





# ROMANS

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THE GOSPEL OF GOD

*Chapters 1:1–5:11*

TITUS CHU

Romans: The Gospel of God  
by Titus Chu

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## Foreword

The chapters of these volumes are drawn from messages spoken by the author in 2001 and 2002 in Toronto, Canada. The messages were originally spoken in Chinese to participants in a year-long spiritual training and time of study that involved churches from around the Great Lakes. These volumes were first published in Chinese in March 2010 before being translated and edited to the version currently before the reader.

Titus Chu has always labored for the subjective experience of Christ in the believers. Accordingly, this work is not meant to be a textbook. We encourage reading it not merely to acquire academic knowledge but to experience the gospel of God personally and subjectively. Our hope is that readers would gain not only a better understanding but also a fuller and richer experience of every verse of Romans.

Each chapter begins with a “Word Study” section to help readers understand the basic meaning behind the apostle Paul’s words and to help clarify matters addressed in the chapter. The sources referenced in these studies are basic Bible and Greek study tools, chosen because of their availability to and acceptance by Christians from a variety of backgrounds. These studies are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, and it is our hope that readers will be inspired unto further study outside of these pages. The “Revelation

and Application” section of each chapter contains the material drawn from the author’s spoken messages.

Paul’s epistle to the Romans is truly an incredible work. It shows us the story of the gospel of God from man’s need for salvation (chapters 1–2), to a description of God’s complete salvation in both its judicial and organic aspects (chapters 3–8), to an appreciation for God’s sovereign choosing (chapters 9–11), and eventually to the results of so great a salvation, namely, that God’s people would function as members of the body of Christ (chapters 12–16).

May the Lord bless the readers of these volumes by bringing them into a fuller realization and experience of the richness of the gospel of God.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:16–17)*

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# Introduction

Before we enter into the apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans, we must have a general understanding of the whole letter. Its content consists of seven key items:

1. It was written according to God's will, which is the gospel of God.
2. It is centered upon the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.
3. It is structured mainly around salvation, life, and building.
4. It reveals to us God's will, His economy, and His marvelous work in us.
5. It unveils our triune God's complete work of salvation, a spiritual reality that is the base of all of Paul's epistles.
6. It teaches us what the healthy growth of life in a Christian looks like.
7. It testifies of the universal body of Christ, which is manifested in local churches.

## Written according to God's Will

The first key item regarding the content of Romans is that it was written according to God's will. It is very likely that Romans was not the first epistle Paul wrote. However, under

God's sovereignty, it is the first epistle in the divinely arranged order of the New Testament. All of Paul's epistles were written according to God's will and exhibit how constituted and clear Paul was concerning this will. Each epistle reveals and testifies of God's will, purpose, plan, and economy. In God's wisdom, the first epistle we come to in the New Testament is the epistle to the Romans.

### God's Will: The Gospel of God

God's will is the gospel of God. This gospel, in all its breadth and depth, is the main theme of Romans. Paul's description of the gospel in Romans includes Christ, the saints, the body of Christ, and the manifestation of this body in local churches.

The gospel of God first addresses the need of humanity. We are told at the very beginning of Romans that people need the gospel of God (Rom. 1:1–2). However, people only need the gospel because God also has a need. Man's need is based on God's need. In God's eyes, if He had no need, people would likewise have no need. But since God needs to accomplish His eternal purpose, people need the gospel of God.

At the beginning of the Bible, man was created according to God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–28). The unique creation of man was for the purpose of manifesting God and ruling on earth for Him. However, man fell, failed, and departed from the original purpose of God's creation. This is where the gospel begins—our need. The gospel shows us that we—people who are fallen, failed, weak, sinful, enslaved, fleshly, natural, and lustful—need the gospel of God and the salvation it provides.

### The Gospel of God: Christ Himself

How can we describe the gospel? Many Christians would



describe it as the means by which people are saved. However, the gospel is not merely the means of salvation; in reality, the gospel is the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul begins Romans by saying, “The gospel of God...concerning His Son” (Rom. 1:1, 3). The gospel is concerning the Son of God, who is Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore, the content, experience, enjoyment, and constitution of the gospel are all Christ Himself. The gospel is for us to gain Christ and for Christ to be manifested from us.

All church meetings are gospel meetings, because every church meeting concerns Jesus Christ our Lord. Bible studies, prayer meetings, and even Sunday morning meetings are all gospel meetings. In the church today, we can live a life of the gospel with the brothers and sisters around us, and together we can pursue the reality of the gospel—Christ Himself. For our whole life, we can live in, grow in, testify of, and manifest the gospel of God!

### Centered on Jesus Christ Himself

The second key item regarding the content of Romans is that it is centered on the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul opens the letter by saying, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...concerning His Son” (Rom. 1:1, 3). In these verses, Paul seems to be saying, “This letter is not centered on me, but on Christ, the gospel!” Paul labored as a bond-servant and apostle, and he had received the gospel from the Lord as his commitment.

In verses 2–3, Paul says, “Which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son.” Both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures are concerned with one thing: the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The gospel of God, centered on Jesus Christ, was promised by God in the Old Testament and is unveiled to us in the New

Testament. Christ is the center, the content, and the sole focus of everything in Romans.

### Christ: The Center of All Paul's Writings

Paul's fourteen epistles, from Romans through Hebrews, are centered on Jesus Christ. The purpose and burden behind all of his epistles is to reveal Christ to us, to supply Christ to us, and to help us experience and enjoy Christ. For example, Galatians is about what Christ has accomplished. Ephesians is about the church as the body of Christ. Philippians is about pursuing Christ. Colossians is about the headship of Christ. First and Second Thessalonians are about the return of Christ. The last of Paul's epistles, Hebrews, is about the excellence of Christ. Reading Romans through Hebrews reveals such a wonderful Christ! It seems Paul saw nothing but this wonderful Christ, and in seeing Him, he valued nothing higher.

It is not easy to understand the knowledge and assurance Paul had when he talked about Christ. Although Paul is never mentioned by name in Hebrews, many scholars agree that he was its writer. In Hebrews, the author's name is nowhere to be found, and from its beginning to end, only the living Christ is seen. In Paul's other epistles, we can clearly see glimpses of him as a servant of the Lord. Yet in Hebrews, Paul is so absent and Christ is so magnified that some wonder if Paul really was its author. Paul was wonderful—he wrote an epistle magnifying Christ to such an extent that no trace of himself can be found.

Paul's fourteen epistles are not chronologically arranged in the New Testament. Surely, our God had a purpose for this. In the order we have, Paul's epistles begin with Romans and end with Hebrews. This order reveals certain arrangements and ideas, and shows us a pathway of Paul's growth from Romans to Hebrews, culminating in his disappearance from the book of Hebrews. This characteristic of Hebrews indicates a

maturity in life and reveals how much Christ had grown and been magnified in Paul. Yet this process had a solid base—the book of Romans.

### Man's Weakness: Inability to Be Centered on Christ

The fact that the gospel of God is centered on Jesus Christ is so good, because people always want everything other than Christ Himself. For example, many brothers love the Lord. However, what they ultimately want is to know the truth, to be powerful, to be able to speak well, to supply life, and to build the church. Many sisters also love the Lord, however, they ultimately desire meekness, kindness, diligence, and fruitfulness. The Bible shows us that the Corinthians wanted tongue speaking and other gifts, the Galatians wanted the Law and traditions, and the Colossians wanted philosophy and the elements of the world. It seems that people, even those who love the Lord, desire everything other than Christ.

The longer we love and follow the Lord, the harder it becomes for us to solely desire Him. New believers are very simple: they only love the Lord, want Him, and desire to follow Him. At the time they believe, they truly gain Christ, live Him out, and enjoy Him. Christ is everything to them, and their prayers are often filled with simple expressions like, “Lord Jesus, I love You! Lord Jesus, I want to gain You, enjoy You, and come close to You! Lord Jesus, I want a healthy relationship with You, and You are all I want in my life! Beside You, I want nothing!”

Once believers begin to love the Lord and to grow spiritually, they begin to receive different kinds of equipping and teaching, such as how to study the Bible, how to serve the church, and how to speak for the Lord. At this time in the process of spiritual growth, many people begin to lose the initial love they had for the Lord and desire things other than Christ.

A brother may pray a good prayer with spiritual expectation: “Lord Jesus, I am willing to serve You. I want to save souls, supply life, and speak in the church meetings. I hope to be equipped, to be useful, to be manifested, to raise up churches, and to have the ability to preach the gospel!” A sister may pray a good prayer filled with spiritual hope: “Lord Jesus, I want to be able to care for people. I want to be able to visit the saints, to help others, and to manifest a steadfast love in the church!” All of the things in these prayers are good, but the brother and sister may be seeking these things rather than Christ Himself. Even in such positive prayers, we may not have Christ.

### Doing Spiritual Things without Christ

If we read the Bible without Christ, we are not reading in the light. If we speak without Christ, we are not speaking forth revelation. If we visit people without Christ, we are not supplying them with life. If we care for the saints without Christ, we are not caring for them properly. Without Christ, everything becomes false, vain, and valueless. We can learn how to read the Bible, how to speak, how to preach the gospel, and even how to manage the church life, but if in these things we do not have Christ, want Christ, and love Christ, we are to be accursed (1 Cor. 16:22).

In the beginning of a believer’s life, everything is Christ-centered, but over time, everything can become self-centered. As the days go by, we can depart from Christ more and more, and many other things can grow up within us. On the one hand, once we are believers, we are always in Christ and growing in Him. On the other hand, as we grow, we are easily distracted by many things other than Christ, even things that belong to Him and are related to our spiritual lives. Yet shamefully, we do not want Christ Himself.

Whenever we depart from Christ to do spiritual things, we are in the principle of idol worship. If we are not careful, even

the spiritual things of Christ can become our idols. To speak for the Lord, to raise up a church, and to serve a church are all spiritual things from the Lord. Yet unconsciously, these things can become what we want, exalt, and even worship, rather than Christ Himself. If these things replace Christ and there is no room for Him to work in us, we have fallen into the principle of idol worship.

### Choosing Only Christ

Christ Himself must be our lifelong choice. God desires nothing outside of Christ. He wants only Christ, to give us only Christ, and for us to enjoy, experience, and gain only Christ over the course of our whole life. He desires our existence to be for Christ alone and wants us to pursue and live out only Christ Himself. Other than Christ, nothing should occupy or possess us. Christ alone must be our vision, desire, and center, so that we would be completely gained by Him.

### Structured around Salvation, Life, and Building

The third key item regarding the content of Romans is that it is structured around salvation, life, and building. As basic as these seem, over our Christian life we can never get away from any of them. We should pay careful attention to these three things, because all of God's work is based upon them.

### Salvation: Judicial and Organic

God's complete salvation has two aspects: a judicial aspect called redemption and an organic aspect called salvation. On the cross, Christ accomplished redemption. Now, based on this redemption, God is working out our salvation.

Redemption is objective to us; it is a fact already accomplished by Christ. However, salvation must be subjective; it is our lifelong experience.

Together, judicial redemption and organic salvation comprise God's complete salvation. Romans reveals that in eternity past God chose and predestined us, and in the course of time He called, redeemed, and justified us, so that we might be reconciled to God and receive the end of our salvation—our glorification (see Rom. 8:29–30).

### The Divine Life

Romans also focuses on the divine life. The reason God's life is so crucial is because His salvation is related both to the divine life itself and to the growth of this life in us. First, Christ comes as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). Second, Christ is life in our spirit (v. 10). Third, He wants to grow from our spirit to our mind to become the life in our mind (v. 6). Finally, He even wants our mortal bodies to be revived by the dispensing of His life (v. 11).

### The Building of the Body of Christ

Salvation is for life, and life is for the building of the body of Christ, which is expressed through local churches. The reality of the building of the body of Christ is experienced in local churches (see Rom. 12–16).

The first eight chapters of Romans are focused on personal salvation, but the last five chapters talk about this personal salvation leading to our functioning as members of the body of Christ. This is very sweet. We used to be dead in sin, fallen, and hostile to God. Yet, through the experience of God's complete salvation, we have become the many members of the body of Christ! Now, as these members, we build up the

body of Christ in different local churches through the functions revealed by our personal salvation.

## God's Work in Us

The fourth key item regarding the content of Romans is that it reveals to us God's will, His economy, and His marvelous work in us. Though God works in people in many ways, all these ways are according to His will and economy. What is this will and economy? Romans shows us three aspects:

1. God wants to make us His many sons.
2. God wants to make us the body of Christ.
3. God wants the body of Christ to be manifested through many local churches.

All of God's work in us is unto these three aspects. In our previous state of condemnation, we needed both the judicial redemption of Christ and His organic salvation. God not only justified us through our obtaining of judicial redemption but is also presently sanctifying us in our experience of organic salvation. Christ not only died for us so that we might die together with Him, but He also lives for us so that we might live together with Him (Rom. 6:1–11).

In addition, God arranges all the environments around us to conform us to the image of His Son, so that we might be led into glory (8:28–30). Romans 9–11 should give us an appreciation and assurance regarding God's sovereignty. Finally, Romans 12–16 describes a healthy local church life in which we can experience the renewing of our minds, transformation, and healthy spiritual growth.

Romans presents a picture in which all of God's work is for us. Everything He is and has helps us, establishes us, causes us to grow and mature, and constitutes us to become His useful servants. That God was even willing to dispense

Himself into us—those who were finite, fallen, sinful, and enslaved—is truly marvelous. Though we were only sinners, He has given us His redemption and is incorporating us into Himself. In the picture portrayed in Romans, God continually works in us until He has fully shaped us according to His eternal will.

### God's Unveiled Complete Salvation

The fifth key item regarding the content of Romans is that it unveils our triune God's complete work of salvation, a spiritual reality that is the base of all of Paul's epistles. Paul shows us in Romans that God's work in people is His complete salvation. Salvation is related to the divine life. Paul knew the divine life, lived in this divine life, and allowed it to organically grow and become constituted in him. This changed Paul's nature, constitution, thinking, and living. At the same time, this life brought him through experiences of being sanctified, renewed, transformed, and glorified. In this epistle, Paul's revelation of the triune God does not emphasize the objective aspect of salvation but the subjective and practical aspect of it. He reveals to us how we can experience the triune God for our complete salvation.

Paul begins Romans with man's rebellion (Rom. 1:18). We were rebellious, yet God desires to conform us to the image of His Son and eventually lead us into glory. For this reason, Paul describes both what people need and what they should experience, enjoy, and focus on. Although Paul had already written other epistles, the revelation of God's complete salvation in Romans caused it to be placed before the rest of the New Testament epistles as a foundation for them. The richer our experience of this foundation, the more assurance we will have regarding the pathway of following the Lord.

It has been said before that if the New Testament is like a ring, then Romans is like the diamond atop the ring. It



is a precious book, and even more so in relation to Paul's other epistles. If we have never read, experienced, or obtained the spiritual reality in Romans, then the doors into all the rest of Paul's epistles will be closed to us. Understanding Romans leads us into the other epistles. Experiencing the judicial redemption and organic salvation in Romans opens up the divine and heavenly riches in Ephesians and Colossians. Without the experiences in Romans, reading Ephesians repeatedly will not transform us into a healthy and glorious church. Without the experiences in Romans, it is hard for us to understand and experience what Paul said to the Philippians: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12).

All the riches of Paul's epistles are based on, unlocked by, and obtained through the experiences of Romans. When people experience God's complete salvation and allow God to work upon them, they will be able to easily understand and enter into the truth of Ephesians. They will easily have the same mind and heart as Paul when they read Philippians and will eagerly await the Lord's coming when they read 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Romans has a high value for us today because, as the revelation of God's complete salvation, it is the foundation for the rest of Paul's epistles.

## The Growth of Life

The sixth key item regarding the content of Romans is that it teaches us what the healthy growth of life in a Christian looks like. This healthy spiritual growth begins with the meeting of our outward need. Almost immediately in Romans, Paul declares God's condemnation of humanity. The ungodly are condemned, the self-righteous are condemned, those who judge others are condemned, the outwardly impressive Jews are condemned, and finally, all the people of the world are condemned (Rom. 1:18–3:20). We too were once

under condemnation, but God prepared redemption for us, that by the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, we could obtain judicial redemption through faith (3:21–26).

Judicial redemption, however, is not the end of our Christian life. When we obtain God’s judicial redemption through faith, the life of God is also put into us. Thus, we become the children of God. Our lives as Christians are not only concerned with redemption but also with the inward growth of God’s life through salvation. The life of God needs to continually grow in us until we are completely sanctified and transformed inwardly, and we are glorified with Christ.

Though we may look fallen, our gradual growth leads to our transformation. This transformation causes us to grow until we manifest something of glory. Our need was firstly outward—we were under God’s condemnation and needed the judicial redemption of Christ. When this need was met, our spiritual growth began to address our inward need of sanctification and transformation. This need is met by our experience of organic salvation. Finally, this inward growth is accompanied by an outward manifestation of glory. Our spiritual growth moves from an outward need to an inward need, which, in being met, corresponds to an outward manifestation.

Romans 8:19 says, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.” This shows that the divine life within us must grow into an outward testimony. When our growth finally reaches the stage of glorification, all of creation will be set free to enjoy the freedom of the glory of the children of God (v. 21).

### Saved by His Life

The first major section of Romans (1:18–5:11) covers our condemnation and justification. The second section (5:12–8:39) covers our organic salvation. Romans 5 emphasizes our inheritance in Adam, Romans 6 emphasizes our obtainment

in Christ, Romans 7 emphasizes the controlling power of the flesh, and Romans 8 emphasizes our deliverance in the Holy Spirit. These chapters focus mainly on organic salvation and emphasize one thing: we who have been regenerated need to grow in God's life until we are inwardly sanctified and outwardly glorified with Christ. This growth is through the process of organic salvation, which is completely a matter of life.

Romans 5:10 says, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Our reconciliation to God through the death of His Son is our judicial redemption. The verse continues, however, by saying, "much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." This verse not only mentions judicial redemption but also lifelong salvation "by His life." It is not enough to gain judicial redemption. Based on this redemption, we must also experience salvation by the life of God.

This salvation by life has three important aspects discussed in Romans: sanctification (5:12–8:13), glorification (8:14–39), and transformation (12:1–15:13). The introduction to these three aspects is the phrase in 5:10: "saved by His life." Experiencing salvation by God's life brings in sanctification, transformation, and glorification. It is through being saved by His life that we experience organic salvation, and the more we are saved by His life, the richer our experience of organic salvation will be.

What does it mean to be saved by His life? It means to experience the ruling of God's divine life within us. The life of God can operate in us as our king, leading and directing us in many situations. God's life is able to lead us in every environment to richer spiritual experiences, to further operations of His life, and to the overcoming of any hardships and obstacles.

These experiences are good indicators of whether we are currently living in organic salvation or not. Organic salvation

is hard to apply and see, but we can know if we are experiencing it by how much God's life is ruling within us daily. Has God's life restrained our diet? Has God's life affected our response when a car cuts us off in traffic? Has God's life affected our attitude when someone offends us? These may all seem like trivial things, but salvation by the life of God touches all of them. Those who are experiencing such things can be sure they are living in God's organic salvation. Their reactions to things will come from God, and their living will manifest a son of God.

To be saved by the life of God is the reality of organic salvation. Sanctification, transformation, and glorification cannot be separated from salvation by His life. We can be sure that we are growing and advancing in these three as we experience salvation by His life. In matters of sin, the fallen world, and our relationships with one another, we need to be saved. God has answered this need by making every person, thing, and environment an opportunity for us to experience the reigning of His life. By these experiences, organic salvation is realized in us.

### The Growth of Life in the Church Life

By the renewing of our mind, we are brought through different stages of transformation, and our outward living begins to be more aligned to God's will. What this looks like is the church life (Rom. 12–16). It is actually in a church life that we experience organic salvation.

In Romans, Paul shows us that people need to know God's economy and experience both redemption and salvation. Redemption is for their justification, and salvation is for their growth. They also need to realize God's sovereignty as they grow (Rom. 9–11). Finally, they need to live in the local church where God has placed them (Rom. 12–16).

There are two major sections in Romans dealing with organic salvation. The first (Rom. 5–8) emphasizes our inner life, while the second (Rom. 12–16) emphasizes our outward living. Romans 5–8 shows how God’s life dwells within us. By His life we exit our inheritance in Adam and enter our inheritance in Christ. This includes our exit from the bondage of the flesh (7:14) and our entrance into the freedom of the Holy Spirit (8:2). Romans 12–16 shows us that the experience of the growth of life includes being renewed and transformed, and that these lead to us living a real church life.

A church life is real and sweet, but not perfect. In fact, a sweet church life is an imperfect church life! Someone may say, “Praise the Lord! Our church life is so wonderful, and the cooperation among the saints is so good and sweet!” Though this statement may be true, such experiences will not last very long. Our experience of a truly sweet church life is when the church is not perfect.

## Transformation

Romans 12:2 indicates that if we want to experience spiritual growth, we need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The renewing of our mind means that many things change in our mind. Our viewpoints, considerations, and evaluations may all change. We may have thought one way about something, but when our mind is renewed, we will think differently about it. These changes indicate that our mind has been renewed, and once our mind is renewed, we will be transformed in our living.

At any specific moment, different people may be in different stages of transformation. Two brothers may say, “I am for Christ and the church!” However, though their words are the same, they may mean two very different things. One of the brothers may mean that he has an old couch for the church to use. The other may mean that he is willing to live and die

for the church and the saints; his words reveal that his existence, living, labor, possessions, and faithfulness are all for the saints. The difference between these two brothers is not a matter of right or wrong. It is simply two brothers in different stages of transformation.

Paul talks about these different stages of transformation in Romans 12–16. Our transformation is progressive, from one level to the next and from a lower stage to a higher one. We begin our Christian life as self-centered individuals, but through transformation, we gain a healthy relationship with the saints around us. Eventually, transformation completely unites us with the saints to become the corporate testimony of Christ.

Romans 12 describes the most basic level of transformation—every saint has a spiritual portion, a function, and can fulfill that function. The highest level of transformation is seen in chapter 16, where Paul greets many brothers and sisters by name. His greetings indicate that he had been renewed and transformed and could testify, “Every saint is in my heart. Every saint is a blessing to me, and I am a blessing to every saint.”

When Paul mentions the brothers and sisters in chapter 16, his sweetness, satisfaction, love, intimacy, hope, concern, and expectation are all revealed to us. We cannot help but worship the Lord, saying, “Lord, thank You. Here was a man who was not only renewed but was also transformed and fully connected with the saints in life.” Paul’s healthy connection with the saints shows the highest level of the experience of transformation and is the mature conclusion to the whole book of Romans.

### The Testimony of the Body of Christ

The seventh and final key item regarding the content of Romans is that it testifies of the universal body of Christ,

which is manifested in local churches. When we read Romans, we should not only pay attention to God's economy, Christ, and God's work, but also to the body of Christ, which is the church. In Romans 12:5, Paul says, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." In 16:16, Paul says, "All the churches of Christ greet you." Chapter 12 begins with the body of Christ, and chapter 16 ends with many local churches. When God's work begins in us, His goal is to fashion us into the image of Christ so that the body of Christ could be revealed through us corporately in many local churches.

God desires that we would be a testimony of Christ in the church life. If Christ is not in us, there will be no outward living and testimony of Christ from us. If Christ does not operate or work in us, it will be impossible for us to live out God's eternal will. It is through Christ Jesus, who dwells in us, that we can prove the will of God and testify of God Himself in local churches.

In God's view, there is only one church in each locality. This is the local church. We should have a comprehensive and accurate understanding of local churches. Every believer in a city is part of the local church in that city. In other words, a local church includes all the believers in that locality. A person who understands the church will not see denominational lines and will be able to accommodate all believers. Such people are extremely broad; they are broad in their hearts, fields of labor, attitudes regarding spiritual exercises, and fellowship. They realize that the local church exists for the body of Christ—which all regenerated believers are part of—and for the testimony of His body.

The Bible is filled with examples of local churches. Acts 8:1 says, "And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem." Paul wrote to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), and the apostle John was told to "write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and

to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev. 1:11). God’s wisdom is shown in His placing us in local churches to live a church life together. All regenerated believers belong to the body of Christ and to the local church in their locality.

The local church is also a wonderful restriction God has given to us. Understanding the principle of local churches prevents us from both big unions and small divisions. A church cannot be so big that she would think that there is only one church on the earth. Nor can a church be smaller than her locality. In other words, any factor that would divide the church smaller than its locality, such as race, practices, or offenses, should not be accepted. The principle of a local church helps us see that all the Christians in one locality must stand on the ground of oneness with one God, one Lord, one Spirit, and one body, while holding fast to one faith, living in brotherly love, manifesting the Lord in whom we have believed, and testifying of Christ to the world.

Romans is such a wonderful book! It was written according to God’s will, which is the gospel of God. It is centered on Christ. It is structured around salvation, life, and building. It reveals God’s work in us according to His will and economy. It unveils His complete work of salvation. It teaches us what to expect as we grow in the divine life. And it testifies of the universal body of Christ, which is manifested in local churches. Praise the Lord for such a foundational book in the New Testament!



SECTION ONE

# THE GOSPEL OF GOD



# 1

## An Overview of the Gospel

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup>concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake.*

—Romans 1:1–5

### WORD STUDY

Paul introduces himself as a called apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. The Greek word for gospel, *euangelion*, means “a good message” (Strong, #2098). It is composed of two other Greek words—*eu*, meaning “good” (Strong, #2095), and *angellos*, meaning “a messenger” (Strong, #32). The Greeks used this word to describe many different situations, including the proclamation of victory over enemies, the birth of a son, the news of an approaching wedding, the enthronement of a king, or the beginning of a new age (Kittel, 2:707–710).

The gospel is described here as being “of God” (v. 1). This

means the gospel could be characterized by God, full of God, destined toward God, or it could belong to God (Wallace, 727–728). Verse 3 further defines this gospel as “concerning His Son.” Of this, Martin Luther wrote, “The meaning of these words, in my opinion, is this: The Content, or Object of the Gospel, or as some put it, the Subject, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God....Gospel is not merely what Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John have written, but, as the verse shows, the Word concerning the Son of God, who was made man, suffered, and was glorified” (Luther, 35–37).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Focus of the Bible

In the first sentence of his letter to the Romans, Paul introduces himself as someone set apart for the gospel of God. This immediately brings us into the fact that Romans is a book about the gospel of God. The word “gospel” is frequently used throughout the book. In Romans 1:9, Paul says that he served God in his spirit in the gospel of the Son of God. He says that the gospel is the power of God (1:16) and that he ministered the gospel of God (15:16). In Romans 16:25, Paul even says, “according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.” Romans, which begins and ends with the gospel, is a book that reveals the gospel of God.

The opening phrase of Romans, “the gospel of God,” actually defines the very nature of this gospel. It is of God! In other words, the gospel belongs to God and is related to His will. It is holy and heavenly, reveals God, is full of God, and is meant to bring people to God.

The apostle Paul realized what the gospel was, and this caused the gospel to become the center of all his life and living. Because of who he was, all of Paul’s epistles talk about the gospel of God, not just Romans. Galatians, Ephesians,

Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and all the rest are all books centered around the gospel of God. If we read the Bible under such light, we will worship the Lord, for everything He reveals to us from the Bible is centered on the wonderful gospel.

### The Gospel Is the Son of God

In clarifying this gospel, Paul says that it is “concerning His Son” (v. 3). Many Christians may think the gospel merely involves bringing people to salvation by persuading them to believe into Jesus. This is not wrong, but the Bible points to the gospel being more than a process to save people. In fact, the meaning of the gospel is far higher, deeper, and richer than getting people saved. The gospel is revealed in the Bible as a living person, the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord!

Those who have the Son of God have the gospel, and those who do not have the Son of God do not have the gospel. It is very simple! When we preach the gospel, we are in fact preaching the Son of God. The purpose of our gospel preaching is to bring people to the Son of God, so that they could live for Him. This is “gospel”! Jesus Christ is the complete reality, substance, and manifestation of the gospel.

The gospel fully encompasses the Son of God. He is not only the center, focus, and reality of the gospel, but the One who controls it, allows it to grow, and who is its ultimate destination. In a very simple way, the gospel is the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ our Lord.

### The Richness of the Gospel

The word “gospel” is singular in the Greek text, which shows that it is God’s unique good news. The Bible contains many promises that God has given us, which include aspects

of peace, joy, and blessing. However, the unique good news that God promises us is nothing but the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we share this good news with others it must lead them unto Christ Himself. He is then the source and center of all the riches we find in the gospel.

In the New Testament age, all the Old Testament types of the gospel are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Christ is the ruling king and reality of the whole New Testament age. In this reality, He also becomes our riches—our healing, protection, and glorious hope. In this proclaimed age full of hope, He is our sacrifice so that we might come close to God. He is also the reality of the wonderful feasts of God's people, and through Him, we can enjoy God with great joy.

