

Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual.<sup>34</sup>

Often things in the natural are a picture of the spiritual. Perhaps God chooses to reveal things to us this way because we are born into the natural, and we have to encounter the supernatural spiritual world of God, when he takes hold of us and redeems us.

The picture we have here is of the seed being buried and raised as new life. We are buried with Christ and raised to new life with him, as sons of God. Later in Romans Paul talks about our sonship thus: -

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.<sup>35</sup>

Paul is here talking about being continually filled with the Holy Spirit, for this is how he leads us and our sonship becomes apparent. If we go back to the seed, the son of David, buried in the ground, this represented a man to whom the Jews looked back. Like Abraham and Moses they looked back to David as one of their ancestors and lived off the promises made to these great men of God. They thought they had a right to the fulfilment of them, by virtue of their hereditary descent. Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees and Sadducees for this approach: -

And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Corinthians 15<sup>45-46</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Romans 8<sup>14</sup>



Jesus was not here telling the people of Israel that they had blown it, as many have supposed, for he was talking to the religious establishment and not the people. No, Jesus was telling them they could not rely upon the promise made to their fathers for their salvation – **they had to seek God for themselves!**

*Here is one of the great lessons that the picture of the buried seed shows us: - we cannot live off yesterday's seed - for it is now just natural seed, it becomes rotten manna once each new day dawns. Burying the natural and raising the supernatural, God was showing us something fundamental to our walk with him - **every day requires a fresh infilling of his Holy Spirit within us, otherwise we become the natural man and not the supernatural fruit that he has raised us to be.***



### 3.3 Beloved Saints of God (1<sup>5-7</sup>)

Finally Paul turns to the recipients of his letter, the object of his and Christ's work, the redeemed people of the Lord.

#### 3.3.1 Called to the Gospel (1<sup>5</sup>)

Paul summarises their calling into one word – gospel. They have been the subject of the grace of God and have apostleship (i.e., being commissioned and sent) to preach the gospel, which Paul summarises this way – *the obedience of faith*.

The NIV puts it this way - *obedience that comes from faith*. The obedience we are able to show God comes from our faith in him, in Jesus' ability to save us from sin and the Holy Spirit's ability to enable us to live free from the entanglement of sin.

#### 3.3.2 Called to Belong (1<sup>6</sup>)

Above all the saints were called to belong to Jesus Christ. They were no longer their own but bought at the most costly price possible – Jesus' blood. This harks back to Paul's opening comment about himself, about being a servant of God. First and foremost a bondservant belongs to his master.

For the saints of Rome, at the heart of the empire this is quite a thing to say, for above all things the empire demanded loyalty in return for which it gave its protection and benefits. Jesus faced this very issue when the Pharisees tried to trap him into telling his disciples to withhold their taxes to the Roman Empire<sup>36</sup>.

This means that above all things we should regard ourselves as belonging to Christ. In today's society, the global village, during the last few years this issue has come to the fore in the publicity surrounding the so-called battle of Islamic extremism with the values of the Western World (itself rather a contradiction in light of its pluralistic creed!). Muslims have often become the public target for this debate, but Christians will only honour the laws of the land in so far as they do not contradict the WORD of God, because above all things we belong to Christ. The day is coming when we will have to choose between the law of man and the law of righteousness.

#### 3.3.3 Called to Be-loved Saints (1<sup>7</sup>)

Paul also describes them as being loved by God and called to be saints. We must never divorce the calling of God to us as servants with his love for us. It is because of his love that he has called us.

We are beloved of God. Everything else about us and our calling has a "because" after it, except this one and only aspect. In other words everything else you can think of about our calling is necessitated by something else – for example we are

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<sup>36</sup> Luke 20<sup>19-26</sup>



cleansed by the blood of Jesus because this is necessary to restore our relationship with our creator, which in turn is necessary for God to be glorified by his creation. ***However there is no cause and effect with the love of God ... He just loves us!***

### 3.4 An Apostolic Claim (1<sup>8-15</sup>)

Now we move on from Paul's greetings to his heartfelt expression of longing to come and visit them. There is much here to sift through in his words, however there are only two elements on which we have time to focus: -

#### 3.4.1 The Impartation of Gifts (vv.8-11)

As we said during our introduction there is no evidence of any apostolic foundation for the saints in Rome. Paul does not even address the church in Rome, but the collection of saints there.

This is because a local expression of the church, no matter how full of life, requires an equipping in its foundations. When Jesus ascended into heaven, Paul tells us that he gave gifts to men, the fivefold ministry of gifts to the church: -

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,<sup>37</sup>

As an apostle then, Paul himself was a gift to the church, equipping the saints so that they may attain to the full measure of maturity. Every part of the Body of Christ requires these equipping ministries to achieve its full maturity. Paul was both a gift in himself but he sought to impart spiritual gifts into them: -

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you—<sup>38</sup>

The word for gift above is *charismata*, which is used of the Spiritual Gifts described elsewhere in the WORD of God. The ESV uses the word “*strengthen*”, which is uncharacteristically weak of the translators, because a better translation is offered by the New King James Version: -

... so that you may be established <sup>39</sup>

Paul is looking to establish them, to address their foundations. This illustrates the apostolic ministry in action both then and today in Jesus' church; but also gives further evidence for the purpose of Paul's letter to these beloved saints in Rome

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 4<sup>11-13</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Romans 1<sup>11</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Romans 1<sup>11</sup> [New King James Version]

- *he wanted to provide them with something that would be absolutely foundational in their understanding of the purposes of God and their growth into maturity.*

### 3.4.2 The Harvest of Gifts

For Paul, the impartation of gifts was not giving, but sowing. So often the saints of God see their ministry and giving in the body of Christ as a sacrifice, which they are glad to make.

Paul did not see his ministry that way at all. Quite the opposite in fact; he saw it as an opportunity for him to reap a harvest of his own: -

... in order that I may reap some harvest among you ...<sup>40</sup>

Every one of us is a sower: sinner and saint alike. This is because we were made in God's image and God himself is a sower. When Adam left Eden, who do you think it was who taught him how to till the ground, plant the crops and bring in the harvest? It was his Father, God.

Everything in this world points in some way to a greater spiritual reality. God designed it that way so that as those born into the natural world; we would have symbols around us all the time reminding us of great spiritual truths, in the WORD of God. This is the principle we have already looked at in action: -

... first ... the natural, and then the spiritual.<sup>41</sup>

We experience the natural symbol first and from this understand the greater spiritual reality. One of those great pictures is that of sowing and reaping. Only about a year earlier Paul wrote about this in his second letter to the Corinthians: -

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

"He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but

<sup>40</sup> Romans 1<sup>13</sup>

<sup>41</sup> 1 Corinthians 15<sup>46</sup>

is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!<sup>42</sup>

Paul saw his serving of the saints in Rome as sowing into them. He would reap in two ways himself, firstly because he would be blessed and encouraged by their equipping (verse 12, “mutually encouraged”) and secondly that God would bless him return with further seed, as he eludes to above in his letter to the Corinthians:

He who supplies seed to the sower<sup>43</sup>

It is when we sow, that God supplies us with more seed!! Our sowing is therefore not a sacrifice to be made, but instead a means to further supply from God, as Paul promised the church in Philippi: -

Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit ... And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.<sup>44</sup>

Notice how Paul talks about the fruit that increases to their credit? In other words they had blessed him and this would increase their own credit - God would supply them with more seed.

In the above section from the letter to the Corinthians we see the other vital element of sowing and reaping: -

... the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.<sup>45</sup>

Sowing into others not only brings a harvest to the sower, but also creates an overflow, in this case of thanksgiving to God. Paul was looking to sow in his ministry gifting to the saints in Rome and expected not only a harvest for him but also an overflow from them. *‘What sort of overflow might that be?’* - we could ask ourselves; the answer is reproduction of the gifts he himself would evidence amongst them and impart to them.

The sign of success of any ministry in the body of Christ is whether or not the ministry reproduces elements of itself in those who sit under it. What can we learn from this? In the ministry Christ has called each of us to, we must understand that at all times and in all seasons we are sowing into others and we

<sup>42</sup> 2 Corinthians 9<sup>6-15</sup>

<sup>43</sup> 2 Corinthians 9<sup>10</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Philippians 4<sup>16,17 & 19</sup>

<sup>45</sup> 2 Corinthians 9<sup>12</sup>



can expect not only more seed from God, but also an overflow of our gifting into others – a real bountiful harvest indeed!



## | 4.0 The Gospel Of God

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- 4.1 A Message Entrusted
- 4.2 A Message of Foolishness
- 4.3 A Message of Power
- 4.4 A Message of Salvation
- 4.5 A Message of Righteousness
- 4.6 A Message of Faith
- 4.7 A Message to be Preached



## 4.0 The Gospel Of God (1<sup>14-17</sup>)

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Now we come to the theme of this great letter of Paul's – the Gospel of God. It is God's work from start to finish and the work to which Paul himself had been called and set apart for. Paul's letter to the saints in Rome was, in essence, Paul's exposition of the gospel of God. It came from the Father, by means of the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit – for this is the way God does everything, the Godhead at work.

In his exposition of Romans, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones makes a very important point about the gospel, which is that it is not a creed or a belief system, on which our faith is based but instead a set of facts. The gospel is an announcement of something that God has done; it is about facts, things that actually happened. It is not legend, or folk telling or an embellished and evolved myth, but instead facts which were witnessed by many hundreds of people; events that turned the world upside down.

Unlike many philosophies and belief systems, which can be accepted and even admired without personal subscription; the gospel of God is a set of facts on which the very hope and life of every Christian depends. The faith of the Christian lives or dies on the strength of these facts!

### 4.1 A Message Entrusted

In light of this and the importance of communicating these facts to others in the early church, Paul often reiterates the need for his churches to follow the gospel he taught them and in which he established them.

We must remember that these young Christians did not have the New Testament, only the *Tanakh* (Old Testament and Jewish Bible); the Apostles were preaching an interpretation of events that were to fulfil many of the Scriptures of that Holy Book, about Jesus. Many false teachers were also at work in the region spreading their own interpretation<sup>46</sup>, so that when Paul wrote to a church which he had established or which he had taught in, he would ask them if they were holding fast to the gospel he had preached to them. In writing to the Galatians Paul laments that this was not the case: -

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel- not that there is an another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Philippians 3<sup>2</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Galatians 1<sup>6-7</sup>



The importance of the message entrusted by the Apostle cannot be emphasised enough, which is why Paul was willing to curse those who distorted it for their own ends. The whole of the book of Romans hinges on verses 16 and 17.

The rest of the letter is an exposition, a working out of these two great verses, which in essence communicate the gospel. It is appropriate for us to therefore spend some time looking at them together to lay the foundation for the following chapters.

## 4.2 A Message of Foolishness (1<sup>14-16</sup>)

Paul starts these verses with an interesting phrase: -

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, ...<sup>48</sup>

### 4.2.1 Why Not Ashamed? (vv.14-16)

Why start with a negative rebuttal? Why not just say that he is proud of the gospel for it is the power of God...?

This is a figure of speech, a literary device called *Litotes*, which is when an *assertion is made in the form of a negative rebuttal*. Paul often used this kind of figure of speech elsewhere in his letters, for example in describing himself to the Captain of the Roman Legion *as a citizen of no mean city* – referring to Tarsus.

Here Paul uses it to encourage the saints in Rome who were fighting feelings of shame for this message because of the environment in which they found themselves, in Rome. We are all subject to varying environments, in our workplaces and families, with varying tolerance and opportunity for the gospel. The enemy will try to intimidate us and we all need encouragement from each other, so that we are not ashamed of the message no matter what.

Even Timothy, Paul's own beloved son in the faith, needed encouragement in his testimony. When eventually Paul did make his way to Rome, it was as an accused man seeking to appeal to Caesar. Whilst there he wrote in his letter to Timothy: -

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in the suffering for the gospel by the power of God, ...<sup>49</sup>

He goes on to praise Onesiphorus for his faithfulness because he was *not ashamed of my chains*<sup>50</sup>. Concerning this period of imprisonment in Rome, Lloyd Jones writes: -

*Many people were ashamed. They knew Paul was there but they pretended not to know it. They did not want to be associated with him; they were ashamed of the gospel. And undoubtedly they were people who were somewhat given to that in Rome itself.*<sup>51</sup>

It is essential for us to recognise the background to Paul's statement (v.16), to understand its depth of meaning, for we cannot divorce the contributors to the WORD of God from their surroundings and experiences, all of which God used. In discussing verse 16 William Barclay makes the following observation: -

<sup>48</sup> Romans 1<sup>16</sup>

<sup>49</sup> 2 Timothy 1<sup>8</sup>

<sup>50</sup> 2 Timothy 1<sup>16</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Romans* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Book One: - The Gospel of God (Romans 1)

It is amazing to think of the background of that statement. Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Berea, laughed at in Athens and in Corinth his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. Out of that background he declared that he was proud of the gospel. There was something in the gospel which made Paul triumphantly victorious over all that men could do to him.<sup>52</sup>

We must go back to verse 14 for in it we see the cultural climate that Paul was addressing.

#### 4.2.2 The Wise and the Foolish (v.14-15)

The Church of Christ was born into a world which was dominated by Greek thought. In the centuries leading up to the birth of Christ, Alexander the Great, the leader of the Greeks had conquered much of the known world. With his conquest went the Greek language and culture, and most importantly Greek thought, which became synonymous with the height of sophistication; so much so that other cultures were considered less developed and more primitive.

In time, the term Greek lost its racial sense altogether; no longer meaning someone who was born Greek but instead one who knew Greek culture and the mind of Greece.

In contrast the term *barbarian* was used for those who were unable to speak Greek or comprehend ideas of Greek thought. Literally meaning *bar bar*, referring to a man who speaks in this way (obviously a derogatory form of mimicry of these non-Greek speakers). Other languages were perceived as ugly and inflexible in contrast to the beautiful and flexible language of Greek.

Paul's message was for the cultured and the uncultured alike – all were equal before the message of the Gospel of God. Paul again refers to this when writing to those who were immersed and brought up in Greek culture, the Corinthians: -

For God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.<sup>53</sup>

The key here in this verse above, is *that no human being might boast in the presence of God*. Paul is saying that in the gospel God deliberately chooses a method which turns the perceived wisdom of men on its head so that men can take no credit whatsoever! As we have said, the gospel is entirely, completely, utterly 100% God's own handiwork. No human fingerprints appear on it at all, so

<sup>52</sup> *Letter to the Romans* by Barclay, William; © 1975 The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.

<sup>53</sup> 1 Corinthians 1<sup>27-29</sup>

that all righteousness may be fulfilled and God alone be glorified through the gospel itself.

### 4.3 A Message of Power (1<sup>16</sup>)

Of all the words Paul could have chosen to define the gospel, the word *power* may not have been one of them we would have chosen. Perhaps we would have instead chosen the word *means* or *mechanism* or *way*. However Paul here uses one of the six Greek words for *power*:-

*Dunamis* - *inherent natural ability residing in a thing by virtue of its nature*

In the Greek text we do not have the definitive article, so it literally reads, for it is *a power of God*. The gospel is a divine power, as Paul says, for salvation.

The question we should ask ourselves is why is the gospel itself the power for salvation? After all Paul does not say the gospel is a *description* of the power of God or that it is *about* the power of God; he says that it **is** the power of God. In other words the gospel is not just a statement confirming what God has done. It is more than that. So how is it more than that?

#### 4.3.1 The Power of Foolishness

In writing his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about the gospel, referring to it as the word of the cross. He says,

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>54</sup>

So here again Paul is saying that the gospel is the power of God itself.

Now we have already said that all men were put on equal footing by the gospel, so that no man had advantage and indeed so that men's fingerprints would not be on a 100% divine work, but if we read on in this section of Corinthians, we see that Paul takes this even further: -

For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>55</sup>

These words could be translated from the Greek literally as follows.

It was when the world by wisdom knew not God that it pleased God by the foolishness of the thing preached. <sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> 1 Corinthians 1<sup>18</sup>

<sup>55</sup> 1 Corinthians 1<sup>21</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *Romans* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Book One: - The Gospel of God (Romans 1)



Why should the folly or foolishness of the thing preached have any power? To the world the prophet, who proclaimed himself to be the Son of God, died a failure after three short years in public life – where is the victory in that?

It is precisely because it is *folly* to the world that the right foundation is laid for the work of salvation to begin. When a person accepts the gospel of Christ, he is letting go of worldly wisdom which would not have chosen to save a world through the defeat of death.

It is this decision that enables us to walk away from thinking which is independent of God. Although to our modern sentiments it seems a terrible thing to say, it is independent thinking that landed the whole of humanity in this mess in the first place. When Eve chose to eat the apple, against the command of God, she was saying by her actions, *although God knows what is best for me and has told me from which trees I may feed, I shall make my own choice because I think I know better.*

When we make a decision to turn away from sin in repentance, we give up the right to choose our own path and hand this back to God, with whom it originally lay before the presence of sin in the world. The most effective way for us to break with our old way of thinking is to accept a gospel that seems to fly in the face of all the “worldly wisdom” we have ever known.

We could think of it this way, if we had all been brought up to believe that we could not fly and yet unbeknownst to us we had an innate ability to fly which was lying dormant; and then someone came along telling us all that we could fly if only we believed – the only real true test of belief would be for someone to jump off the tallest tower and put their faith in this innate ability.

In this act someone would be throwing off all they had ever known and understood to be true – that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this throwing off which delivers the death blow to the natural sin dominated mind. *This is why* God chose a foolish thing through which to save us all. For if it confirmed all we knew and understood in our unsaved state then it would not be the Gospel of God. However as we shall see below that ability to throw off worldly wisdom cannot come from within us, but from the power of God himself.

### **4.3.2 God’s Own Power**

Paul makes the obvious but necessary point in verse 16 that the gospel is the *power of God* for salvation. That is, it is God’s very own power and not anyone else’s. Again as per our earlier points, men’s fingerprints are completely omitted from this gospel and only God’s can be seen. This for Paul is a point on which we can rejoice for *if the gospel is by God’s own power then it is destined to succeed.* It cannot fail. Now someone might say, *well it is all very well to have confidence in the message of the gospel for Jesus has already died and has risen; surely we are just looking back on these events and the good of them in which we now live – where is the need for confidence?*



The work of the gospel only began with the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. The purpose of the gospel, as we shall see later in Romans is the full adoption of sons of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit in every Christian and the redemption of all creation through this adoption. Paul told the Corinthians that they may die in confidence that they will be resurrected when Jesus returns at the end of the age and that all saints living on the earth will be caught up into the air to meet them.

So confidence is crucial to the Christian, because he or she is still living in a fallen world, which has yet to see the full outworking of the glorious victory of Christ Jesus. Indeed the Cross is still folly and foolishness to this world in which we live.

Our confidence in the gospel is also crucial because Jesus told his disciples that the sons of God are those who keep on believing and being fruitful to the end<sup>57</sup>. In writing to the Philippians, Paul told them where their source of confidence was that they would indeed persevere to the end, faithful to their saviour,

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup>

### 4.3.3 In Word AND Power

The gospel is not just a message of words alone, but of divine power. It is not just a proclamation but a demonstration of divine power. This, Denney argues is why Paul was not ashamed of it, because it was not just the latest philosophy or talk of the day, but the very power of God himself: -

The conception of the gospel as a force pervades the epistles to the Corinthians; its proof, so to speak, is dynamical not logical. It is demonstrated not by argument, but by what it does; and looking to what it can do, Paul is proud to preach it anywhere.<sup>59</sup>

The words of the gospel are inherently designed to be accompanied by the very demonstrable power of God. Observe Paul's own recollection of his preaching amongst the Corinthians: -

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in

<sup>57</sup> In the Parable of the Sower we see that it is not the initial progress of the seed that counts but the end result.

<sup>58</sup> Philippians 1<sup>6</sup>

<sup>59</sup> *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* by the Rev. James Denney, D.D. Professor of Systematic and Pastoral Theology, Free Church College, Glasgow [Part of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*: (Ed.) Nichol, W. Robertson, © 1988, Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, US.]



demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.<sup>60</sup>

Now, here it is worth focussing on Paul's assertion that their faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Did you notice that he does not juxtapose the wisdom of men with the wisdom of God? *Instead men's wisdom is set against God's power!*

We should ask ourselves why he would do this as it is not a direct *like-for-like* comparison. If we read on in Corinthians Paul does say (in the next verse) that they did impart Godly wisdom to the mature, so Paul is not saying God's wisdom does not come into our salvation at all. So what is he saying?

Let us look at Paul's words to the Thessalonians for some light on this: -

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.<sup>61</sup>

The words of the gospel are important, but it is the power of God which brings full conviction upon a man so that he may receive the gospel of God. *Hang on, someone might say, isn't the power that accompanies the gospel to be liberty from sickness and oppression which were the signs that accompanied Jesus in his preaching of the Kingdom of God?*

Yes, we should expect a powerful demonstration of the Kingdom of God in this way, but the most important demonstration of power which accompanies the gospel is the conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit. For it is this demonstration of power which produces the lasting fruit necessary in the life of a new Christian. The healing is great but it will not on its own produce fruit in keeping with repentance. In some ways the transformation of a life should eclipse the miracle of healing for the fruit is eternal. Paul's core gospel was to preach Christ crucified:

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>62</sup>

Freedom from the stranglehold of sin and self is a greater miracle than freedom from a disease or infection. We should ensure that although the gospel that we preach is liberty, it is centred on the Cross and the power of the Holy Spirit to bring full conviction. Otherwise we shall have many seeds fall onto rocky ground or amongst the thorns, which although immediately springing up shall only fall prey to a lack of its own root or to the cares of this world.

The good news is that God desires to bring men and women into full liberty in all areas of their lives, body and soul. However we must lay the foundations carefully

<sup>60</sup> 1 Corinthians 2<sup>1-5</sup>

<sup>61</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1<sup>4-5a</sup>

<sup>62</sup> 1 Corinthians 2<sup>2</sup>



and in the right order so that new births into the Kingdom of God are healthy and produce enduring fruit.

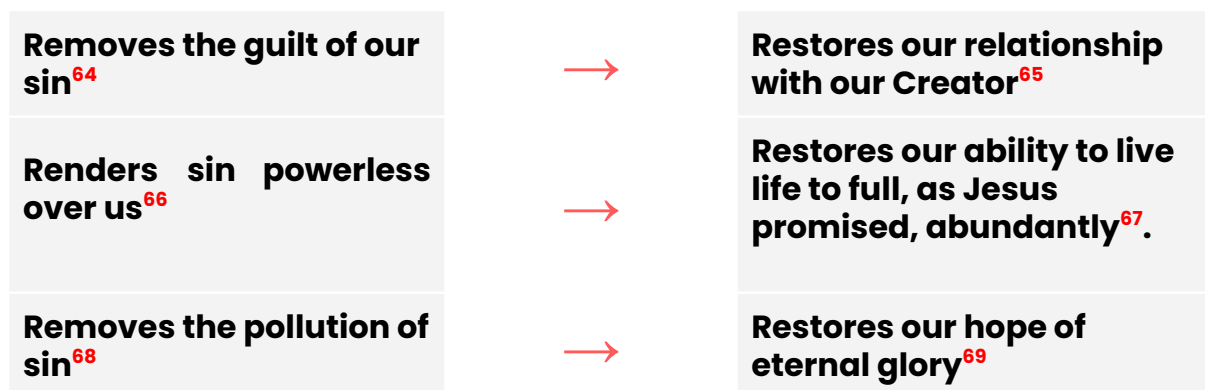
## 4.4 A Message of Salvation (1<sup>16</sup>)

This power of God is for a purpose of course, as some of the more literal translations put it, to move us into salvation, i.e., the state of being saved.

What then is salvation? Lloyd Jones defines it thus,

*Salvation is the deliverance of man from the consequences of the Fall and of sin.*<sup>63</sup>

There is much that can be said about this but at this point in the letter we need only summarise the practical outworking of the above statement, for Paul takes the rest of the letter to expound on it fully. For now however we can say that salvation achieves its goal by removing some things and restoring others, which he does in the chapters following: -



All of these things we shall come back to as we work our way through the letter. Paul of course has to start by establishing the necessity of the things to be removed as well as the things to be restored.

## 4.5 A Message of Righteousness (1<sup>17</sup>)

The gospel reveals the righteousness of God is what Paul tells us in verse 17. Again we are brought back to the God-ness of it all! The gospel has nothing to do with our righteousness, or even, dare we say it, us being made righteous; as if we

<sup>63</sup> *Romans* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Book One: - The Gospel of God (Romans 1)

<sup>64</sup> *Romans* 3<sup>24</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Romans* 8<sup>14-15</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Romans* 6<sup>6</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *John* 10<sup>10</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *2 Peter* 1<sup>4</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Romans* 8<sup>30</sup>, *Colossians* 3<sup>4</sup>



have now a righteousness of our own as a result of the gospel. Let's consider why.

#### 4.5.1 Not Our Own Righteousness

This might sound somewhat pedantic semantics, but there has often been taught in the church a doctrine of imputed righteousness, as if we are infected but then through Jesus somehow we are purified so we are righteous again, similar to the pre-fall state that Adam and Eve had.

In fact this might sound perfectly reasonable, based on the many Scriptures which talk about us being made righteous and white as snow etc. However this is not what the WORD of God actually teaches us. The righteousness, Paul tells his readers, is God's own righteousness. We don't lay hold of it and take it; it remains God's righteousness from start to end.

What does this mean? It means that we are treated, in the judgement of God, in accordance with the righteousness of Christ himself. We are always and ever shall be entirely dependent upon his righteousness and not our own. To think that we somehow take on our own righteousness is to confuse justification with sanctification, which is something Paul comes back to in much depth later in his letter.

For now however it would help us to take a look at what Paul meant by this word righteousness.

#### 4.5.2 What is Righteousness?

A word that we often read in the Bible but how well do we actually understand what it means?

Righteousness is an attribute of God, so the righteousness of everything else is measured in conformity to God's righteousness – he is the standard. However if we are not careful we can easily think of righteousness as “spotlessness”, which is not the Old Testament concept of righteousness and so would not have been in Paul's thinking as he wrote these words.

F F Bruce points out that the ideas of right and wrong among the Hebrews were forensic ideas, that is akin to something settled before a judge. So righteousness is not so much a moral quality but a legal status. The Hebrew word for righteous (“saddîq”) literally meaning “in the right” and wicked (“rasha”) meaning “in the wrong”. These two words are demonstrated when Pharaoh admits his wickedness before God in holding onto the Israelites:

Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Exodus 9<sup>27</sup>



So when we talk about being justified through the gospel, this essentially means being considered to be “in the right”, rather than a sort of carwash for the soul. There is of course an inward rebirth for we are new creations in Christ Jesus, but this is not what justifies us before God. In other words Jesus does not make us perfect before God so we stand justified. Instead we are treated as if we are innocent first, on account of what Jesus has done.

This substitution where God looks upon Jesus’ righteousness when judging us, is really well demonstrated in the Psalms: -

Look upon our shield, O God; look with favour on your anointed one.<sup>71</sup>

This Psalm is all about being in the presence of God by the grace of God. The “shield” referred to above is identified only a few verses later: -

For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favour and honour.<sup>72</sup>

God himself is our shield – not God the Father but God the Son, Jesus Christ – the anointed one referred to in verse 8 above.

So as we have said, the righteousness by which we are justified is never really our own, but always Christ’s, even though we may take hold of it in faith.

### 4.5.3 Righteousness Revealed

In verse 17 we are also told that the righteousness of God is revealed. This word means something that comes into view which was before hidden. Surely we may say that the righteousness of God had been revealed before the gospel? Surely men were aware of the righteous nature of God before the gospel, for God revealed it in his Word, the Hebrew Bible the Tanakh?

The gospel therefore contains an unprecedented revelation of God’s righteousness, which is twofold:-

- **MERCY WITH JUSTICE** – God was able to justify man without being inconsistent with his own nature. We shall come back to this later in our studies for it is a crucial part of understanding the wrath of God and its satisfaction on the cross. It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament we find the same Hebrew root<sup>73</sup> of the word righteous (tzdk) being used for words translated justification, justice, rescue, and innocence. In the Psalms and in Isaiah 40-66 the same root refers most often to God’s saving action. For example righteousness (*tzedakah*) refers to God’s deliverance of Israel in Babylon<sup>74</sup>:

<sup>71</sup> Psalm 84<sup>8-9</sup> (New International Version)

<sup>72</sup> Psalm 84<sup>11</sup>

<sup>73</sup> The vast majority of words in the Hebrew language can be boiled down to a three-consonant root word that contains the essence of the word’s meaning.

<sup>74</sup> *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, Jacob Neusner, Editor in Chief

I bring near my righteousness [tzedakah]; it is not far off, and my salvation [teshuah] will not delay; I will put salvation [teshuah] in Zion, for Israel my glory.<sup>75</sup>

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS TO BE TAKEN HOLD OF** – God reveals a righteousness which can be taken hold of, by one who believes. Up to this point, the offerings made in the Old Testament did not entirely satisfy the wrath of God. As we shall learn in the coming chapters, they simply deferred God’s judgement until such time as God himself would make proper provision in the form of his own Son, Jesus.