### The Gospel Is Eternal

A famous hymn says, "Floods of joy o'er my soul/ Like the sea billows roll/ Since Jesus came into my heart" (Martin, #151). In our experience, the gospel brings floods of abundant joy to us without end or shortage. The gospel not only brings us joy, but also quenches our thirst, brings us to the will of God, and supplies us with all of God's riches. This means that in our lifetime we can never fully experience the gospel or exhaust its supply. Because the gospel is no less than Christ Himself, its riches are infinite. Christ is the all-inclusive and unlimited One, and His unsearchable riches in the gospel are meant for us to experience, enjoy, and pursue lifelong without limits or boundaries.

We may sometimes feel that God is abstract or distant from us. However, as the gospel, the Son of God brings the truth, or reality, of God to us. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). God may seem far away from us, One to be worshiped from a distance. However, the Son of God, who is the reality of God, is near to us (Rom. 10:8). We can experience, enjoy, and obtain Him. Truly, the

gospel is not only good news, but also “floods of joy” for us to experience and enjoy continually day after day and step after step.

We may think we have fully gained and enjoyed the Lord, but He will say to us, “There is still more!” We may feel that our experiences of the Lord could not be richer, but He will say to us, “There is more to experience!” This is the wonderful, unfathomable gospel.

### The Source of the Gospel

Romans 1:5 tells us that the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, is not only the center of the gospel, but also the source of the operation of the gospel. Paul says that, “through [Him] we have received grace and apostleship.” Both are for “obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.” The gospel is not static, but is always operating to cause people to become obedient to the faith and to experience the judicial redemption and organic salvation within the gospel.

The gospel operates by flowing from its center, Jesus Christ, to those who are being saved. It will eventually transform sinners one by one into sons of God. This transformation results in a healthy and godly human life and in a church life that magnifies Christ. The gospel is the Son of God, but even more it is the Son of God in operation!

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, “According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil. 1:20). As we experience the unsearchable riches of the gospel, the result will be the spread of the gospel. This spreading of the gospel is related to our exaltation of Christ. Ultimately, every person’s purpose is to exalt and magnify Christ, thus spreading the gospel. We should have a high and noble feeling. A Christian’s life is a life of living

and magnifying Christ, a life of the gospel! To everyone who believes in the Lord, loves Him, and serves Him, this is truly the most glorious and valuable life.



## 2

# God's Promised Gospel

*Which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.*

—Romans 1:2

## WORD STUDY

Romans 1:2 refers to the gospel of God mentioned at the end of verse one, and reveals that this gospel was promised by God “beforehand through His prophets.” The English phrase, “promised beforehand,” is actually one word in Greek, *proepangellomai*, meaning “to promise of old” (Strong, #4279). This shows that the gospel of God was not an afterthought or new invention, but was planned, arranged, and prepared by God long ago (Alford, 2:312). This gospel was then promised through God’s prophets.

The first recorded prophecy in the Old Testament regarding the coming Savior is found in Genesis 3:15, and the last recorded prophecy in the Old Testament is found in Malachi 3:1. Over the one-thousand-year period in which the Old Testament was written, around 300 distinct prophecies regarding the coming Messiah were recorded (McDowell, 164, 193). These prophecies were God’s speaking and promising of the gospel through His prophets in the holy Scriptures.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The Bible is a wonderful book that is different from all other books in the world. It is wonderful because it is a book of God's promises, which He wants to reveal to us in His gospel. The whole Bible concerns the gospel of God. Even though we can find history, literature, biographies, prophecies, miracles, and human philosophy in its pages, these things are not its center. What does the Bible focus on? What does it want to reveal and talk about? Nothing but the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the gospel promised by God through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Contrary to many people's thought, the Old Testament is full of gospel messages that contain the promise of Christ. For example, immediately after man fell, God promised that the seed of a woman, Christ, would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). This was the promise of the gospel to Adam!

In Noah's age, God commanded Noah to prepare and build an ark. This ark eventually brought his whole household and all the living creatures on Earth safely through the floodwaters. In typology, the ark is Christ. This was the gospel promised in Noah's time (Gen 6:13–22; 1 Pet. 3:20).

In Abraham's age, God revealed the gospel in many ways. He promised that Abraham would have a seed. This "seed" was singular, referring to Christ (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16), who is the gospel. When God spoke to Abraham, saying, "I will make you a great nation" (Gen. 12:2), this "nation" was another revealing of the gospel to Abraham. When God again said, "Indeed I will greatly bless you" (22:17), the "blessing" was another reference to Christ. God told Abraham, "I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies" (22:17). These descendents of Abraham are a race that comes from Christ, the Seed. This was the gospel promised during Abraham's time.

In the age of Moses, God promised the Israelites that He would raise up a prophet like Moses. This prophet was Christ, who is the Son of God over the house of God. This was the gospel promised to the children of Israel during Moses' time (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:6).

In the books of the Prophets, there are even more promises regarding Christ. Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would conceive and bear a Son, and He would be called Immanuel, meaning, "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23). Jeremiah prophesied that the Christ is the Branch of righteousness, and that He would be our righteousness (Jer. 23:5–6). Ezekiel prophesied that Christ is the One sitting on the heavenly throne in glory, yet with the appearance of a man (Ezek. 1:26–27; Rev. 3:21). Each prophecy was a further unveiling of the promise of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God.

If we were to go into more detail, we would find that the entire Old Testament is full of Christ, the gospel promised by God (John 5:39, Luke 24:27). Now in these times, the reality of all the prophecies in the Old Testament is available for us to gain! All the records of people, objects, and events in the Old Testament are gospel messages to us, in the hope that we would gain and enjoy Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the reality of the gospel of God.



# 3

## A Bond-servant of Christ Jesus

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

—Romans 1:1

### WORD STUDY

In his introduction, the first phrase Paul uses to describe himself is “a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.” The Greek word used here for “bond-servant,” *doulos*, means “a slave” and was frequently used to denote a sense of subjection or subservience (Strong, #1401). The term emphasizes bondage and belonging to another (Rogers, 315). In this way, the word denotes two things: the idea of belonging to a master and the service as a slave (Vincent, 3:2). This shows that Paul belonged to a Master, Christ Jesus, and that he served Christ Jesus as a slave.

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

#### A Slave of Christ Jesus

In the Old Testament, the gospel of God was promised through many prophets (Rom. 1:2). In today’s New Testament

age, this gospel is spread by many bond-servants of Christ Jesus who become constituted with the gospel. These bond-servants, or slaves, include the called apostles, such as the apostle Paul. Here in Romans 1:1, Paul mentions his two identities: he was a slave of Christ Jesus and he was a called apostle.

According to his person, he was a slave. According to his labor, he was an apostle. He was a slave without freedom, status, or dignity. He was also an apostle who was called by God and sent to spread the gospel over the earth, to speak for God, to represent God, to reveal God, and to glorify God. This was who the apostle Paul was.

### Belonging to a Master

Paul was a slave of Christ Jesus. This means that he totally belonged to the Lord, and that his whole life was spent completely for the Lord. His life, his living, his service, and his future were wholly for his Master and his Master's benefit. He not only lived for objective knowledge about God, but for a Lord who was very real to Him subjectively. He not only lived for a God based on doctrine, but for a Lord he could enjoy and experience.

Paul's life was ordained by the Lord. His manner of living was determined by the Lord. All his drive and motivation were dominated by the Lord. The One he experienced, enjoyed, pursued, and labored for was the Lord. Eventually, the Lord even radiated from Paul.

No matter how hard we try to understand Paul's epistles, if we are not slaves of Christ Jesus like him, we will not be able to fully obtain their riches. We must have the same desire, living, and consecration that Paul had. Otherwise, no matter how long we study Romans, we will not be constituted with its riches. Only a slave of Christ Jesus could have written such an epistle, and only a slave of Christ Jesus can fully enter, apply, experience, and enjoy all its riches.

I once knew a young married couple who were forced to live in separate cities due to their jobs. They communicated with each other by letters. One day, their young daughter picked up these letters to read, but no matter how many times she read them she could not understand what her parents had written. This was because at such a young age she had no appreciation for the meaning of marriage, what it means to live for another person, or what it takes to build a healthy family with another person. Children never truly understand the meaning of their parents' marriage until they themselves are married. In the same way, no matter how much we read, study, or memorize Romans, its riches cannot be ours unless we also, like Paul, are slaves of Christ Jesus.





# 4

## A Bond-servant In Christ

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

—Romans 1:1

### WORD STUDY

Paul's first description of himself is as a bond-servant, or slave, of Christ Jesus. According to Greek grammar, "Christ Jesus" is in the genitive case, describing "bond-servant." It is probably best to take this genitive phrase as showing possession—as a slave he belonged to Christ Jesus (Rogers, 315). However, adjectival genitive phrases have a wide variety of implications in the Greek language. Such a phrase could indicate that Christ Jesus was the content of Paul's servanthood, that Christ Jesus was the destination or purpose of Paul's servanthood, or that Paul's servanthood was produced by or sourced in Christ Jesus (Wallace, 727–728).

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Understanding Paul's introduction here in Romans is critical to our understanding of him as a person. Paul was

a bond-servant of Christ Jesus and held Christ Jesus as his source, supply, and realm. Because Christ was a realm for Paul, he was someone who was in Christ Jesus.

## The Divine and Mystical Realm

What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus? The first aspect we must understand is what it means to be “in Christ.”

Consider Romans 16:7: “Greet Andronicus and Junias... who also were in Christ before me.” Although Paul was writing of greeting other Christians, we can see that he considered himself “in Christ.” “In Christ” indicates a realm that is spiritual, heavenly, divine, and mystical. This realm is a divine and mystical realm. Those who are in Christ are in this divine and mystical realm, an all-inclusive and boundless realm in which Christ is all and in all. Those in Christ find their existence is Christ, their breath is Christ, their enjoyment is Christ, their living is Christ, and their walking is Christ. Paul even wrote that in Christ we are complete (Col. 2:10).

## The Realm of the Spirit

The divine and mystical realm is the realm of the Spirit. Consider the following: God is Spirit (John 4:24); the last Adam, who is Christ, became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45); he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17); and, the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). The divine and mystical realm is completely a realm of the Spirit of God. When we live in this realm, we are joined with the Spirit, mingled with the Spirit, and testify of Christ to others in the Spirit.

To be in Christ is to be in the Spirit and in the divine and mystical realm. As soon as we were saved we were put into

this realm of Christ (Rom. 8:9). In the way a baby enters the realm of human beings through birth, we similarly entered the realm of the Spirit through our second birth. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5-6). This is the realm of the Spirit—the realm of our spiritual living, existence, and labor.

It is a fact that we live and exist in the divine and mystical realm today. Therefore, we must take care that all of our spiritual labor is in this realm. In this realm, the Spirit is always able to supply us, support us, and strengthen us, no matter what situation we are in. Therefore, we should actively partake of and enjoy the Spirit.

The Spirit surrounds us in this realm. He preserves us, blesses us, and guides us. The Spirit is both inside and outside of us. The Spirit supplies us, leads us, and can be our enjoyment and experience.

One hymn writer wrote:

*Thou only art true Life,  
To know Thee is to live  
The more abundant life  
That earth can never give:  
O Risen Lord!  
We live in Thee  
And Thou in us eternally!* (Martin, #89)

Dear brothers and sisters, according to the Bible we are in Christ! This realm of Christ is the divine and mystical realm, the realm of the Spirit, the realm in which we taste “the more abundant life.” Those who are committed with the gospel stand in this realm.



# 5

## A Bond-servant in Jesus

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

—Romans 1:1

### WORD STUDY

For a brief study on the phrase “bond-servant of Christ Jesus,” please refer back to chapter 4.

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

#### True Freedom

A bond-servant of Christ Jesus is not only in Christ, but also in Jesus. Jesus Christ is not two separate people, but there are two aspects of His person: a victorious divine aspect and a limited human aspect. It is beyond our imagination how the unlimited God put Himself fully into Jesus, a limited man (Col. 1:19). God, who had never been restrained by anything, one day became the man Jesus and experienced all human limitations in order to save us from our sins (John 1:14, Matt. 1:21). This aspect of our Lord is not easy to understand or experience.

What does it mean to be in Jesus? It means suffering gladly with Him in all limitations. This is not easy. No one likes to be limited and no one would choose to become a limited slave. Many Christians see that they are free in Christ (Gal. 5:1), but they do not know what this freedom truly is. The true freedom in Christ is the result of pursuing God for many years and allowing ourselves to be limited and molded by Him.

We are very quick to assert that we are free, but it is very easy for us to forget our status as a slave. People hate limitations and fight to be free of them. Many believers struggle to not only freely enjoy the Lord and follow the Spirit, but also to operate and to develop a ministry. Yet the pattern is clear: the unlimited God was willing to become a limited man. Real servants of the Lord are slaves who, in Jesus, serve the churches even in their limitations. This is a hard lesson to learn. In the end, however, only the limitations that come from our mingling and blending with Jesus lead to the true freedom spoken of by Him (John 8:36).

### The Greatest Limitation

Limitation is the greatest suffering to experience. By placing man in the limitation and restraint of time, God gave humanity a great suffering. Additionally, God not only restrained people in time but also in space. Time and space are strong limiting factors for us! On the one hand, such limitations were sovereignly measured to us by God. On the other hand, they are the result of Adam's transgression.

Because of Adam's transgression, God also gave man the greatest restriction: death, which is isolation (Gen. 2:17, 3:19). In Adam, we are dead to God and isolated from Him (1 Cor. 15:22). However, even when we were dead in transgressions, God made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:5). He raised us up with Christ, seated us with Him in the heavenly realms

(Eph. 2:6), made us heavenly citizens (Phil. 3:20), and made us His new creation.

Praise God! We have been raised up together with Christ Jesus! This is wonderful! However, Paul also testified, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31). He wrote in 2 Corinthians, “Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you” (4:10–12). This reveals the principle of what it means to be in Jesus. A person in Jesus has been raised up from the dead, yet willingly subjects themselves to limitations by repeatedly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake.

To be constantly “delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake” means our natural wisdom must die. Our talent and ability must die. Our ambitions and dreams must die. Our worldly enjoyment must die. Even spiritual things pursued by many Christians must die to us. There is only one purpose of living in Jesus: to be mingled with the death of Jesus so that life can operate and grow in the saints around us.

### A Thorn in the Flesh

God will sovereignly allow many environments, experiences, and weaknesses to limit those who are in Jesus, and He will even add thorns to their flesh as further limitations. Paul wrote, “To keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me” (2 Cor. 12:7). Some Bible scholars say that this thorn was Paul’s eye illness, which is possibly alluded to in Galatians 4:15. Some simply say that this thorn was an unknown illness that was unique to Paul. Some have also said that this thorn was a common weakness that Paul could not overcome.

Watchman Nee said that God allows everyone to have a weakness in their flesh that they cannot overcome, so that they must trust in God with no self-boasting. This thorn may have been a special limitation for Paul that prevented him from becoming arrogant or boastful and which led him to trust in God alone instead of in himself. This is an experience of being in Jesus.

Watchman Nee also said that people's weaknesses cannot limit God's power. In other words, God's power always overcomes our weaknesses. This was surely Paul's experience, as he boldly declared that God's power was made perfect in his weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Those who are joined with Jesus will eventually be given a thorn in their flesh, but their limitation and weakness will become the source for God's grace and blessing both to them and to all the saints.

### The Life of a Servant

Just as a slave does not have freedom, neither does a person who is willing to be in fellowship with the suffering of Jesus. Paul was such a person. He may have thought as he wrote this first verse, "Dear saints in Rome, I am a slave of Christ Jesus. I am a man in Christ, the divine and mystical realm, but I am also willing to suffer with Jesus. I would be restrained, limited, imprisoned, and even criticized and judged by men. I am in Christ, enjoying the supply of the Spirit, but I am also in Jesus."

Those in Jesus must realize that they will suffer being despised, rejected, and detested by the world. Paul himself testified, "We have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now" (1 Cor. 4:13). Paul announced, preached, and labored for the gospel, always doing his best for the Lord, but in the eyes of others, he was like the scum of the earth and the refuse of the world. No one honored him and no one understood him. Here was a man in Jesus.



In Christ, we are victorious and heavenly. In Jesus, we are humble and restricted. In Christ, we are spiritually rich, we obtain life, and we are called to supply others. In Jesus, we are despised, rejected, and cast off by the world. Oh, this is the experience of a true slave of Christ Jesus!

### Living under Divine Sovereignty

To live in Jesus also means to submit to God's divine sovereignty. Paul was different from most people because he was a slave of Christ Jesus. He knew the heavenly and prevailing aspect of being in Christ, where he enjoyed the riches of the Spirit, experienced the abundance of life, and applied the all-sufficient supply of God. Yet he also knew the limited and restricted aspect of being in Jesus. In such a position, he could not make his own plans or decide his own future. He could only yield his life to the Lord. In doing so, Paul allowed the Lord to sovereignly restrict him, lead him, and arrange his environments. Paul belonged to Christ Jesus, and lived a life in which he was delivered over to death.

In the church, it seems that many are in Christ, but few are in Jesus. Many say, "Lord, I love You," but they are unwilling to consecrate themselves to the Lord, to die with Him, and to live for Him. Our victorious expressions of being in Christ must not be without the experiences of being in Jesus. Both aspects are found in one person: Christ Jesus. We cannot have one aspect without the other. If we do not learn to be "in Jesus" we will never experience the reality of being "in Christ."

We should sigh within ourselves, saying, "Lord, why do we all like to be in Christ, but are so unwilling to be in Jesus?" There are so many who are willing to share and enjoy glory with Christ, but so few who are willing to suffer with Jesus! There are so many who are willing to obtain the blessing of Christ, but so few who are willing to lie down upon the altar and be delivered over to death!

If we do not die with the Lord, we cannot live with Him. If we are not willing to be in Jesus, it is very hard for us to have the reality of being in Christ. People are always planning, hoping, and considering things for their future. If we can lay down all of these things, wholly consecrate ourselves to the Lord, become slaves of the Lord alone, and live in the restrictions and limitations arranged by God, the Lord will have a way to break through in us.

### In Christ Jesus

Please remember that the two aspects of Christ Jesus go together; they are closely linked. When we are in Christ, the supply we gain from the Spirit in the divine and mystical realm upholds us for our experiences of limitation in Jesus. At the same time, being in Jesus causes us to know the reality of being in Christ in a deeper and fuller way. If we are short of experiences in Jesus, our experience in Christ will not be as deep. Yet if we only have experiences in Jesus, our following the Lord will be weary and dry.

I hope that all those who are slaves of Christ Jesus could have a prayer like this:

*Lord, I am not only a slave of Christ, I am a slave of Christ Jesus. I am willing to abide in the divine and mystical realm to enjoy all of the supply in the Spirit. Along with such a supply, Lord, I am willing to accept all of Your restrictions. By limiting and restricting me, Lord, cause me to more sincerely and deeply become Your slave, following You and serving You lifelong.*

# 6

## Called as an Apostle

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

—Romans 1:1

### WORD STUDY

In this verse, Paul describes himself first as a bond-servant, then as someone who had been called. The Greek word used here for “called,” *klētos*, literally means “invited, that is, appointed” (Strong, #2822). This calling was for Paul to be a particular kind of person: an apostle.

The Greek word used here for “apostle,” *apostolos*, literally means “one sent forth” (Vine, 30). A biblical apostle can be considered “an ambassador of the Gospel” (Strong, #652). While the term is often used in connection with a specific group of people (the Twelve Apostles), it also has a wider reference in the Bible, referring to other believers who were “sent ones” (see Acts 14:4, Rom. 16:7, and 1 Thess. 2:6).

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Paul described himself as a called apostle, a person who

was sent by God. His apostleship did not come from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father (Gal. 1:1). On the one hand, Paul was a slave of Christ Jesus. On the other hand, he was also a called apostle. Unto God he was a slave, yet his work among people testified that he was an apostle. He lived before God as a slave, and he operated among people as an apostle.

### An Apostle's Operation

It is not easy to be a slave of Christ and a called apostle. Many of God's servants today do not live as a slave before God or as an apostle before others. How regrettable this is! We must pay attention to both aspects.

I hope that all servants of God could have a prayer like this:

*Lord, I am a slave before You. You are my Lord and Master, and You have authority over my whole life. If You call me to go east, I dare not go west. If You call me to go south, I dare not go north. If You call me to be high, I dare not be low. If You call me to be low, I dare not be high. I am Your slave and am willing to be restricted, limited, and stricken by You. Mold me, Lord, according to Your will. I also desire to live before men as an apostle called by You. Though a slave before You, provide me with confidence among other people. Since You have called me, I will go. Send me into the midst of people and flow out through me so that I might supply others with You, bringing You to others and bringing them to You. Lord, allow me to be such a blessing to others!*

If we are not slaves before God, it will be difficult for us to be sent among people. If our relationship with God is not healthy, our relationships with others will not be healthy either. We must first live before God so that we might live

among others and become a blessing to many. In living before God, we must allow Him to restrict us, limit us, and discipline us. If we are willing to live in such a way before God, our whole life will become glorious!

### The Suffering of a Called Apostle

A slave of Christ Jesus and called apostle will surely suffer. In fact, very few servants of the Lord do not suffer in some way. Parents all understand what this suffering is like, especially when their children enter their teenage years. Children who loudly praised the Lord in the church meeting yesterday may tell you today, “I won’t go to the meetings anymore!” In most cases, children are simply not mature enough yet—their person is still developing. They need to go through a normal growing process. However, although this growth is a very normal process for the children, it is filled with suffering for the parents.

Parents do not just judge their children based on what is right or wrong. Rather, there is a love that parents have for their children that surpasses the matters of right or wrong. The same principle should apply in the church. Those who talk about what is right or wrong in the church have not grown up into a “parent” in the church life.

Faithful servants of the Lord are like parent, and will consider every brother and sister good, useful, valuable, and a blessing to the church. Yet at the same time, every brother and sister will become a source of suffering and travail for the servants of the Lord. When a brother does not come to the church meetings, it is sorrowful. If that brother does not grow well, it is sorrowful. If that brother grows well but not unto maturity, it is sorrowful. If that brother matures and blossoms yet bears no fruit, it is sorrowful. If that brother bears much fruit but is trod down in his service, it is sorrowful. Truly, if we desire to be proper servants of the Lord, our lifelong labor with people will be filled with sufferings!

Some may say, “I serve the Lord and serve the saints, but I never allow myself to be affected in this way, nor do I cause anyone else to suffer!” A person who says this will never adequately raise a spiritual child. If we desire to raise up healthy spiritual children, we have no choice but to suffer and be afflicted. Paul said to the Colossian believers, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (Col. 1:24).

Human parents go through this same process. If their children are crying loudly, the parents feel distressed. If their children stop crying but isolate themselves, they also feel distressed. If their children are not well-behaved, they become upset. If their children are well-behaved but lack energy and creativity, they become worried. If their children do not grow well, they are troubled. If their children grow well but are arrogant or proud, they feel even more troubled. If this is true in the human realm, how much more does it apply to spiritual matters? As soon as we beget spiritual children, we begin to live a life full of suffering.

Some may feel, “If I have to go through this, I do not want spiritual children!” This is not something said by someone who is healthy and loves the Lord. If you do not want spiritual children, you will eventually become lonely and your spiritual commitment will fall away. Parents cannot choose their children. They must accept God’s sovereignty over their human family, regardless of how well their children grow. If we do not want spiritual children, we will not be able to enjoy all the riches of Christ according to His sovereignty over the divine life.

### The Joy of a Called Apostle

Though there is surely suffering in raising children, when parents talk about it they often speak the most about the

enjoyment. Raising children is full of hardship, but it is also full of joy. In serving the saints and suffering, we are given many more opportunities to turn to the Lord and find Him. He desires that we would enjoy Him more, experience Him more, gain more of Him, know more of His excellence, have more assurance about Him, and give more glory to Him. All of these can be accomplished in our service to the saints. This is the lifelong experience of a slave of Christ Jesus and called apostle.





## Set Apart for the Gospel of God

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.*

—Romans 1:1

### WORD STUDY

G. Campbell Morgan said, “While Paul introduced himself in the most distinct language, his purpose in doing so was that of declaring his relation to the Gospel” (Morgan, 3). Paul was “set apart for the gospel of God.”

The Greek word used here for “set apart,” *aphorizō*, means “to set off by boundary, i.e. (figuratively) limit, exclude, appoint” (Strong, #873). Paul was very clear that he had been separated from all other things for the gospel of God. *Aphorizō* is written here in the perfect tense, indicating that the past action of separation had a continuing effect in Paul’s life (Rogers, 315).

Paul was a vessel chosen by God to carry His name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). For this, Paul was taken from other occupations and tasks, separated, appointed, and sanctified (Luther, 34).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Paul was a slave of Christ Jesus and a called apostle who was separated for the gospel of God. His life was lived totally for the gospel of God. He was not only completely separated from other things for the sake of the gospel, but by the end of Romans, we see that it even became *his* gospel (Rom. 16:25).

This shows that a gospel preacher, as a slave of Christ Jesus and called apostle, should enter completely into the gospel, be saturated with the gospel, and eventually become constituted with the gospel. This state of separation for the gospel is not limited to times of preaching or involvement in gospel activities. It is the very constitution of a servant of God.

Paul's separation for the gospel was related to four things:

1. His existence
2. His labor
3. His living
4. His constitution

His existence did not depart from the gospel of God, his labor was to preach the gospel of God, his living was to testify of the gospel of God, and eventually he became constituted with the gospel of God. Paul's experience shows us the way all slaves of Christ Jesus and called apostles must walk through their life. Such people exist solely for the gospel, labor in preaching the gospel, live to testify of the gospel, and eventually become constituted with the gospel.

### Our Existence: In the Gospel

Those who have been set apart for the gospel have an existence that is totally related to the gospel. Our existence

tells us what to live for. A newly married man does not exist solely for himself, but also for his wife. Thus, he will live for his wife. After a few years, his existence and living will not be only for his wife, but also for his children. Likewise, the healthy existence of a person committed with the gospel is related totally to the gospel of God.

The highest existence in the universe is for the gospel of God. Those who exist for the gospel of God live in such a way that everything they do is for the gospel of God. The house they purchase, the job they find, and even the way they dress is for the gospel of God. From the hidden things to the manifest things, none of their life is apart from the gospel of God. This is the effect of an existence based upon the gospel of God.

There was a brother who felt the Lord had committed the gospel to him in a certain neighborhood. This caused him to be willing to buy a house near where the church met, so he could support the church's testimony in that area. Some brothers talked to him, saying, "To buy a house, you should first consider the school district and then consider the price. No one buys a house in the way you are planning to." This fellowship moved his heart. He thought, "Everything they say is right. It doesn't *really* matter where I go, does it? I can always find a place for church meetings, can't I?" In this brother's thinking, he departed from the commitment the Lord had given him and his existence departed from the gospel of God.

Another brother found a job in a different city and asked if there was a church there. However, if the Lord was leading him and his decision was in line with the gospel of God, such a question did not need to be asked. If the Lord was with him and leading him, it did not matter if there was a church in that area or not. If there were no church, the Lord could raise one up through this brother's cooperation with the gospel. However, if the Lord was not with him or leading him, it would not matter where he would go; he would remain centered on his own will and desires.

Our existence should be for the gospel of God. Whether we are buying a house or finding a job, we should ask whether our decisions are centered on the gospel of God, and whether they will help the gospel spread. When our existence is for the gospel, our lives become so meaningful. One day as we retrace the path of our lives, we will be able to joyfully say, “Lord, I worship You. Because I lived my whole life for the gospel, it did not pass in vain. My possessions, achievements, and earthly heritage may not be much, but I have gained and left behind the most valuable thing—the gospel of God!” The most valuable living is to live for the gospel.

### Our Labor: Preaching the Gospel

Those who have been set apart for the gospel should not only exist for the gospel of God, but should also labor for the preaching of the gospel of God. What does labor mean? The word “labor” is often used when speaking of childbearing. When a woman is in labor, she is giving birth to a child. Her labor is closely related to the producing of life. Spiritually speaking, preaching the gospel of God is a labor to bring forth God’s life in others.

A slave of the Lord labors in life, struggling to bring in the effective working of the divine life in others. When life is produced, it can revive others. If we are willing to rise up to serve the Lord, then in our service we should rise up to preach the gospel. While we are preaching the gospel, we should strive to not only produce life in others, but also bring in the revival of life. Whether we are bringing people to salvation, reviving their spirits, or spiritually feeding them, all are related to our labor and the effective working of the divine life.

This kind of laboring for life is full of suffering for us, even though it is related to life and results in others becoming revived in life. Serving the Lord is not easy or always

enjoyable. In fact, it causes many suffering and hardships! This process can be truly understood only by those who fully follow the Lord. It is a simple thing to preach the gospel of God and we may even persuade many to believe in the Lord. However, if we want to be centered on the gospel of God as the meaning and purpose of our existence, we must be totally immersed in labor, resulting in the experience of many sufferings and hardships.

Our labor is not only for the producing and establishment of life in others, but also for their growth and maturity of life (Col. 1:28–29). It is like that of a mother who not only suffers birth-pains for her children, but who also suffers for their growth. Paul said to the Galatians, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). By that he meant, “If Christ has not been formed in you, I would suffer birth-pains all over again and would go through all kinds of suffering on your behalf.” Those who labor in the gospel produce life, establish life, and suffer so that those whom they serve can healthily grow in life until Christ is formed in them.