## 4.6 A Message of Faith (1<sup>7</sup>)

### 4.6.1 God’s Prescription

Earlier we noted the word for *power* used by Paul in verse 16 is *dunamis*. In the vernacular<sup>76</sup> of Paul’s day this Greek word *dunamis* was also used as we today use the word prescription, being the note the doctor gives us for the necessary medicine to deal with the problem our bodies face.

The gospel is God’s prescription for the problem of sin and like any prescription it becomes effective when utilised, which is why Paul adds the qualification *for everyone who believes*.

### 4.6.2 100% Faith

James Buchanan<sup>77</sup> points out that the righteousness which is *by faith* is called such to distinguish it from faith itself (i.e., faith itself does not make us righteous) and from the other kind of righteousness which is sought through the works of law and not by faith.

Faith is required to take hold of this righteousness which God has revealed through the gospel. Faith is not the thing which saves us, that is the righteousness of Christ, but it is required.

The righteousness of God revealed by the gospel of God cannot be obtained through any human effort. In fact it is mutually exclusive to any human effort – meaning that if anyone puts any effort into their justification before the throne of God, i.e., relying in any part on their own efforts and works, then this makes null and void any righteousness they might have attained by faith.

This is a very subtle thing sometimes, where someone can believe they have God’s acceptance 95% by his grace and 5% of their own merit or efforts – this is

<sup>75</sup> Isaiah 46<sup>13</sup>

<sup>76</sup> i.e., everyday words or the language of the common people.

<sup>77</sup> The Doctrine of Justification - An Outline of its History in the Church and its Exposition from Scripture; James Buchanan, D.D., L.L.D.

simply not possible. That 5% pollutes the other 95%. This sheds some further light on the familiar statement made by the writer to the Hebrews: -

... without faith it is impossible to please him, ...<sup>78</sup>

Now when we look at the above Scripture in isolation it may be easy to think that this means we just have to have *some* faith to please God. However when we view it in the context of verse 17 in Romans, we get a fuller meaning. This is illustrated well by the New Living Translation's rendering of this part of verse 17: -

This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith.<sup>79</sup>

So when we approach the throne of God we must satisfy his righteous holy requirements and we can only do so by having 100% of our faith and confidence in the righteousness of God he has made available to us by faith!

### 4.6.3 0% Flesh

It is nearly always helpful when you see Old Testament Scripture quoted by New Testament writers, to go and find the passage quoted from the Old Testament to look at the context around it.

At the time these men were writing what became the New Testament it was common practice amongst the Rabbis to quote part of the Old Testament, but imply the context around it. This is because even the ordinary Jews of the day were raised with a solid knowledge of the Scriptures and would be familiar with the context without the Rabbi having to quote it all.

Paul, having been trained by the Rabbis himself, of course used this method more than most. If we look at the context to this quote Paul uses, it illustrates the point. Paul has quoted from Habakkuk:-

Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.<sup>80</sup>

The context gives us some more light for this statement. The prophet is comparing the righteous who live by faith with the proud who trust in themselves. It is not simply about having faith in the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel but it is also about having no confidence in ourselves.

The world is divided into two types of people – those who trust God and those who trust in their own judgement (even if that be manifest in putting their faith in false gods and idols). In order to take hold, Paul is saying, of the righteousness which God has revealed in his gospel, we have to let go of our own righteousness.

<sup>78</sup> Hebrews 11<sup>6</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Romans 1<sup>17</sup> (New Living Translation)

<sup>80</sup> Habakkuk 2<sup>4</sup> (New Living Translation)



Now this may seem an obvious point, however there are many people in this world who when they hear the gospel message say to themselves, *but I don't need this gospel of yours. I don't feel that my life is in need of God or his help. I am happy with my life the way it is. I am not in any personal crisis.* Now we say to those people that no matter how well they think they are living their life, as far as God is concerned they are “puffed up” (ESV) and “proud” (NLT) and therefore unrighteous before God and ultimately subject to this judgement.

## 4.7 A Message To Be Preached (1<sup>15-17</sup>)

In verse 15 Paul tells his readers that he is eager to preach the gospel to them. In the following six verses (vv.16-21) Paul gives us six “For”s, i.e., six reasons why he is eager to preach to them. The last four we shall come onto in our next section, and the first two we have looked at in this section.

Paul is eager to preach the gospel first and foremost because he is proud of it (remember his use of litotes) and he gives us the reasons for his pride in it. Secondly he is eager because of what it reveals of the righteousness of God which can be laid hold of in faith. These first two reasons are good news to the hearer.

In the next section we go on to look at the four latter reasons for his eagerness, which are negative reasons. Remember that the gospel of God is not about men being let off for their sins against God. On the contrary it involves the wrath of God and his judgement against sin. The gospel is about judgement before the throne of God; it divides men into those who stand behind the shield that is Christ and those who choose instead to stand in their own righteousness.



## **| 5.0 The Folly of Man (The Great Exchange)**

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- 5.1 The Wrath of God
- 5.2 Divine Revelation and Man's Response
- 5.3 The Great Exchange

## **| 5.0 The Folly of Man (1<sup>18-25</sup>)**

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Having given us his two main positive reasons for being eager to preach the gospel, Paul comes to the negative; the danger of man's position and his need to hear this great message of hope for deliverance.

### **5.1 The Wrath of God (1<sup>18</sup>)**

In raising with us the negative reasons for the need for the gospel to be preached Paul gets right to the heart of the matter: the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven.

Today, even in the church, the concept of the wrath of God is often unpopular and either dismissed out of hand or else watered down to lose its meaning. This is not a new phenomenon in the church and can be seen often over the last century.

A school of thought has arisen which rejects the idea of a God of wrath as an Old Testament conception of God and not the God of love of the New Testament at all. Such a doctrine plays well to a world which refuses to accept the condemnation of anyone, even God, on their lifestyles and attitudes. However for Paul the revelation of God's wrath was central to the good news of the gospel, for it laid out the need of man for that very same gospel.

It is beyond the scope of our studies to go into much more detail on the wrath of God at this point and we shall be coming back to the need for satisfaction of the wrath of God in chapter three.

For now though, we can say that such an erroneous doctrine is formed out of the struggle of many to reconcile these two aspects of God's nature (wrath and love) and tries to relegate the wrath of God to what may be classed as a universal law of consequence. In other words, when men choose to do something of which God disapproves there is a consequence, which is as certain as the law of gravity bringing us to the ground should we leap from a building. It is not God himself, they say, bringing us to the ground, but simply the natural consequences of our decisions.

Such a view betrays a lack of understanding about the very nature of God, which is that none of God's attributes are in conflict with one another. He is self-harmonious and consistent in all aspects of his nature. In the gospel we see all aspects of God's nature revealed and satisfied.

Paul goes on to give us four main reasons for the wrath of God and its revelation upon the world.





## 5.2 Divine Revelation and Man's Response (1<sup>18-21</sup>)

### 5.2.1 Suppression of the Truth (v.18)

The unrighteousness of fallen men is not autonomous to the revelation of God in the world. In other words if men choose to live in unrighteousness it actually suppresses the truth. The truth spoken of here is not the gospel, but instead the self-revelation of God which Paul goes on to outline (*cf. v.25 the truth about God*).

The word suppress here, *Katecho*, means to hold something down in restraint. By their refusal to acknowledge who God is men are actually holding it back, refusing to let it change them and judge them.

One of the key thoughts here is of the lack of any grey area. Either men acknowledge the truth of who God (*cf. v.25*) is or they aid the suppression of this truth through their continued ungodliness.

### 5.2.2 Denial of What is Made Plain (v.19)

Paul's next contention is that men have always been in denial about what is plainly before their eyes. God has provided a level of revelation about himself to man throughout history. When Paul and Barnabas were worshipped for the miracle they performed at Lystra, they addressed the crowd which had gathered:

*In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.<sup>81</sup>*

Within men then is the God-given capacity for them to perceive a supreme Deity, a Creator.

### 5.2.3 Without Valid Excuse (v.20)

Paul goes on to qualify this in the next verse, where he says that his invisible attributes, by which he means that which is of the unseen realm as opposed to that which is perceived by the human senses alone, are actually discernable *in the things that have been made*.

Everything about creation tells us something about God. Everything God made in this world he created to paint a picture, to tell a story about himself, or in biblical terms to give revelation of his invisible attributes – his eternal power and divine nature.<sup>82</sup>

What is surprising perhaps in this verse is that Paul confirms that not only did God make his self-revelation plain to the world he made but that man actually

<sup>81</sup> Acts 14<sup>16-17</sup>

<sup>82</sup> For more on Biblical Symbolism the student is referred to the following book: *Through New Eyes*, Jordan J B © 1999, Wibpf and Stock Publishers, Eugene OR, USA.

perceived it. Paul says in verse 20 that these things *have been clearly perceived*. So ignorance is not an excuse.

#### 5.2.4 Without Proper Response (v.21)

Having established that God has revealed himself to men and done so in a way that is plain and uncomplicated; and having established that men have perceived God's self-revelation and so cannot plead ignorance, Paul goes on to provide the greatest indictment of human history – men's response to this revelation was to choose not to honour him or give thanks to him, which no doubt Paul is saying would have been the proper response of man.

This resulted in an effect on men's hearts and minds. Paul goes into more detail on what this means in the verses following which we shall come to in section 5.3.

For now, however Paul shows us that men chose to exchange what God had given them in four main areas of life ...

### 5.3 The Great Exchange (1<sup>22-25</sup>)

In responding to God's evident self-revelation through history then, men have made four major exchanges. What God has revealed to men they have exchanged for something else.

#### 5.3.1 God's Wisdom For Their Own (v. 22)

Men chose to exchange God's wisdom for their own. There are two interesting words here in the Greek, really not conveyed well in our English translations: -

- *"Claiming" to be Wise: phasko* - meaning to affirm, allege, pretend or profess. This verb was used in Greek for an unfounded assertion.
- *They became "Fools": mōrainō* - meaning to be silly, foolish, to become stupid.

The equivalent noun for the latter word is *mōrōs*, which means dull, sluggish or stupid and from which we get our English word **moron!** A modern translation of this verse may therefore be: -

*Passing themselves off as wise, they became morons!*

When God has forbidden an action of man, this has been rejected because men cannot see the reason for God's judgement nor the consequences that may follow. In this exchange men chose their own judgement over God's judgement in all things, with the inevitable consequences.

### 5.3.2 The Immortal For The Mortal (v.23)

Another way in which men exchanged what God gave them was to exchange the immortal for the mortal. The immortal God had revealed himself to men, but instead they chose to worship mortal things – images made of men and animals alike.

The sad truth was that men were made in the image of God to show them something of their Creator God, but they instead chose to worship the work of his hands instead of the Creator himself. Adam was charged with spreading that image throughout the earth by reproducing himself.

In this exchange men became numb to the things of **Eternity** and dominated by the **Temporal**, so that men inevitably live for today. This preoccupation with the temporal always find itself at odds with the call of God to man to put himself right with God by seeking him in repentance: -

At that time the Lord, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, called you to weep and mourn.

He told you to shave your heads in sorrow for your sins and to wear clothes of burlap to show your remorse.

But instead, you dance and play; you slaughter cattle and kill sheep. You feast on meat and drink wine.

You say, **“Let’s feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!”**

The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has revealed this to me: “Till the day you die, you will never be forgiven for this sin.” That is the judgment of the Lord, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.<sup>83</sup>

In this exchange men become naturally blind to the eternal consequences of their actions and can only live in the light of the here and now.

### 5.3.3 The Truth For The Lie (v.25)

The world of men has embraced a lie, denying the truth of God. In this exchange men have sought the lie in place of the truth. A modern example of this has been the quest of the last two hundred years amongst some to find a replacement for what God has told us of our origins.

During the BBC Series Light Fantastic broadcast in 2004, no secret was made of the facts that during the early days of the enlightenment men were driven by a desire to be able to explain the origins of our world without the need for God to exist. In other words, instead of following the facts, the breadcrumbs if you will, laid down by God to conclude that he made all things, men instead set out to prove he did not. They theorised and then tried to find facts to fit. This is a recipe for disaster and not the way the work of a detective should proceed: -

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<sup>83</sup> Isaiah 22<sup>12-14</sup>

*I never guess. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. [Sir Arthur Conan Doyle]<sup>84</sup>*

As we have already seen, part of the power of the Message of the Cross was its foolishness to men, in that it pleased God to save men through such “folly” (in their eyes). Here we see the reason for taking this step of putting aside all common sense to embrace the cross of Christ for salvation – because long ago men exchanged the truth for a lie and in order to come back to the truth he must put off the lie. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: -

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another.<sup>85</sup>

There is no present English translation which does justice to the Greek here, for it reads literally ... *Having put off once for all **the lie***<sup>86</sup>

Here in verse 25 of Romans 1, we find the same phrase used by Paul, not “a” lie but “the” lie. In other words the lie to outdo all other lies, the big one, no other lie comes bigger than the lie men substituted for the truth about God.

### 5.3.4 The Creator For The Creature (v.25)

Men chose to worship what is created instead of the Creator. Although this seems similar to the point made in verse 23, there the emphasis was on the mortal verses the immortal, whereas Paul’s point in verse 25 is the exaltation of nature in place of the divine.

We are increasingly seeing this. Nature has become almost deified, with very legitimate causes, such as the environment. Now surely, we may say, protecting the planet and stewarding the resources of earth is a Godly pursuit? In itself it is, but much of the environmental movement today is founded upon the misconception that men have disrupted nature’s equilibrium on the earth. Man is painted as a temporary squatter, who is squandering the resources.

This is a subtle school of thought and one of which we should not be ignorant. The theory goes that men have lost a once harmonious relationship they had with mother nature. Often primitive and ancient peoples are looked back on as being more sophisticated than men of today because they lived in reverence of nature.

In a very controversial speech made by the author, Michael Crichton, who himself was a Harvard physician and at the age of 22 a visiting anthropology lecturer at Cambridge, made the following comments concerning the modern day reverence for the noble savage: -

<sup>84</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four, A Scandal in Bohemia*

<sup>85</sup> Ephesians 4<sup>25</sup>

<sup>86</sup> *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament - Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.*

*How about the human condition in the rest of the world? The Maori of New Zealand committed massacres regularly. The dyaks of Borneo were head-hunters. The Polynesians, living in an environment as close to paradise as one can imagine, fought constantly, and created a society so hideously restrictive that you could lose your life if you stepped in the footprint of a chief. It was the Polynesians who gave us the very concept of taboo, as well as the word itself. The noble savage is a fantasy, and it was never true. That anyone still believes it, 200 years after Rousseau, shows the tenacity of religious myths, their ability to hang on in the face of centuries of factual contradiction.*

*There was even an academic movement, during the latter 20th century, that claimed that cannibalism was a white man's invention to demonise the indigenous peoples. (Only academics could fight such a battle.) It was some thirty years before professors finally agreed that yes, cannibalism does indeed occur among human beings. Meanwhile, all during this time New Guinea highlanders in the 20th century continued to eat the brains of their enemies until they were finally made to understand that they risked kuru, a fatal neurological disease, when they did so.<sup>87</sup>*

Whatever Crichton's motives, there is evidence to support the observation that even modern day 21<sup>st</sup> century men are starting to look back at our history and tell themselves that when men revered nature he lived in harmony with his environment.