### The Goal of our Labor

Romans 1:3 says that the gospel is concerning the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. This clearly shows that the content of the gospel is the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. This is important to understand because those who truly labor in the gospel must identify themselves with the gospel.

In the world, any accomplishment is the result of labor that had a goal and a process that produced a result. The gospel is no different. It has a goal, and through a process should produce a result. These three things should never be anything other than the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. When we labor for the gospel, our goal should be more of the operation of Christ in us, our process should allow Christ

more freedom to lead us, and the result should be more constitution of Christ in us.

Our labor must never depart from Christ. Many may be willing to labor for the gospel, but in the process, they forget Christ. For example, a brother may be busy preparing material for gospel messages, creating invitations for friends, and setting up the meeting place. He may be very busy, but in this process, he may forget the goal of the gospel—Jesus Christ Himself.

After many years in the church life, it is easy to have numerous customs and forms. Such things can prevent the healthy growth of life within the church, as they prevent many saints from functioning as they should. Often, those who are naturally strong like to do everything by themselves and by their own strength. Weaker members often consider anything they do as insignificant, so they do nothing. Both tendencies result in a poor church life. Why does this happen? Often, it is because we are short of the Son of God, and we no longer take Christ Himself as our goal, process, or result of our labor.

If we are not careful to hold Christ as our focus in our labor unto the gospel, we will unconsciously depart from Him. Such departing leaves us utterly unable to be gained more by Him. It will not matter what spiritual activities we are involved in. Even if we are diligent, dedicated, and faithful, the growth and constitution of Christ in us will be limited if our goal, process, or result is not clearly Him.

Servants of the Lord will experience many high points and many low points. There may be grand and spectacular days, and there may also be many experiences of sorrow and weeping. Sometimes, the Lord will cause them to experience His riches in many wonderful aspects, and sometimes, the Lord will allow them to be deprived of many things. Ultimately, all of these rich experiences are not for the experiences themselves, but for them to gain more of the Son of God. If we lose the Son of God as our goal, process, or result, this will

prevent us from gaining Christ, and all these experiences will lose their value.

Unfortunately, many people desire things other than the Son of God, regardless of where they are in their Christian walk. When people are saved and gain the Son of God as the source of a new life, they often want only the enjoyment of this life, and not the Son of God Himself. If people are attracted by the Son of God today and even rise up to pursue Him, they often pursue only the sweetness of that attraction, not the Son of God Himself. Even if some people are attracted by the Son of God to the point they are willing to lay everything aside to follow and serve Him, they often want an overcoming work to call their own, not the Son of God Himself. People who have followed and served the Lord for many years often desire spiritual riches, the manifestation of gifts, and the development of their work, but not the Son of God Himself. This is the miserable but real situation of many believers today.

Please pay attention to Paul's words in these opening verses: "Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...concerning His Son...Jesus Christ our Lord." The gospel of God is nothing more than His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

We should tell the Lord, "May the goal and existence of my whole life be You and for You alone. May the process my life goes through be for my experience of You. I desire the result of my whole life to be my gaining of You. Nothing is more valuable in my life than You and nothing else will satisfy me. Lord, may I only have You in my life and only want You through my whole life."

### A Real Church Life

Concerning our labor in the gospel, our personal goal, process, and result must be to gain Christ Himself. However,

our goal for those whom we labor for should be the supplying of Christ to them. The process should be the bringing of our supply of Christ to them for their enjoyment, and the result should be their gaining of Christ Himself.

One aspect regarding our labor in the gospel is our attention to the increase of the number of saints in the church. Yet as soon as our focus turns to numbers, our goal becomes higher numbers, our process becomes inviting people from everywhere, and our result is based on how many people are in the church meetings. With this focus, whether we have Christ or not loses importance, and whether the saints we serve gain Christ or not also loses its importance.

A brother once portrayed a certain scenario to show what this situation is like: Suppose a family was ready for dinner, yet the mother found that one of her five children was missing. The father would be home soon, and the mother was afraid to tell him of the missing child, so she went to the streets and caught another child. Thus, when the father came home they still had five children.

If this scenario were true, we would be shocked that the mother would act in such a way: not out of love for her children but out of fear of reporting to her husband. But do not think this story is so absurd! We often act like this in our practical church life. Many people come, many people leave, and we are just happy to have been spared an overall decrease in the number of the saints. We do not mourn for those who have been swept away. How small we are!

When the number in the meetings becomes so important, the spiritual situation of each saint becomes less important to us. Our spiritual activities become very important, yet the growth of the saints becomes less important to us. The financial offering becomes very important, yet the fulfillment of each saint's ministry becomes less important to us. Why does this happen? It is because from the beginning, the goal of our labor was not clear, the process of our labor was not healthy, and thus the result of our labor was without hope.



Many of God's children who labor in the gospel do not have a goal of the Son of God, do not have a process of the Son of God, and do not have a result of the Son of God. Eventually, what is left is only the maintenance and exhibition of a number. This is truly sorrowful! If we only have a superficial number but are short of spiritual parents, companions, and personal care for each saint, we should be ashamed! Our labor and care should be personally given to anyone that comes into the church, so that they would receive a supply of Christ and grow in life.

### Our Living and Constitution: Of the Gospel

Those who truly labor in the gospel must also have a manner of living that testifies of the gospel of God. Regardless of how our life turns out, it should be a testimony of the gospel of God. Whether we are greatly used servants of the Lord or unknown saints in the church, the result of our life should be Christ. Rather than considering how useful we are to the Lord, our concern should be whether our focus is on Christ or not. If our focus is Christ and if the goal, process, and result of our labor is also Christ, then our living will become a testimony of the Christ we have gained. In other words, our living will be a testimony of the gospel of God.

This gospel is what Paul's whole letter to the Romans is centered on, and he covers throughout the letter all the various aspects and elements of this gospel. He describes our growth in organic salvation, which includes many experiences. In this organic salvation, we are no longer condemned (4:4–8), we are justified (3:24), we are sanctified (6:19), and we are glorified (8:30). All of these are our experience of the gospel of God. There is also God's sovereignty (9:11) and the church life (12:1–21). Each of these items is part of the gospel.

It is our experience of the gospel of God that causes all of our growth in life. All the work of God in us is for us to gain the gospel of God, to enjoy the gospel of God, to experience the gospel of God, and to be constituted with the gospel of God. Once we have been constituted with the gospel, it will automatically radiate from us. When people see us, they will see the gospel of God. When they contact us, they will contact the gospel of God. When they talk with us, they will hear the gospel of God.

Paul uses two phrases in Romans 1: “the gospel of God” (v. 1) and “the gospel of His Son” (v. 9). In reality, the gospel of God and the gospel of the Son of God are the same gospel. By the end of Romans, Paul advances to say that God will establish the Roman believers according to his gospel (16:25)! The phrase he uses: “my gospel,” does not indicate a different gospel. Rather, it is the same as the gospel of the Son of God. When Paul became constituted with the gospel of God, the gospel of His Son, he possessed it and it became his gospel.

Our experience should match Paul’s experience. To say, “my gospel,” indicates that we not only preach the gospel of God, but that we are also full of the experiences, enjoyment, application, and riches of the gospel. “My gospel” shows that the gospel has been fully realized and fully constituted in us. When Paul says “my gospel,” he seems to be saying, “The gospel of God is the gospel of the Son of God, and it is also my gospel. When I preach the gospel, I am not merely teaching doctrine. Because the gospel of God is so much a part of me, everything I say and do is the gospel in me being lived out.”

The constitution of the gospel in us is the constitution of the Son of God in us. Every Christian has only one thing to do in their life—to become constituted with the Son of God, Jesus Christ the Lord. Regardless of whether people are wise, common, emotional, logical, or anything else, they need to be constituted with Christ. A person with a gift of eloquence needs to be constituted with Christ, and a person without a

gift of eloquence also needs to be constituted with Christ. A person with five talents and a person with one talent (Matt. 25:15) both need to be constituted with Christ. If we are fully constituted with Christ, our labor will become the outflow of the gospel and will be a blessing to many.

### The Example of Jacob

Those who are constituted with the gospel of God are like Jacob, the Old Testament character in the book of Genesis. When Jacob was old, he went down to Egypt and was led to Pharaoh by his son Joseph. Pharaoh asked him, “How many years have you lived?” Jacob answered, “The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning.” Then he blessed Pharaoh (Gen. 47:7–10).

Jacob was very humbled by the end of his life. In his old age, a famine forced him to leave his home and bring his whole household through the wilderness to Egypt (46:7). What was the quality of his life at this point? How must he have felt? The answers are perhaps beyond our imagination. We should try to put ourselves in Jacob’s shoes when he found out Pharaoh wanted to see him. How would we have felt? We might have thought, “My son is a ruler in Egypt because of Pharaoh. My household could not survive without Pharaoh. He is the one with power and in authority, not me. I am only a low servant attaching myself to him today.”

However, Jacob did not think in this way. He blessed Pharaoh. The Bible tells us that the lesser person is always blessed by the greater (Heb. 7:7). Jacob was seemingly so low, unable to provide for his household and forced to seek shelter under Pharaoh. Yet he considered himself the blesser and Pharaoh the blessed! Jacob felt his days had been few and evil, and had not attained to the blessing his fathers had experienced,

but he still considered himself able to bless Pharaoh. Pharaoh must have been impressed and thought, “This man is special! Who is he? What kind of person is he?”

Though Jacob was old and did not have much, he had gone through many experiences specifically designed by God to give him a certain constitution. The testimony he exhibited before Pharaoh was of a man who did not have things others may admire or value, but one who had God Himself and had been constituted by God Himself. Jacob was not able to bless because of what he had done or how he had lived, but because of who he was. Though he was seemingly so low, he could bless Pharaoh.

When Pharaoh asked him about the days of his life, Jacob did not tell his life story. He could have mentioned leaving home many years earlier, having a dream at Bethel, seeing the ladder between heaven and earth, crossing the ford of Jabbok, or wrestling with God. Instead, he seemed to tell Pharaoh, “My days are short and evil, which have not attained to the days of my fathers. However, I have been totally constituted by God. I would like to bless you and become your blessing!” This is a wonderful example of someone who is constituted with the gospel of God today. We are not a blessing to others because of what we have done or the things we have achieved, but because of who God has constituted us to be. This constitution is the gospel, Jesus Christ, our Lord and the Son of God.

Jacob had been molded by God, was full of experiences of God, and had allowed God to fully constitute him. He could bless Pharaoh and become Pharaoh’s blessing. He did not bless Pharaoh because of happiness or sorrow. He did not bless Pharaoh at a moment when he was pleased with himself, nor did he bless him when he was dejected. No, Jacob’s very person was a blessing, God’s gospel at that time. When he prospered, he was the gospel; when he was dejected, he was still the gospel. When he was exalted, he was the gospel; when he was laid aside, he was still the gospel.

In the same way, the apostle Paul testified that he had been set apart for the gospel of God. He was fully committed to the gospel and served God in the gospel of the Son of God. Eventually, he became constituted with the gospel of God and allowed this gospel to become “my gospel.” Oh, what examples for us today! We too can be constituted by the gospel and become a blessing to others! Praise the Lord!



# 8

## Jesus Christ Our Lord

*Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh.*

—Romans 1:3

### WORD STUDY

In this verse, Paul firstly further defines the gospel of God, writing that it is “concerning His Son.” The Greek word used here for “concerning,” *peri*, is a common Greek preposition that means “through (all over), i.e. around” (Strong, #4012). Here, it could indicate the idea that the gospel is a topic that surrounds the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and holds this One as its center and content. Martin Luther wrote, “The Content, or Object of the Gospel, or as some put it, the Subject, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God....Gospel is not merely what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have written, but as the verse shows, the Word concerning the Son of God, who was made man, suffered, and was glorified” (Luther, 35, 37).

The gospel of God is not just any good news. It is focused around the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, and must be considered in light of who He is.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Son of God

This verse reveals the wonderful fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the all-inclusive One, the all-extensive One, the One filling all things, and the One dwelling in us (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:15–19; Rom. 8:10). The gospel of God surrounds Him, and ultimately He is the One who is the gospel! The gospel takes on the same characteristics and qualities our Lord has. For example, just as Christ lives, the gospel is living. When we receive the gospel, we receive the Son of God Himself, and because He is living, we can never be separated from Him.

Jesus Christ is both God and man, divine and human. He brings both realms completely together in His person and experiences. He is Christ, so He is divine, but He is also Jesus, so He is human. He is not only God, nor is He only a man; He is both! He is a man with both perfect humanity and divine essence. What a person He is! The Son of God is truly marvelous. He is both God and man, the wonderful God-man in the universe.

### Union, Mingling, and Incorporation

The gospel is Jesus Christ our Lord, within whom is the union, mingling, and incorporation of both God and man. The moment we believed into Jesus Christ, we gained the gospel, the Son of God Himself. We used to be fallen, weak, offensive to God, and full of failures and sins. One day, however, we repented and accepted Jesus Christ into us. Outwardly, we were still the same person, but inwardly we became united with God in life. Now God wants our outward man to be mingled with His nature and incorporated with His person.

All three of these aspects can be considered in an example of a branch being grafted into a tree. The grafting of the



branch is the union of the branch to the life of the tree. As the tree and branch share the same life from the roots, their distinct natures begin to mingle together. Eventually, the life of the tree becomes fully incorporated into the branch and the branch bears fruit. Union is a matter of life, mingling is a matter of nature, and incorporation is a matter of our person and living.

When we believed into Christ and became sons of God (Gal. 3:26), we were united with God in life. As we walk with Him, we become mingled with Him in nature, and He becomes incorporated into our person and living. The gospel is not only for man's salvation, which is the uniting of God and man. Once we have such a union, we also need to be sanctified and transformed to be mingled with Him in nature (Rom. 5:12–8:13, 12:1–15:13). Once we have been united to God and mingled with His nature, we also need our persons and living to be incorporated with Him, becoming the complete duplicate of Christ and being brought into glory (8:18, 30).

Jesus Christ is not just a person we can objectively admire from a distance. No! He is the One who entered us, lives in us, and has been united with us!

The gospel not only saves us, but is also how we grow. Through the gospel, we are further united, mingled, and incorporated with God until the day we will be the same as the Lord—conformed to the image of the Son of God. The apostle John said, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). To look and be like Jesus Christ is the result of our full union, mingling, and incorporation with God, and it is the realization of the gospel in us.

### The Eternal Riches of the Gospel

The gospel is not only our rich enjoyment and experience

today; it is also something eternal. Even in eternity we will experience and enjoy the gospel (Rev. 22:1–2). The riches of the gospel are unsearchable and can never be fully apprehended by us in our lifetime. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). No one can fully understand the gospel. Its riches are unfathomable and need eternity to be experienced and enjoyed.

The Bible paints a picture for us of a glorious city at the end of time—the New Jerusalem (Rev. 12:2). However, the New Jerusalem is not a physical city. The Bible describes it by using symbolic imagery, including the number twelve for many of the measurements. The number twelve typifies an eternal completeness. It is three, which represents the triune God, multiplied by four, which represents created man. Thus, the number twelve represents the union, mingling, and incorporation between God and man in eternity. This shows even more that we need eternity to enjoy the unlimited riches of God.

The gospel is so wonderful! The gospel is not only for salvation, but for our lifelong enjoyment. Even more, the gospel is not only for our enjoyment in this life, but also for eternity. We should tell the Lord how thankful we are for His gospel, and say, “Lord, I give myself to You. I want to live in the reality of the gospel day after day, and to enjoy and experience the gospel lifelong. My prayer is not only to be united to You but to also become mingled and incorporated with You. Lord, I so look forward to enjoying the gospel’s riches through all eternity. Thank You, Lord!”

# 9

## Born of a Descendant of David

*Concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh.*

—Romans 1:3

### WORD STUDY

Paul's first description of the Son of God is that He was "born of a descendant of David according to the flesh." The Greek word used here for "born," *ginomai*, means "to become or come into being" (Strong, #1096). This is the same Greek word used by the apostle John when he wrote, "And the Word *became* flesh" (John 1:14). The thought here in Romans 1:3 is not focused on the Son of God as the supreme One in the universe, but on the fact that He became a man. Martin Luther said, "He who was before all things and created all things, Himself assumed a beginning and was made man" (Luther, 35). His humanity was fixed in the lineage of David, Israel's anointed and greatest king. Thus, while this phrase touchingly introduces the humanity of Jesus Christ, it also introduces Him as the One who "will ultimately fulfill the covenant promises which were made to David" (Rogers, 315).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The Bible records that David was the king of Israel. In 2 Samuel 7:12–14, Jehovah told David,

*When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men.*

The immediate application of Jehovah's promises was to David's son, Solomon. However, Solomon was a type of the coming Christ (Luke 11:31) and Jehovah's promises ultimately referred to Him. Here in Romans, Jesus Christ is identified as the promised descendent of David. He is not only the Son of God, but also the son of David to rule on David's throne (Luke 1:32).

### A Perfect Humanity

The Greek word for "descendent" can also be translated "seed" (Strong, #4690). This "seed" indicates the humanity of Christ. On the one hand, Christ was born through the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18). On the other hand, He is the descendent, or seed, of David, and as David's descendent, He is the king.

Christ is, at the same time, divine and human. Though He put on a human body of the old creation, He did not know sin (2 Cor. 5:21), nor was man's sinful nature in Him (Heb. 4:15). We can never forget that He was born of a descendent of David, so He is a man like any other; but He is a perfect man, a complete man, a man without sin, and the man through whom God would gain what was in His heart.

When Satan said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God...” Jesus answered, “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4:3–4). This showed that Jesus chose to pass through His trials and temptations not as the Son of God, but as a man. The Lord Jesus Christ indeed joyfully put on humanity to become our salvation (Matt. 1:21).

The Lord Jesus testified, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). He knew that He had to experience death and the resurrection from the dead. In His crucifixion upon the cross, He was like the bronze serpent Moses put on a pole, which had only the form of the serpent but not its nature (Num. 21:8–9). In the same way, our Lord came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), yet He did not have sin. Just as Moses’ bronze serpent became the source of healing for the children of Israel, Jesus Christ, a perfect and complete man, became the source for our healing. This could only be accomplished through His death and resurrection.

### The Accomplishment of God’s Eternal Will

Jesus Christ’s birth from the line of David was part of a process for God to accomplish His heart’s desire. When God created Adam, He purposed that Adam would rule over the whole earth (Gen. 1:26). God’s heart’s desire was to gain a perfect man who could administrate all things for God.

Unfortunately, man fell (Gen. 3:6–7). It seemed God would not gain what His heart desired. However, God became a man, the Lord Jesus Christ, putting on the human body of the old creation. To accomplish God’s eternal will, He went through the process of death and resurrection and brought forth the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), which is His church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:23). This process began with Christ and continues in Christ all the way unto eternity. Oh, God’s will is accomplished only through the Lord Jesus Christ!

## Divinity Revealed in Perfect Humanity

Romans 1:3 is a wonderful verse. When Paul talked about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he did not start with His divinity, but with His humanity. Paul did not mention verse 4 first: “who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness.” Instead, Paul first mentioned that Christ was born of a descendent of David (v. 3), and then that He was declared the Son of God with power (v. 4). This is not according to our own thought process. Our effort is often to be more spiritual, but it seems that God’s hope is that we could first be a real man. True spirituality is revealed in humanity. If we say of someone, “This is a spiritual man,” it would be more accurate to say, “This person has the perfect humanity of Christ.” True spirituality is only manifested in perfect humanity.

Even more, Christ’s humanity is the support of our whole Christian life. The book of Hebrews tells us that Christ, born of the seed of David, took on flesh and blood to be like us (Heb. 2:14). Because of this, He experienced all the suffering and trials of human life. He was touched with feelings of weakness. He was tempted, but He did not sin (Heb. 4:15). This Christ, who experienced all trials yet did not sin, can now support and accompany us through all of our own suffering, trials, pain, and weaknesses.

The gospel is realized for us in the humanity of Christ. Because of His resurrection, we can be regenerated (1 Pet. 1:3). Because He abides in our spirits with His perfect humanity, we can rely on Him throughout our whole life. From Him we can receive mercy and find grace for timely help (Heb. 4:16). Praise God for such a Savior!

## Resurrection from the Dead

*Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—Romans 1:4

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used here for “resurrection,” *anastasis*, means “a standing up again, i.e. a resurrection from death” (Strong, #386). We can literally say that Jesus “stood up” from death. His physical resurrection is one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith. Consider some of the significance the Bible attaches to it:

- His resurrection was for our justification (Rom. 4:25)
- His resurrection is powerful (Phil. 3:10), and in it is newness of life (Rom. 6:4)
- Without His resurrection, our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins (1 Cor. 15:13–19)
- Because He resurrected, we have hope and comfort regarding our future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:21–23; 1 Thess. 4:13–18)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ should cause us to praise God. The tomb Jesus was laid in is empty; He is not there (Mark 16:4–6)! Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead!

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). His divine essence, the Spirit of holiness, is eternal and powerful (Heb. 9:14). Yet although our Lord Jesus is the resurrection and has the power of resurrection within Him, He also went through a process to physically resurrect. Through His physical death, He was able to reveal the existence and power of resurrection for us who believe.

### From Death Comes Life

The Lord Jesus is a man, born of a descendent of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3). However, the divine essence is also within Him; it was according to the Spirit of holiness that He was raised from the dead and declared to be the Son of God with power. It is important that Jesus Christ was declared the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead, because it shows that His death was a crucial part of the process. What is death? Death is isolation, which did not exist until Adam’s fall.

After God created Adam, He put him in the Garden of Eden and said to him, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16–17). God did not mean that Adam would drop dead upon eating the fruit. Instead, this death was isolation from God. A person in this condition is isolated from God, does not have fellowship with God, has no way to contact God, and has no way to come to the presence of God.



When Adam disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his spirit died and was separated from God. At that moment, death entered into man and became part of fallen man's being. Thus, man's whole life fell under the authority of death.

However, in the Lord Jesus there is no death. There is no separation in His fellowship with God. There is no fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Him. He said what the Father said and did what the Father was doing. Yet although death had no place in Him or authority in His life, He desired to go through the process of dying and resurrecting. Why? He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:23–24). His death was to produce life. The Lord's selfless attitude was, "I must face death and pass through it. I must enter into death and come out of death, then My death will become a source of life for many more."

### An All-Inclusive Death

The death of the Lord Jesus Christ is all-inclusive, meaning it is totally comprehensive. Consider some of the effects of His death the Bible talks about:

- He is the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24).
- He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3).
- He became the likeness of sinful flesh and an offering for sin, thus God condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).
- By His wounds we were healed (Isa. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

- With His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place as our High Priest once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12).
- Our old man was crucified with Him, in order that the body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6).
- Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24).
- Through His death He judged the world and cast out the ruler of this world (John 12:31).
- Through death He destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and released those who through fear of death were subjected to slavery all their lives (Heb. 2:14–15).
- Through death God disarmed the rulers and authorities, made a public display of them, and triumphed over them (Col. 2:15).

When we consider everything the all-inclusive death of Christ has accomplished, a praise to the Lord should well up within us. Oh, how rich the accomplishments of the Lord's death are!

### The Powerful Resurrection

Though the Lord had such a rich death, He did not stay in the grave. Our Lord was raised out of death! This is a great victory. He overcame God's enemy, Satan, and overcame even death itself.

When He was put to death in the flesh, He was made alive in the spirit (1 Pet. 3:18). When He came out of death on the third day (1 Cor. 15:4), Satan must have realized that his scheme to crucify the Lord Jesus had backfired. All the rulers, powers, world forces of the darkness of this age, and spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12) rose

up and with all their strength besieged the Lord Jesus to keep Him from coming out of death. Even so, it seemed that by a small shake of His shoulder in resurrection power, the Lord shook off Satan and all of his fellow partners and stood up from death.

Dear brothers and sisters, Christ was resurrected! He overcame death! Therefore we can also boldly say, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). By His resurrection, Christ announced His victory over sin, the grave, and Satan. By this, we know that Christ is and will be victorious! Praise the Lord!



## Declared the Son of God (1)

*Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—Romans 1:4

### WORD STUDY

Verse 3 reveals the humanity of Jesus—He was born of a descendent of David according to the flesh. Verse 4 presents another side of our wonderful Savior—His divinity. Here, Jesus Christ’s divinity is not set in contrast to His humanity, but is taken up as a correlative part that makes up the whole (Alford, 2:313). In other words, Jesus Christ is not presented as either human or divine, but rather as human and divine.

The Greek word used in this verse for “declared,” *horizō*, means “to mark out or bound, i.e. (figuratively) to appoint, decree, specify” (Strong, #3724). This verse does not simply declare the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but offers the proof that He is. This proof is His resurrection from the dead (Alford, 2:313). He was not “made” or “born” the Son of God, but rather “declared” the Son of God. Through His powerful resurrection, Jesus Christ’s divine sonship was revealed and made known to all mankind (Luther, 36).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Romans 1:3 says that, according to the flesh, the Lord Jesus was born of a descendent of David. However, in verse four He is declared the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness. The term “Spirit of holiness” shows that the Lord Jesus is holy, and within Him is the divine essence. The Spirit of holiness operated in Him and caused Him to experience the power of resurrection after His physical death. By the power of resurrection and according to the Spirit of holiness, His human flesh was led through a process that brought the humanity of Jesus into divinity. By His resurrection from the dead, He was declared in His humanity as the divine Son of God.

### Uplifting Humanity into Divinity

According to outward appearances, the Lord Jesus was a man born from a royal family (Rom. 1:3). However, He also had the inward essence of God. With regard to His humanity, He went through death. With regard to His divinity, He overcame death and in resurrection brought His humanity into divinity. When the Lord Jesus came to the world, He became flesh and brought divinity into humanity. After being raised from the dead, He was declared the Son of God, and thus uplifted humanity into divinity.

The Greek word used for “declared” means “to mark out.” It implies that the humanity of the Lord Jesus was “marked out” unto His divine sonship. As the human descendent of David, Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross and buried in a tomb. However, according to the Spirit of holiness, His crucified humanity was resurrected, uplifted, and fully brought into divinity. Now this humanity has become a part of the divine (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5)! This is why this declaration is so important.

## God's Desire for Man

The Bible consistently reveals to us God's desire to declare people as sons of God. In Luke's description of the genealogy of Jesus, Adam is called the son of God (Luke 3:38), showing that God's original intent in creating man was to gain sons. In the very first chapter of Genesis, man was created in the image of God, according to His likeness (Gen. 1:26). After creating him, God placed Adam in front of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9), showing that in God's heart was the desire for man to receive His life. God longed for people who were not only like Him outwardly, but who also shared His divine life inwardly.

God's original will in creating Adam was not only to gain a man, but to gain a God-man. He desired one who was God and man, one who had both the human and divine nature, and one who could stand as a king and rule over all things (Gen. 1:26–28). Adam was not created as a side project or as a piece of the puzzle. God created Adam to gain a God-man who could rule over the whole earth—the fish, the birds, the beasts, and all the creeping creatures. Even the spiritual realm would be under the management of this God-man.

When Adam was created, he did not know what sin was, nor was sin in him, so there was no isolation between him and God. However, neither the Spirit of holiness nor the divine life were in Adam yet. When Adam fell and ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, death came to mankind and defeated them. Man became fallen, sinful, and unable to come to the tree of life to gain God's divine life (Gen. 3:22–24). Adam was the son of God in creation, yet he was not the reality of the son of God in life. God's will was not accomplished in him, nor did God obtain in him what He wanted.

## The Last Adam

Finally, the Lord Jesus came and was declared. The Bible

calls Him “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). From our point of view this may be hard to understand, because Jesus seems the same as the original Adam. However, from God’s point of view, the One His heart had desired for so long had finally appeared on the earth. In many ways, Jesus was very similar to Adam. Just as Adam had known no sin, Jesus knew no sin. Just as Adam had been completely focused on God, so was Jesus. Just as Adam was appointed to rule over all things, Jesus was also appointed as head over all things (Eph. 1:22–23).

However, Adam was only a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14). The Lord Jesus is the same as Adam outwardly, bearing God’s image and likeness. Inwardly, however, Jesus is different from Adam. Adam was only a created man, but the Lord Jesus is both God and man, full of divine attributes and human virtues. Even while the Lord was in His mother’s womb, the divine life and essence marked Him (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35), separating Him from all other things. He is unique and everlasting, holy and eternal. Just as God is eternal, powerful, and holy, so also is Jesus Christ. In this way, Jesus is not like Adam, for Adam was only called the son of God. Jesus Christ is full of the divine reality of the Son of God, and the divine sonship is realized in Him.

### Declared through Death and Resurrection

Though the Lord Jesus is the true Son of God, He went through the process of death and resurrection for the reality of His sonship to be declared. His designation as the Son of God was the result of a process, and it was a manifestation and witness to the world. When the Lord Jesus resurrected, God testified to the whole universe that He had finally gained the Son He desired from the beginning. What mankind had lost and been unable to manifest, Jesus Christ recovered and



revealed in resurrection! Hallelujah for our Lord's death and resurrection! Hallelujah for the declaration that He is the Son of God!