The WORD of God on the other hand tells us that the only harmony that existed was **before** the fall of man in the garden. Upon being expelled from Eden, Adam was taught by God to cultivate the land and manage his environment – he has never lived in harmony on account of worshipping mother nature – essentially this means worshipping the *Creature* and not the *Creator*. The mandate of man has always been and still is, to subdue the earth and multiply within it the image of God. The Message of the Cross speaks to that very mandate, which we shall see in chapter 8 later on in our studies.

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Crichton, *Environmentalism as Religion*, Speech of 15 September 2003 (<http://www.michaelcrichton.com/speech-environmentalismasreligion.html>)



## **| 6.0 The Judgement of God**

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- 6.1 The “Handing Over”
- 6.2 The Inescapable
- 6.3 The Final Reckoning

## 6.0 The Judgement of God (1<sup>25</sup>-2<sup>11</sup>)

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The actions of men through history could not help but stir a reaction from the Holy God to whom they were directed in disobedience. The Judgment of God responds in two ways, firstly in the here and now, but also in the future reckoning to come and it is to this future judgement that Paul now turns his attention, in explaining the requirements of the righteousness of God, in the face of sin.

### 6.1 The “Handing Over”

It is not difficult to notice Paul use the same phrase three times in this last section of chapter 1, *God gave them up*. Now as we said at the beginning of the last section we have to be careful that we don't limit the judgement of God to simply a giving up or giving over to the natural consequences of one's actions. This aspect of the judgement of God which Paul here outlines for us, is simply the judgement of man's sin in the here and now.

A final judgement of all sin is also due at the appointed time, because the holy nature of God will not tolerate sin on the earth indefinitely. In the meantime, in response to man's exchanges of all that God had given him, God handed them over to sin in two key areas.

The word for *gave them up* which we see, is a Greek word: -

***Paradidōmi*** - *To give into the hands of another, to give over into one's power or use.*

Interestingly the word was used of betrayal, which gives us an idea of the seriousness of it, although we must be careful not to anthropomorphise God.

#### 6.1.1 Lust of the Flesh (v v.25-26)

In Greek thought the concept of flesh and spirit became separated and seen in different contexts, however in Hebrew thought spirit and flesh were viewed as intertwined. God's intention had been that the flesh of a man would always be in subjection to his spirit. However we see at the beginning of verse 26, that it was because men chose to elevate the creation over its creator that God gave them over to the flesh.

So it was that the natural order was subverted (which had been Satan's intention in tempting Eve in the first place, instead of going to the head of mankind, Adam). Men became dominated and subject to their natural appetites. As we can see from Paul's list of depravity that followed the appetite was never quenched and led only to more depravity in search of fulfilment of the cravings of the flesh. God's warning to Cain before this judgment took place rings loudly through history: -

... sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it <sup>88</sup>

## 6.1.2 Depravity of the Mind (v.28)

Again Paul gives a specific reason for this handing over of men to judgement in this area. In verse 28 he says *since they did not see fit to acknowledge God*. There was a direct link between their refusal to acknowledge God and the judgement that followed in their mind. It is worthwhile looking at the Greek behind this phrase “see fit” in our English translations: -

**Dokimazō** - *to put to the test for the purpose of approving and finding that the person tested meets the specifications prescribed, to put one’s approval upon him.*

Wuest points out that *‘the human race put God to the test to see if he matched up to their standards and because he did not, they refused to worship him as God or even have him in its knowledge’* <sup>89</sup>. Now the interesting thing here is the word Paul uses for a debased mind: -

**Nous** - a “disapproved mind”, adokimos meaning something that is not standing  
**adokimos** the test, not approved.

Men disapproved of God, so he in turn gave them over to a *disapproved mind*, which was incapable of making the judgements it should have been able to. *Nous* (*mind*) here used, also refers to the conscience. In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C S Lewis sums it up very well: -

*I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. I do not mean that the ghosts may not wish to come out of hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man “wishes” to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. **They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and they are self-enslaved: just as the blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.*** <sup>90</sup>

We may well ask when this actually took place in human history. This process took place over many years of human history, rather than being a one off event. In addressing the Sanhedrin<sup>91</sup>, Stephen puts one such occasion into historical context for us, speaking of the Israelites: -

<sup>88</sup> Genesis 4<sup>b</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *Romans in the Greek New Testament* - Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>90</sup> *The Problem of Pain*: C S Lewis, © 1940, The Centenary Press 37 Essex Street, Strand, London

<sup>91</sup> The supreme council and court of justice among the Jews.



Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven, ...<sup>92</sup>

So men were dominated by the passions of their flesh and the depravity of their minds. This was part of God's judgment for them, but not all of it as we shall see below. It was freedom from this self-enslaved state that Jesus came to bring to us all. Writing to the Ephesians about their old lives, Paul says: -

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

## 6.2 The Inescapable (2<sup>1-4</sup>)

At first reading the beginning of chapter 2 may look strange, because Paul reacts almost as though someone had raised an objection to his statements in chapter 1. Paul was playing devil's advocate because as soon as judgement is pronounced, fallen man will by nature try to resist that judgement. Paul paints a picture which fallen man cannot recognise of himself; although he will perhaps admit that such behaviour exists in the world, he will not admit to being party to it.

Paul's response to such a reaction is to point out (verse 2) that in separating themselves they are in so doing making a judgement on the rest of men; and it is by that very act of judging that men condemn themselves because they have all sinned in some way.

Today society is no different. It deplores actions which it considers to be wrong, whilst at the same time allowing itself to behave in a way contrary to the clear instruction of the WORD of God. Observe the words of Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones: -

*Somebody might come forward and say, "Yes I am ready to agree with anybody who lives the kind of life that is depicted from verse nineteen to the end of chapter one - I am ready to agree that such people are vile and foul, and that they deserve punishment; but everybody is not like that. There are some people who have got ideas, wonderful ideas of morality; there are people to whom God seems to have been very kind and He has been very good to them; surely they are not going to be*

<sup>92</sup> Acts 7<sup>39-42a</sup>

*under this wrath and under this condemnation?" ... But God is not interested in your wonderful ideas, says Paul; He is interested in your life. ... We shall judged not by our professions, our ideas, or anything else. But by our total living and our total relationship to God.*<sup>93</sup>

Paul is making the case for the inescapable judgement of God on all men, whether Jew or Gentile and he logically works it out in his letter so that his readers, the saints in Rome, may understand clearly in their thinking how and why all men desperately needed to hear this message of power and faith in God to save them from the judgement of God. He is showing them why they should not be ashamed of this gospel of God. In other words he is still expounding his central statement of the letter in chapter one (vv.16-17).

### 6.3 The Final Reckoning (2<sup>5-11</sup>)

There will be a final reckoning in light of the wrath of God which has been revealed. The Word of God refers elsewhere to this as the Day of Wrath, the Day of the Lord. It is something which the world is often tempted to scoff, because it seems delayed, but the Apostle Peter warns against such complacency: -

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.<sup>94</sup>

The gospel that Paul and the other gospels preached and entrusted to the church was good news, but never omitted the certainty and sobriety of the wrath to come.

#### 6.3.1 Stored Up Wrath (v.5)

Although the judgement of God is inescapable, Paul tells us that God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (2<sup>4</sup>). It is in light of man's refusal to repent and humble himself before God, Paul reveals, that his wrath is being stored up to be fully vented on the day of wrath.

Here in verse 5 we see something interesting, which is that Paul talks about the righteous judgement which *will be revealed* (future tense). Remember that he said in verse 18 of chapter one that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. As we have seen this has resulted in men being given over to the passions of his flesh. Paul is now saying

<sup>93</sup> *Romans in the Greek New Testament - Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament: Wuest, Kenneth S © 1942 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.*

<sup>94</sup> 2 Peter 3<sup>4-7</sup>

that there is further wrath being stored up to be released *when God's righteous judgement is revealed*. This judgement comes upon men because they have refused to (i) acknowledge God and (ii) repent even in the face of God's interim judgement upon them.

If the interim judgement upon unrepentant men resulted in such terrible consequences, how much more terrible will the final reckoning be? The difference between the two is that the former judgement is reward in this life for sin, whereas the latter is reward in the next life for sin, from which men refuse to repent even in the face of the gospel. The former deals with the consequences of sin in this life and the latter deals with the final judgement of sin in the next eradicating its presence from God's creation for good, in the place being prepared for it – hell.

### 6.3.2 Proportional (vv.6-8)

Paul makes it clear to us that the judgement on all men on that final day will be proportional to their works, that is, their conduct in this world. The word Paul uses in verse six is the payment that is made in return for work - wages: -

***Apodidomi*** - *to pay off, discharge what is due. A debt, wages, tribute, taxes,*

Paul draws upon similar language later on in chapter 6: -

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>95</sup>

If judgement is proportional, in the sense of being payment of a debt, then one aspect of the judgement to come, which confirms this to us is the fact that hell itself has different levels of judgment within it.

### 6.3.3 Impartial (vv.9-11)

Again, as if to head off the objection that some men may not get the full render of their account, Paul categorically states that his judgement is impartial and no respecter of persons, because it is not the person which is being condemned but the works their lives have produced. This is a central pillar of Paul's gospel and the theme that he picks up on going into the next section (verse 12 onwards) because to his readers, Jews and Gentiles alike their first question would be *what about the law? Doesn't this separate men and women from each other in terms of the day of judgement to come?* In the next section we shall find out ...

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<sup>95</sup> Romans 6<sup>23</sup>



## **| 7.0 The Folly of Religion**

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- 7.1 Hearing is *NOT* Doing
- 7.2 Possession is *NOT* <sup>9</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of the Law
- 7.3 Our Faithlessness is *NOT* God's Failure

## 7.0 The Folly of Religion (2<sup>11</sup>-3<sup>8</sup>)

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As Paul starts this next section he again deals with possible objections to what he has said. In this case he is addressing the person who has raised the issue of the law. We may well ask how this universal judgement, the extent of which Paul has laid out for us, is affected, if at all, by the law? What happened to those to whom the law was given, the Jews?

A word of warning is warranted here. Although Paul addresses the Jews and their historical situation (which he comes back to in depth later in the letter), as we have seen *first the natural and then the spiritual* – what is evident through the natural (represented by the nation of Israel in the Old Testament) is a lesson for us in the spiritual: -

Now these things happened to them [the Israelites] as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.<sup>96</sup>

So although everything that Paul says is true about the Jews and the law, the deeper and more important meaning in this section of the letter is not a warning to the Jews but a warning to the Body of Christ about the folly of religion. The history of the church sadly demonstrates the necessity of Paul's warning.

For it is *religion* that Jesus attacked with verbal criticism during his earthly ministry and not the Jews as a people. It was the religious leaders from whom the kingdom would be ripped away to be given to those (also Jews) who would embrace the new righteousness which Jesus came to bring.

As with all these things, we must take care not to become distracted with the physical symbol, in place of the more important lesson of the Word here. This explains why this section is not headed up, 'the Jews and the Law'.

### 7.1 Hearing is NOT doing (2<sup>12</sup>-16)

In relation to the law, Paul makes the most important point that hearing the law is not the same as doing the law. Remember that Paul has just told his readers (v.6) that the judgement of God is rendered according to our works. It is a man's actions that are judged in the end.

#### 7.1.1 Sin is Sin! (v.12)

Paul makes the point that it doesn't matter if you sin without the law or sin with the law, because the bottom line is that you have sinned! The wages of sin are death, so the end result is the same, death: -

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<sup>96</sup> 1 Corinthians 10<sup>11</sup>

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### 7.1.2 It's the Doing That Counts (v.13)

Paul makes an interesting statement in verse 13, that seems to indicate justification is possible under the law! Surely, we might say, we have just said that it doesn't matter whether we live under law or not? Paul's point here is that the law has to be put into action to enable us to be justified. We shall come back to whether or not that is actually possible later in this module. For now however it is interesting to view this aspect of the law against the backdrop of the following instruction from the Apostle James: -

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves <sup>97</sup>

James then goes on to refer to law, but this time the law of liberty. As we see later in his letter James' point is that the keeping the law does not justify us, but the fruit of our righteousness, which is by faith, are our works which conform to the law of God. The works are the evidence not the cause of our righteousness.

### 7.1.3 The Work of the Law (v. 14-15)

This phrase is interesting here in verse 15. Paul is saying that where men's own conscience testifies to the law of God in those who have not received the law (the Gentiles) the work of the law is accomplished. So what is the work of the law? In Galatians Paul tells us what that is:-

But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our **tutor** to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. <sup>98</sup>

The law was ultimately designed to be a tutor, or as the King James Version puts it, *a schoolmaster* to bring us to Christ. It was not designed to justify us, but to show us our need for justification. The word used here for tutor is *Paidagogos* (literally boy-leader), which is where we derive our modern word pedagogue, meaning school teacher or educator however in Paul's day to ...

*a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.* <sup>99</sup>

The vernacular usage of this word would not place an emphasis on teaching however argues David Stern,

<sup>97</sup> James 1<sup>22</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Galatians 3<sup>23-25</sup> [New King James Version]

<sup>99</sup> Strongs Lexicon

*The paidagogos had no teaching functions ... actually would have been harsh disciplinarian, hired to do a job, with the boy required to obey him. Thus the Torah, because it was perverted into legalism, served in the role of **harsh disciplinarian** to the Jewish people, providing some protection but generally making the Jewish person aware of many transgressions.<sup>100</sup>*

So the law affects both Jews and Gentiles, those with and without the law, Paul argues. It only offers righteousness to those who don't just profess it, but actually do it! The problem with this is that no one can fulfil this condition, as the Apostle James points out: -

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for **all** of it.<sup>101</sup>

The corollary of all this is therefore that the primary role of the law is not to justify us, for that is impossible, but instead to lead us to Christ and the law of righteousness.

## 7.2 Possession is NOT <sup>9</sup>/<sub>10</sub> of the Law (2<sup>17-24</sup>)

Any argument concerning the law inevitably involves the Jews who were those who possessed the very law of God. Paul now turns his attention to this aspect of the law. In verse 17 he says,

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law ... (verse 17)

### 7.2.1 **The Fallacy of Possession (v.17-20)**

When addressing the Pharisees, Jesus took them to task on just this point. Their boast lay in their heritage, on being recipients of the law of God, unlike the rest of the peoples on earth, but just possession of the law is not the same as being righteous through the law: -

And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David Stern © 1992, Jewish New Testament Publications, Clarksville, Maryland, USA.

<sup>101</sup> James 2<sup>10</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Matthew 3<sup>9-10</sup>

The Jews had relied on the fact that they were possessors of the law of God – they *knew* the will of God as revealed in the law. However, as we have said, simply knowing what the law says is not the same thing as hearing it! Even today, ultra Orthodox Jews carry small portions of the law on their person (sometimes on their heads) to literally fulfil the old commandment from the book of Deuteronomy: -

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.<sup>103</sup>

The Jews have taken this Scripture literally and wear small boxes on their heads called *phylacteries*<sup>104</sup>. The tragedy of course is that the Jews missed the point by applying the righteous law legalistically. God's true heart intention he expressed in Jeremiah's words: -

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

God's Covenant plan for the Jews had been for the law to be not only in their hands but in their hearts. This is why Jesus took the religious leaders of his day to task for going through the motions of the law without honouring it in their heart:-

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.<sup>105</sup>

As Christians we are no less in danger of falling into this trap for it is not specifically a Jewish problem but one of *religion*. When men slide into religion then mere appearance becomes the most important thing. For the Jews this meant possession of the law.

## 7.2.2 Form With No Power – Leads to Hypocrisy (v.21-24)

When appearance takes priority over substance then the inevitable result will be religion that has form but no power. This effectively is what the Jews had by Jesus' day. An external appearance of religion but with no real power to rescue humanity. For the religious leaders this means they were no better than the godless which Paul describes in his second letter to Timothy as those who were ...

<sup>103</sup> Deuteronomy 11<sup>18</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *Tefillin*, (Hebrew: תפילין), also called *phylacteries*, are two black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with biblical verses. The arm-tefillin, or *shel yad*, is worn on the upper arm, while the head-tefillin, or *shel rosh*, is placed above the forehead [Source: Wikipedia]. For more detailed information on phylacteries, the reader is directed to <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=290&letter=P&search=Tefillin>.

<sup>105</sup> Matthew 5<sup>27-28</sup>



having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.<sup>106</sup>

This in turn leads to hypocrisy as Paul accuses the religious leaders of the day in verses 23 and 24. They were prepared to condemn the ordinary people or indeed the Gentiles, whilst they themselves were falling short of the law inwardly. He quotes from the Isaiah: -

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “Long ago my people chose to live in Egypt. Now they are oppressed by Assyria. What is this?” asks the LORD. “Why are my people enslaved again? Those who rule them shout in exultation. My name is blasphemed all day long<sup>107</sup>. But I will reveal my name to my people, and they will come to know its power. Then at last they will recognize that I am the one who speaks to them.”<sup>108</sup>

In the original passage the misfortune of the Jews led to Gentiles blaspheming the name of their God who seemed powerless to help them. Whereas Paul is saying that their misconduct has the same result. The same is true today, as many so-called Christians live in a form of religion but not in any real power of the Holy Spirit. They find themselves helpless amidst circumstances (being the tail and not the head) and often bring disrepute to the name of Christ through their hypocrisy.

In all these things, as we saw earlier from 1 Corinthians 10, the greater lesson here is for the Body of Christ to avoid the same traps of religion.

### 7.2.3 Circumcision of the Heart (vv.25-29)

Paul then turns naturally to the issue of circumcision. His objector appears again and says *what about circumcision, did that not separate the Jews and make them God’s own people. Does it have no value?* Paul deals with this straight away, saying in verse 25 that it *is* of value, so long as it is accompanied by keeping the law. We are back to James’ catch 22 that a man is to keep the whole of the law if he is under the law.

Paul has spent time explaining to us how the mere possession of the law and knowledge of the divine will did not bring about righteousness. Circumcision was one of those external things which the Jews came to rely upon as making them God’s people and therefore righteous.

Interestingly, many of Israel’s neighbours<sup>109</sup>, excluding the Philistines, did actually practice circumcision themselves<sup>110</sup>, although usually much later than eight days old<sup>111</sup>. So circumcision itself was not as distinctive as we might think. Instead it

<sup>106</sup> 2 Timothy 3<sup>5</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Greek version reads *The Gentiles continually blaspheme my name because of you.*

<sup>108</sup> Isaiah 52<sup>4-6</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Jeremiah 9<sup>25-26</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Old Testament Introduction (page 98): - Werner H Schmidt © 1999 published by Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>111</sup> *Life in Biblical Israel*: - Philip J. King, Lawrence E. Stager © 2001, Westminster John Knox Press.

was God's plan for them to be distinctive in their devotion to him and trust in him for everything. In this part of the letter we have words from Paul which give rise to much debate amongst Christians: -

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God. <sup>112</sup>

Many Christians view this as Paul's endorsement of the view that there were Spiritual Jews and Physical Jews. Christians become spiritual Jews. This kind of language is a red herring and distraction for us. It is the opinion of the author that Paul is talking about Jews here from start to finish. He is not saying that Jews stop being real Jews when they don't reflect the law inwardly, but instead he is saying that amongst the Jews those who really embraced what it meant to be a Jew were those who sought circumcision of his heart.

In other words Paul is not talking about Jews and Gentiles here, but instead distinguishing between two types of Jews, those who were outwardly and inwardly circumcised from those who were merely circumcised outwardly.

It is true that Paul talks in his letter to the Colossians about a circumcision *made without hands* <sup>113</sup> (of the heart by the Spirit of God) but the picture for us is not one of becoming some kind of spiritual Jew, but with our hearts being circumcised. Again we have the natural first, through which God reveals to us the greater spiritual truth – circumcision of the heart.

## 7.3 Our Faithlessness is NOT God's Failure (3<sup>1-8</sup>)

### 7.3.1 The Value of Circumcision (vv.1-2)

The first couple of verses in chapter 3 may come as a surprise to us. It may seem that Paul is doing an about turn. Again, he picks up the objectors question, *what was the point of physical circumcision (and by extension the law and the Old Testament dispensation) if circumcision of the heart was required all along? Was it not doomed to failure?*

This is a good question and it goes right to the heart of how we regard the Old Testament and everything before Christ. Wasn't it all just a waste of time? The answer to this question is an emphatic "No!" It is a mistake to regard the announcement of a saviour for mankind by God in the garden of Eden <sup>114</sup>, a plan B. Adam and Eve were not plan A, with Christ being brought in as plan B. Similarly it is just as misguided to regard the Old Testament dispensation, the people of Israel as another plan that somehow went wrong. It's easy to think of things that

<sup>112</sup> Romans 2<sup>28-29</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Colossians 2<sup>11</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Genesis 3

way, given the law was never able to put men right with God. After all Paul later in the letter to the Romans says about it: -

The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it.<sup>115</sup>

It was not the law that failed but us! The law was not another plan that failed but part of God's overall plan for man, to lead him to Christ.

So coming back to Paul's statements in the opening verses of chapter 3, Paul is saying that what the Jews were given was to their advantage in every way. They were entrusted with the message of hope for all men, through their prophets. Theirs was the Messiah after all – through their son<sup>116</sup> salvation would come to all of mankind. There was nothing to stop them embracing their Messiah and there was nothing to stop them walking by faith, being circumcised within and without, which as we shall see in the next chapter, their ancestor Abraham did.

### 7.3.2 The Integrity of God (vv.3-8)

Paul makes several points here but they all point to the integrity of God: -

- Man's unfaithfulness does not mean that God had failed. The blame lies squarely with man.
- God's righteous judgement prevails because of his integrity. The quote here (in verse 4) is from Psalm 51: -

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment..<sup>117</sup>

(The whole verse is quoted here). The whole Psalm is one of repentance by David after his dramatic fall from God's will in adultery with Bathsheba. God remained faithful to David despite his sin, but in the midst of it all David remembers that God is still right to judge his actions as evil (in your sight).

- His faithfulness and integrity is not licence for us to continue in our failure, just because it highlights his faithfulness to us. His judgement is real and it is coming. Paul had been accused, most likely by the legalists, of preaching lawlessness because it made God seem more faithful. Paul treats such perversion of his point here with the contempt it deserves. The law will not make us righteous, argues Paul but that does not mean we abandon what

<sup>115</sup> Romans 8<sup>3-4</sup> [The Message]

<sup>116</sup> Matthew 2<sup>15</sup> (cf. Hosea 11<sup>1</sup> where the son is Israel. Jesus, as a son of Israel, represented his people)

<sup>117</sup> Psalm 51<sup>4</sup>



is right and good. Our faith in Christ must produce the fruit of righteousness in our lives.

The body of Christ is able to make the same mistakes that Israel made, so we must learn from her mistakes. This is why Paul takes the time to show us Israel's failure to embrace circumcision of the heart, so that we the church do not slip into the same subtle trap. As Paul warns us later in this letter to the Romans, Israel's failure is not cause for the church to feel superior but to *walk humbly with their God* and learn the lessons of the past. Righteousness by faith is a permanent **state of being**, so we have to be diligent to enter into the rest of righteousness by faith: -

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be **diligent to enter that rest**, lest anyone fall according to the same example of [Israel's] disobedience.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Hebrews 4<sup>9-11</sup> [New King James Version]



## **| 8.0      The Divine Prescription**

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- 8.1            Condemned by our Words
- 8.2            Held Accountable by the Law
- 8.3            Falling Short
- 8.4            Pretermission - The Forbearance of God
- 8.5            Propitiation - The Divine Payment in Blood
- 8.6            The Law of Faith

## 8.0 The Divine Prescription (3<sup>9-31</sup>)

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You will recall how we noted that the Greek word for power (*dunamis*), used by Paul in those pivotal verses 16-17 of chapter one, is the same word used for a doctor's prescription to a patient (in the vernacular<sup>119</sup> of the day). So Paul is here unpacking further those great verses concerning *The Gospel of God* to which we devoted time earlier in our studies.

Remember how Paul started with the general state of mankind and God's verdict on it and then moved on to deal with the various objections to this verdict. In dealing with these we have seen the folly of religion, which we are here defining as the legalistic observance of the demands of the law and its consequences, fleshed out so clearly for us by Israel, to serve as a lesson to the Body of Christ of the dangers of legalism<sup>120</sup>.

Why did Paul pick up *religion* in dealing with these objections to God's judgement on mankind? It is because mankind faces a problem, which is obvious to see when you look at the world around you regardless of faith, and *religion* represents his attempts to solve the problem he faces through his own efforts, which the WORD of God refers to as *works*. To God this is pure folly, like swimming up stream against an overwhelming current. To man however God's prescription to the same problem is also pure folly<sup>121</sup>.

So Paul now turns to the heart of the matter – the human problem and God's prescription for it, and demonstrates why God's prescription is right and man's prescription is wrong.

### 8.1 Condemned by Our Words (3<sup>9-18</sup>)

#### 8.1.1 Jews and Gentiles Stand Condemned Together (v.9)

Paul picks up where he left off with the Jews in verse 9. At first sight it looks as though he is contradicting verses 2 and 3 of this chapter, where he has said that Jew's have an advantage in every way. Here Paul is saying that Jews are not better off at all!?

The difference between these two statements is that the Jews had an advantage because of their calling, but here Paul is referring to being under the charge of sin. When it comes to guilt, they have no advantage over the Gentile, because as we have seen mere possession of the law does not exempt the Jews from judgement under it, nor does it make them righteous.

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<sup>119</sup> i.e., everyday words or the language of the common people.

<sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthians 10<sup>11</sup>

<sup>121</sup> 1 Corinthians 1<sup>18</sup>

## 8.1.2 The Words From Our Mouths (vv.10-18)

In verses 10 to 18 Paul brings together various parts of the Psalms all of which condemn men. Here, although the original application may have been to specific men, Paul is applying them to mankind as a whole, because as we saw at the beginning of chapter 2, when we start to separate ourselves from depths of humanity's sin, we find ourselves condemned by our own words! We could call this the "Hitler Comparison". People have always viewed the worst of human depravity with a degree of separation from itself, not realising that it is the same cancer, sin, which runs through us all by differing degrees.

Notice in these verses refer again and again to our words ...

- *Throat (v.13)*
- *Tongues (v.13)*
- *Lips (v.13)*
- *Mouth (v.14)*

Other bodily parts are mentioned but the most common is the mouth, for by it the destructive course of man has been steered from the expulsion of Eden to the present day. The Proverbs gave sharp warning to men about this: -

From the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled;  
with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied.  
The tongue has the power of life and death,  
and those who love it will eat its fruit.<sup>122</sup>

The Apostle James recognised this and gave further warning about a mixture in the words of men: -

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.<sup>123</sup>

With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.<sup>124</sup>

If men's mouths have been filled with ungodly things then they could never have also been good before God, for He cannot tolerate mixture<sup>125</sup>. Men stand condemned by their own words.

<sup>122</sup> Proverbs 18<sup>20-21</sup>

<sup>123</sup> James 3<sup>6</sup>

<sup>124</sup> James 3<sup>9-12</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Revelation 3<sup>16</sup>

## 8.2 Held Accountable by the Law (3<sup>19-20</sup>)

In verse 19 we see Paul picks up on the words of sinful men with this phrase,

| ... so that every mouth may be stopped

There are two things to notice here: -

- Paul says *whatever the law* says, whereas the quotations are for the most part from the Psalms and not the Pentateuch<sup>126</sup>. This is because the law has now become a pronoun for the WORD of God.
- Did you notice how he says the law speaks to those *under the law*, but so that **every** mouth may be stopped. The law may have been given to the Jews but it held all of mankind accountable. We have said that the job of the law is to bring all men to Christ, through whom alone they can be righteous.

The verdict that the WORD of God brings on the words of men, is one of death. It silences all the objections that Paul has been dealing with to this point in the letter. All of the clever arguments and lofty illusions of exemption and excuses are silenced by the verdict of the WORD of God – men stand condemned by their own words. As Jesus said: -

| The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."<sup>127</sup>

## 8.3 Falling Short (3<sup>23</sup>)

We are jumping ahead a little in the text here but in verse 23 Paul tells us what that verdict is: -

| for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ...<sup>128</sup>

There are two words Paul uses for man's failure and it is worth looking at both of them: -

### 8.3.1 Missing the Mark, Going Astray

The word for "sinned" above is a common Greek word in the New Testament: -

<sup>126</sup> The name of the first five books of the Old Testament, referred to by the Jews of Paul's day as the Law.

<sup>127</sup> Matthew 12<sup>35-37</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Romans 3<sup>23</sup>



- **Hamartia** - (lit.) a missing of the mark.