## Declared the Son of God (2)

*Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—Romans 1:4

### WORD STUDY

For a brief study on the phrase, “declared the Son of God,” please refer back to chapter 11.

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

#### The Focus of God’s Economy

There are many aspects of the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. First, we must understand that Jesus Christ is God Himself. One of the best verses to prove this is Romans 9:5: “from [the Israelites] is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.”

Another aspect of the sonship of Jesus Christ is His place in God’s economy. God has a certain way of doing things, which we call His economy. Everything God did before Jesus was

born revolved around bringing Christ into the world through the line of David. Everything after the birth of Christ, when the Word became flesh (John 1:2), is now done according to Christ. God's economy is totally centered on His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

In His economy, God wants many sons to become His corporate testimony (Rom. 8:19). To achieve this, God not only became the man Jesus Christ, but also made a way through Christ for His entering into men. God's economy is centered around Christ and today operates within the realm of Christ. God works within this realm so people can obtain Him, accept Him into themselves, and become constituted with His life to be His many sons. This is God's eternal economy.

Romans 8:29–30 says, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” These two verses reveal that God has a purpose—He wants to produce and gain many sons. These many sons were chosen and predestinated by God before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4–5). They were regenerated through the resurrection of Christ to become the many sons of God and the many brothers of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3; Heb. 2:10–12; John 20:17). Even more than this, God wants to conform them to the image of Christ, who, as the firstborn from the dead, is the prototype. This process of sanctification, renewing, and transformation eventually leads us into glory as the revealed sons of God (Rom. 8:19; Heb. 2:10).

### The Operating Force in God's Economy

Our God is very active and is always operating in many ways in many places. First Corinthians 12:6 says, “There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in

all persons.” Philippians 2:13 also says, “For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” How does God operate? All of His activity is in His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Without Jesus Christ, the gospel of God would not exist, and God would not operate in His economy. However, Christ has both come and is the substance of all of God’s operations. The purpose of God’s activity in His economy is to dispense Christ into us and to help us obtain Christ, enjoy Him, and become His duplicate. When we experience God’s operation upon us, we should enjoy Christ more, gain more of Christ, grow more in Christ, and become more constituted with Christ.

### The Process of the Gospel of God

The gospel of God has a process by which it operates. This process is totally related to the life of God. Consider our own salvation experience. We were all born of man according to flesh. Yet one day, according to the Holy Spirit, we allowed the divine life to enter into us by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ. This life is eternal and active, and over time, it causes Jesus Christ to be revealed in us as it conforms us to His image. Ultimately, God wants us to become His sons in life, duplicates of Jesus Christ.

As the content of the gospel, Jesus Christ was sown into us as a seed in the moment we believed and were saved (Matt. 13:23). As a seed, He grows within us to organically produce sons of God according to His life. The model for our growth is the Lord Jesus Himself, whom God desires we match in life and nature (Phil. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:21). This growth of life is the process of the gospel and is for us to enjoy and experience over our whole life.

The moment we believed and were saved, we gained the Son of God as the gospel. In that moment, the process of the

gospel began in us. This process of growth in life involves sanctification, renewing, transformation, and conformation, and ultimately forms the person of Christ within us. The process of the gospel is a lifelong experience of the growing, maturing, and forming of God's life in us.

### The Healthy Balance of the Growing Process

There are two aspects of the process of the gospel of God. One is revealed in Romans 5–8 and concerns our sanctification, conformation, and glorification. The other is revealed in Romans 12–16, and concerns the renewing of our minds and transformation.

Chapters 5–8 focus on the unseen life within us. This first aspect, related to our inner life, emphasizes sanctification, which leads to our conformation and glorification. Chapters 12–16 focus on our visible living. This second aspect, related to our outward living, emphasizes the renewing of the mind and our transformation through this renewing. Sanctification deals with the organic relationship between us and the Lord—our personal experience and enjoyment of the Lord. Transformation emphasizes the manifestation of the Lord in our living—the living out and magnification of the Lord from us. We must be clear that the process of the gospel of God deals with our lives both inwardly and outwardly.

We are sanctified inwardly. The more fellowship we personally have with the Lord, the more sanctification will become a reality within us. We are transformed outwardly in our living. The more we are transformed, the more we will be able to testify the gospel in our day-to-day living. In principle, however, our inward sanctification and outward transformation are closely tied together. The more we experience inward sanctification, the more we will experience outward transformation. Those who are more sanctified are also more transformed.

We must be careful to care for both aspects of our experience of the gospel of God. We should not focus so much on our inward unseen life that we forget about how we live and are seen. At the same time, we should not focus so much on our living that we ignore the unseen aspect of our inward life. We must be cautious. We should not boast in our inward spirituality or in our ability to function in an outward way. Many saints have a very strong inner life, their relationship with the Lord is very deep, and they give people a great feeling of spirituality, but they cannot bear fruit outwardly. This is not normal. Other saints seem to have a very strong outward spiritual manifestation, but their inner root is not deep, and their relationship with the Lord is very distant. This is not a healthy situation either.

### The Church: Where Our Need is Revealed

Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Although transformation deals with our outward living, it also requires an inward change. This change is the renewing of our mind through God’s divine life. It is a renewed mind that produces a change in our living. If our mind is renewed, our living will be transformed. However, if our mind is not renewed, we will never experience the reality of transformation.

The church is the best place to experience the renewing of our minds. In order to live a life filled with the Lord and His church, our minds have to be renewed. This renewing deals directly with our subjective feelings and opinions. Some saints very much revere God and often experience the presence of the Lord, yet their minds are not renewed. Without a renewed mind, their insistence on certain things cannot be touched by anyone else, and their opinions begin to shape the church. As long as they insist that the church life should be one way, then the church life will become like that. As long

as they insist that the elders should minister in a certain way, then the elders will be forced to minister in that way. Eventually, their subjective opinions lead them to dissatisfaction with many things in the church. This shows that their minds have not been renewed, which in turn means that there is not much transformation expressed in their living.

In the church, many may have a heart for the Lord and love Him. There may be many saints who desire to be trained and spiritually equipped and who are able to handle things, take the lead, and serve. However, if they have not gone through the renewing of the mind and been transformed, they will usually lack respect for their fellow brothers and sisters in the church and will not honor the elders. They will say things like, “I want this, and I want that. I want to do this, and I want to do that.” Their words are full of “I” and short of Christ. Why does this happen? It happens because their inner relationship with Christ is weak, they have not gone through much renewing and transformation, and the reality of the gospel in them is short. We should pray often that the Lord would renew our minds with His life and transform our outward living to match His desire.

### The Church: Where We Can Experience the Gospel

Concerning the gospel of God, Paul addresses condemnation (Rom. 1:18–3:20), justification (3:21–5:11), sanctification (5:12–8:13), renewing and transformation (12:1–15:13), and conformation and glorification (8:14–39). This process becomes concrete and practical in the church where God has placed us. Our life in the church is where this process is expressed. It is in our church life that we experience Christ, who is the center and reality of the gospel of God. In this way, the church provides an environment where God can use the means necessary to take us through the process of the gospel.



The church is where we can experience the reality of the gospel of God, and it is also the church that upholds us as we go through that process. We often fail and are limited. However, no matter how much we struggle in the process of the gospel, we will always have a church life to refresh and supply us to go on. In this way, the church is like a greenhouse in which our spiritual lives can grow and develop in a healthy way. Through this growth and development, God gains the many sons He desires. We can be so thankful that we have the church, a place where God's eternal economy can be accomplished!



## Grace and Apostleship

*Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake.*

—Romans 1:5

### WORD STUDY

Paul received two things through Jesus Christ: grace and apostleship. The Greek word for “grace,” *charis*, means “that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness” (Thayer, 665). In the New Testament, grace is used “especially [of] the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life” (Strong, #5485).

The Greek word used here for “apostleship,” *apostolē*, is slightly different than the word Paul used to describe himself. In verse 1, *apostolos* simply meant “one who is sent.” Here, *apostolē* implies not a general mission or sending forth, but rather the office of an apostle (Rogers, 315; Alford 2:314).

Both grace and apostleship are received “through Him.” In other words, only through Jesus Christ is grace and ministry received. He is the source and agent of conferring these gifts, and thus, both are ultimately for the sake of His name (Alford, 2:314).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Operation and Working of the Gospel

The gospel of God is active and always working, and the operation of the gospel has Christ as its source. It is through Him that we receive grace and a ministry. The gospel of God is not only the person of Christ, but also involves the constant working and operating of Christ. The result of the operation and working of the gospel in Paul was the receiving of grace and apostleship.

There is a difference between the words “operation” and “working.” The activity of the gospel can be considered in two ways: the gospel has a broad plane of operation, and within this plane the gospel works at many points. The totality of these points of working composes the gospel’s broad operation. It is like when an army calls a broad plan an operation, within which lies many battles and smaller operations. In showing us different scales of God’s operation and working, Colossians 1:29 says, “To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (NKJV®). In this verse, Christ has a mighty working that Paul strove according to and labored for. I would call this broad and mighty working the operation of Christ. Yet this broad and mighty operation also worked in Paul, who was a smaller point of work within the overall operation.

In the early church life, the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47). This was a broad operation. However, the Lord was also working in each saint, leading them one-by-one. Even within each saint are many points where God is working. Each time the Lord reveals His life, His forgiveness of sins, and His shining love, the resulting tears, prayer, consecration, and pursuing are all unique points of His working. We should understand that within God’s operations are many smaller workings.

## Grace: Man's Enjoyment of Christ

Grace is the satisfaction and enjoyment that comes from someone else's presence. This is like a couple who is dating and loves one another. The sweetest moments for them are when they are with each other. Though they may not understand their feelings, they experience an indescribable satisfaction when they are together, and each simply enjoys the other's presence. This is grace.

When we enjoy the presence of Christ and the satisfaction His presence brings, that is grace from Him. When we focus on Christ, we obtain grace, that is, the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord and the enjoyment of Him as our life and supply. A person who lives in grace can say, "My life is full of enjoyment, satisfaction, and the supply of divine life. I have the sweet presence of the Lord. I never want to leave His presence my whole life."

The source of the operation and working of the gospel in us is Christ. Therefore, if there is no grace, then there is no gospel. Additionally, if we cannot enjoy the presence of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, then there will be no substance in our church lives. Many of the negative situations in the church come because we do not live in grace. This causes a shortage in our enjoyment of the Lord and in the supply of His divine life. True grace is according to enjoyment, presence, life, and the supply of life. A healthy Christian lives in grace and enjoys Christ as their supply of life. A healthy church life is also full of God's grace shared between the saints. It is a life in which we enjoy Christ together as our supply of life.

## Apostleship: The Constitution of Grace

Through Christ, Paul obtained not only grace but also apostleship. When we experience grace with Christ, we experience the enjoyment of being in the presence of the One who

is the source of the gospel's operation and working. When the gospel operates and works in us, we are given more grace. Over time, this grace produces a ministry in us. On the one hand, the grace we receive satisfies us and brings us into the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord; on the other hand, because of everything grace brings to us—joy, satisfaction, enjoyment, life, the supply of life, and the Lord's very presence—it eventually constitutes us and becomes a ministry.

As soon as the gospel comes to us, the Son of God begins to work in us. This is the beginning of our enjoyment of Christ as the gospel. What we enjoy inwardly is grace, but what we manifest outwardly is ministry. If we can enjoy and experience grace upon grace, the divine life will eventually constitute us to be a person with a ministry.

This aspect of grace and ministry can be seen in the example of a newly married couple. The wife may have never cooked or managed a household before getting married. Yet because she loves her husband so much, day after day she will strive to learn how to cook and manage the household. In time, her ability to manage the household grows and becomes manifest. This starts with the grace between her and her husband. Because of her love for her husband and because of her enjoyment of his sweet presence, her ministry of household management eventually develops.

Genuine ministry grows out of grace. When we have received grace, experienced grace, and enjoyed grace, out of us will grow a ministry that can supply the saints and serve the churches.

### The Portion of the Saints

Some may think that Romans 1:5 cannot be applied to them. They may think that we all have received grace to varying degrees, but not everyone can have a ministry. To this we should strongly say, "No!" Every saint can have a ministry,

because the Bible here says, “we have received.” We have all received gifts (Rom. 12:6). We may not be apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, or teachers, but we can at least be those who exhort, give, lead, and show mercy (Rom. 12:8). Because we have received grace through Christ, we can all receive our portion of the ministry.

Different saints’ portions of ministry grow from their experiences of grace in different things. Some portions of ministry grow because of the Lord’s discipline, some grow because of pursuing the Lord, and some grow out of help from other saints. Regardless of how our portion of ministry grows, the most important factor is to continually receive abundant grace from the Lord. When the Lord disciplines us, we will feel beaten to death if there is no grace. If there is no grace when we diligently pursue, we will become exhausted. If there is no grace when the saints help us, we will not have the capacity or patience to receive their help.

We must be full of grace in all the environments and situations the Lord has measured to us. When we are disciplined, we must have grace. When we diligently pursue, we must have grace. When the saints come to help us, we must still have grace. By God’s mercy we can live our whole lives in His grace. Living in grace causes our whole person to be full of the presence of the Lord, full of enjoyment, full of life, and full of the supply of life. Eventually, as the gospel continues to grow and constitute us, a portion will grow out of us as a ministry.

No one is born with a ministry; a ministry is gained only by being constituted with grace. There are four aspects of this constitution: the growth of life, the equipping with truth, the riches of experience, and the ability to operate. These four aspects of the constitution of a ministry are essential to every person. How do we know if certain ones have a ministry? We should ask, “Have they received life, enjoyed life, and allowed this life to grow in grace? Do they know the truth, and have they been equipped and constituted with the truth in grace?”

Have they experienced different aspects of the riches of the Lord in grace? Have they developed the ability to operate and work in grace?" Even if we labor for the Lord and diligently pursue Him, without these four items we cannot be very useful to the Lord.

When we consider the gospel of God, we should be full of awe. This gospel is so great! When the gospel operates, we receive grace, and a ministry can grow in us. We should not stop at only receiving grace! We should also become those with a ministry in the grace of the Lord.

### Our Ministering Ability

The term "apostleship" not only indicates an apostle who has a portion in the New Testament ministry, but also his ability to fulfill his ministry after years of being constituted by grace.

First Corinthians 12 says, "And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord" (v. 5), and, "God has appointed in the church, first apostles" (v. 28). First Corinthians 12 emphasizes apostles, those who have been given a specific ministry. Romans 1, however, emphasizes the apostleship, or the ability of the apostle to minister. A healthy apostle has a ministry, and as Paul said, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart" (2 Cor. 4:1). However, a healthy apostle must also be able to minister. Judas originally had an apostleship, but instead of fulfilling it, by transgression he fell from his apostleship (Acts 1:25). The apostle Paul, however, fulfilled and honored his ministry (2 Cor. 4:1–2; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Paul was abundantly constituted by the grace of God, allowing him not only to have a ministry but also to fulfill it.

Paul's ministering was "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:5). His ministry, within the broader New Tes-



tament ministry, was full of revelation, vision, and life. He was full of God's speaking, and eventually became the most significant minister in the New Testament ministry (2 Cor. 3:6, 11:5).

Paul himself testified, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). In this verse, Paul mentioned the grace of God three times. The first time referred to the character of Paul's apostleship—the grace of God made him who he was. The third time referred to Paul's ability to labor and minister in his apostleship. Both aspects need grace. The forming of a ministry in us needs grace, yet our ability to minister also needs grace. Oh, grace from God is so necessary and so wonderful! How much we need to experience this grace from God!



## The Obedience of Faith

*Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake.*

—Romans 1:5

### WORD STUDY

Paul begins the verse by announcing Jesus Christ as the One through whom he received grace and apostleship, clarifying that Christ is the source for this grace and ministry. Paul writes that grace and apostleship are “to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles.” The English phrase, “to bring about,” is a translation of the Greek word *eis*. It can be translated “unto,” indicating the object, or purpose, of the grace and apostleship. Thus, the larger phrase could be translated, “in order to bring about obedience to the faith” (Vincent, 3:5).

The phrase “obedience of faith” is hard to understand. “Of faith” is a genitive phrase describing obedience. This could indicate that obedience produces faith. This option would imply an obedience, or submission, to the body of Christian beliefs called “the faith” (Alford, 2:314). The genitive phrase could also indicate that obedience is produced by faith. This

option would imply that obedience characterizes and proceeds from faith (Vincent, 3:5). Both interpretations are valid and do not need to be taken exclusively. Obedience and faith are closely related in this verse and may continually motivate, produce, and characterize each other.

Paul says that “the obedience of faith” is for “His name”—the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, the ultimate purpose and destination of grace and apostleship is the glory of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Alford, 2:314).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The gospel of God is always moving and operating. The source of the gospel’s operation is Christ, and in Paul, the gospel produced grace and apostleship. This operation then resulted in Christ’s testimony from Paul, leading many to “the obedience of faith...for His name’s sake.”

Because Paul had received grace and apostleship, he rose up to preach the gospel and free those under the authority of darkness unto the obedience of faith. Paul’s labor allowed the name of Christ to be exalted, and his desire was that all nations could hear, believe in, honor, and glorify the name of Jesus.

### For His Name’s Sake

Because of the apostleship Paul had received, it was not for his own sake that he rose up to minister, but to exalt the name of Christ. Here was a genuine servant of the Lord! He testified only of Christ, not of himself. Even though Paul was spiritually rich, admirable, and worthy of honor, he was willing to hide himself so the name of Christ could be exalted.

Paul had received a ministry from the Lord and knew his

charge was to allow the name of Christ to be exalted. He may have thought, “If I have any riches, I would like to use them to bring people to Christ. If I speak anything for the Lord, I want that speaking to bring people to Christ. Any experiences I have and any help I can give are all for bringing people to Christ. All of my labor is to bring people to Christ! All I want is for others to follow and know Christ. People should not see me; they should see Christ through me. People should not follow me, but should gain Christ through my service. People should not become my disciples; rather they should become Christ’s disciples through me.”

Christ filled Paul’s heart and mind. He desired one thing—that the name of Jesus Christ would be exalted. What an example for us today!

### Fruit unto God

Paul wrote to the Colossians, “We proclaim Him [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col. 1:28–29). These verses are a sweet picture of Paul’s labor. They reveal that his labor was warning and teaching everyone in order to present them to God. Though Paul labored, the fruits of his labor were rendered to God.

Those who have a ministry must understand that their ministry is not for themselves. This is the greatest temptation to all who serve the Lord. If we are not cautious, the Lord’s work and many years of constitution in a person can easily become a halo that replaces Christ. There is only one purpose of a ministry and ministering—the obedience of faith among all peoples and nations for Christ’s name.

Many saints may feel that they only have one talent from the Lord (Matt. 25:15). Even if this is so, we should all ask

Him that our gifts could develop into a ministry. This ministry may help one person receive salvation and love the Lord, it may lead to our home being opened to care for the saints, or it may enable us to take the lead in church meetings, to become an elder in the church, or even to become an apostle to supply many churches. No matter what kind of ministry can be developed in us and regardless of how large or small it is, it has only one purpose—the obedience of faith among all people for His name.

### A Constitution of Faith

The only way for men to receive the gospel is through the obedience of faith. Hebrews 11:1 tells us what faith is: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” Faith does not involve imagination; rather, it is something solid, something very real and substantial. Faith is the reality of the gospel, Jesus Christ, who is the focus of God’s eternal purpose and economy. This redeeming Christ is lovely and precious. He is building His church (Matt. 16:18) and perfecting His bride (Eph. 5:27).

“Obedience of faith” does not imply an abstract thought of Jesus. Rather it involves a clear vision of Christ Himself—His working, His accomplishments, and His goals. This assured faith allows everything Christ is and everything He has done to be constituted in us. This constituting takes a process. The children of Israel went through a similar process in the Old Testament. Though they had been saved out of Egypt, their unbelief caused them to be unable to enter the good land (Heb. 3:19). The Lord then caused them to wander for 40 years in the wilderness before they could enter the good land, a process that was needed to constitute them with faith. Similarly, we not only need to believe into Jesus Christ but to become constituted by faith. This is “the obedience of faith.”

## The Enlargement of the Gospel

Paul's apostleship was for people to obey the faith. This had two aspects: to be saved by believing into Jesus Christ, and to become constituted by faith. The gospel involves both aspects—both the saving and the constituting of people. The gospel is not only that Christ will save men from Hell, but that He will also enter them for their enjoyment, growth, and constitution, and eventually for His magnification. Eventually, those who preach the gospel and those who receive it share in the blessings of the gospel together (1 Cor. 9:23)! This is the enlargement and multiplication of the gospel.

The gospel is living, multiplying, and growing (Col. 1:5–6). First, the gospel operated in Paul to give him a ministry. Then, through the expression of the gospel in him, he caused many to come to the obedience of faith for the name of Christ. Because many people were constituted with faith, the Lord gained more people with ministries. Those with ministries all exalted the same Christ and caused more people to come to the obedience of faith for His name. This process is still continuing today! This is a divine and heavenly multiplication and enlargement of the gospel for the purpose of people becoming fellow partakers of its blessings.

In the whole world, there is no other multiplication or enlargement more beautiful than the gospel's. When people begin to mature in Christ, they are able to testify of Christ more and are able to bring others unto the obedience of faith. These ones in turn will begin to mature, allowing them to effectively testify of Christ and bring even more people unto the obedience of faith. Under such a heavenly view of the spread of the gospel, even we are the fruit of the apostles Paul, Peter, and John. We are actually the fruit of many servants of the Lord who have lived in His grace and were used by Him. This is so glorious! May we be filled with thankfulness for the multiplication and enlargement of the gospel and with expectation for its continued growth in the days to come!





## Called of Jesus Christ

*Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.*

—Romans 1:6

### WORD STUDY

In this short verse, Paul declares his audience to be “called of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word used here for “called,” *klētos*, is the same word Paul used of himself in verse 1—“*called* as an apostle.” The word literally means “invited or appointed” (Strong, #2822). Here, it may denote the Lord’s invitation of people to participate in the blessings of salvation (Vine, 87).

The phrase “of Jesus Christ” is a genitive phrase describing the called believers. The genitive case could indicate that the called ones are produced by Jesus Christ, are destined for Jesus Christ, contain Jesus Christ as their content, or belong to Jesus Christ (Wallace, 727–728). In their commentary on Romans, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown take this phrase to indicate the possession of the saints by Jesus Christ. They wrote, “The called of Jesus Christ—not the ‘called by Him’... but ‘Christ’s called ones,’ or the called who belong to Him” (Jamieson, 3:193).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The One We Belong To

The source of the gospel's operation is Christ, and the very content of the gospel itself is Christ. Romans 1:6 shows that Christ is also the One whom we belong to. We can never get away from the principle that a person who has been gained by Jesus Christ belongs to Him.

To belong to something or someone is not a small matter. A wife can testify, "I belong to my husband. He is responsible for me. He not only cares for me but also strives to meet all of my needs." A husband can say the same thing about his wife. When we belong to Christ, He is completely responsible for us.

The problem many Christians have is that in their eyes they do not belong to anyone. In fact, many Christians flee from the One they should belong to. We may make many plans for our future, but if our planning does not include the Lord, we are ignoring the One to whom we are supposed to belong. Very few Christians can confidently say, "I have Someone to whom I belong. I have the Lord, and He is completely responsible for me."

There is no doubt that we should belong to Jesus Christ. However, we often look around for other things to belong to. We must be very clear that our whole life belongs to Christ. Our very existence is related to Christ, and our living and labor must be related to Christ. What we do, where we go, and how we live should all be determined by Christ leading us, guiding us, and ruling within us.

When we belong to Jesus Christ, everything from ourselves must be done away with. Who we are, what we have, and everything we have accomplished must be terminated, whether these things are good, bad, right, or wrong. It is often these things that prevent us from completely relying on Christ. Those who belong to Jesus Christ do not rely on

themselves, but cling to what God has done and what He can and will do. Oh, it is not a small thing to belong to our Lord, to be a called one of Jesus Christ!

### Called into Another Realm

What is the result of being called by Jesus Christ? His call is to leave the realm of all people, things, and matters that do not have God and to enter the realm of the triune God. Consider the Old Testament example of Abraham. He was called by God to leave the land of Ur in order to be brought into the land God would show him (Gen. 12:1). This separated him from all the people, things, and matters he had lived among, including his family, his country, and the fallen world.

When we received the gospel, we received a similar calling. Everything of ours—who we are, what we have, and what we have accomplished—must be left behind, just as Abraham experienced. To be called by God is to be separated from all people, things, and matters outside of God, to enter into the realm of the triune God, and to become a person belonging to Jesus Christ. As the father of faith, Abraham is the father of the race of called ones, which includes us today.

The calling in Romans 1:6 follows the operation of the gospel in verse 5, indicating that the operation of the gospel will continually call people to belong to Jesus Christ. Because God has poured Christ out and dispensed Him into people, those who belong to Him can enjoy grace, obtain a ministry, and exalt the name of Christ. The result is even more people enjoying grace, obtaining a ministry, and exalting the name of Christ. As the gospel operates, grows, and spreads, more and more people will be called by Jesus Christ to belong to Him.



## Called as Saints

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

—Romans 1:7

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word for “beloved” *agapētos*, means “beloved, esteemed, dear, favorite” (Thayer, 4). It comes from the Greek word *agapaō*, which means “to love” (Strong, #25). W. E. Vine says that when *agapaō* is used of God, “it expresses the deep and constant ‘love’ and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy creatures” (Vine, 382). This must have been a wonderful and comforting phrase for the believers in Rome to hear.

The Greek word used here for “saints,” *hagios*, means “blameless, consecrated, holy” (Strong, #40). It holds both moral and spiritual significance—a saint is both separated from sin and consecrated to God (Vine, 307). The Bible tells us that people cannot be holy on their own terms but are made holy through the blood of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 3:17; 1 Pet. 1:15–19). Through His blood, we are called “saints.”

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The operating of the gospel of God in Romans 1:1–6 has brought us to a point in verse 7 where we, the called saints, can experience the abundant and overflowing love of God in our local churches. Just as God placed a group of saints in the church in Rome, He has placed us in the churches we are in today. This is so we can enjoy His love among many others who are also “beloved of God.”

### Belonging to the Church

In verses 6–7, two callings are mentioned—one is “of Jesus Christ” (v. 6), the other is “as saints” (v. 7). Are these two separate callings or two aspects of one calling? In other words, does a Christian receive one calling, or two? It is hard to answer this question, but it is clear that Paul makes a distinction in these two verses. Such a distinction should cause us to look for the deeper spiritual meaning.

First Peter 2:5 tells us that we are not only meant to be individual saints, but together make up the church, a holy priesthood. Here in Romans, the calling in verse 6 is for Christ and the calling in verse 7 is for the church. The calling in verse 6 is related to our beings—we are called to belong to Christ. When we belong to Jesus Christ, we also belong to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), having fellowship in life with all the members of the body of Christ. The calling in verse 7 is different—it relates to where we are, testifying that we belong to a local church. In this case, Paul wrote his epistle to all the saints in Rome.

The first calling calls us into the universal body of Christ; the second calling calls us into a local church life. When we are called into Christ and into His body, it is a spiritual and unseen matter. Yet for the practical expression of His body, we are also called into a church life in different localities.

We must soberly consider our calling. All saints are called to belong to Jesus Christ and to become witnesses in the local churches. We are not only called to belong to Christ and His universal body but also to belong to local churches. The two go together. It is in the church where God has placed us that we can experience the reality of belonging to Christ. Belonging to Christ and His body can be intangible and mystical, but this unseen fact becomes reality in our day-to-day living in the local church.

Most of Paul's epistles were written to the saints in a certain locality or to the churches in different localities. We must understand how important and precious this calling is to belong to a local church. In our local churches, we can experience Christ as the One we belong to as well as God's love that comes to us in Christ. We are just as the saints in Rome were: "beloved of God." What a calling we have!

It is a simple yet profound fact that the church in Rome was made up of the saints in Rome at that time. This shows us that although the content of the church is Christ, the church is made up of the saints who have Christ. Oh, how wonderful the saints are! They are called to belong to Christ Jesus. They are holy, separated from all people, things, and matters on the earth. They do not belong to sin, they do not belong to religious rituals, they do not belong to the world, and they are no longer common. Instead, they are separated and godly.

Dear brothers and sisters, it is a high and marvelous thing to be called as saints. We should thank the Lord that He has called us with two callings. As saints, we have Christ as our Savior and source of life, and we are in local churches where we can experience this life in our daily living.





## Grace and Peace

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

—Romans 1:7

### WORD STUDY

In this verse, Paul prays for two things for the believers in Rome: grace and peace.

The Greek word for “grace,” *charis*, means “that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness” (Thayer, 665). In the New Testament, grace is used “especially [of] the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life” (Strong, #5485).

The Greek word for “peace,” *eirēnē*, means “peace, by implication prosperity,” and can also be translated “quietness, rest” (Strong, #1515). It can indicate the harmonized relationship between God and man through the gospel, or more likely in this verse, the sense of rest and contentment that comes from such a harmony (Vine, 464). According to J. Thayer, this peace is “the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is” (Thayer, 182).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Having Peace through Enjoying Grace

Here in Romans 1:7, Paul links grace and peace together, instead of other divine attributes, such as mercy or power. The Greek word used for “grace” in verse 7 is the same as was used in verse 5. In verse 5, this grace constituted Paul and produced a ministry in him. Here in verse 7, however, the experience of grace is linked with peace. This combination of grace and peace is found in the church.

Peace is the outward manifestation of the grace within us. Grace is joy, favor, and even the sense of the Lord’s divine presence in our hearts and lives, while peace is the sense of rest and contentment that comes from this grace. Grace is when we enjoy the presence of the triune God and it results in peace. Those who have received the gospel can enjoy the grace that comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The outward manifestation of such grace is peace.

Many people wonder where they can find peace. Instead of searching for many ways to find peace, we should simply ask, “Am I enjoying grace right now?” If we are enjoying grace, then we will live in peace. When there is a lack of peace in the church life, we must realize that this lack indicates a shortage of grace. As we enjoy more of the Lord’s presence as grace, we will find peace for our lives.

We must remember that grace is related to the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to grace and grace flows to us, this grace can meet all of our needs and bring us into oneness with God. An outward sign of this oneness is peace. Those who live in grace have full peace. When we enjoy the presence of the Lord and experience His life, the result should be that we feel very peaceful. This is true peace that transcends all of our problems and situations (Phil. 4:7).

## The Foundation of Our Living

Grace and peace should be the foundation of our daily living. The quality of our spiritual life can be proven by the presence of these two things. We should always ask ourselves questions related to grace, such as, “Am I living in grace?” and “Am I enjoying and experiencing the living Christ and all of His riches?” Then, in the church, when saints gather together to obtain grace, they will enjoy peace together. The presence of peace proves the reality of grace in the church life and in our lives.



## The Gospel of the Son of God

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.<sup>9</sup>For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you.*

—Romans 1:8–9

### WORD STUDY

In verse 9, Paul calls the gospel “the gospel of His Son.” In verse 3, Paul wrote that this gospel was “concerning His Son.” The Greek word used in that verse for “concerning” was *peri*, a common Greek preposition that literally means, “through (all over), i.e. around” (Strong, #4012). In other words, it indicated that the gospel is a topic that surrounds the Son of God, Jesus Christ and holds Him as its center and content.

Martin Luther wrote, “The Content, or Object of the Gospel, or as some put it, the Subject, is Jesus Christ, the Son of God....Gospel is not merely what Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have written, but as the verse shows, the Word concerning the Son of God, who was made man, suffered, and was glorified” (Luther, 35, 37). The gospel of God is totally focused and centered on the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

In Romans 1:1–7, Paul wrote concerning the operation and working of the gospel of God. Now, in verses 8–17, he writes concerning the effectiveness of this operation and working.

In this chapter, we will consider how the gospel effectively operated in both the believers in Rome and in Paul. In the saints in Rome, the operation and working of the gospel of God produced faith that was spoken of throughout the whole world (v. 8). In the apostle Paul, the gospel molded him into a servant of God who could perfect other saints in the gospel of the Son of God (v. 9).

### The Gospel of the Son of God

The beginning of Paul's letter to the Romans seemingly introduces two different gospels: the gospel of God (v. 1) and the gospel of the Son of God (v. 9). However, these are the same gospel, not two different gospels. The gospel of God is totally centered and focused on the Son of God. The gospel of the Son of God is the realized gospel of God within us. In other words, once we understand and apprehend the gospel of God, we realize that it is the gospel of His Son. The gospel not only saves people from Hell, but is also the way the Son of God is dispensed into people. The gospel is for people to accept the Son of God and to allow Him to dwell in them. The gospel allows the Son of God to grow, become strong, and mature in us, and eventually it allows Christ to be formed in us (Gal. 4:19). This whole process centers on the Son of God. As we continue to experience the gospel of God, we will more and more realize that it is the gospel of His Son.

To new believers, the gospel of God may seem objective and theoretical. However, once we realize that the gospel of God is the gospel of His Son, the gospel will bring life into us and will radiate from us. When this occurs, we not only

preach the gospel of God with words but we ourselves become a testimony of the gospel. We not only tell others about the gospel of God but our very lives testify that we have obtained, enjoyed, and experienced the Son of God.

Everything God is, has, desires, and does is in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God is the center and content of the gospel of God, and when we believe the gospel of God, we receive the Son of God. The gospel of God is fulfilled when the Son of God lives in us. The gospel of God is extended as the Son of God grows in us, and the gospel of God is testified of when the Son of God radiates from us. Paul wrote, "I was set apart for the gospel of God" (v. 1), but once that gospel was realized in him, he called it "the gospel of His Son" (v. 9). In the same way, the gospel of God should lead us through a process unto the realization of the Son of God Himself.

### The Nature of the Gospel: Objective and Subjective

When our experience of the gospel has brought us unto the gospel of the Son of God, it becomes not only objective knowledge but also subjective experience. For example, America is a beautiful country. This is a fact that we can tell people, but if we live in America, we are able to experience this beauty first hand. It is not only an objective fact; it is also a subjective experience. The way we talk about America to people becomes very different after experiencing living here. In this case, America moves from objective and theoretical knowledge to a subjective and practical experience. Similarly, the gospel of God is not only objective, but also able to become subjective!

Even newly saved people can tell others, "I believed into Jesus yesterday, and now I feel very joyful and peaceful within. You must also believe into Jesus!" They not only received

salvation from Hell, but also the Son of God Himself. When the Son of God entered into them, He became the subjective One. Now, when these new believers preach the gospel to others, their preaching matches their experience and enjoyment. This is the beginning of the realization of the gospel as the gospel of the Son of God.

The subjective nature of the gospel of the Son of God is rich; it contains forgiveness, peace, joy, divine life, and satisfaction. Incredibly, all of these riches can also grow, develop, and become strengthened in us. We should continually have subjective experiences, application, and enjoyment of the Son of God, which allows us to become richly constituted by the Son of God. This constitution is the result of the organic process of gaining His riches. In such a process, the resurrected Son of God puts into us all of who He is, what He has, what He has accomplished, and what He desires. At the same time, He allows us to experience laboring, striving, and struggling for God's will. On the one hand, the Son of God surely becomes our perfect enjoyment. On the other hand, such enjoyment transforms us into those who look away from all earthly things and who diligently struggle for God, for His church, for the building of the church, and for God's testimony.

### The Nature of the Gospel: Vision and Experience

The gospel of the Son of God is not only related to our vision but also to our experience. Vision is related to what we see, while experience is related to the enjoyment and application of what we see. To believe in Jesus is a matter of revelation. Consider what we tell people: "There is a God in the universe. This God became a man, the Lord Jesus, who died and shed His precious blood for you, cleansed all of your sins, and was resurrected from the dead. Now He can enter into you to become your life." According to man's natural thought,



this is foolishness! However, this testimony has been accepted by many people, whether they are common, noble, simple, or wise. How have they accepted such a seemingly foolish testimony? The gospel of the Son of God is not a matter of wisdom or intelligence, but a divine revelation for people's opened hearts to see and accept.

To experience the revelation of the gospel of the Son of God is a lifelong matter. For example, when we believed into the Lord, the precious blood of the Lord washed away all of our sins. We possibly had no idea what sin was or how powerful the authority and influence of sin was in us. Over time, however, as we see more of the gospel of the Son of God, our knowledge of sin deepens and our feeling toward sin becomes more sensitive. This is an experience of the effective operation of the gospel of the Son of God.

Another example of the gospel's effectiveness deals with our growth. When we accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior, we probably had no idea what "abiding in Christ" meant, how Christ wanted to operate in us, or what it meant for Christ to grow and mature in us. These aspects need one unveiling after another—a lifetime of revelation. We should tell the Lord, "No matter how much You have illuminated things for me and no matter how much You have shown me about myself, I desire greater, higher, and richer revelation. Lord, with these revelations, I pray that I could obtain richer, deeper, and higher experiences that shine more light and transform me."

### The Nature of the Gospel: Existence and Living

The gospel of the Son of God should not only be our existence but also our living. Our existence and living are slightly different, just as existing as an American and living in America are different. Those who believe in the Lord exist

as Christians, but that does not mean they live as Christians. As soon as we believe, we obtain the gospel of God and became a born-again and redeemed person. Once we are redeemed, we are redeemed forever. This is a matter of existence. We exist as a redeemed people. However, as the gospel of God becomes the gospel of the Son of God to us, it becomes no longer merely a matter of our existence but also a matter of our living. This living involves all of the subjective experiences of the gospel of the Son of God. In this living, the Son of God makes decisions for us, judges things for us, and decides our future.

Even though we have been saved, regenerated, and rescued from perishing eternally, we must allow the Son of God to become our life and live through us. We must allow His life to grow and become mature in us so that we may become one with God. Our oneness with Him testifies that the gospel of the Son of God is more than our existence—it is our living as well.

### The Nature of the Gospel: Labor and Operation

Those who live in the gospel of the Son of God should not only labor but also be full of operation. What is the difference between labor and operation? Labor means “I have to.” It means feeling obligated to do something. Operation involves persistence, direction, and a burden produced by the divine working of the Son of God in us. If the gospel of God is a heavy weight upon us, then we will only experience labor. If the Son of God becomes our burden, our source of determination, and our direction, we will not only labor but will also be full of operation.

If we live in the gospel day after day but have no operation, then the gospel is mostly a matter of emotion and sensation with very little substance or experience. Such handling of the

gospel is not a commitment produced by a burden, and shows that the gospel has not been realized in us.

There must be labor within operation, but there may not be an operation involved when we labor. Preaching the gospel can be a labor, or it can be something out of our operation. If it is only labor, then we will toil and feel weighed down whenever it is time to preach the gospel or visit the saints. If our labor is out of operation, however, we will not feel wronged or unfairly put-upon, or that we are wasting time. Instead, our pouring out to preach the gospel, to serve the Lord, and to care for the saints will become an unspeakable joy to us.

If we allow the gospel to work and operate in us, it has profound effects on our operation. The operation of the gospel of the Son of God effectively causes us to follow Christ's example. Just as the Son of God loves mankind, we will also love mankind. Just as the Son of God forsook Himself, we will also forsake ourselves. Just as the Son of God poured Himself out for others, we will also become willing to pour ourselves out. Just as the Son of God disregarded the price of satisfying God, we will also pay the price for His satisfaction. The gospel of the Son of God rescues us from a self-centered Christian life and refocuses us on God and His eternal purpose.

### The Nature of the Gospel: Commitment and a Source of Life

The gospel of the Son of God should not only be our commitment but also our source of life. The Son of God wants us to be full of His divine life, and for this, the gospel of God needs to be realized in us as the gospel of His Son. Paul said that he was set apart and committed to the gospel of God (1:1) but his preaching was of the gospel of His Son (1:9). He was not only committed to the gospel of God, but also realized that the Son of God is the content, focal point,

and enjoyment of this gospel. It was in the gospel of the Son of God that Paul found his source of life and enjoyment.

Those who preach the gospel have no choice but to cling to the Son of God. Those who abide in the gospel of the Son of God cannot help but testify of Him. The Son of God is abundant life, our complete salvation, and the reality of God's work. When we accept the gospel, we accept the Son of God Himself. As we allow the growth of the gospel in us, the Son of God grows in us. Our transformation comes from the growth of the Son of God in us. As He is formed in us, we become more and more conformed to His image. How wonderful it is to not only be committed to the gospel but to also have it as our source of life!

Every Christian should joyfully declare, "We are those who preach and live in the gospel of the Son of God. Not only have we been given a commitment by the Lord, but we have also been given His divine life in the gospel!"

We should not forget that the gospel of the Son of God is the realization of the gospel of God in us. If we are short of the reality of the Son of God in us, we are short of the gospel of God. As we strive to preach the gospel of God, we must have the Son of God as the reality within us. Although Paul was charged to preach the gospel of God, it was also normal for him to do so because the gospel of the Son of God was his inward source of life and he had been fully constituted by it. His preaching of the gospel of God was a normal outflow of the divine life of the Son of God in him.

If serving the Lord does not have a foundation of divine life, the Lord may not recognize our service. The Lord Jesus said that when He returns, some will cry, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" (Matt. 7:22). We may think such workers will receive a great reward from the Lord for all they have done. However, the Lord will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (v. 23).

The Lord does not know us through our acts. He knows us through our connection with Him in life. If we merely serve out of responsibility and commitment, the Lord may say, "I never knew you." Yet if we serve in life and out from life, we will be known by Him when He returns. Regardless of how much people criticize us, judge us, or curse us, these verses in Matthew provoke the question, "Does the Lord really know my service?" Do we preach the gospel merely because of a commitment received from the Lord, or because we have the inward realization of the Son of God and have allowed His divine life to flow out of us?

We do not only have a commitment. We also have the Son of God inside of us to bring us life in order that we may pursue Him, enjoy Him, and bring Him to others. This is "the gospel of His Son," in which we would live, serve, and operate.



## Serving God in My Spirit

*For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.*

—Romans 1:9–10

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used in verse 9 for “serve,” *latreuō*, means “to minister to God, that is, to render religious homage” (Strong, #3000). This word is used in other passages to denote the service rendered to Jehovah by the Israelites as His peculiar people (Rom. 9:4, Acts 26:7). Paul uses it here for the spiritual service of a Christian (Vincent, 3:7). Paul writes that this service was accomplished “in my spirit,” showing that the way by which he rendered service to God was by using his spirit (Rogers, 315).

Man is composed of three parts: body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). God is Spirit (John 4:24), thus, everything from Him is of a spiritual nature. There is a clear separation between the spirit and the soul (Heb. 4:12), and spiritual comprehension requires our spirit, not our soul (1 Cor. 2:14). Because of sin, however, our spirits were made dead (Eph. 2:1). The fall of

man into sin made it impossible for us to have any interaction with God, but the Son of God became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) through His death and resurrection. Now, when we receive salvation we also receive the Spirit of God to regenerate and enliven our spirits, so we can commune with God (1 Cor. 2:11–12, Eph. 2:18). Our spirit is the place of our second birth (John 3:5–6) and it is by our spirit's union with the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:17) that we can walk (Gal. 5:16, 25), please God, and gain life and peace (Rom. 8:3–11).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The reality of the gospel of God caused Paul to become a servant of God in his spirit. This is the natural progression for someone who has experienced the gospel of the Son of God. After we meet God, enjoy Him, and possess Him, the result should be service to Him in our spirits.

### A Life of Serving God

Romans 7:6 says, “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” We can experience this newness of the Spirit through our own spirits being joined to God. This is why it is so crucial for our service to be in our spirit. The only way to have a real and healthy service to God is in the newness of the Spirit, and the only way to experience this is in our regenerated spirit.

Those who desire to serve God must serve in their spirit. Our spirit is related to our existence, while service is related to our living. We should exist in the spirit and live for the sake of serving God. When we are saved, we are joined to the Lord in our spirit (1 Cor. 2:11–12, 6:17). The more we are joined with God, the more He will begin to rule in us. This



leads more and more to an existence in the spirit, which in turn leads to living more and more to serve God. Our own cares and concerns will become replaced with God, with His view, and with His economy.

The matter of serving God is an unrecognized problem among many Christians. Although Paul served God in the spirit, our opinion is often that God should serve us! We may have heard many testimonies in church meetings of how saints were greatly moved by how God came to serve them, rather than how a person served God in the spirit. A brother testified once, "I almost had a car accident, but miraculously the Lord prevented our cars from colliding! Praise the Lord!" This was a testimony of how God came to serve him, not how he served God.

We should ask, "Does God serve me, or do I serve God?" Suppose the brother really did have a car accident. If his attitude was that God should serve him, he would immediately blame the Lord. What if he was traveling to gamble? If he was, he may have felt the accident was a restraining by the Holy Spirit. If he was going to a church meeting, he still may have felt the Lord was utterly responsible for his car becoming wrecked. No matter what his situation was, he would blame the Lord. However, if his attitude were one of service to God, he would not complain to God or people. On the contrary, he would simply trust himself unto the God who causes all things to work together for good (Rom. 8:28) and accept all of God's work on him through environments and situations. When our view is that God serves us, we blame Him. When we serve God, we accept everything He brings to us. The gospel of the Son of God changes our insistence that God must serve us and causes us to serve God instead.

Paul's existence was very much in the spirit. With such an existence, it was natural for his living to be a service unto God. Likewise, when the gospel of God is realized in us as the gospel of the Son of God, our own lives will become lives of service for God. This is a natural progression. With the

gospel of the Son of God operating and working in our spirit, we can serve God in the spirit and thus live a life serving Him. Such a daily living proves that the gospel of the Son of God is real to us.

### Our Relationship with the Son of God

Our service in the spirit must be related to the Son of God (Rom. 1:9). In other words, our service is related to the health and strength of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The Son of God is God Himself (9:5), the “I AM” who rules over all things and accomplishes His eternal purpose through His faithfulness and mighty power. The Son of God carries out what God wants to accomplish and dispenses His divine and eternal life to us. If our relationship with God is not healthy, it is because we are not allowing the Son of God to be active in us, shutting off the flow of His life to us.

Our relationship with God is totally based on our relationship with the Son of God. The more our relationship with the Son of God is normal and healthy, the more it is with God also. Whenever our relationship with the Son of God is not healthy or normal, a distance grows between God and us. To serve God in the spirit, we must have a healthy and normal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

### Supply for Our Service

The result of our service is that the Christ who sits enthroned in the heavens is applied as the Christ in our spirit. In this relationship, we are bountifully supplied by Him. When the Christ in the heavens is applied in our own spirits, we naturally radiate Him in our daily living.

Today, very few people apprehend, enjoy, or experience the incorporation between Christ in our spirit and Christ in the

heavens. Christ Jesus, the One we have believed into, resurrected, ascended to the heavens, was enthroned, and now rules over all things (Eph. 1:20–21). This heavenly Christ is both God and man. He is fully constituted with divine attributes, and He is full of rich human virtues. Now He is the life-giving Spirit who, by joining with our spirit, supplies us with all He is and has.

Those who serve God in the spirit and allow the heavenly Christ to supply them are not weak, poor, or trapped. This is because the Christ we enjoy in our spirit is directly related to the heavenly and enthroned Christ. Everything the heavenly Christ possesses can become our enjoyment and experience through Christ in our spirit. The saints who have such an enjoyment and experience are directly related to the heavenly and divine supply. The more believers can enjoy the heavenly Christ in their spirit, the more His riches become applied in their spirits, and the more Christ is radiated. Whether such saints speak in a church meeting, preach the gospel, or personally care for others, there is an obvious quality about them; people who meet these saints meet and see the reality of the gospel—the heavenly Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. What a marvelous testimony of the gospel of the Son of God! May we all serve God in our spirit, in the newness of the Spirit, and with the divine and heavenly supply.



## Caring for the Saints in Prayer

*For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, <sup>10</sup>always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you.*

—Romans 1:9–10

### WORD STUDY

In these verses, Paul says that God Himself is a witness “as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request...” The Greek word used in verse 9 for “unceasingly,” *adialeiptōs*, can also be translated, “un-interruptedly,” implying “without omission” (Strong, #89). This word was used for the continual hammering of a battering ram against the walls of a besieged city (Rogers, 315). The implication of “without omission” may mean that Paul seized every opportunity to pray without missing one of them.

The Greek word used in verse 10 for “always,” *pantote*, literally means “every-when, that is—at all times” (Strong, #3842). Paul’s constant prayer for the Christians in Rome, whom he had never seen, may seem like an exaggeration. However, Paul calls upon God as his witness—the One who knew all of Paul’s secret prayers (Alford, 2:316).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The effective operation of the gospel not only brings us to God, but also brings us into a relationship with the children of God. As we have God, we are eventually led to serve Him in our spirit. Then, our relationship with the children of God should eventually produce a concern for the church and the saints. The gospel of the Son of God is realized in us in two ways: serving God in the spirit and caring for the saints and the church in our prayers. There is a difference between serving and caring. Paul served the God in the heavens, yet it was the saints on earth he was concerned about. Those who serve God in the spirit must be full of concern for the saints in prayer.

Paul's example shows us that those who care for the church in prayer must be fully concerned in spirit for the saints. Paul had many prayers in his epistles that showed such concern. He prayed for the saints in Rome (Rom. 1:9–10). He prayed for the saints in Ephesus (Eph. 1:17–23, 3:14–19). He prayed for the saints in Philippi (Phil. 1:3–5). He prayed for the saints in Colossae (Col. 1:9–11). He prayed for the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 1:2–3). He prayed for many churches and for many saints. Paul's epistles testify that he was a person of prayer. His seriousness before God, his love for the churches, and his concern toward the saints were all revealed in his prayers.

There were two aspects of Paul's labor. His service to God was according to his spirit, while his prayers and concerns were focused on the church. Paul was so full of concern for the churches under his care that even God Himself could testify how Paul always made mention of the saints in his prayers. Paul's concern for the saints caused him to pray, which in turn surely led to more concern for them in his heart. The more he was concerned for the saints, the more he prayed. The more he prayed, the more his loving concern for the saints grew.

Paul did not go through the motions of prayer, nor did he simply fulfill an obligation to pray. His prayer life was much higher. Because of his relationship to the Son of God through the gospel, he became very much concerned for the saints. Such a concern issued out of his heart and spirit. His heart's focus was the churches of Christ. He was concerned for the needs of the saints, for their spiritual growth, and for their situation before the Lord. Paul's heart became fully invested in the saints and the church, and through his prayer, he could be closely knit together with the saints.

As we follow the Lord, we should often tell Him, "Lord, I am willing to pray for my dear brothers and sisters. I am willing to pray to the point my heart is knit to them. I am willing to be so concerned for them that they would occupy my heart, occupy my time, and occupy my person." Such prayer leaves Satan no room to work in the church, and such prayer results in an organic and living relationship between us and those whom we are concerned about. Oh, that we would struggle to have this kind of prayer for the saints and the church!





## Imparting Some Spiritual Gift

*Always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;*

—Romans 1:10–11

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used for “gift” in Romans 1:11, *charisma*, is one of several Greek words in the Bible that can be translated “gift.” *Charisma* often denotes the operational gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit, as in Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:4 (Vine, 264).

The word “gift” is singular, indicating that Paul was thinking of a certain or unique spiritual gift. It is likely that he was referring to something more than the operational gifts of the Spirit. H. Alford writes, “Paul did not value the mere bestowal of these gifts so highly as to make it the subject of his earnest prayers incessantly” (Alford, 2:317).

The spiritual gift here is qualified by the word “some,” from the Greek word *tis*, which means, “a certain, a certain one; used of persons and things concerning which the writer either cannot or will not speak more particularly” (Thayer, 625).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Unique Gift: Christ Himself

In Romans 1:11, Paul writes of his desire to impart to the saints in Rome “some spiritual gift.” This phrase is not easy to understand, because our concept is that Paul would write of imparting many spiritual gifts to the believers. However, he writes here of one “certain” gift, a *unique* gift.

This one unique gift must be Christ Himself. As this unique gift, Christ is then the content for all the spiritual gifts mentioned later in chapter 12. The spiritual gifts in Romans 12 are many manifestations of the one unique gift, and the content of all of those gifts is one person—the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ, as the unique gift, is like a seed that produces many blossoms—the many gifts of Romans 12.

### Longing to See the Saints

We can also see from this verse that there was a certain eagerness in Paul’s heart. He longed to see the saints in Rome, even if he could just bring Christ to them! He was full of feeling for the saints. He desired to impart Christ to them, which would establish them and firmly build them up together. He even besought God that, by His will, he could see the believers in Rome by whatever way possible.

We should praise the Lord for a servant like Paul! He preached the gospel, presented truth, and helped the Roman saints in spiritual matters. In all of this, what he really gave to them was Christ Himself. Paul understood that Christ would be expressed in many different ways through the believers in the form of different spiritual gifts. The gift he gave to the believers in Rome to reveal and express, however, was only the one unique gift—Christ Himself.

## Encouraged Together by Each Other's Faith

*For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; <sup>12</sup>that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.*

—Romans 1:11–12

### WORD STUDY

The phrase at the beginning of verse 12, “that is,” indicates that verse 12 is not merely a repetition of verse 11, but that it modifies and even helps explain verse 11 (Vincent, 3:8).

The Greek word used in verse 12 for “the other’s,” *allēlōn*, means “each other, mutual, one another” (Strong, #240). The phrase “the other’s faith” can also be translated “the faith which we recognize in one another” (Alford, 2:317). Here, faith is not only set doctrines, but the active belief residing in both Paul and the saints in Rome.

The phrase “while among you” is not in the Greek text. However, it is implied by the Greek word for “encouraged together,” *sumparkaleō*, which means “to console jointly, to comfort together” (Strong, #4837). J. Thayer writes that the sense here is “that I (Paul) with you (believers in Rome) may be comforted among you, i.e. in your assembly, with you” (Thayer, 597).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The gospel of the Son of God constituted Paul and became his focus, enjoyment, and experience. This caused him to serve God in his spirit (Romans 1:9). He loved the church, cared for the saints in his prayers, and hoped to supply them with Christ as a spiritual gift. The expected result was that they would be established, have mutual faith, and be mutually encouraged. This is a wonderful description of the relationship between the apostles, the saints, and Christ!

### Encouragement Together

We can see in verse 12 what Paul expected upon coming to Rome. He said, “That I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other’s faith.” Paul desired to come to Rome to impart some spiritual gift to the saints, that is, to dispense Christ to them. The imparting of the gift would not only produce faith in the saints, but also in the apostle Paul. The faith produced by the gift would become their “mutual faith.”

Paul would give the gift—Christ, and the saints would obtain faith from Him. Yet Paul, as the one imparting the gift, would also have faith dispensed into him. This process means that the faith in the saints and the faith in Paul were the same faith. This mutual faith would then become their mutual source of encouragement. Paul seemed to be saying, “My faith can become your encouragement and your faith can become my encouragement. We can both become encouraged together in the same faith.”

### The Divine Golden Triangle

A further consideration of verse 12 will shed light on the

relationship between Christ, the apostles, and the saints. A helpful analogy is three cities located close together. Each city has its own characteristics—one may specialize in science and medicine, one may be full of scholars and universities, and one may be an economic center filled with businesses. When these three cities work together, they form what we can call “a golden triangle.”

In the same way, the Christian life needs a divine golden triangle. There are no believers who can properly live before the presence of God on their own. The greatest temptation Satan gives us is the thought that we can live properly without others. However, even a spiritual man like the apostle Paul told the saints in Rome how much he needed them as he followed the Lord. The saints in Rome would surely have agreed that they needed the apostle Paul as well. Together, Paul and the saints also needed the Lord. Eventually, the Lord supplied Paul and the saints in Rome through each other, and they were encouraged together in Him through that supply. This is the divine golden triangle that exists between Christ, His servants, and the saints.

It is marvelous that Paul, an experienced and spiritual apostle, could write this to the simple saints in Rome. His words and example stand in contrast to our own. We habitually find ourselves trying to follow the Lord alone. We find it hard to share a mutual faith with the saints, and we find it hard to be mutually encouraged. This should not be our situation.

When I consider my own Christian life, two brothers in particular stand out to me as ones who greatly influenced and helped me in my walk with the Lord. These two have since passed away, yet I feel that my entire Christian walk is owed to them. Because they are now with the Lord, I cannot speak with them directly, but I can say that I share a mutual faith with them because of their labor. In fact, their imparting of the spiritual gift, Christ, to the saints is still producing a mutual faith in many people today. This sharing of the faith

of the saints who were before us is a mystical reality in the organic body of Christ.

We should not only share in the faith of those who were before us, but we should also learn to continually supply and receive the gift of Christ. We should learn how to impart Christ to the saints. At the same time, we should also learn how to receive the supply of this spiritual gift from those who are more experienced, spiritually richer, and more mature than we are. This giving and receiving will produce a mutual faith both in us and in those we are with, and will help us grow in the same faith possessed by the believers before us.

Consider the broad application of this principle: the faith we have today is the same faith of Paul himself, and it is the same faith many servants of the Lord have had in past generations. When Paul said, "Each of us by the other's faith," he was talking to the saints in Rome. However, when we read this today, we can say, "Lord, thank You. You gained the apostle Paul, and now I can share in his faith!"

Paul's whole letter to the Romans shows us this divine golden triangle: Christ, His servants, and the saints. We must learn how important it is that our Christian lives never depart from this triangle. We always need the Lord. We also always need His servants. Moreover, we always need the saints. Only with this triangle can we receive the divine supply of life, be comforted, be encouraged, grow, and become mature in the same faith.

### The Building Up of the Body of Christ

Even though the word "building" is not in Romans 1:12, there may be no better description in the Bible concerning the building of the body of Christ. This building of the body of Christ is described as our being mutually comforted and encouraged together. Each of these states is the result of mutual faith.

How does mutual faith help build us together? In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote, "In all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith" (3:7–8). Mutual faith becomes comfort and blessing from the saints to the servants of the Lord and from the servants to the saints.