It is a general term used for sin, but conjures up the idea of sending an arrow toward a target and missing the bullseye<sup>129</sup>. There is also the concept here of going astray (from the target) which should remind us of one of the principle definitions of sin from the Old Testament: -

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.<sup>130</sup>

The original Covenant made with the first man, Adam, contained a mandate from God. From the time of the fall in the garden Adam and his descendents have collectively gone astray from this mandate. Jesus came to enable us to get back on track.

Although beyond the scope of our studies Paul here uses the aorist tense in the Greek meaning something done once and for ever, which alludes perhaps to the fact that as Paul shows us later in chapter five<sup>131</sup> (which is beyond the scope of this module) that *in Adam* we have all sinned. For more on this see the footnote below.<sup>132</sup> It is combined with the continuous tense suggesting that we are in a constant state of ***Falling Short***.

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<sup>129</sup> According to the Greek Scholar W E Vine M.A. [Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 1940] it seems that the etymological meaning of this word became somewhat lost in the New Testament times. It is the most comprehensive term for moral obliquity. In tracing this idea back to the Old Testament Gottfried Quell [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume, © 1985, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA] comments that one of the four main Hebrew roots in the Old Testament carrying the idea of sin shares the same meaning. It is basically metaphorical and has the sense of “missing”, e.g., the way (Proverbs 192), what is sought (Proverbs 836), the mark.

<sup>130</sup> Isaiah 53<sup>6</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Romans 5<sup>12</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Romans, An Exposition of Chapters 3.20 – 4.25, Atonement and Justification by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, © 1970 The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh: - *The Apostle deliberately used the aorist tense of this verb ‘to sin’, which means ‘something done once and for ever’. We should therefore translate this verse like this: ‘For all sinned and are coming short of the glory of God.’ He has used two different tenses, first the aorist, something complete, once and for all; then, secondly, something which is continuing in the present. What does he suggest by that? He says ‘all sinned’. When did all sin? The answer he will give us later in the fifth chapter is ‘in Adam’. You will find it in the twelfth verse of the fifth chapter. I just mention it now; but we shall come to it again in greater detail. But he teaches here, as he teaches in chapter 5 and elsewhere, that all sinned in Adam. We all died in Adam as the result of his sin. Adam was the federal head of humanity, and when he sinned we all sinned. He represented us. We were all in him. ‘All sinned’ – once and for all. So that in addition to the sins, the individual sins, that you and I have committed, we have all sinned in Adam. That is why ‘death reigned from Adam to Moses’, that is why death has come in at all and everybody dies. Even a new-born babe may die. It is the result of the sin in which we have participated in Adam – ‘all sinned’.*

### 8.3.2 Failing to Finish The Course

The words “fall short” in verse 23 come from the Greek word: -

- **Hustēreō** - *to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end, to lack.*

Here we have a picture, which reinforces the first term Paul used for missing a target. The tense used here is aorist. This second word conjures up the picture of competitors in a race where no one finishes. Some get further than others but no one finishes. Perhaps a helpful way to see this in the context of righteousness is to imagine a swimming race from one land to another. Swimmers enter the race and they make the following progress: -

- One group makes a good start but runs out of steam early on and has to turn back.
- Others manage to get halfway across but then run out of energy and end up sinking below the waves, for they don't have enough energy to get home.
- A small minority of swimmers however make it very nearly to the other shore. They sink one by one until only one remains. The lone swimmer is within sight of land when his strength begins to fail. He just does not have enough left in him to make the last stretch and sinks below the waves.

No one won the race, for none completed the course. They all fell short of the goal. We have already seen that the Law had exacting standards which require satisfaction in full or the resulting failure in the eyes of the law becomes inevitable: -

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for **all** of it.<sup>133</sup>

Most unbelievers regard themselves as *better persons* than some others. As we saw at the beginning of chapter two, you will recall how Paul raised the objection of such people who by nature separate themselves (thus bringing a judgement on others) from those Paul described at the end of chapter one.

Today people are no different. They are ready to believe that Hitler and other such monsters should not have any eternal reward or enter heaven (should it exist) but do not wish to be lumped in the same category with these sort of persons. Perhaps they acknowledged they are not perfect but consider themselves at least to be trying to be better persons.

Unfortunately, however their efforts (which are of course *works*) still fall short of the purity of Holiness of the God who made them and to whose standards they will be compared on the Day of Wrath. In this sense, Paul is saying, everyone falls short.

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<sup>133</sup> James 2<sup>10</sup>

## 8.4 The Forbearance of God (3<sup>25-26</sup>)

The question remains as to why God did not simply wipe mankind from the earth, permanently.

### 8.4.1 Just and The Justifier

Here we come to a strange verse (25) where Paul gives us a glimpse of this part of God's plan of redemption announced in the garden of Eden: -

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.<sup>134</sup>

The gospel which brought about our justification from the permanent state of falling short of God's glory, showed God's righteousness to the world, through faith in Jesus. Up to that point the charge may have been brought that God had not brought total judgement to the world of men. Paul goes on to show us in verse 26 how the Cross silenced that charge and upheld the integrity of God's word to both deliver man and judge sin: -

..., so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.<sup>135</sup>

Lloyd Jones comments on this:-

*On Calvary God was making a way of salvation so that you and I might be forgiven. But he had to do so in a way that will leave his character inviolate, that will leave His eternal consistency still absolute and unbroken ... God was declaring publicly once and forever His eternal justice AND His eternal love. Never separate them, for they belong together in the character of God.*<sup>136</sup>

### 8.4.2 Pretermission

Before the Cross however Paul tells us that God *passed over* sin in the world. We get a glimpse of what actually happened in the Heavens in the counsel of the Godhead.

The words passed over in English come from a Greek word, rich in meaning.

- **Paresis** - *Pretermission, that is, a passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding*

<sup>134</sup> Romans 3<sup>25b</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Romans 3<sup>26</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

It is a most interesting word, mistranslated in some versions (including the King James Version) as *remission of sins*. This word *remission* is correctly used elsewhere in conjunction with sins forgiven (e.g., Matthew 26<sup>28</sup>, KJV), but we find a word used only here in the whole of the Bible! Nowhere else is this word used. The closest English translation is *pretermission*. It was found in Roman law at the time and is defined by Lloyd Jones<sup>137</sup>: -

*It refers to someone who had made a will and who left somebody out of his will. Imagine a man making a will and leaving something to a number of his friends. But there is one friend to whom he does not leave anything - that is 'pretermission'.*

In other words it means to overlook someone intentionally. The key for us here to understand is that **the difference between remission and pretermission, is the difference between forgiving and not punishing**. Again Lloyd Jones is helpful in showing us the significance of Paul's statement: -

*Do you follow the argument? What he is saying is that under the old covenant, under the Old Dispensation, there was no provision for dealing with sins in a radical sense. It was simply a means, as it were, of passing them by, covering them over for the time being. Those old offerings and sacrifices have a kind of purification of the flesh, they have a ceremonial cleanness, they enable the people to go in praying to God. But there was no sacrifice under the Old Testament that could really deal with sin. All they did was to point forward to this sacrifice that was coming and that could really do it, and could cleanse the conscience from dead works and truly reconcile man to God.*

*Do you mean by that, asks someone, that the saints in the Old Testament were not forgiven? Of course I do not. They were obviously forgiven and they thanked God for the forgiveness. You cannot say for a moment that people like David and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob were not forgiven. Of course they were forgiven. But they were not forgiven because of those sacrifices that were then offered. They were forgiven because they looked to Christ. They did not see this clearly, but they believed the teaching, and made these offerings by faith. They believe God's Word that He was one day going to provide a sacrifice and in faith they held to that. It was their faith in Christ that saved them, exactly as it is faith in Christ that saves now. That is the argument.<sup>138</sup>*

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

In addressing the Areopagus<sup>139</sup> in Athens, Paul says the same thing about the advent of the gospel age on the earth,

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ...<sup>140</sup>

The writer to the Hebrews picks up on this and tells us how the New Covenant made in the blood of Jesus Christ, reaches back before the Cross as well as forward to all those who have followed: -

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.<sup>141</sup>

## 8.5 Propitiation – the Divine Payment in Blood (3<sup>25-26</sup>)

In verse 25 we have a curious word used by Paul, *propitiation*. It is a word that has caused debate and argument in the church over the years, because its use has implications for what we believe about the character of God himself. Some more *equivalent dynamic* translations use the phrase *sacrifice for atonement*, instead.

### 8.5.1 Satisfaction of Wrath or Removal of Guilt?

It is worth us looking at the word itself.

- **Hilastērion** - *A means of atonement or appeasement, a sacrifice*

According to the puritan writer Dr John Owen, there are four essential elements:

- i) An offence to be taken away
- ii) A person offended who needs to be pacified,
- iii) An offending person; a person guilty of the offence,
- iv) A sacrifice or some other means of making atonement for the offence.

<sup>139</sup> The hill of Mars, the seat of the ancient and venerable supreme court of Athens, called the Areopagites, (Acts 17<sup>19-34</sup>). It was composed entirely of ex-archons, of grave and blameless character, and their wise and just decisions made it famous far beyond the bounds of Greece. Their numbers and authority varied greatly from age to age. They held their sessions by night. They took cognizance of murders, impieties, and immoralities; punished vices of all kinds, idleness included; rewarded or assisted the virtuous; and were peculiarly attentive to blasphemies against the gods, and to the performance of the sacred mysteries. The case of Paul, therefore, would naturally come before them, for he sought to subvert their whole system of idolatry, and establish Christianity in its place [Rand, W. W; American Tract Society Bible Dictionary published in 1859. Public Domain].

<sup>140</sup> Acts 17<sup>30</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Hebrews 9<sup>15</sup>

The word propitiation therefore refers to the means by which God's Wrath is satisfied and is linked the words following, *by his blood*. The payment was made in blood. Some theologians over the years prefer the word *expiation* instead because of the difference in meaning.

***Expiation emphasises the removal of guilt through a payment of the penalty, while propitiation emphasises the appeasement or averting of God's wrath and justice.***

Some Christian writers have rejected this notion of propitiation being applied to God, through the work on the Cross. Mainly because they reject the whole notion of the 'Wrath of God' which the propitiation seeks to appease and satisfy. Lloyd-Jones cites writers who: -

*... do not believe 'in that God who sat on top of Mount Sinai issuing forth His wrath and His anger', but instead believe in 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' They regard the whole notion of wrath as barbaric, and on a level with the primitive Hebrew conception of God.*<sup>142</sup>

They point back to pagan religions where a propitiation had to be offered (a ransom) to appease some angry god, and this would often be another human. This reminds us of the worship of the god Molech whose appeasement demanded the sacrifice of children.

However the flaw in the approach is the perception of God's wrath, in comparing it to a god, like the gods of Olympus who were reputed within the annals of Greek mythology, to treat humans according to how their mood took them, usually based on favouritism and jealousy of the worship of other gods, always capriciously never consistently. Such gods were anthropomorphisms of man's invention.

Instead those who favour the concept of expiation regard the wrath of God instead, as we have seen earlier on in our studies<sup>143</sup>, hold that wrath is simply the inevitable consequences of stepping out of God's will for us, like being subject to the law of gravity. For example, C.H.Dodd claims that the references in the Bible to the Wrath of God do not describe the attitude of God toward man, but describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe. Dodd describes the 'wrath of God' as 'an archaic phrase' suiting 'a thoroughly archaic idea'.

What does this mean for our view of the Cross then? Reconciliation requires nothing on God's side, God is love they say, He has already forgiven mankind, and all that is necessary is that man's eyes need to be opened to this fact. It is argued that the word 'expiation' should be used instead of propitiation.

<sup>142</sup> *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3.20 - 4.25, Atonement and Justification* by Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, © 1970 The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh

<sup>143</sup> Section 5.1

## 8.5.2 The Character of God

The whole philosophy of rejecting the notion of God's Wrath, is both contrary to Scripture and a complete failure to comprehend the character of God. It may possibly be due to the fact that some teachers perceive wrath on a human level, a human fault.

Aiden Tozer describes this principle of God staying true to His nature. The wrath of God is about *Justice* in all things, that all rights and wrongs are dealt with properly, that is according to God's nature. He points out that the translation of the Scriptures into English, shows that the words justice and righteousness are almost synonymous. It appears that the same word in the original seems to be translated into either almost at the whim of the translator, i.e., God's righteousness is closely related to the fact that He is just. Were He to be unjust, for example: not punish a sinner for his sins, then He Himself would no longer be righteous, He would actually be unrighteous. And this, as Tozer points out, is impossible for God: -

*It is sometimes said, "Justice requires God to do this," referring to some act we know He will perform. This is an error of thinking as well as of speaking, for it postulates a principle of justice outside of God which compels Him to act in a certain way. Of course there is no such principle. If there were it would be superior to God, for only a superior power can compel obedience.*

*The truth is that there is not and can never be anything outside of the nature of God which can move Him in the least degree. All God's reasons come from within His uncreated being. Nothing has entered the being of God from eternity, nothing has been removed, and nothing has been changed.*

*Justice, when used of God, is a name we give to the way God is, nothing more; and when God acts justly He is not doing so to conform to an independent criterion, but simply acting like Himself in a given situation. As gold is an element in itself and can never change nor compromise but is gold wherever it is found, so God is God, always, only, fully God, and can never be other than He is. Everything in the universe is good to the degree it conforms to the nature of God and evil as it fails to do so. God is His own self-existent principle of moral equity, and when He sentences evil men or rewards the righteous, He simply acts like Himself from within, uninfluenced by anything that is not Himself.*

*God's being is unitary; it is not composed of a number of parts working harmoniously, but simply one. There is nothing in His justice which forbids the exercise of His mercy. To think of God as we sometimes think of a court where a kindly judge, compelled by law sentences a man to death with tears and apologies, is to think in a manner wholly unworthy of the true God. God is never at cross-purposes with Himself.*



*No attribute of God is in conflict with another.*

*God's compassion flows out of His goodness, and goodness without justice is not goodness. God spares us because He is good, but He could not be good if He were not just.*<sup>144</sup>

Throughout the WORD of God we see God's compassion linked with his justice and righteousness because they are inseparable attributes. In fact in one of the Psalms, where we often see the Hebrew couplet used to repeat in the second line of the verse a thought which was communicated in the first verse, but using other words, we see exactly that: -

He [the LORD] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.<sup>145</sup>

### 8.5.3 The Payment in Blood

Perhaps the problem comes out of the Old Testament usage of the Greek word (in the LXX<sup>146</sup>) where *Hilastērion* refers to the mercy seat or golden cover which was placed on the Ark of the Covenant over the tablets of stone on which were the ten commandments. Blood was sprinkled on this cover and it ceased to be a place of judgement and became a place of mercy.