A servant of the Lord, like the apostle Paul, could say, "My faith can help you, and your faith can support me. What I have gained before the Lord becomes your encouragement, and what you have experienced before the Lord becomes my inspiration. What I have received before the Lord becomes your help, and the grace you have received from the Lord becomes my blessing. My blessing becomes your enjoyment, and your growth becomes my support. What I have gained in Christ becomes your supply, and what you have experienced in Christ becomes the motivation for my spiritual walk. Because you live before the Lord, I can boldly go forward. Because I live before the Lord, you can enjoy the riches of Christ more and more. When we have mutual faith, we can encourage and comfort one another and an organic and living union is formed between us." This is the reality of the building of the body of Christ.

Romans 1:12 describes something different from our natural understanding. We usually think the building up of the body of Christ involves action, effective labor, fruit bearing, and testifying of the glory of God. Yet Paul's revelation of building is deeper than this understanding. According to his revelation, the building of the body involves mutual comfort, mutual encouragement, and mutual support with the saints in mutual faith.

### Needing the Saints Around Us

Paul reveals in Romans 1:11 how his longing was to see the saints in Rome. If we do not long to see one another, it

is very hard for mutual faith to be produced in us. If we live our own lives, never miss one another, and are never in one another's hearts, it becomes impossible to truly have a mutual faith. Paul was not afraid to say to the saints in Rome, "I long to see you...that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith" (vv. 11–12). He was willing to show how much he needed the saints and that he could not be separated from them.

Paul and the saints understood how much they needed one another. Because of this, it was impossible to separate them from each other. The greatest frustration to the building up of the body of Christ is our tendency to separate. After man's fall, the most significant characteristic was separation. First, man was separated from God (Gen. 3:23). Second, man was separated from one another (Gen. 10:5). Today, fleshly people will always separate themselves from one another (1 Cor. 3:3–4). One of the hardest things to do today is to remain closely related to the saints. To do this, we must allow the gospel of the Son of God to operate and work in us, forming a mutual faith that joins us to the saints and breaks down our natural tendency to be separated.

Among all of Paul's epistles, his letter to the Ephesians probably emphasizes the matter of building the most. When considering the building of the church, we often look at what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11–12: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." The matter of these gifts, given by the Lord for the building of the church, is a truth that is very precious, very high, and very heavenly. The Lord has given many servants to the church today to perfect all the saints, so that they can aid in the building of the body of Christ. Yet these verses often remain abstract to us because it is so easy for us to be separated from the saints around us.



If someone asks us today, “Are you building the body of Christ?” we should not ask ourselves, “Are we doing the work of an apostle? Are we doing the work of a prophet? Are we doing the work of an evangelist, shepherd, or teacher?” Instead of considering what we are doing, we should consider who we are with. Who are we being built up with? From whom are we unable to be separated? To whom is our faith an encouragement and whose faith comforts us? These questions truly reveal if we are helping to build up the church. Dear brothers and sisters, if we can be believers who are utterly unable to be separated from the saints around us, there could be a real building up of the church among the Lord’s people in these days.



## A Debtor of the Gospel

*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup>So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

—Romans 1:13–15

### WORD STUDY

In Romans 1:14, the Greek word for “under obligation,” *opheiletēs*, means “a debtor; a person indebted, an ower” (Strong, #3781). The beginning of this verse could be translated, “I am a debtor” (Darby Translation). In Greek, the base of this word is *opheilō*, which comes from the idea of accruing (increasing) debt, and which means “to owe (monetarily)” (Strong, #3784). This indicates that Paul may have felt he was under obligation to pay a debt that was continually rising.

Verse 15 shows us what Paul felt he owed. The verse starts with the Greek word *houtōs*, which means “in this way, so, thus” (Strong, #3779). It connects the thought of verse 14 to Paul’s action in verse 15—preaching the gospel. Paul felt he was a debtor to all people of the gospel. It made no difference

to Paul whether a person was Greek, barbarian, wise, or foolish; he only felt that he owed them the gospel (Alford, 2:318).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### A Debtor to All Men

Romans 1:14 shows us that Paul felt he owed something to all people, because he describes himself as a debtor to all men. What was he a debtor of? He was a debtor of the gospel. The gospel is the Son of God Himself, Jesus Christ, and it relates not only to the initial salvation of people but also to their growth as Christians. For this reason, Paul would have felt indebted not only to unsaved souls but also to the saints for their growth and perfection. Paul truly felt indebted to *all* people. It made no difference to him whether people were Greek, barbarian, wise, or foolish—he only knew that he owed them the gospel. What caused such a feeling in Paul? It was the operation of the gospel of the Son of God in him that made him a debtor of that gospel to all others.

In a proper and healthy relationship between parents and their children, the parents always feel an obligation to their children. Parents are always willing to do anything to provide what their children need and are always willing to help. Even when children are young, many parents begin to consider and plan for their future. Healthy parents never feel that their children owe them; rather, they feel indebted to their children. Even though parents do so much for their children, they always hope to be able to do more.

Just like Paul, we should have an indebted feeling toward every soul. A debtor of the gospel does not condemn others to Hell for sinning, nor does a debtor of the gospel judge people unworthy of God based on their sins. On the contrary, a debtor of the gospel should feel that every soul is lovely, precious to God, and deserves to be saved.

## Not Becoming a Creditor

Those who do not inwardly know the gospel of the Son of God will not feel indebted to others. Instead, they will feel that others owe them. They will feel like the elders in the church owe them, that their coworkers owe them, that older brothers owe them, that younger brothers owe them, etc. This is a big problem in our church lives. Too often we feel that we are creditors, not debtors. Creditors owe no one anything and feel that others owe them.

For example, the church may decide to have a gospel meeting to share the gospel in their neighborhood. For such an undertaking, the elders would encourage all the saints to come together and serve. Some need to do the cleaning, others need to prepare the food for the meal, and still others need to go out to invite people. A “creditor” brother may feel at this moment that any service is totally unreasonable, since he is not a paid church worker. Would a debtor dare to say such a thing? If we are like Paul, considering ourselves debtors of the gospel and not creditors, we will feel that we owe the church, that we owe the saints, and that we owe those who are not believers. We, too, will say, “I am a debtor of the gospel.”

## Repaying All Our Life

If we are debtors of the gospel, anyone can come to us at any moment to “collect the debt.” If we receive a phone call around midnight, we cannot murmur—a person has come to collect the debt. The brother on the phone might say, “Do you have some time? I need to talk about something with you.” We cannot say that we do not have time. What debtor dares to say that he does not have time?

Remarkably, as we begin to pay our debt to others, our debt will only seem to grow! This is because there is always

more to do. Every person has another stage to grow to. Those who have not yet believed into the Lord need to believe into Him. Those who have believed into the Lord need to love Him. Those who love the Lord need to consecrate themselves to Him. Those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord need to grow and be equipped with truth. Those who have been equipped with truth need to minister. Those who minister need to mature and develop a ministry. The whole process moves along only as we begin to pay our debt to others. We should feel obligated and responsible to bring each person to their next stage, whether that stage is simply believing or developing a ministry. For this we must learn how to discern where people are in their walk with the Lord and where they need to go.

The more we pay our debt, the more debt we will owe others. Many followers of the Lord can testify that their life is a life of paying their debt. As soon as a brother begins to love the Lord, we are indebted to him. If he grows well, we are indebted to him that he might continue to grow. If he does not grow well, we ought to feel even more indebted, that he might grow well again. Whether someone grows well or poorly, we should always feel indebted to them.

A person who lives in the gospel of the Son of God should learn to say, "The debt I owe others is immense. I am indebted both to unbelievers and to believers. I am indebted both to those who love the Lord and to those who do not. Whether people are spiritual or not and whether they pursue God or not, I am indebted to them. I owe every human being. I am a debtor of the gospel, and I will spend my life paying that debt."

### The Heavy Feeling of a Debtor

As debtors of the gospel, we will often feel heavy within. There is nowhere we can go to escape our debt, for both un-

saved souls and saints in the church should cause us to realize our debt. As long as we remain alive on the earth, we will feel inwardly heavy from the responsibility and debt we owe to all people. An elderly brother once said, "Think about the apostle Paul. He did so much work in only a few years, yet what have we done after even more years?" This word came out of the feeling of a debtor who realized that there is always more debt to pay.

Those who do not feel like a debtor are quick to boast about their spiritual accomplishments. They have no heavy inward feeling of owing others. Whenever debtors of the gospel see someone, they immediately feel indebted. As long as a debtor of the gospel lives on the earth, not one day will pass without this heavy feeling for others. Such people have so much debt of the gospel to pay, so much responsibility of the gospel to fulfill, and so many riches of the gospel to pour out. The apostle Paul revealed this heavy feeling again when he said, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Living as a debtor of the gospel is not a small thing, nor is it an easy life, but it is the most valuable life in the universe.





## Unashamed of the Gospel

*I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup>So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

—Romans 1:14–16

### WORD STUDY

Verse 16 begins with the Greek word *gar*, a primary particle that can be translated “for, because, therefore” (Strong, #1063). It indicates the coming addition of a “reason and cause of a foregoing statement” (Thayer, 109). In other words, verse 16 tells us why Paul is so eager to preach the gospel in Rome.

The reason Paul gives for his eagerness to preach the gospel is that he is not ashamed of it. The Greek word used here for “ashamed,” *epaischunomai*, is a strengthened form of the common Greek word for “ashamed”—*aischunomai*. W. E. Vine writes that *epaischunomai* is only used in the sense of “the feeling of shame arising from something that has been done” (Vine, 39). In other words, Paul knew that he would never have a feeling of shame rise up from the action of preaching the gospel. Therefore, he was eager to preach it.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Being Unashamed of the Gospel

Paul wrote that he was under obligation to all people—he was a debtor. What did he owe? Paul felt that he owed all people the gospel of the Son of God. His description of himself as a debtor is very interesting. A debtor usually feels very heavy or burdened, and we can imagine Paul also had the inward feeling of heaviness that comes from owing others. Yet unlike most debtors, Paul was not ashamed. He did not consider the gospel of the Son of God shameful, but glorious (1 Tim. 1:11)!

Paul was eager to preach the gospel to those in Rome. He felt he owed them the debt of the gospel, so he wanted to go to them and impart a spiritual gift. Whether Jews, Gentiles, wise, or foolish, Paul felt he owed them all! Paul would fully agree that, as a debtor, he owed a lot to the saints in Rome, and he would fully acknowledge his heavy and burdened feeling within. Yet Paul could also say, “The gospel I preach is glorious! I am *not* ashamed of it. It is the glorious gospel of the blessed God!”

### Seeing the Value of the Gospel

To be ashamed of something is related to one’s commitment and recognition of value. Some people esteem money as something glorious, so they are not ashamed of being rich. Some esteem fame as something glorious, so they are not ashamed of a good reputation. Some esteem a high social status as something glorious, so they are not ashamed of a high position and handsome salary. Paul had his own judgment of what was valuable. He recognized that the value of his existence rested only in the gospel of God, Jesus Christ. Thus, Jesus Christ Himself eventually became Paul’s commitment and labor.

To most people, Jesus was a simple Jewish country man from Galilee. He had no form or comeliness. He could not give people high positions or handsome salaries. On the earth He had only the shameful death of a cross. However, Paul knew that this man Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Creator, the One upholding all things, the inheritor of all things, and the One accomplishing the will of God. He is the wonderful Lord and there is nothing common about Him. Even though many people consider Jesus in a common way, He is in reality the most heavenly, sacred, valuable, exalted, and perfect One. Since Paul recognized this, he was not ashamed of the gospel of this One.

### The Power of God

Paul goes on to write in Romans 1:16 that the gospel is the power of God. This power caused the Lord Jesus to rise from the dead, ascend to the heavens, and be glorified. It is also the power that can open the eyes of people's hearts and bring them from darkness into light. Through belief in the Lord Jesus, this power can revive people's spirits, regenerate them, and bring the life of the Son of God into them. This power also operates and works continuously in those who already believe the Lord, bringing them the reality of the divine life and the blessing and glory of resurrection. This power allows Christians to enjoy resurrection their whole life long!

Verse 16 also says that this gospel, which is the power of God, is unto our salvation. The gospel is truly wonderful! Because Paul recognized the worth of the gospel, received a commitment to share the gospel, and was full of the wonderful experiences of the gospel, his boast was, "I am not ashamed of the gospel!" Let us endeavor to value the gospel of the Son of God as Paul did. We, too, would then be able to say, "We are not ashamed of the gospel!"



## The Power of God

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

—Romans 1:16

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word *gar*, translated “for,” is used twice in this verse. It indicates the coming addition of a “reason and cause of a foregoing statement” (Thayer, 109). This helps us see why Paul was not ashamed of the gospel; it was because the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”

The Greek word used here for “power,” *dunamis*, can also be translated “ability, might, strength” (Strong, #1411). In Greek thought, *dunamis* was not simply strength or might, but a force that could move, control, and govern the cosmos. It was power that had ability and capacity, and it implied impact on people. According to this verse, this power of God is the power of salvation—the power to save and deliver people from the power of darkness (Kittel, 2:285, 309).

H. Alford writes, “The gospel, which is the greatest example of the Power of God, he strikingly calls that Power itself.... Not only is the gospel the great example of divine Power; it

is the field of agency of the power of God, working in it, and interpenetrating it throughout" (Alford, 2:318).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The gospel of the Son of God has an infinite power which, according to Romans 1:16, saves all who believe. It enables people to believe into the Lord, love the Lord, consecrate themselves to the Lord, live for the gospel, offer up everything they have, and follow the Lord by disregarding everything else. In reality, the gospel is the very power of God itself.

### The Power of God in the Gospel

Paul did not only experience the power of God in his outward environment. This power also operated within him. The gospel powerfully changed him until he could not help but preach and announce the gospel to others. He preached both to unbelievers and believers, to those who did not want God and to those who were searching for God. He preached to those who could not understand spiritual things and to those who could. He felt indebted to all people, whether Greeks or barbarians, wise or foolish (v. 14).

Paul was a debtor of the gospel, but what about us today? Even we are debtors of the gospel. Everyone who has believed and received the gospel owes this debt to others. As we attempt to pay this debt, however, we will find that it is not an easy thing to persuade people to receive the gospel. For example, it is very hard to convince a skeptic that our sins are forgiven simply by believing in the Lord Jesus and being washed by His blood. Likewise, it is very difficult to persuade someone that God became a man, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and was made sin for us in His death on the cross.

In principle, people's faith and acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ do not come from their natural beings; rather, this is a matter of spiritual revelation. Therefore, on the one hand, we are debtors who must pay the debt of the gospel. On the other hand, however, it is impossible for us to pay this debt by any effort apart from the Lord.

We may be amazed at how many people God's mercy can touch. His mercy can cause people to begin to love the Lord, pursue the Lord, and offer themselves up wholly to His service. Where does this response come from? We can only say that it is the result of the power of God in the gospel. Even the apostle Paul, who could supply, lead, and bless many churches with a mature and rich ministry, had to confess that the source of any blessing is the power of God found in the gospel.

### The Power in the Son of God

The gospel is the very power of God, but not just because the Bible says so. It is because the gospel is centered on Jesus Christ, in whom the very power of God operated. Ephesians 1:19–22 says:

*And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.*

These verses state that the might, or power, that operates toward believers in the gospel is the same power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead and seating Him in

the heavens, far above all things. The way this power worked in Christ shows us how it can work in us today. Many passages in the Bible describe how this power operates in us and what it produces. We will take some time to consider this operation and effect of the power of God in Christ and in us.

### The Power of Resurrection

The power which operated in the Lord Jesus Christ is first-ly mentioned in Ephesians as the power of resurrection. Three days after His crucifixion and death, the Lord Jesus rose from the grave, putting an end to the agony of death and proving that God had accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. This resurrection was accomplished in accordance with the power of God (Eph. 1:19–20).

Today, this power of resurrection can be experienced by us! We were once dead in trespasses and sins, yet God made us alive together with Christ (2:1, 5). This enlivening was our regeneration, which was accomplished by the power of resurrection found in the gospel (1 Pet. 1:3). Regeneration is our first experience of the power of resurrection, yet this experience is meant to continue throughout our whole lives.

As we follow the Lord, it is very normal for us to have subjective experiences of death. Jesus said, “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). He also said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). By Jesus’ own words, a Christian’s life will include experiences of death. The Christian life is a high life, filled with many heavenly and joyful experiences, yet any Christian who has experienced such high times knows of the valleys that follow. Those who never go up the mountain do not realize that there is also a time to come down as well. These valleys are times of death.

The apostle Paul testified, “For we who live are constantly



being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:11–12). Those who truly desire to follow the Lord must have death operating in them all the time. When we believed in the Lord, the overcoming and transcendent eternal life entered us and brought peace and joy. Even so, death continually visits us. Death is experienced through the limitations of our environments, illnesses in our physical bodies, and the suffering in our hearts. These subjective experiences of death's operating are lifelong, yet the result is only further experiences of the power of the resurrection of Christ. Even though death is always operating in and around us, we have the power of resurrection within us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider the words of Jesus from John 12:24 again: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Those who never fall into the earth and die will never know or experience life—the bearing of much fruit. The more we die to this world, to ourselves, and to sin, the richer our bearing of the fruit of life will be. As we experience death, we will also experience bearing the bountifully rich fruit of life. With experiences of the life of Christ come the precious experiences of Christ Himself. When death operates, life also operates.

The power of resurrection requires us to experience death, but this will then bring us into the experience of the resurrection life produced through death. This resurrection life is unlimited, all-inclusive, and infinitely rich for our enjoyment and application. Through this process, the life of Christ grows more and more within us.

### The Power of Ascension and Transcendence

The power that operated in Christ Jesus is also the power of ascension, for by it He was raised and seated at the right

hand of God in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20). The power of the gospel not only brings us out of death, but also raises us heavenward so that our existence, living, and operation would all be related to heaven. The power of ascension makes us transcendent and bold, able to rise above all earthly bondage, restrictions, and temptations. The power of God in the gospel not only enables us to experience and live in resurrection life, but it also makes us a heavenly people, able to transcend all other things through the same power that operated in Christ.

Praise the Lord! The power of God raised Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:21). When God’s power operated in Christ, what a transcending power it was! On the earth, He rose above all principalities and powers; He is the King over all things, the Ruler of all the kings on the earth (Rev. 1:5). In the spiritual realm, He rose above Satan and all his power and influence. Through the power of God, the Lord transcended all things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Now in the heavens, He is sovereign over all people and things.

Today, we too can experience the power of ascension and transcendence in the gospel. This power is greater than all earthly and spiritual things. A professor may have a high status, but Christ is higher. A boss may have quite a high status, yet Christ is higher. The president of the country has one of the highest statuses, yet Christ is still higher! Because Christ has the supreme status, nothing happens to us apart from His will. Every environment we go through is measured by the Lord. Every experience we go through, whether of blessing, bitterness, happiness, or sorrow, is given to us by the hand of our ascended Lord. Today, we can thank the Lord that all our lives are measured in His hands, and that our spirits can rise above our situations and environments to sit with Him in the heavenly places.

## The Power of Subjection

Ephesians 1:22 says, “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.” In our present time, it seems that not all things are subjected to Christ. That is because the power to subject all things to Christ begins with the church, His body, and will eventually progress to include all things in creation.

What is the difference between the power of ascension and the power of subjection? The power of ascension concerns Christ’s status—His very person is in the heavenly places. The power of subjection, however, brings Christ into a headship position over all things. Just as the head of a person’s body supplies the whole body, the power of subjection will bring Christ into a position in which He supplies all things with His divine life. As head, Christ has been given first to the church, His body.

The power of subjection is related to Christ’s working to dispense His life. The power that subjects all things to Him causes the saints to grow and mature in the church life, which in turn will bring all things under subjection to Christ. This power of subjection is what will conform the Lord’s people into the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29), that they could be revealed in glory with Christ. It is this revelation of the sons of God that all creation is earnestly waiting and groaning for, so that it could be released from its slavery to corruption unto complete subjection to Christ (Rom. 8:19, 21–22). The operation of the power of subjection, though it begins in the church, will eventually cause all things to be under one Ruler—Christ Himself.

## The Power of an Indestructible Life

Hebrews 7:15–16 says, “And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, who

has become such not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an indestructible life.” Christ Jesus is the priest who has arisen according to the power of an indestructible life. When we obtain the gospel, we are also able to experience the priestly service of Jesus according to the power of indestructible life.

First Corinthians 15:45 says that Christ has become a “life-giving Spirit.” Second Corinthians 3:6 says, “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Christ is not only a High Priest who in His power is able to solve all of our problems, but a High Priest who can give His very life to us—an indestructible life! The power of this life renews us, transforms us, and uplifts us. By this power, we are made heavenly and are joined with Christ and His life. This life causes the saints to grow, as Paul himself testified, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6).

Oh, the power of an indestructible life is so great! When we are weak, He is strong and can deliver us from our weakness. When we are weak again, He can still deliver us! Though we may fail time and time again, He can deliver us from each and every failure. Though we may be limited in ourselves, He can deliver us from our limitations over and over. He leads us through the gates we cannot pass through ourselves, and is always sufficient for our every need. His indestructible life is *always* able to save us. The power of this life joins us to God in life and nature so that we might be fit to be presented before Him (Col 1:22).

How are we able to enjoy and experience this boundless power in the gospel? Romans 10:12–13 says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” This salvation is our experience of God dispensing His rich, indestructible life into us. This dispensing of God’s divine life is salvation for all who believe. We should learn to simply call, “Lord Jesus!” in both adverse and favorable circumstances. We should call

on Him whether we overcome or fail, whether we are strong or weak, and whether we are encouraged or disheartened. As we call on Him, He dispenses into us His indestructible life, and we experience the power of life in the gospel.

### The Power to Produce Union, Mingling, and Incorporation

First Corinthians 6:17 says, “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” The power of God in the gospel not only brings us life in the Spirit, but also unites us with the Lord. This power makes us one with the Lord, producing a union, mingling, and incorporation. A Christian’s spiritual growth must involve these three steps: being united with God in life, being mingled with God in nature, and being incorporated with God in person.

The first step is union, which is like the grafting of a branch into a tree. Grafting is the process of attaching a foreign branch to another tree, in which it continues to grow. When grafting is done properly, the tree will accept the foreign branch and supply it with nutrients. Romans 11:17 tells us that the Gentiles, a wild olive branch, were grafted into God’s economy. The divine life is a grafting life, uniting us to the Lord and producing an organic relationship between us and the Lord.

The second step is mingling. When we abide in the Lord through His divine life, we are like grafted branches abiding in the supply of the tree (John 15:5, Rom. 11:17). Such abiding in the Lord mingles us with Him, allowing His life to flow to us, in turn causing His nature to become our nature.

The third step is our incorporation with God, which involves our very person. When the roots, trunk, and branches of a tree all work together, the branches bear sweet fruit. The life of the tree comes from the roots. Since the branch has no life of its own, the life of the roots is expressed through the

branch. This is similar to our relationship with the Lord—expressing the Lord and bearing fruit for Him is the result of the incorporation of the Lord’s life and person into our own. God Himself, what He is doing, and what He desires can all become incorporated into our being. Then we can say, “For me to live is Christ!” The divine life has been given to us in the power of the gospel. When God is incorporated into our person, this life is our experience and enjoyment, and the source of all the fruit we bear for Him.

### The Power That Reveals Glory

Eventually, the power of God reveals God’s glory in us so that all creation can be brought into the freedom of the children of God. Romans 8:18–21 says:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

This is the power of the gospel of the Son of God! What a glorious and powerful gospel we have! The power of the gospel not only saves us, but is also heavenly. It not only brought us the Son of God, it also resurrected us together with Him, seated us in heavenly places with Him, and allows us to enjoy the transcendence of ascension together with Him (Eph. 2:6). Even more, it subjects all things to Him and will head up all things under one Ruler—Christ (1:22, 10). The operation of this power in us is organic—uniting us with God, mingling us with God, and incorporating us with God—that we might

bear fruit to His glory (John 15:8). Our glorification through the power of the gospel will cause all creation to be liberated from its bondage to be brought into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Oh, how powerful is the gospel! Because Paul knew this power, he was able to say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel." May we too know and experience this power.





## Salvation to Everyone Who Believes

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

—Romans 1:16

### WORD STUDY

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because the gospel is the power, or ability, of God to save everyone who believes. The phrase “for salvation” begins with the Greek preposition *eis*, which means “to, into” (Strong, #1519). It could indicate the direction in which the power of God acts, being “toward salvation” (Alford, 2:318). It could also indicate purpose—“for the purpose of salvation”—or result—“with the result of salvation” (Wallace, 741).

The use of the term “salvation” rather than “justification” may be significant. Here, “salvation” may refer not only to our redemption and salvation from Hell, but to the whole sanctifying work of God as we grow and mature. According to H. Alford, “Justification by faith is in fact only a subordinate part of the great theme—only the condition necessitated by man’s sinfulness for his entering the state of salvation, whereas the argument extends beyond this, to the

death unto sin and life unto God and carrying forward of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, from its first fruits even to its completion” (Alford, 2:319).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Salvation to the Uttermost

Paul was a debtor of the gospel. His debt weighed heavily upon him, yet he was not ashamed of it. He realized that in himself he lacked the ability to pay that debt, yet he also knew that the gospel is the power of God and that it will become salvation for everyone who believes. What a comfort this revelation must have been to Paul!

What does it mean that salvation is for everyone who believes? It means that anyone who believes—whether Jews, Greeks, wise, or foolish—will find that the gospel of God saves to the uttermost. There are no differences between people when it comes to God’s salvation. The salvation of God far surpasses our diverse backgrounds, races, languages, and cultures. People from different races, cultures, and countries can all obtain the salvation of God as soon as they believe into the Lord Jesus. In many different situations and environments, this salvation can become their lifelong experience. Everyone who believes can be saved to the uttermost!

### Judicial Redemption and Organic Salvation

The salvation of God has two aspects: judicial redemption and organic salvation. Through the blood shed by Jesus Christ on the cross, we are justified (Rom. 5:9). This is the judicial aspect. Obtained once for all, it is our objective status gained before God. Even more, however, through Jesus Christ we are saved by His life (v. 10). This is the organic and

subjective aspect, and it is for our lifelong experience. Salvation includes both of these aspects. We are not only redeemed judicially, but our nature is being sanctified organically. This sanctification renews our mind and transforms us according to God's divine life (12:2).

We should remember this phrase: "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." After our redemption, we can continually experience the salvation of the gospel of the Son of God. Our salvation is not only objective and judicial but is also for us to experience subjectively. Over time, we will become constituted with all these experiences of the gospel of God and His gospel will become realized in us as the gospel of His Son. Such subjective experiences and such a realization allow the salvation of God to radiate from us. Praise the Lord that our salvation is not just objective but is also subjective!



## The Righteousness of God

*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;  
as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”*

—Romans 1:17

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used in this verse for “righteousness,” *dikaïosunē*, means “the virtue or quality or state of one who is righteous; the condition acceptable to God” (Thayer, 149). Here, this righteousness is “of God,” which could imply that this righteousness is:

1. The righteous standing God gives,
2. The righteous character God is, or,
3. The righteous activity that comes from God (Rogers, 316).

This verse also says that the righteousness of God is “revealed from faith to faith.” “From faith,” *ek pisteōs*, can also be translated “out of faith,” and may indicate that faith is the source of the revelation of God’s righteousness (Rogers, 316). “To faith,” *eis pisteōs*, can also be translated “unto faith,” indicating that the revealed righteousness of God is with a view to produce faith (Vincent, 3:14).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Foundation of God's Salvation

The salvation we have obtained, experienced, and enjoyed has the most solid foundation—the righteousness of God. If God's salvation were based on His love, He could still choose to take away our salvation after our believing. If God's salvation were based on His grace, He could choose to withhold His grace from us. However, God is righteous and cannot be unrighteous. Thus, salvation based on His righteousness is the surest salvation for us. Because the righteousness of God is the foundation of our salvation, it compels God to save us to the uttermost.

We should be comforted that God is a righteous God. If He were only a God of love or grace, our salvation would not be solid and we would be unable to trust it. But praise the Lord—God is also righteous! As a righteous Father, He will discipline us, rebuke us, and restrict us, but He will also thoroughly love us (Heb. 12:5–6). Because He is righteous, He will complete the good work He began in us (Phil. 1:6). Because He is righteous, He will continually save us and will relentlessly form Himself in us, no matter what our spiritual condition might be and regardless of how long we have been saved. His desire is to fill us with the reality of the gospel of the Son of God so that we might become the same as Him in life and nature. This is what God righteously purposed in Himself before the foundation of the world, what His economy is focused on, and what He wants to accomplish (Eph. 1:4–10).

In the day we see the Lord face to face, our highest, most glorious, and most joyful praise we utter to Him will be of His righteousness. In that day we will all say, “Lord, thank You for being a loving God, able to forsake Yourself for me. Lord, thank You for being full of grace and supporting me with Your grace throughout my entire life. Lord, thank You most of all for being a God of righteousness. Thank You that

the gospel revealed and testified of Your righteousness, and that Your righteousness made my salvation so sure. Your gospel truly was powerful to save anyone who believed!"