As we have seen already, the sacrifices under the Old Covenant were simply a temporary measure, to remove the guilt of men but did not fully satisfy the wrath of God against sin. So Jesus' laying down his life and shedding of his own blood was able to provide a full satisfaction of God's wrath for all those who came before and after the Cross.

This means of course that when Jesus was crucified, although the gospels give us a detailed account of the physical punishment he endured, we are only seeing what happened in the natural.

Earlier we looked at the principle of *first the natural then the spiritual*. The natural always reflects a greater spiritual reality. In this case the physical punishment was purely an indication of what was happening in the spiritual. Jesus had never been separated from the Father; with the Holy Spirit they had always dwelt in sweet unity forever. Now however, for the first time Jesus was not only separated from his father but also received the full force of his wrath against all the sin of the world. God held nothing back, for without complete judgement could not come complete redemption for you and me.

Such things when considered soberly by the Christian are uncomfortable for we do not understand so much of what happened. However one thing we can say with certainty when Jesus considered what lay ahead of him in the garden it was

<sup>144</sup> *Knowledge of the Holy*, by Aiden W Tozer © 1961

<sup>145</sup> Psalm 33<sup>5</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Septuagint



not the physical pain and humiliation (for he had no pride!) that gave him cause to pause but instead the realisation of the full wrath of God and the fact that his Father would now turn his back on him ...

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.<sup>147</sup>

And being in an **agony** he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.<sup>148</sup>

## 8.6 The Law of Faith (3<sup>27-31</sup>)

So what follows on from this great act of God? Paul immediately brings everything back to us, how we are affected by God's great propitiatory sacrifice.

### 8.6.1 ... Excludes boasting (v. 27)

As we have seen already, the Gospel is entirely God's and has no human fingerprints on it at all. It was God's plan from start to finish. Nothing we have done, or will do, can add or subtract anything from it. Essentially the gospel is not asking us to do anything, but instead is telling us about something that God has already done for us, entirely on his own.

Paul says the same thing to the Ephesians: -

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>149</sup>

If we could boast about what God has done then God would not receive all the glory, which is as it should be, as Peter states in his first letter to the exiles: -

— in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.<sup>150</sup>

### 8.6.2 ... Is Faith Apart from Works of the Law (v.28)

This verse many have often seen as contradicting the statement of the Apostle James in his letter: -

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone ... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>147</sup> 2 Corinthians 5<sup>21</sup>

<sup>148</sup> Luke 22<sup>44</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Ephesians 2<sup>8-10</sup>

<sup>150</sup> 1 Peter 4<sup>11b</sup>

<sup>151</sup> James 2<sup>24 & 26</sup>

On the face of it, James seems to be saying that faith and works together justify us before God. However we have been labouring with Paul in Romans to understand how works of the law never did justify a man. In fact we called upon James earlier in this very argument to demonstrate that the law required absolute obedience and tolerates no failure at all<sup>152</sup>, which is why it was never designed to save us but lead us to the sufficiency of Christ.

Paul has shown us that it is by faith in Christ that we lay hold of the righteousness that God has revealed through the Gospel. And here Paul is saying that the law that is operative with the gospel is not one of works but one of faith.

We are helped here by reminding ourselves of something we looked at earlier concerning the legalistic application of the law. The Pharisees and others like them considered an outward fulfilment of the law sufficient to make them righteous, whereas Jesus taught that which mattered was their heart attitude, which the law was designed to speak to.

So Paul has throughout these early chapters of Romans showed us that a legalistic application of the law will not justify us before God, for it only leads to failure. We can only fall on Christ our Saviour.

So what then is James telling us in his letter? He is speaking into a different context to Paul, who was addressing the objections of those who pointed to mere possession or outward observance of law for their justification and escape of the wrath of God. Instead James was speaking into a context where some were claiming a faith, but that faith was not evidencing itself in any fruit.

James uses examples of those who were listed as heroes of faith, by the writer to the Hebrews, as those whose faith was then acted out in what could be described as works or fruit. Without that fruit there would have been no faith in the first place. When Abraham plunged the knife downward, his faith was unequivocally demonstrated in action, so that no one, not even Satan, could question that this man should be the recipient of the promise. James was pointing out to his readers that faith and works are inseparable. Faith, if it is real, will inevitably lead to works.

And just so that we don't think Paul sees things differently, we find in the very next verse from the above quotation (8.6.1) from Ephesians, where Paul tells his readers that their works have not saved them, but that it is a gift from God, he says: -

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

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<sup>152</sup> James 2<sup>10</sup>

In other words, faith and works go hand in hand. The following comment from D J Moo sums up the difference between Paul and James' intention in the words they wrote: -

*The difference between Paul and James consists in the **sequence** of works and conversion: Paul denies the efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works.<sup>153</sup>*

### 8.6.3 Justification of the Circumcised and the Uncircumcised (vv.29-30)

Here in these two verses we have clear confirmation from Paul that both the Jew and the Gentile equally require faith from both of them to justify them through the blood of Christ. Paul clearly shows his readers that Jew and Gentile stand equally justified even though they have approached the throne of grace from different places. In Paul's day there were false teachers trying to infiltrate the church who were trying to make Gentiles become circumcised before coming to faith in Christ. In writing to the Galatians Paul deals with this issue head on:-

... for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.<sup>154</sup>

This statement of Paul's confirms that both circumcised and uncircumcised come into justification before God the same way - faith in Christ.

### 8.6.4 ... By Which the Law is Upheld (v.31)

Just in case we start to think that Paul is advocating the complete abandonment of the law he makes us think again: -

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.<sup>155</sup>

What does Paul mean by this? How, through the law of faith, do we uphold the law? Well, firstly we have to say what Paul does not mean. He does not mean that Christ gives us power and strength to fulfil the law for ourselves, by living the good life, the Christian life. This line of thinking encourages Christians to try and be better people through the power of Christ and so to somehow fulfil the requirements of the law that mankind failed to fulfil under the Old Covenant.

Jesus announced his intention clearly in relation to the law: -

<sup>153</sup> *The Letter of James, An Introduction and Commentary* - © 1985 Douglas J Moo, B.A. M.Div., Ph.D, IVP, England.

<sup>154</sup> Galatians 3<sup>26-29</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Romans 3<sup>31</sup>

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.<sup>156</sup>

The Greek word used by Jesus translated above by our English word *fulfil*, is *plērōsai*, which literally means to “to fill”, in the sense of completion. So that this word is not mistaken for completion in the sense of something coming to the end of its life, Jesus confirms that not the smallest apostrophe in the law will pass away until its work is accomplished. Jesus came to build on the work of the law, for the law was designed to lead men to Christ.

Jesus fulfilled the law in every aspect of his ministry: life, death and resurrection: -

- Jesus established (fulfilled the requirements of) the law in his living.
- Jesus established the ceremonial requirements of the law and fulfilled them.
- Jesus illuminated and explained the law.
- Jesus established the law in his death, paying the penalty demands of the law due to our sin.
- Jesus’ death confirms God’s wrath against sin.
- Jesus’ death establishes the law’s requirement for blood to be shed.
- Jesus reveals the true purpose of the law.

We have to remind ourselves that there is no disharmony between the Old Testament and the New. Jesus in actual fact confirmed the canon of the Old Testament. Jesus never attacked the law, but instead the legalistic observance of the law, which religious life had been brought down to under the spiritual rule of the Sanhedrin, as a means of righteousness. The law did its job well and upon it the law of faith brings to completion the work of God in the hearts of men to restore them, through Christ, to right relationship with Creator and Father.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Matthew 5<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>157</sup> According to the Greek Scholar W E Vine M.A. [Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, 1940, no copyright] it seems that the etymological meaning of this word became somewhat lost in the New Testament times. It is the most comprehensive term for moral obliquity. In tracing this idea back to the Old Testament Gottfried Quell [Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume, © 1985, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA] comments that one of the four main Hebrew roots in the Old Testament carrying the idea of sin shares the same meaning. It is basically metaphorical and has the sense of “missing”, e.g., the way (Proverbs 19<sup>2</sup>), what is sought (Proverbs 8<sup>36</sup>), the mark (Judges 20<sup>16</sup>). While predominantly used for wrong action, the word thus suggests always the idea of going astray. It is worth looking at the above referenced scripture from Judges: - *Among Benjamin’s elite troops, 700 were left-handed, and each of them could sling a rock and **hit a target within a hair’s breadth without missing.*** [New Living Translation]



## **| 9.0 The Divine Model**

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- 9.1 Abraham's Faith
- 9.2 Abraham's Son
- 9.3 Abraham's Walk

## 9.0 The Divine Model (4<sup>1-25</sup>)

Abraham was considered by the Jews to be their greatest ancestor. He was held in even higher esteem than Moses. It is natural then for Paul to turn from God's solution to the problem of sin, next to the man whom God declared both a friend and righteous. For if Christ had only just died, how was Abraham declared to be righteous nearly two thousand years before his coming?

### 9.1 Abraham's Faith (4<sup>1-16</sup>)

#### 9.1.1 Nothing New (vv. 3 & 6-8)

In turning to Abraham Paul does something which Jesus often did, which is to find Scriptural witness from the WORD of God as a whole for what he is teaching. Observe Jesus' words: -

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."<sup>158</sup>

The Jewish Bible (which we now refer to as the Old Testament) was divided into three parts and so arranged in a different order to our current Old Testament section of our Bibles. These parts were known as: -

The Law (Torah)	The Prophets (Nevim)	The Writings (Kethuvim)
Genesis through Deuteronomy (The Pentateuch)	Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve minor Prophets <sup>159</sup>	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth Lamentations, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles

The above Hebrew names make up the acronym *Tanakh*, which was the Jewish name for the Bible. In this passage from the gospel of Luke, Jesus is confirming the authenticity of the Old Testament by referring to all its parts (The Writings were often referred to as Psalms, for short by the Jews of Jesus' day). For more on Jesus' confirmation of the Hebrew Bible as reliable and to be trusted by his followers see this Endnote<sup>160</sup>.

<sup>158</sup> Luke 24<sup>44</sup>

<sup>159</sup> This term refers to the size of the book, not the importance of the author or message. It refers to the twelve books which in our New Testament we order Hosea through to Malachi.

<sup>160</sup> Obviously Jesus did not confirm the whole New Testament canon, however we find in the gospels numerous instances where he confirmed the existing Old Testament canon. We also never find a dispute between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders of his day over the issue of

Paul has already referred back to Habakkuk's words (The Prophets) and now in verse 3 he refers to the Genesis Account of Abraham's Faith (The Law). Then he turns finally to David's words in the Psalms (The Writings). The point of this was to show that the faith of which the gospel speaks was there all the way through the Old Testament all along. This is why the heroes of faith laid hold of it.

In fact just in case we should start to think that only a select few were ever going to be able to see it before God made it public on the Cross, we should remember the words of the writer to the Hebrews concerning the people of Israel: -

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the **gospel** preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.<sup>161</sup>

Picking up on the thoughts and themes he has spent time debating with his imaginary objector Paul then picks up on the three main ones to show them in Abraham's life

### 9.1.2 Gifted Righteousness (vv. 1-9)

Paul makes the case clearly that there are two types of justification - works and faith. Abraham we are told by the WORD of God *believed* and in so doing was counted righteous by God. He made no boast in his works but instead trusted God, which is the essence of the faith referred to by the statement in verse 5, *his faith is counted as righteousness*.

How did Abraham trust God? Does this mean Abraham trusted God to justify him? No, that it is not what the Scripture Paul quotes from Genesis tells us. Abraham trusted God that he would have a son and heir, despite the fact that

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canon, but rather on the interpretation of the Scriptures. He also testified to his own words on an equal if not greater authority than the Old Testament.

In the wilderness Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy referring to the words of this book affirming the words of Deuteronomy as from God's very own mouth. We also find when he refers to the Genesis narrative, he confirms these to be the words of *he who made them* (i.e., God). One of the most conclusive examples of confirmation we find in Luke's gospel,

*"Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary."*

Abel was the first recorded martyr in the Old Testament and Zechariah the last. The Hebrew canon was arranged at the time with Genesis being the first book and Chronicles, which records Zechariah's death at Joash's command, being the last. So Jesus was confirming his acceptance of the Hebrew canon, from its first book to its last book, as it was so ordered at the time.

The Hebrew canon had 22 books in it, which is the same material as our Old Testament, except that further divisions were made (to make the present 39 books) and the material arranged differently.

<sup>161</sup> Hebrews 4<sup>6</sup> [New International Version]

Sarah was barren. In other words he trusted God over everything that his mind and his senses told him.

In other words Abraham believed in the primacy of the spiritual over the natural, which is something that men had not done since the fall. When Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit God had forbidden, they took the word of creation (the serpent, satan who represented the natural) over the word of the Creator (the spiritual) and so became dominated by the natural in place of the spiritual, in so doing losing the ability to commune fully their Creator (cf. Romans Chapter One) and being banished from his presence.

So Abraham's decision meant he did not earn God's favour but instead God chose to grant him His favour as a gift. It doesn't mean that Abraham was sinless or suddenly clean before God. He was still a fallen man, but as David says in the Psalms (quoted by Paul) Abraham was blessed by God because he did not count his sin against him. In reality the Father justified Abraham because without knowing it he had believed in Jesus for his salvation by believing in his predecessor, type and foreshadow Isaac. We shall go into this in more detail in section 9.2 below.

### 9.1.3 Sealed Faith (vv. 10-12)

Paul now turns to circumcision which he has already touched on. Here he says something which if you spot it, is really interesting. The purpose of Abraham's circumcision ...

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised<sup>162</sup>

The purpose of Abraham's circumcision was to enable him to be a father to those who were not circumcised!? Does this sound right? Surely not, we might say? What did God say about Abraham's circumcision?

You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.<sup>163</sup>

It was at least 14 years after the Covenant made between God and Abraham, which Paul identifies as that detailed in Genesis 15<sup>18</sup>. The reason for this gap? Perhaps God left this *delay* to show that his seal of approval marked by this outward sign, neither created nor enhanced Abraham's righteous status before Him? Perhaps also, Abraham spent those years without the seal so that one day those who were not subject to the seal (the Gentiles) could look to Abraham as their father, knowing that the physical seal was no longer necessary now that a greater seal had come, the Holy Spirit: -

<sup>162</sup> Romans 4<sup>11b</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Genesis 17<sup>11</sup>



Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the **uncircumcision**" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—<sup>164</sup>

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.<sup>165</sup>

When Abraham looked down at his circumcision he would be reminded of the divine seal of approval on his faith, counted by God to him as righteousness. Equally when we remember the Holy Spirit who lives in us we too have the divine seal of the righteousness of Christ we have laid hold of by our faith.