### From Faith to Faith

The revelation of God's righteousness is "from faith to faith," or, out of and unto faith. The process of the gospel's revelation of this righteousness is our experience of salvation, which is according to faith. In other words, the revelation of God's righteousness corresponds to our realization of God's salvation. "From faith" indicates that faith is the origin of salvation. "Unto faith," indicates that salvation produces more faith. The realization of the salvation of God in us is "out of faith" and "unto faith."

The process of faith is wonderful! Some people make a distinction between their salvation and their believing into the Lord. They may testify, "I believed into the Lord, and then I was saved!" However, the experience of many of us was that faith pressed us until we could not help but believe. Many people, after experiencing salvation, are unable to understand why they believed. For many of us, it did not matter how many times the gospel was preached to us, how many people encouraged us to believe, or how many church meetings we attended—our hearts simply were not moved. Suddenly, in a moment, we felt the need to believe into Jesus. How did this happen? We cannot explain it; faith simply entered into us. We were not born with faith—it is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8, 4:7). No effort of our own brought faith into us; rather, the faith God put into us operated and caused us to accept the Lord Jesus as our Savior. This was the beginning of our salvation, the beginning of the revelation of the righteousness of God.

This same principle applies to us even after we are regenerated. We will encounter many situations in our lives that the

Lord needs to save us from. Many times we will find that our faith is weak, and that we are not willing or able to believe our Lord. Yet the faith God gave to save us is still operating and can bring a fresh experience of salvation to us again and again. These experiences strengthen us and add to us more faith! No one can believe into the Lord by their own power, and no one can follow the Lord by their own strength. All who believe into the Lord have obtained faith from Him, and all who follow the Lord will experience the inward operation of this faith, enabling them to go on. It is so wonderful that our salvation began with faith, continues by faith, and produces more faith!



## Having Life and Living

*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith;  
as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”*

—Romans 1:17

### WORD STUDY

The phrase, “the righteous man shall live by faith,” is quoted from the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:4). Here in Greek, the sentence can be arranged in two possible ways:

1. “The one who by faith is righteous shall have life”
2. “The righteous one shall live by faith” (Alford, 2:320)

In the first option, “life” refers to something possessed, while in the second option, “live” refers to a practical living. The Greek word used here for “live” is *zaō*, which, although a verb, could include either the aspect of having life or the aspect of actively living (Vincent, 3:14).

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Romans 1:17 says, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” This phrase means that God’s justified people will both obtain

life by faith and live this life out by faith. The life obtained by faith is God's divine life; when we daily live by faith, we are living in God's organic salvation.

According to verse 16, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes. This powerful gospel not only allows us to obtain God's divine life, but also empowers us to live by this divine life. Faith is the spark to this whole process. Paul said in Galatians 2:20 that this faith is "in the Son of God." We obtain life through our faith in the Son of God, and we live out this life by our faith in the Son of God. This living by faith naturally manifests and testifies of the gospel of God.

### Eternal Life and Our Living

By faith, we obtain life and live. Obtaining life is the beginning of the process of living it out. The Greek word for "live," *zaō*, belongs to the same word group as *zōē*, which indicates God's divine eternal life. Therefore, both aspects of *zaō*—"to obtain life" and "to live"—are related to eternity, are for eternity, and have eternal value. The divine life is an eternal life, and everything divine life issues in has eternal value. By faith, we not only obtain eternal life, but can also live by this life. Living by this life has an eternal value.

We all experience times of natural revitalization in our lives. This is true of both Christians and unbelievers. A time of revitalization may come after going through a hard situation at work, a bothersome illness, or after coming out of a time of sorrow. However, these natural revivals are only temporary, and it is only a matter of time before another sorrow, illness, or hard environment emerges. However, God's revitalizing is different! By His will, we obtained eternal life in the moment we believed into the Lord Jesus Christ. This caused our very existence to become related to eternity and gave our lives an eternal value. This eternal life

then becomes the source, or spring, of our living. Christians surely experience times of sorrow and bothersome illnesses, and they also need revitalization, yet their revival is not only a bridge to the next environment or suffering. Rather, through our environments and suffering, God's eternal life revives us to form Christ more in us, producing a daily living more consecrated to Him. His revivals in us always leave our lives with more eternal value.

In our living, we can follow everything the Lord Jesus went through. Just as the Lord Jesus shone as light wherever He went, our living can also shine as light to those in darkness. Just as the Lord Jesus was crucified, this *zaō* can lead us through many hard environments. Yet, just as the Lord rose from death, this *zaō* will surely lead us into resurrection life with God. Just as the Lord Jesus entered into glory, the life we have obtained and the living we have unto God will certainly lead us into His glory.

This is the wonderful life of a Christian who loves the Lord! We have a life that is indestructible, incorruptible, and eternal. We can even testify that, "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). Such a living unto God and for God testifies of Him to the people around us. Paul truly gave such a wonderful declaration and testimony here: the righteous shall obtain life and live by faith.



SECTION TWO

# CONDEMNATION



## An Overview of Condemnation

*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.*

—Romans 3:9

*Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God.*

—Romans 3:19

*So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.*

—Romans 5:18

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word for “sin” in Romans 3:9, *hamartia*, literally means “a missing of the mark,” although in the New Testament the literal meaning of sin is mostly ignored and it is used as the most comprehensive term for immorality (Vine, 576). Paul often uses it in Romans to indicate an inward element producing sinful acts, and it is personified as a governing principle or power acting through the members of the

body (Vine, 576). Paul says in Romans 3:9 that all men are under this sinful nature.

The Greek word for “condemnation” in Romans 5:18 is *katakrima*, which means “an adverse judgment” (Strong, #2631). It comes from the Greek verb *katakrinō*, which means “to give judgment against; to judge worthy of punishment” (Thayer, 332). In these chapters of Romans, Paul will show that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, are under God’s condemnation due to sin and transgressions.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The first half of Romans 1 (vv. 1–17) introduces us to Paul’s epistle and shows us that the focus of the epistle is the gospel of God. In the following section (1:18–3:20), Paul writes about condemnation—the guilty verdict passed by our righteous God on mankind.

### The Cause and Purpose of Condemnation

All mankind stands condemned before God because of sin. What is sin? Sin means to be without God, to be away from God, and to not believe in God. Whatever is apart from God is sin, and those who live in sin do not have God. The Lord Jesus told Nicodemus, “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Sin destroys our relationship with God, making it unhealthy and causing us to have a shortage of God in our daily living.

Many people only think of sin as unrighteous deeds. However, there is a deeper source of such deeds—our sin nature, a nature that is without God. Sin is not only a matter of our deeds but a matter of whether we have God or not. People’s



deeds can seem right, but without God, all are still condemned. This is the effect of our fallen and sinful nature, cutting us off from God and bringing us under condemnation.

Paul shows us that both Jews and Greeks are under sin (Rom. 3:9), referring to man's sinful nature. However, he does not stop after the thought of condemnation. He explains that people need God's complete salvation. By experiencing the gospel as the power of God, they can be rescued from condemnation.

Our state of condemnation is not without purpose, for it allows us to see ourselves and acknowledge our sin (2:20). God has prepared a path for us so that we who have been condemned might be justified by the redemption of Christ and brought to experience God's complete salvation (3:24–25). Though we are condemned, the gospel can save us from our condemnation, for it is “the power of God for salvation” (1:16)!

## The Sources of Condemnation

In Romans, Paul describes both specific sins and the sources behind them. In 1:18–3:9, he presents three main sources of sin, and thus, condemnation:

1. An improper relationship with God (1:18–32). An unhealthy relationship with God brings people under His condemnation.
2. The fallen condition of mankind (2:1–16). The problems the sinful nature issues in also bring people under God's condemnation.
3. The wrong approach to faith and a lack of reality in our faith (2:17–3:9). It is easy to profess belief, but the reality of faith must be exhibited in people's lives. They can attend many church meetings, but if the reality of faith is not present to affect their situations, they are still under condemnation.

Today, man's problems before God stem from these three roots. Their relationship with God is not right, they themselves are not right, and their attitude regarding faith is not healthy. Therefore, Paul eventually concludes that all the people of the world have fallen under God's condemnation (3:19).

All three of these matters affect people today. There are problems in people's relationship with God; this is sin, and a source of God's condemnation. Furthermore, the fallen nature of man is filled with problems. Because of these problems, people live self-centered lives of sin, and thus fall under God's condemnation. Even more, condemnation results from religion, that is, traditions of men that rob people of the reality of faith. Many people seek to be religious, yet they never obtain the reality of faith in Christ. Though they may not realize it, such people are still under condemnation.

Unbelievers are not the only ones who face these problems. Even Christians struggle with these three matters, resulting in a subjective feeling of condemnation. All Christians have God, but many times, we who have believed find that our relationship with God has become unhealthy. Similarly, we can attend many church meetings, yet we ourselves may still be filled with problems. Even more, though we have believed into the Lord, we may not have the reality of faith in our day-to-day living. Such problems issue a cry within both unbelievers and God's believers: "Who will rescue us?"

### Rescued from Condemnation

We have a great need to be rescued from condemnation! For this reason, God has prepared for us redemption and salvation in Christ (Rom. 3:21–26). Praise Him! His judicial redemption deals with our dirty outward appearance. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ washes us, cleansing us from all our sins. Now under His blood, we are no longer condemned by God! However, though we have been judicially cleaned we

may still struggle with the root causes for our unrighteous deeds. This need for an inward salvation is met by the organic growth of God's life in us. By this organic salvation, we can be rescued out of our subjective condemnation (8:1).

Many Christians do not understand the difference between redemption and salvation. Redemption was prepared for us by God for our sakes. Salvation is necessary for the glory of God. Redemption is for the forgiveness of our sins and saves us from the wrath of God once and for all. Salvation is for our being conformed to the image of the Son of God (8:29) and is our lifelong experience. This salvation is organic because the divine life is organic. At the moment we were regenerated, we began to experience the process of organic salvation.

The more the divine life grows in us, the healthier our relationship with God will become, the healthier we will become, and the more our faith will be real. God's organic salvation answers the problems of the three sources of our condemnation. As His life grows within us, we will be conformed more and more to the image of Christ, and this life will eventually be manifested in an outward way. Christ's wonderful redemption brings us out from under condemnation, for it is God who justifies us (3:24). His wonderful salvation will make us like Christ, the Son of God (1 John 3:2). Not only are we not condemned, but we will also enter into glory (Rom. 8:17, 30).

Praise the Lord! In Christ Jesus, we are condemned no longer! The Christ within us is divine, resurrected, and powerful. Today, we do not have to abide in sin and condemnation. Instead, we can abide in Christ Jesus our Lord.



## The Wrath of God

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,<sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.*

—Romans 1:18–20

### WORD STUDY

In Romans 1:18, the Greek word used for God’s “wrath,” *orgē*, means “anger, indignation, vengeance, and by implication, punishment” (Strong, #3709). Another Greek word that can be translated “wrath” is *thumos*. However, there are important differences between these two words. *Thumos* expresses the inward feelings of anger and indignation and is characterized by a quick blazing up and subsiding. *Orgē*, however, is a more settled or abiding condition of mind. It is less sudden in its rise than *thumos* and more lasting in its nature (Vine, 26). Here, God’s wrath (*orgē*) against sin is not an outburst of anger that quickly subsides; it is a deep-seated anger that is settled and long-lasting (Rogers, 316).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

As Paul begins to write of condemnation, his first topic is God's wrath. Romans 1:18 is relatively straightforward. Ungodly and unrighteous men suppress truth in unrighteousness and do not honor, regard, or hold fast to the reality of the existence of God. This causes God's wrath to be revealed. This improper relationship with God is the first source of condemnation mentioned. Yet this is the state not only of a few people, but also of all mankind. Everyone on earth is under condemnation, for none but the Lord Jesus is righteous (Rom. 3:10). We must realize that all people are ungodly and unrighteous, suppressing truth in unrighteousness and living under God's wrath.

### The Realms of Faith and of Wrath

The revelation of God's wrath (v. 18) quickly follows the revelation of God's righteousness (v. 17). The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel "from faith to faith" and the wrath of God is revealed "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." These two revelations express two realms in the universe: the realm of faith and the realm of wrath. Justification is in the realm of faith, while judgment and condemnation are in the realm of wrath. In the realm of faith, we are united and mingled with God in life. In the realm of wrath, however, all ungodly and unrighteous men are judged.

When Adam fell, mankind began to live under God's judgment in the realm of wrath. Sin reigned over man, and no one could overcome it. Thus, mankind faced a destiny of eternal perishing. What a wretched thing! Although God is love, He is also righteous, and His righteous wrath must judge sin. Yet our loving God was willing to die for us! Today, all regenerated Christians—those who have been reborn

and who live by faith—have come out from under God’s wrath by being transferred from the realm of wrath to the realm of faith.

### What Is Known of God

Although what can be known about God has been made evident, people still choose to deny the invisible eternal power expressed throughout all of creation, and to abandon the invisible divine nature that is revealed through all good things (vv. 19–20).

These verses say that we can know two things about God through the created heavens and earth: His eternal power and divine nature. What a simple sentence to describe what can be known about God through simple observation of the world around us! The very existence of heaven and earth, as well as our own existence, show us that God is the divine Creator. As the divine Creator, He Himself is full of eternal power. In His divine character, He laid the plans for creation, and with His eternal power, He made these plans reality. The very reality of creation around us testifies so much of God’s divine character.

On the one hand, we live in a fallen and corrupt world. On the other hand, when we lift up our eyes to consider the heavens as the Psalmist did in Psalms 8:3, or when we watch the birds in heaven and marvel at the flowers in the wilderness, we cannot help but be awestruck at the greatness of God. It is not surprising this sentence is in the Bible: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psa. 14:1). Only a fool can say such a thing, because God has clearly shown us what can be known about Himself.

God is powerful. He has the power to create, and He has put us here to live upon the earth. He has the power to uphold all things, allowing us to live in an ordered universe rather than one of chaos. He even has the power to subject all

things to Himself so that He can accomplish His eternal plan. No one can reasonably say that God does not exist. Such a conclusion is surely foolishness, for what can be known about God has been made evident in and among men. This should cause us to realize our need for God, to feel the vanity of life without Him, and to fear and seek Him with our whole hearts. What is wonderful is that when we seek the all-powerful God, the very Creator of the world around us, we can find and obtain Him. God promised His people through the prophet Jeremiah, "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).



## Man's Thought

*For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.*

—Romans 1:21–23

### WORD STUDY

In verse 21, Paul says that people “knew God.” The Greek word used here for “knew” is *ginōskō*. Another major word in the New Testament for “to know” is *oida*. *Oida* often refers to an intuitive knowledge, an awareness or perception that comes from within. *Ginōskō* generally refers to knowledge gained by learning or experience (Thayer, 118, 172–174). The context of these verses show us that everyone has a certain knowledge of God simply by studying and experiencing the physical world, although they may not see and experience Him inwardly.

In verse 21, Paul says that because people did not honor or thank God, their speculations became futile and their foolish heart was darkened. The Greek word used here for

“speculations,” *dialogismos*, can also be translated “thinking, consideration, imagination, reasoning” (Strong, #1261). The Greek word for “became futile,” *mataioō*, means “to make empty, vain, foolish” (Thayer, 393). In other words, these people’s “ideas and conceptions of God had no intrinsic value corresponding with the truth” (Vincent, 3:16).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

When did people begin to have problems in their relationship with God? These problems began when people did not honor God or thank Him, even though the knowledge of God and His invisible attributes were manifest to them. Even today, many people say, “I believe God exists,” yet very few say, “I honor Him and thank Him as God.”

### Man’s Reasoning

Paul did not say that though people knew God, they dared to commit all kinds of sins. He said that although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him as God. Rather, their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened (v. 21).

The Greek word used here for “speculations” can also be translated “reasoning” or “consideration.” People live according to their reasoning. For example, a young man may reason that he is more likely to get a job in one city over another, so he moves to that city. His reasoning affects his life. Our whole existence, living, and future are all related to how we reason. The healthier our reasoning is, the healthier our future will be. The higher our reasoning is, the higher the value of our existence is. The more heavenly our reasoning is, the more heavenly our living will become.

## Unhealthy Reasoning

According to Paul's thought in Romans, people's reasoning must be related to God to match Him. One of the biggest reasons people stand condemned is that they do not include God in their reasoning. If God is not a factor in people's reasonings and their thoughts are not according to God's heart's desire, their reasoning will not be healthy. These verses are not immediately concerned with matters like righteous living and good or evil practices. Rather, this passage's chief concern is whether people's thoughts and considerations are related to God or not.

Unhealthy reasoning does not involve God. If our considerations are not related to God, our relationship with Him will have problems and we will immediately fall under condemnation. Doctrinally, we may understand that we should love God and give our lives to follow Him, but our daily thinking and reasoning may be very different. If God has no place in our thoughts and we do not consider things according to His desire and leading, even though we may do many spiritual things, we are living in empty religion and stand condemned by Him.

Paul indicates that all mankind is condemned because they have a problem in their reasoning. Those without God in their daily thinking and reasoning quickly judge things by their own thoughts and feelings, not God's. They say things like, "I feel we should do things like this; I feel we should not do things like that; I think this is right; I think that is not right." People plan for so many things, but they often do not consider God in their planning. Because of this, God's needs and desires remain uncared for, and the way people live does not express God.

Dear brothers and sisters, the proof of healthy reasoning lies in whether or not we have God Himself and whether or not we care for His need in our daily living.

## Healthy Reasoning

Healthy reasoning is both holy and heavenly, and it gives God the first place in all considerations. This means we give God the place of authority in all matters of our life. For example, we may want to develop our own business, invest our money, plan a vacation, or find a job, yet if our thoughts on these matters are only centered on what we want, our reasoning is unhealthy. We should allow God the first say in these matters of our life. Again, this is not an issue of right or wrong, but whether God has the proper place in our reasoning. If our considerations do not start with God, it does not matter what we do; such considerations will not please God and will instead be condemned by Him.

Second Thessalonians 3:10 says, “We used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” It is not wrong to have a job or to start a business. It is proper for us, as human beings, to hold jobs. However, a common problem people have is that in the process of finding a job, buying a house, and selecting a life style, God is disregarded. Those with healthy reasoning will allow God to have the first place in all of these decisions.

A brother once mentioned another brother in a church meeting, saying, “If he finds a job that prevents him from serving the Lord well, it will be a great loss for the church!” This word was wonderful! Here was a brother who focused his thoughts on God and gave Him the first place. If we desire to follow the Lord, our relationship with Him must be healthy. For such a healthy relationship, our reasoning must also be healthy. No matter what we do, our thoughts and considerations must be related to God and He must have the first place.

## The Results of Unhealthy Reasoning

Unhealthy reasoning is futile, meaning it is ultimately

pointless and unfruitful. People with such reasoning think only of themselves—what they want, what they can earn, and what they can gain. Yet after getting what they want, they always find that it is all worthless. Such people began with seemingly glorious thoughts, yet in the end these thoughts prove futile.

If a man's reasoning is futile, it does not matter how wise, intelligent, rich, or famous he seems; he is still a fool. Romans 1:22 says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools." We need God's mercy that we may maintain healthy reasoning, honor Him as God, be thankful to Him as God, be one with His considerations, and live according to His desire.

People's problems with God are the first source of condemnation. The condemnation expressed in Romans 1 is based on an unhealthy relationship with God, and a healthy relationship with God is fully related to our thoughts and reasonings. We should ask the Lord to protect us, saying, "Lord, I pray my relationship with You will be healthy my entire life. No matter what I do or what I decide, may I always have healthy reasoning and thinking, giving You the first place in all of my considerations."

Verse 23 gives us the most serious result of futile reasoning: "And [they] exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures." These images of corruptible men and animals are idols. When people forsake God, they eventually replace Him with idols. Idols hold the rightful place of God and follow right behind unhealthy reasoning.

Visible idols can be a new business, a house, a car, or any of the material things that people pursue. Invisible idols could include fame, success, and power. When these invisible things become a person's pursuit and life goal, they are idols. Whether an idol is visible or an invisible matter of the heart, those with unhealthy reasoning will become idol worshippers.

The religious realm can also have many idols. If Christians replace Christ by exalting a spiritual man, then this spiritual man has become their idol. Likewise, if Christians replace Christ by exalting a certain spiritual truth, this truth also becomes their idol. Some may love the Lord, hope to develop spiritually, desire to accomplish much spiritually, and wish to become a “spiritual man.” This is fine, yet if they want to be spiritual men more than to have God, or if they want spiritual accomplishments more than Christ, these things are their idols. We should only give the first place in our lives to One—our triune God.

It is almost impossible to escape from futile reasoning in the world. Therefore, Paul wrote later in Romans, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (12:2). Once our minds are renewed by our interactions with Christ Himself, then our reasoning will be healthy and well-pleasing to God.

## God's Giving Them Over

*Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.<sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.*

*<sup>26</sup>For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, <sup>27</sup>and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.*

*<sup>28</sup>And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, <sup>29</sup>being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, <sup>30</sup>slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup>without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; <sup>32</sup>and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.*

—Romans 1:24–32

## WORD STUDY

In this section of verses describing fallen mankind, the striking phrase “God gave them over” is used three times (vv. 24, 26, 28). The Greek word used here for “gave over,” *paradidōmi*, means “to surrender, that is, yield up” (Strong, #3860). This word often carried with it a judicial aspect (Rogers, 317) and was used to indicate putting someone in prison (Strong, #3860).

The thought in these verses is that as people departed farther and farther from God, God in turn gave them up and delivered them over to judgment. It shows that as men progressed in sin and darkness, God’s dealing with them also had a progression (Alford, 2:323). The feeling of this phrase on the side of God is one of sad resignation; what else could He do with mankind? God’s giving up of men was never His desire but was necessary because of man’s actions and treatment of Him.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

## The Serious Condition of Man

The most sobering statement in this section regarding condemnation is found in Romans 1:24: “Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” God seemed to say, “Since people have become futile in their reasoning, forsaken me to worship idols, and filled their hearts with lust, I will let them go.” When people worshipped idols instead of God and dishonored their own bodies, their actions caused God to give them up to what they were doing.

Yet God’s forsaking of mankind was only a response to their forsaking of Him. When people forsook God, three things happened: they became futile in their reasoning, they



produced idols, and they dishonored their bodies. Many scholars agree that this “dishonoring of their bodies” is the physical sin of fornication. Fornication is the most immoral sin (1 Cor. 6:18–19; 1 Thess. 4:3–8). Many young people today are too loose when it comes to this matter; they do not understand the serious consequences of fornication. Here in Romans, it is something that would even cause God to give people up.

The second half of Romans 1 paints for us a picture of the result of man's fall. People are fallen to the extent of being filled with all kinds of low, sinful, and ugly things. They are “filled with unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boasters, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful” (Rom. 1:29–31). We can truly say that people have utterly fallen away from God.

### The Progression of Man's Fall

Sin is like a growing tree. Its roots lie deep in the problems that exist between man and God. According to the progression in these verses, because man's relationship with God was not right, their reasoning was also affected, resulting in the replacement of God with idols. When idols were introduced, people began to dishonor their bodies and did not retain the knowledge of God. Even worse, “although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (1:32). In other words, man's fall is to the extent that people boast in their sin and approve of others committing the same sin. They even seek out those who sin the same way as them and delight in their unrighteous practices. How grievous is man's fall!

As man's fall progressed, God's reaction also progressed. For every step people took from God, God loosened His hold

a little more. Eventually, God gave them up to their desires and put them aside. Without God, a person's life becomes fake and futile, vanity and fear come in, and these things result in a man-made religion that worships creatures rather than the Creator.

The more people progress in their fallen state, the more futile their existence becomes, and the greater they feel a need for human religion to cope with their fallen state. The more they surround themselves with such religions, the further they move away from the true God and Savior. This is a truly sobering word, yet it represents exactly the condition of a fallen person abiding in sin. Sin is often more prevalent where man-made religions are the strongest. The most corrupt societies tend to be those with the most idol worshippers. This is the result of what Paul says here in Romans—people did not worship or serve the Creator, and so God gave them up.

## Despising the Riches of His Kindness

*Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. <sup>2</sup>And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. <sup>3</sup>But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? <sup>4</sup>Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? <sup>5</sup>But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

—Romans 2:1–5

### WORD STUDY

In the first three verses of this passage, the words “judge” and “judgment” are used six times. The main difference between the uses lies in the source of the judging. When referring to mankind, Paul uses the Greek verb *krinō*, which means, “to try, condemn, punish” (Strong, #2919), and is also used to denote the assuming of the office of a judge (Vine, 336). When referring to God, Paul uses the Greek noun *krima*,

which means, “a decision, condemnation, judgment” (Strong, #2917), and refers more to the content of the judgment than the action itself (Vincent, 3:25). Paul’s overall thought is that all people are guilty before God, yet here he addresses those who judge, explaining that they cannot escape God’s judgment, which is true and righteous.

In verse 4, Paul writes of God’s kindness, tolerance, and patience. The Greek word for “tolerance,” *anochē*, indicates the suspense of wrath, and the Greek word for “patience,” *makrothumia*, means “a long holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or passion, a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation without complaint or irritation” (Rogers, 319).

In verse 4, Paul’s use of the words “not knowing” was to show that the readers may have the wrong idea about God’s kindness (Rogers, 319). His kindness should not be abused toward greater judgment, but should lead, drive, and induce men to repentance.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Self-Centered Judgments

In Romans 2:1–3, the words “judge” and “judgment” appear six times. Twice, they refer to God’s judgment, while four times they refer to people judging. Why does this matter of people’s judgment take such a central role in these verses? It is because once people do not have God, only their egos are left, and they become their own standard by which to condemn others.

The condemnation portrayed in Romans 1 is first related to God—whatever does not have God is sin (1:18–32). Now, in chapter 2, Paul unveils condemnation related to people themselves. Apart from God, people’s basic existence is messy; they are filled with problems and live under sin and condemnation.

An isolated living apart from God, however, results in self-righteousness that produces judgment toward others, a hard and calloused heart, and disobedience to the truth (2:1–16). Condemnation is not only the result of sinful behavior, but is also the result of man's existence lacking the proper focus and center of God.

Paul first explains sin as a problem in the relationship between God and man. He then goes on to explain sin as an issue of man's self-centered nature. People's problems are complicated; not only do problems exist between people and God, but also among people themselves! Problems with God begin with the fact that although people know God, they neither glorify Him as God, nor are they thankful (1:21). People's problems with one another spring from their self-centered fallen natures. This leads to judging others by subjective standards.

Paul understood that self-centered people judge others and fall under God's condemnation. He even states that those who judge others condemn themselves in whatever they judge (2:3). In these verses, he seems to be sounding a wake-up call for all who judge and live a self-centered life. People can be rescued from this condition, but they must repent. They must give God the first place in their lives and realize that the center of the universe is not themselves but God.

### God's Kindness: Leading Us to Repentance

Paul continues, "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). God's kindness is unto us. He tolerates our behavior and is patient, waiting for our hard hearts to turn to Him. Consider such a marvelous fact. God is full of kindness unto us. He is full of tolerance when it comes to our actions, and He patiently waits for us to choose to come to Him. How wonderful

this is! We are treated with such love by our infinite God with His infinite virtues.

Verse 5 says, “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” A self-centered person who judges others is storing up wrath. The more people live isolated from God, the more self-centered they will become and the more God’s wrath will rest upon them until the day of God’s righteous judgment.

God’s kindness, however, has a hope and purpose—He desires to lead us to repentance. God is not careless, but has a will and purpose. Why does God show so much tolerance and patience to us? It is because He wants us to repent, and in our repentance to accept Him, gain Him, take Him as our Savior God, and live a life centered on Him. May God’s kindness lead all our hearts unto such repentance!

## God Will Repay

*Who will render to each person according to his deeds: <sup>7</sup>to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; <sup>8</sup>but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. <sup>9</sup>There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, <sup>10</sup>but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>11</sup>For there is no partiality with God.*

—Romans 2:6–11

### WORD STUDY

In these verses, two kinds of people are mentioned: everyone who does good (Rom. 2:7, 10) and those who do evil (vv. 8–9). Rather than showing the importance of faith in Christ, this section states the fact that in all places and to all people, God punishes evil and rewards good (Alford, 2:329).

Of those who do good, Martin Luther says, “Patient continuance is so altogether necessary that no work can be good in which patient continuance is lacking....In this very way, God proves what work is good and pleasing to Him” (Luther, 55). To those who seek glory, honor, and immortality, God

will render eternal life—*zōē*. This is the Greek word commonly used to refer to God's life, the highest life (Vine, 367). Verse 10 additionally names glory, honor, and peace as rewards to workers of good.