### 9.1.4 Lawless Promise (vv. 13-16)

Lastly Paul turns to the other main theme he has expounded, the law. To underline the fact that his faith came through no human effort or works, but trust alone, Paul points out that the promise came hundreds of years before the Law was ever given to the Israelites: -

This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.<sup>166</sup>

We have the same principle applying here as we did with circumcision! God perhaps delayed the introduction of the law, by so many years not only for circumstances but also to underline the point, in his Providence, that law itself did not guarantee the inheritance (cf. section 7.2.1, The Fallacy of Possession), nor was it the means of the promise of God coming to pass. As we have seen its purpose was only to point toward the Christ, through whom the promise would come: -

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.<sup>167</sup>

So the promise had to be lawless or autonomous to the later law, because as Paul points states in verse 16: -

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring<sup>168</sup>

<sup>164</sup> Ephesians 2<sup>11</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Ephesians 1<sup>13-14</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Galatians 3<sup>17-18</sup>

<sup>167</sup> Galatians 3<sup>23</sup>

<sup>168</sup> Romans 4<sup>16a</sup>

***If it did not rest on grace it could not be guaranteed because if there was a human element in the equation then it would fail. The plan and the promise had to be 100% divine – the Gospel of God!!***

## 9.2 Abraham's Son (4<sup>17, 19</sup> & 23-25)

The promise Paul refers to in verse 16 is that of Isaac, who would one day be born to him and Sarah. In verse 17 Paul picks up on the specifics of the promise: -

... as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.<sup>169</sup>

On the face of it, such a way of describing the promise may seem strange. Why did he not just say *'the God whom he believed gave them Isaac'*? The reason is that Paul is touching on a key aspect of righteousness by faith, **Resurrection Life**. The circumstances in which the birth of Isaac was promised by God, were by divine design, to show us spiritual truths of greater eternal importance ...

### 9.2.1 Resurrection Life (v.17)

Well beyond the scope of our studies is the topic of Resurrection Life, it is a central theme to the Cross of Christ and integral to our new life as men and women filled with the Spirit of God.

We find throughout the WORD of God a repeated pattern of **death to life**. God brings life where there was only death before. The culmination of these patterns is in Jesus' condescension from divinity into humanity and then into death, to be followed by his resurrection and exaltation into life, title and glory at the right hand of the Father once again – this is vividly shown by Paul in his letter to the Philippians<sup>170</sup>. Jesus' death and resurrection demonstrated to the world the power of resurrection life, the life laid down before God is raised up by him: -

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.<sup>171</sup>

Why is this? Because in all things God must be glorified<sup>172</sup> and in order to do this all human fingerprints must be removed. This is why God chose to bring life through the broken body of Abraham and the barren womb of Sarah ...

### 9.2.2 Abraham's Body (vv.17&19)

Paul says of God in this verse: -

... who gives life to the dead ...

<sup>169</sup> Romans 4<sup>17</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Philippians 2<sup>6-11</sup>

<sup>171</sup> James 4<sup>10</sup>

<sup>172</sup> 1 Peter 4<sup>11b</sup>

This is an obvious reference to Abraham's body, for in verse 19 Paul uses the same description of Abraham's physical body that the writer to the Hebrews does<sup>173</sup>, namely that it was *as good as dead*.

If Abraham and Sarah had been a young and fertile husband and wife then what faith would Abraham have required to believe God's promise? Once again God chose to bring life in the place of death to enable Abraham to move in faith and in order that his power would be demonstrated. God confirmed this again in the life of Isaac when he tested Abraham's faith, asking him to sacrifice Isaac to him. The writer to the Hebrews picks up on the theme of life from death once again: -

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.<sup>174</sup>

The principle here is of life overcoming death. The life of God overcoming the death of sin and the fallen world. There is no phrase that more succinctly sums this up than that used by Paul when describing the eventual freedom to be experienced by the children of God when they are freed from the physical body which is still subject to some aspects of the curse: -

For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.<sup>175</sup>

***Abraham's body represented mortality, the natural, the perishable, all that Adam became when he fell.*** God by a divine miracle brought life in the place of death.

### 9.2.3 Sarah's Womb (v.17)

Paul's next statement in verse 17 demonstrates another principle of resurrection life, which is something from nothing, the power of God's creative word: -

... calls into existence the things that do not exist.<sup>176</sup>

Sarah's womb was barren. There were no viable eggs in her womb for Abraham to fertilise. ***God therefore chose to speak into Sarah's womb and call forth a nation.*** In so doing he called forth the very Seed, to whom Paul refers in his letter to the Galatians,

<sup>173</sup> Hebrews 11<sup>12</sup>

<sup>174</sup> Hebrews 11<sup>17-19</sup>

<sup>175</sup> 2 Corinthians 5<sup>4</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Romans 4<sup>17b</sup>



The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.<sup>177</sup>

Sarah's womb represented a place where only God's creative power could create life. This creative power is key to faith, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us: -

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen ... By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

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<sup>177</sup> Galatians 3<sup>16</sup> [New International Version]

## 9.3 Abraham's Walk (4<sup>18-22</sup>)

So these central principles of faith Abraham had to walk out as God's man of faith, in whom God had vested his promise. Paul shows us exactly how Abraham not only took hold of these things but walked them out.

### 9.3.1 The Peter Principle (v.18)

The first thing that Paul says about Abraham in walking out the promise of God in his life was that: -

... he believed against hope, that **HE** should become ...

Abraham had to believe not only that God could do what he promised, but that he could do it through Abraham's own body, which was as good as dead. This could be called the Peter Principle because it is so clearly shown for us in the gospel accounts of Peter stepping out of the boat and walking on water to Jesus:

- Peter responded to Jesus' voice, i.e. what he heard not what he saw. He was not walking by sight but by hearing the WORD of God.
- Peter stepped out of the boat because he believed that he could do what Jesus said he could do.
- When Peter reverted from hearing to seeing, looking down at the waves, he sank.
- When he sank, Peter cried out to Jesus to save him, which demonstrates to us that he had not lost faith in Jesus to keep him afloat but instead he ***had lost faith in what Jesus said HE could do.***

Like Peter, Abraham believed that God would bring his purposes to pass through him, despite what his body told him. This is a necessary part of the walk of faith to which we are all called in Christ Jesus – to believe that God can do great things through us. For we have the same Holy Spirit living in us, who enabled Jesus to do every miracle he did.

### 9.3.2 Not in Denial (v.19)

Next Paul tells us that Abraham ...

... did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body.<sup>178</sup>

It is important for us to remember that Abraham was not a naïve optimist who had no trouble accepting what God had promised, as if he just thought things would work out in the end! He was not in denial about his situation. On the contrary Abraham faced his circumstances head on – he considered his own body. This word means: -

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<sup>178</sup> Romans 4<sup>19b</sup>

- **Katanoeo** - *to perceive, remark, observe, understand;*  
*to consider attentively, fix one's eyes or mind upon.*

Despite his complete understanding of reality he resolved within himself that he would believe God's word over this present reality. This again is part of the walk of faith that we too shall face, because every Christian, by God's own Providence no doubt, faces circumstances that stand up against the WORD of God and its promises. Like Jesus in the desert we have to stand on the WORD of God and make it our confession concerning its promises: -

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.<sup>179</sup>

Satan can easily fool us into thinking we are being unrealistic about any given situation. He is able to make a reasonable case for anything he wants to, as he did in the garden of Eden to Eve! We are not in denial however, but resolved to hold on to the promises.

### 9.3.3 A Fixed Gaze (vv. 20–21)

Finally Paul says of Abraham ...

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God ...<sup>180</sup>

Paul words this very carefully, because we could easily think that Abraham's focus was fixed on the promise of God itself, whereas Paul refers to **distrust**. Trust usually refers to a person not a thing or an object. The promise is only as good as the One who made the promise! Abraham's gaze was firmly fixed upon God himself, for Paul states in the very next verse, that he was: -

fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.<sup>181</sup>

There are two key elements in this: -

- God is able.
- God is willing.

To walk in faith like Abraham we have to believe not only that God is able to do it, i.e. it is within his power, but also that he will actually do it, that he wants to do it. This is very hard when we have believed and prayed for things and not seen results. We have a choice when this happens to us, we can either choose to adjust our theology to match our experience or we can hold fast to the promise and expect fulfilment according to the WORD of God. In the great chapter in

<sup>179</sup> 2 Corinthians 1<sup>20</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Romans 4<sup>20</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Romans 4<sup>21</sup>

Hebrews on our forefathers in faith we find the following statement concerning them: -

And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ...<sup>182</sup>

Although they did not receive because Christ had not yet come, the principle stands that whatever they faced, they held fast with a fixed gaze to the end, like Stephen whose body knew the blows of stones but whose eyes saw only the glory of his risen Lord in the heavens.

### 9.3.4 Finishing the Course (v. 22)

Paul finishes this description of Abraham's walk of faith by telling us that this is why his faith was counted as righteousness, because he remained in faith. Abraham's faith was not a one off act which guaranteed him blessing all his life; it was an ongoing state of being. The same is true for us, faith should be as much a constant in our lives as breathing. In fact breathing is a good picture of faith for the spirit of man. Having faith is the equivalent of breathing for the spirit – it is that vital for us.

Jesus told his disciples often that it was those who kept on believing until the end who would be saved. Faith is ongoing and will produce fruit, or evidence of itself in the heart.

Paul has shown us how Abraham held on to the promise and never stopped believing and pressing into all that God promised him. That same walk of faith is evidenced by the writer of this letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul, who up until his execution was pressing into all that God had called him to do. He finished his race well and we too should press on for as long as Christ chooses for us to remain on this earth in his service: -

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.<sup>183</sup>

And a few years later, near the very end of his life, Paul was able to say: -

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.<sup>184</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Hebrews 11<sup>39</sup>

<sup>183</sup> Philippians 3<sup>13-14</sup>

<sup>184</sup> 2 Timothy 4<sup>6-8</sup>



## Conclusion

So in these first four chapters Paul has laid the foundation stones for the Gospel of God. In the next part of his letter he starts to deal with the life of the man and woman who now stands justified because of Jesus' death and resurrection, with the word "Therefore ..." (in light of all I have said in chapters 1 to 4).

And all the things that follow from Paul are for us to consider together another day ...



## **| 10.0 Closing Thoughts**

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It will be helpful for us to finish this module by drawing together the things we have seen in the WORD of God. These closing thoughts are not exhaustive and it is hoped that the student has laid hold of much more, on a personal level.

### **The Apostle's Heart**

As with all Paul's correspondence, even to those whom he had not yet visited, his heart clearly comes through. He told the Philippians that he loved with the very heart of Christ himself, not by his own efforts and limitations but by the grace of the risen Christ. Paul shows the same love of Christ toward the saints in Rome.

Overwhelmingly we see Paul is *harvest-orientated*. The divine mandate for man is for multiplication, harvest, growth of the glory of God in this earth. Wherever Paul went he was sowing and looking for harvest. He never looked to his own needs first because he knew that God gives bread to the sower and seed for sowing to produce a harvest in the lives of others.

Above all, Paul was a Servant of God.

### **The Gospel of God**

This was the central message of Paul's ministry, the Gospel of God. For in it, is everything. The statement he makes here in the first chapter of Romans about this great work of God is simply one of the most powerful statements ever made in human history, in significance, far above even the most profound work of the greatest minds before or since.

Paul's statement is like an opening shot, a "big bang" if you like (to borrow a phrase!), from which the rest of what he has to say unfolds and unpacks before our eyes in the inimically ordered and systematic style of the Apostle Paul.

### **The Folly of Man**

Without any compromise or deference to the world, Paul shows us the sheer folly of human thought over the course of the centuries. Although men have never totally agreed on anything since Babel, they all share the same carnality of thinking, making the same foolish exchange of everything that God has given them for the things that "look" more pleasing to the eye. We see the echo of the fall in Eden, again and again and again.

As the redeemed of the Lord, Paul shows us how we have been lifted out of the natural, so that we can see everything from the divine perspective as we sit alongside Christ in the Heavens. We are not intimidated, surprised, fooled, or impressed with the folly of natural man, for we see right through it all.

## The Law of God

This is one area where it is hoped we have been able to look afresh at what the purpose of the law was. It has been the mistake of many great men and women of God throughout the centuries of church history, to demonise the law because they have polarised the WORD of God into Old and New Covenant. They often failed to see the continuum of the Eternal Covenant purpose of God flowing through human history like a wave carrying countless generations of saints on its crest, both before and after the Cross of Christ – an eternal, not temporal event.

So we have seen instead how the law achieved its purpose to bring us to Christ and how it still speaks today to the folly of religion, that outward-focused, legalistic, mechanical rule-applying way of seeking God's approval. The look back at Israel's failure to embrace the law in her heart was not just a history lesson so that we could sit in judgement but a warning for the church to reject religion in all its forms and never confuse it with faith.

## The Cross of Christ and Character of God

There is no greater exposition of what happened when Jesus was crucified for the sins of mankind than in this part of Paul's letter. Paul shows us the reality of the situation, and the implications are simply astounding! It helps us to realise that we have only glimpsed the reality of that terrible day and everything that Jesus faced. The natural is only an indicator to the spiritual reality.

We have also seen that even here in the central doctrine of Christianity, the sentimental carnality of man creeps into the thoughts of many. Paul forces us to face the reality of the wrath of God in the Cross of Christ, because our perception of the very character of God is at stake. Paul's prayer before the Philippians was to know Christ in his death and thereby attain to Christ's resurrection himself. It is essential then for us to **know** him truly in this great act. We cannot shy away from an idea of God which seems distasteful to us, because we have applied mankind's fallen standards and ideas to Him. Any concept of God which is carnally conceived is, after all, idolatry itself.

Paul also shows us how God was able to pass over the sins of man until the time came for the public judgement on sin. All that was human was judged, killed and buried that day – to be raised in divine life for eternity.



Lastly, we saw how Paul chose to devote a large portion of this letter to Abraham, because he responded to the promise of God with faith. Well before circumcision was required, and before the law was given, Abraham took God at his word. Paul has shown us the primacy of this over these other things that followed, because they were meant to serve merely as an outward indicator of the faith already in Abraham's heart.

In Abraham we see a man who believed the WORD of God over anything in the natural, no matter how convincing it was. Through Abraham's walk of faith we see that it is not about abstract perfection, but simply trusting God ... that He *was able to do what he had promised*. Abraham believed in the creative power of God's words, *calling into existence the things that do not exist*.

And yet Abraham was simply pointing forward to the same faith we see in Jesus himself when he faced the Cross. Absolutely everything around Him told Him that night, in the garden of Gethsemane, told Jesus that His father would abandon Him. Yet despite what every other voice told Him, Jesus chose to believe and trust His Father's promise ... .. ***for the righteous shall live by his faith!***