Those who do evil are characterized as selfishly ambitious, disobedient to the truth, and obedient to unrighteousness. Some translations of these verses use the word "contentious" in place of "selfishly ambitious." The Greek word used here, *eritheia*, was used to describe officials who seek their own purposes in the exercise of their office (Alford, 2:330). H. Alford says that "self-seeking" is the best sense of the word here. To such ones who do evil, upon their soul (*psuchē*) is given tribulation and distress, and from God they receive wrath and indignation.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Paul says that God will "render to each person according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). "Render" can also be translated "repay" (Strong, #591); God will repay each of us according to our deeds. In other words, people will reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7). For example, a man who lives an unhealthy lifestyle—smoking and drinking excessively everyday—will have a shorter lifespan. Spiritually, our time on earth is a time of continually sowing and storing up. Eventually, what we have sown will become the fruit that is due to us.

### Those Who Do Good

God will render eternal life "to those who by perseverance in doing good seek glory and honor and immortality" (Rom. 2:7). Glory and honor are both related to immortality. Anything mortal ultimately falls short of glory; anything immortal is glorious and honorable. Deep within man's conscience



is the knowledge that immortality exists (Eccl. 3:11). These verses in Romans say that when man seeks this immortality, God will render to him eternal life.

However, there is a requirement for gaining this eternal life: patient continuance in doing good. What is “doing good”? Most people think it means to do good things. To God, however, this is not so. In the gospel of Luke, a ruler asked the Lord Jesus, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The Lord Jesus told him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone” (18:18–19).

Only God Himself is good. In the eyes of our Lord Jesus, “doing good” means to seek for God. Those who do good are those who seek for God; these are the ones who seek glory, honor, and immortality, and are rendered eternal life. In short, if we seek God, He will render to us eternal life.

### Those Who Do Evil

In the midst of writing about condemnation, Paul mentions two kinds of lives. The first is God’s life (*zōē*), which is eternal. The second is man’s finite and fallen life, his soul life (*psuchē*). All people have a soul life (*psuchē*), yet God wants them to obtain and live by eternal life (*zōē*). If people, by patient continuance in doing good, seek for glory, honor, and immortality, this eternal life will become their reward and blessing. Conversely, if they forsake the divine life, are self-seeking, and obey unrighteousness rather than the truth, tribulation and distress will mark their soul life.

In verse 9, Paul goes even further and calls a soul under tribulation and distress one “who does evil.” If “doing good” is seeking for God, then “doing evil” is whatever is done without God. People may say, “I do not murder, steal, or live my life in a way that harms others. What evil can you accuse me of?” From the side of outward behavior, they may not do evil things, but a soul without God as its center is simply an evil soul.

A soul that is not centered on God suffers as a consequence (v. 9). A man may be a powerful CEO or university president, or he may earn hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, but if he does not have God as his center, his soul will suffer. Even to gain such a position and status requires suffering. After gaining such a position and status, there is still suffering. Why is this? When people are without God and do not hold God as their center, then tribulation and anguish weigh heavily on their souls, resulting in a suffering *psuchē*-life.

A soul not centered on God will automatically become self-centered. In this passage of verses, such a soul is called selfishly ambitious, implying the presence of contention. This is like a situation between two self-seeking businessmen. Both want to do business, earn money, and build up their companies. Yet in their hearts, they want to earn more and do better than the other. This is contention, and the fruit of an evil soul. It is not hard to see that such a soul will only find tribulation and anguish.

### God Is Not Partial

God promises glory, honor, and peace to everyone who does what is good, both to the Jew and to the Greek. There is no partiality with God (Rom. 2:10–11). In the midst of condemnation, Paul presents a pathway out—if people seek for God, glorify Him, take Him as their center, and desire to live before Him, God will render to them eternal life. God will add to such people glory, honor, and peace, regardless of who they are. It does not matter if they are a Jew or Greek, rich or poor, high or low, for there is no partiality with God.

Like all people in the world, those who love the Lord will go through times of tribulation and anguish. However, the supply and support from God will keep the suffering from their souls. Many who follow the Lord Jesus can testify that their lives have not been free of tribulation or distress, yet

because their souls were continually supported and supplied through the Spirit, they were able to maintain joy even in the midst of tribulation.

When our soul no longer seeks for God or gives Christ the first place in our life, we will lose the supply of divine life, unconsciously become self-centered, and rely on our own talent, ability, and effort. This is the moment our soul begins to suffer. If we set our soul to seek God and give Christ the first place in our life, we become one who “does good” in God’s eyes. With this kind of focus, we can receive God’s divine life, bringing in glory, honor, and peace.



## All Are Under the Law

*For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; <sup>13</sup>for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. <sup>14</sup>For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a Law to themselves, <sup>15</sup>in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, <sup>16</sup>on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.*

—Romans 2:12–16

### WORD STUDY

In verse 12, the Law may refer to law in the abstract or the Mosaic Law, although it seems to point specifically to the Law of Moses (Vincent, 3:27). This shows that the first half of verse 12 refers to the Gentiles, who had not received the written Law of Moses.

However, verse 14 shows that even without the written Law, the Gentiles still had knowledge of right and wrong. H. Alford wrote, “It is on that very undeniable assumption, ‘that

all who had a Law given shall be judged by that Law,' that the Apostle constructs his argument, asserting it with regard to the Mosaic Law in the case of the Jews, and proving that the Gentiles have had a Law given to them in the testimony of their consciences" (Alford, 2:331). Therefore, all will be judged (v. 16).

In verse 16, the Greek word for "secrets," *kruptos*, means "hidden, concealed, secret" (Thayer, 362). The "secrets of men" means the inward and hidden things that are hidden in a person's soul.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

In Romans 2:12–16, Paul deals with God's people, the Jews, showing that their relationship with the Law does not exempt them from God's condemnation.

### All Are Under God's Law

Paul says that as many as have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and as many as have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law (v. 12). Additionally, he says that simply hearing the Law does not make one righteous; it is the doers of the Law who will be justified (v. 13). Though the Jewish nation had heard the Law, they were unable to fulfill it. Thus, they could not obtain God's justification and as a result fell under condemnation.

The Gentiles are not free from the Law either. In verses 14–15, Paul states that though the Gentiles do not outwardly have the Law of Moses, the work of the Law is written in their hearts. Even without God's statutes and commandments, the Gentiles inwardly understood what was in the Law and thus became a law unto themselves. Whether Jew or Gentile, both find themselves under God's Law.

In verse 14, Paul mentions the instincts, or nature, of man. Our nature was created by God and was good under God's original creation (Gen. 1:26, 31). It was not until later that the Jewish nation was formed and the Law was given by God to Moses. Within all people is a natural knowledge that God exists and ought to be worshipped and sought after. Even more, the work of the Law has been written in our hearts, that we may know what does or does not match God. Before the Law was given to Moses, people already knew the Law—it was in their hearts. For this reason, all people are under the Law, whether they have been given the written ordinances or not.

### Judging the Secrets of Men

Because all people are under the Law, no one who is self-centered and judges others can boast before God. God, who judges according to His righteousness, will not only judge people's outward and obvious deeds, but will also judge through Christ Jesus the secrets of men (v. 16). In that day, everyone's inward secrets will be revealed. Christ said, "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops" (Luke 12:3).

How serious this will be! Would any person feel confident to stand before the Lord and to have their innermost secrets judged? Today every person is in need of the gospel, is in need of God, and is in need of being rescued from condemnation. There is not one person without these needs.





## A Superficial Name

*But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely upon the Law and boast in God,*

—Romans 2:17

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used here for the phrase “bear the name,” *eponomazō*, means “to name further, that is, to denominate” (Strong, #2028). It is found nowhere else in the New Testament. In this verse, *eponomazō* may be written in the passive voice. The passive voice would imply that Paul’s readers had the name “Jew” imposed on them by an outside source (Rogers, 320). In other words, they had been “denominated [Jew]” or “had the name [Jew] put on thee” (Alford, 2:333–334).

Together with the following verses, a feeling emerges that the outward name of “Jew” was only a superficial name and those who bore it lacked the reality of being God’s people. Though the Jewish nation had many outward things of God that should have been positive marks of their belonging to God, Paul states these things with obvious irony (Kittel, 4:754–755). Thus the Jew’s “reliance” upon the Law was really a false trust, and their “boast” in God was self-pride in their covenant with God (Alford, 2:333–335).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### God's People Condemned

Beginning in Romans 2:17, Paul specifically addresses the Jews and the condemnation they are under. Paul viewed the Jews with pity, for they had the letter and rituals but had lost the reality of God. This is immediately applicable to us today and shows us that a person living in the empty shell of religion, without the reality of God, is under God's condemnation.

In the passage following verse 17, Paul points out that the Jews who boasted in the Law, yet who broke it and dishonored God, are under God's condemnation (vv. 21–23). Paul was clear that the Jews had many advantages, the first being that they had been entrusted with the oracles of God, which have their source in God (3:1–2). However, the Jews had lost God Himself. In fact, they blasphemed the very name of God by departing from Him and living without Him (2:24–26).

### In Name without Reality

Paul stresses in these verses, beginning with verse 17, that if something that came from God departs from Him and loses Him, it is condemned. Judaism originally had God and the Law, which Moses received from Him. Yet in the practice of the ordinances contained in the Law, the Jews lost God Himself. Their regulations, statutes, rituals, and practices became only the empty outward shell of a condemned religion, and the Jews themselves became a group of religious people condemned by God.

Today, we must be cautious. On the one hand, we can have Jesus Christ and do many things that are related to Him. On the other hand, if we do not have Christ when we practice such things, we will become religious people in the same vein as the Jews. In other words, we may believe in the Lord Jesus

and consecrate ourselves to serve Him, yet we can unconsciously lose the Lord Jesus in our service. This is a characteristic of religious people who have lost the reality of the Lord.

### The Jew's Lack of Experience

Though it is a short verse, Romans 2:17 tells us three things:

1. Paul has begun talking to the Jews, God's chosen people;
2. They rely upon the Law;
3. They boast in God.

What nation in the world is more esteemed in the Bible than the Jewish nation? They are God's chosen people, the Law they rely upon is issued by God, and God Himself is their boasting. According to this verse, the Jews would seem to us to be a very high and wonderful people, yet Paul seems to be saying, "You Jews only have a superficial name, and you too stand condemned by God!"

If we were reading this verse as a Jew, we would sigh with emotion because it implies we have only a superficial name. According to birth, we would be a Jew in name, yet not a true Jew in experience. We may not have experienced the God whom Moses experienced, whom David experienced, whom Elijah experienced, and whom so many other servants of God experienced. We may not have experienced the God who did great work through many people in past generations. We would be called a Jew and would seemingly have everything; yet these experiences would be very far from us. This is what it means for the Jews to have only a superficial name.

The so-called Jews mentioned here were characterized by the name of God's people, yet they lacked God as their reality. In the Old Testament, God led the Israelites out of Egypt, did many miracles among them, and issued the Law to them on

the mount of Sinai (Exo. 24:12). He led their next generation into the good land of Canaan (Josh. 3:17). The Israelites could genuinely testify of a real and living God, full of power, who could be relied upon and trusted. Unfortunately, the spiritual reality of their experiences disappeared, little by little, over time. Eventually, the Law of God remained, the system of the priesthood remained, and the ritual worship of God remained, yet God Himself had left.

### A Superficial Name in Religion

Though the Jews had many godly things and religious activities, they did not hold on to God, who is the reality of those things. How pitiful this is! They have fallen to become a group of people who have religious activities yet do not have God. The same principle applies to religious groups today that boast of belonging to a certain organization or famous person. They may boast of their spiritual leaders, saying, "This man is our father who always led us. When he was with us, God worked in wonderful ways and blessed us immensely!" An Israelite once cried a similar expression: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" (Judg. 7:20). Gideon, who had been raised up by the Lord for His work, was placed by the people at the same level as the Lord Himself! By the end of his leadership, Gideon had made an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah, where all Israel played the harlot with it, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his house (Judg. 8:27). When any religious group loses its spiritual content, the only thing left is a superficial name.

We must be cautious! Though we have been saved and have believed in the Lord Jesus, we too can bear a superficial name and be without the reality of a rich spiritual heritage. If this is our situation, we are exactly like those who are called Jews yet live in religion. By the Lord's mercy, may we continuously allow His divine riches to constitute us so that we may obtain

the reality of spiritual things and avoid becoming those who only have a superficial name in religion.

Concerning the relationship we should have with the ministries that have served us, Watchman Nee said that once a person with a ministry has passed away, his ministry is also past. Even more, it will be “rooted out.” Ministries are like the rice plant after harvest time in China—no one lets the remaining root remain. Instead, the plants are rooted out and the soil is turned for the seeds to be scattered anew.

Throughout church history, many Christian groups have been holy, heavenly, and full of the blessing of the Holy Spirit when they began. However, as these blessings eventually passed away, leaving only a name, the people chose to remain as a group with that name rather than to follow wherever the Lord was leading them next. God could do nothing but raise up another group of people for His work on earth. This is truly a warning to us to remain watchful! Let us not fight for a superficial name, which in the end only brings us under condemnation. Instead, let us fight for the reality of God in our churches and with the brothers and sisters around us!



## The Embodiment of Knowledge

*And know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, <sup>19</sup>and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.*

—Romans 2:18–20

### WORD STUDY

In these verses, Paul sets out everything the Jewish nation took pride in. He includes in verses 19–20 a list of titles the Jews proudly used for themselves. Of special note is the last phrase in verse 20—the Jews were confident they had in the Law “the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.”

The Greek word used here for “embodiment,” *morphōsis*, means “form, appearance” (Strong, #3446). It is a neutral word used only one other time in the New Testament and must be taken according to its context. In 2 Timothy 3:5, it refers to sinners who have an outward form of godliness but lack its inner essence and reality. However, here in Romans, it is a boast made by the Jews, meaning they must have felt they possessed in the Law the actual representation or embodiment

of knowledge and truth. This judgment is stated with obvious irony by Paul (Kittel, 4:754–755). Though the Jews may have felt they held the actual embodiment of knowledge and truth, they held only a rough sketch, a frame without the inward substance or reality (Rogers, 320).

Paul describes the Jews as confident that they themselves are “a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness” (v. 19). Jesus used this title ironically when He said of the Pharisees, “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matt. 15:14).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

In the previous chapter, we considered how the Jews had many outward religious things, but they had lost the reality of God. In this manner, they are an example set forth for us today, warning us to hold to God as our reality. Their example is immediately applicable to our lives and our walk with the Lord.

In the Old Testament, God told the Israelites again and again how He had led them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm in order that they would be His people and nation on the earth (Deut. 4:34; 26:8). The Israelites clearly knew what the meaning of their existence as a nation was and what the purpose of their living was. However, their knowledge about God never penetrated them; it remained objective and outward.

According to Romans 2:18, even with only the outward knowledge of God, the Jews were able to approve the things that are essential. Verse 19 tells us that the Jews believed they were a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness. We can still see this attitude among many Jews today. They believe that all the people in the world are blind and that only their eyes are clear because they know God. They also deeply



believe that all the people in the world live in darkness and that they alone are the light to those in darkness.

We can also look at this section more generally as a description of religious people who have lost the reality of God in their worship and practices. They too consider themselves guides to the blind and lights to those in darkness. They do not realize that they themselves need a guide and a light. After reading Paul's description in these few verses, we can say that religious people are self-centered, arrogant, and have the form, yet lack the reality, of knowledge and truth.

Several things about the Jews from these verses still apply today. They have been instructed out of the Law, know the will of God, and are able to approve the things that are essential. They should know what is heavenly, what is of God, what is valuable before God, and what will exist for eternity. Unfortunately, even with the ability to approve these essential things, the Jews have been unable to obtain them. Today, we must not be those who are encumbered with empty religion, but those who strive to approve *and* to obtain the divine things. If we can be those who not only approve the excellent things but also pursue them and become constituted with them, we will be a people according to God's heart's desire.



## Having the Letter of the Law

*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? <sup>24</sup>For “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” just as it is written.*

*<sup>25</sup>For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup>So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup>And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? <sup>28</sup>For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.*

—Romans 2:21–28

### WORD STUDY

There are two main outward signs that set the Jews apart from the Gentiles—the letter of the Law and circumcision (v. 27). The Greek word for “letter,” *gramma*, can be translated

“learning, letter, scripture” (Strong, #1121). Here it refers to the written commandments of the Word of God (Vine, 365). Circumcision was given by God as a sign of His covenant with Abraham and his children (Gen. 17:9–11). Both the Law and circumcision were outward signs given by God to distinguish His people, and they were undoubtedly distinctions the Jews were very proud of.

However, Paul’s argument concludes that these outward signs are not what make a true Jew (Rom. 2:28). The word “outward” in verse 28 is a rendering of the phrase “*en tō phanerō*,” which literally means “in the open” (Vine, 453). W. E. Vine explains that the outward signs of the Israelites are here set “in contrast to the inward operation of the Holy Spirit under the New Covenant” (Vine, 365).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

It is hard to believe a religious person would do the evil things mentioned by Paul in Romans 2:21–23. Many unbelievers are not even this evil! Yet it seems the religious Jews Paul addressed committed such acts. It is shocking that the things a religious person does can be as bad as or even worse than the things unbelievers do.

Paul wrote that “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (v. 24). The Jew’s hypocrisy was so noticeable that the unbelieving Gentiles even blasphemed Jehovah. The empty religion of the Jews caused the Gentiles to become blasphemers of the name of God.

### Paul’s Challenge

Paul’s debate in verses 25–27 is quite amazing! He challenges the Jews with the same thought from verse 13, that the doers of the Law are justified, not the hearers. Though

the Jews had seen and been given so much, they were unable to live out what they had seen. Others who had not seen as much nor been given as much were able to live out what the Jews should have been able to live out. Paul's challenge seems to be a question to the Jews: "Which life will be counted before God? Which life is valuable?" Like the Jews, religious people tend to hold fast to the outward letter and rituals, yet these things ultimately do not have much value before God.

The problem the Jews faced was that their name was superficial; they were not real Jews (v. 28). They were like Chinese children born in western countries. Over the past generation, many Chinese couples have come to western countries, settled down, and had children. These children look Chinese, speak Chinese, and eat Chinese food. However, their thinking, logic, and values are totally western. They grew up in a western environment, received a western education, and experienced western society. They may be Chinese in appearance, but they are inwardly western. From Paul's point of view, the outward things do not matter much; what matters is what is inside. Outward things do not make a person a Jew, just as circumcision is not a matter of the flesh, but of the heart.

### A True Jew is Not One Outwardly

Superficial things do not count for much. We have to agree that the Jews are to be honored today; they are God's chosen people, they have the Law of God, they boast in God, and they are taught by the Law to know the will of God and to approve the things that are essential. However, if these are only outward things, the Jews are not real Jews. Even if they keep the Law by being circumcised, honoring the Sabbath, offering sacrifices, and keeping the feasts, these things are totally unable to produce true Jews.

Why did God want the Jews to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12)? It was a sign that they should not live in their fallen

flesh. Why did God want them to keep the Sabbaths (Exo. 31:14)? It was for them to learn to take God as their rest. Why did God want them to offer sacrifices (Lev. 23:37)? It was for them to consecrate and trust themselves to God. Why did God want them to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exo. 12:17)? It was to show that their living should be apart from the leaven of the world.

Simply following these outward rules without realizing their significance may produce outward Jews. However, because Jews today do not have an inward relationship with Jesus Christ, they are unable to live unto God and are not true Jews.

## The True Jews

*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. <sup>29</sup>But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.*

—Romans 2:28–29

### WORD STUDY

The word “outward” in verse 28 is a rendering of the Greek phrase, “*en tō phanerō*,” which literally means “in the open” (Vine, 453). Likewise, the word “inwardly” in verse 29 is rendered from the Greek phrase, “*en tō kryptō*,” which means “in the secret, or hidden” (Vine, 331). Thus, what makes a true spiritual Jew is set in contrast to one who is merely circumcised naturally and outwardly. The inward reality is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit.

The Greek word used here for “praise,” *epainos*, denotes commendation (Strong, #1868). It is commonly used in reference to believers, either receiving praise or offering praise to God (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 8:18; Eph. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:7) (Vine, 479–480). Martin Luther wrote, “With these words, the Apostle clinches the charge that the Jews are sinners....The

Apostle here teaches what our Lord says of the work-righteous in Matthew 23:5. The praise of outward righteousness comes from men; but it is rebuked by God. The praise of inward (*spiritual*) righteousness, however, comes from God; but it is rejected and persecuted by men" (Luther, 64).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### True Judaism

Being a true Jew is not a matter of outward signs; it is an inward reality. It is not a matter of rituals, of Law, of race, of teaching, or of boasting. It is a matter of whether the divine life is an inward reality. This inner reality is a totally different thing from outward religion.

A true Jew is someone who has the inner reality of life in the Spirit. An outward Jew might say, "I am called a Jew." The true Jew will say, "My Lord calls me a Jew." An outward Jew might say, "I am taught from the Law and I rely on it." The true Jew will say, "The Law is within me and regulates me daily." An outward Jew might say, "I can boast in God." The true Jew will say, "I am in one accord with God." An outward Jew might say, "I know the will of God." The true Jew will say, "I live and walk according to God's will." An outward Jew might say, "I can approve the things that are more excellent." The true Jew will say, "The things that are more excellent are mine."

True circumcision is of the heart and is by the Spirit. The organic aspect of God's complete salvation is completely inward, requiring people to experience and apply the Spirit. True Jews are those who, by God's mercy, are willing to apply the redemption the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross, so that they might be delivered out of the lust and bondage of the flesh to enjoy the freedom and release of the Spirit. God's organic salvation is not a matter of the letter but of the Spirit. What a great salvation this is!



## Praised by God

Speaking of the true Jews, Paul says, “His praise is not from men, but from God” (v. 29). Paul had already shown that both Gentiles and religious people are under the condemnation of God. However, we should thank God, for He has called us out of such condemnation into praise from Him! If we are full of the inward reality of the Spirit, we are true Jews in God’s eyes. We may not have a flesh and blood relationship to the nation of Israel, we may not be familiar with the Law, and we may not understand many godly things, but we can have the Spirit. When we have the inner reality of the Spirit, then we will receive praise from God.

Our relationship with God is what determines whether we are in religion or not. It does not matter what other people think or say. A person who is trapped in religion expects and looks for praise from other people; but a person who lives before God and has a healthy relationship with Him will only accept praise from God. If we live in the Spirit and are full of the inner reality of the Spirit, our praise will come from God, not from other people.

Watchman Nee wrote a hymn, which is roughly translated from Chinese:

*You may go to get a reputation, riches, glory, and friends.  
You may go to find success, praise, followers, and abundance.  
But I am willing to be lonely and poor, not seeking prosperity.  
My heart earnestly hopes to follow my Lord loyally to the  
road’s end.* (Martin, #568)

Watchman Nee’s whole life was like this hymn—he did not receive much praise from men. Dear brothers and sisters, we must be clear about what we will gain by living a Christ-centered life. If we pursue things other than God, or if we hope to receive praise from others besides God, we will eventually fall into religion. Remember what the Lord Jesus said:

“Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6:26). This is one of the basic principles of following the Lord.

These verses show us two basic principles of following the Lord—that we must live by the reality of the Spirit (not the outward letter) and that our praise must come from God (not other people). To avoid a superficial name, we must be full of the inner reality of the Spirit. Surely we will experience many high times of overcoming and low times of weakness, but in the day we see the Lord, how wonderful it would be to hear Him say to us, “Well done, good and faithful slave” (Matt. 25:21). Is there any word from the Lord that is better, higher, or sweeter than this? To be praised by God is indeed the most blessed thing!

## The Oracles of God

*Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup>Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. <sup>3</sup>What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it? <sup>4</sup>May it never be! Rather, let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, “That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged.”*

*<sup>5</sup>But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.) <sup>6</sup>May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world? <sup>7</sup>But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner? <sup>8</sup>And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), “Let us do evil that good may come”? Their condemnation is just.*

—Romans 3:1–8

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used in verse 2 for “oracles,” *logion*, means “utterance” (Strong, #3051). Strictly speaking, it means a little divine word or a brief divine utterance (Thayer, 379). Some scholars believe the reference here is to the Old

Testament scriptures with the Law and the promises (Vincent, 3:31–32), while others also include the Messianic promises in the Old Testament (Thayer, 379). In the Old Testament, God directly revealed Himself and His speaking to the Jews only, a matter Paul considered a great advantage and benefit (Alford, 2:337).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

In previous verses, Paul had shown that even the religious Jews, who were God's own people, were condemned. Since this was the case, what was the value of being a Jew? Paul tells us here that first of all, God had committed His oracles to them (Rom. 3:2).

### The Static or Operative Word of God

Paul uses "oracles" (*logion*) in a plural sense, indicating multiple utterances. This plural *logion* emphasizes the commands and promises of God for His people in the Old Testament. It is derived from the Greek word *logos*, which is used in John 1:1: "In the beginning was the *Word*." *Logos* denotes not only the utterance of some words, but even the whole expression of thought (Vine, 683). It is a dynamic Greek word that emphasizes the operation of the words that are spoken.

However, the oracles spoken of by Paul are not *logos* but *logion*. *Logos* is active, full of movement, operative, and purposeful. Yet what God committed to the Jews was *logion*, a statement of words rather than the fully operative word. The *logos* can reveal the desire of God's heart, His inward hope, and His will and purpose, yet what the Jews received was *logion*. This was surely an advantage over nothing, yet these brief teachings and statements were unable to produce life and reality in the hearers.

Healthy Christians should be full of the moving and operating word of God. Yet the word of God can have two different aspects. To someone full of spiritual reality, God's word is *logos*. To someone in religion, God's word remains only *logion*. Religious people may have God's word, but in them, the word is static and unable to operate effectively. They have the word of God, but are unable to respond to it. The word is rendered inoperative in them, and it is unable to change them. It becomes nothing but *logion* to them—small sayings or utterances. We not only need the word of God, but we must allow it to operate in us!

If the spoken word of God is unable to produce a healthy response in us, the word will not be of much benefit to us. What is the use of listening to a sermon or receiving teachings? No matter how many sermons we have heard or church meetings we have attended, we should ask ourselves if God's word is producing any inward reality in us. Are we able to subjectively and experientially apply these words? Oh, may the word of God become full of operation within us for our application and experience!

### Paul's Conclusion

In verses 4–8, Paul reveals more about those who are in religion. God is true (v. 4), and His words reveal righteousness. A common characteristic of religious people is their desire to dispute, even with God Himself. Those who are in religion always like to argue, but Paul says, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (v. 4). Paul's final conclusion is that all in religion are under condemnation, and their condemnation is just (v. 8).



## All Men Are Under Sin

*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;<sup>10</sup> as it is written,*

*“There is none righteous, not even one;*

*<sup>11</sup>There is none who understands*

*There is none who seeks for God;*

*<sup>12</sup>All have turned aside, together they have become useless;*

*There is none who does good,*

*There is not even one.”*

*<sup>13</sup>“Their throat is an open grave,*

*With their tongues they keep deceiving,”*

*“The poison of asps is under their lips”;*

*<sup>14</sup>“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness”;*

*<sup>15</sup>“Their feet are swift to shed blood,*

*<sup>16</sup>Destruction and misery are in their paths,*

*<sup>17</sup>And the path of peace they have not known.”*

*<sup>18</sup>“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

*<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; <sup>20</sup>because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.*

*—Romans 3:9–20*

## WORD STUDY

The Greek word used in Romans 3:9 for “sin,” *hamartia*, indicates an abstract thought of sin (Strong, #266), and is different from the Greek word for a single specific sin—*hamartēma* (Strong, #265). *Hamartia* is an inward element producing sinful acts (Vine, 576). Thus, to be “under sin” in this verse is to be under the controlling power of man’s sinful nature.

This passage explains that by the Law, the world may become accountable before God (v. 19). The Greek word used here for “accountable,” *hupodikos* (Strong, #5267), is composed of two words—*hupo*, meaning “under,” and *dikē*, meaning “justice.” Thus, the word literally means “under justice” or “under judgment” (Rogers, 322). The result of the speaking of the Law, according to this verse, is that the whole world stands guilty and under the judgment of God.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

## All Are Under Sin

Paul used the first chapter of Romans to deal with the Gentiles, and then chapters 2–3 to deal with the Jews. After addressing both groups, Paul’s argument culminates in the conclusion that the whole world is under condemnation.

Paul tells us that all men live “under sin” (v. 9). This means that all men are under the controlling power of sin, leading to ungodly, self-centered, religious lives. Sin is a power that causes people’s living, deeds, and even existence to be turned aside from God and made useless.

Paul continues by showing the horrible extent of mankind’s fall away from God. He says, “There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside” (vv. 11–12). Because of sin, all who live in the world have throats that are open graves (v. 13). If people in the world looked within themselves



and exposed the depths of their souls, they would find that they are only graves on the inside. Though some may look put-together and proper outwardly, everyone is rotten and corrupt inwardly.

### Fallen Man's Living

"Their feet are swift to shed blood" (v. 15). The deeds of people in the world are linked to violence. They kill, shed blood, and harm others. As long as people neglect a relationship with God, it is impossible for them to have relationships with one another that are not harmful. In the end, every action a person takes will hurt others. We need the Lord's mercy to learn how to do things related to Him so that our deeds would not hurt others.

"Destruction and misery are in their paths" (v. 16). The ways of people in the world are rooted in destruction and misery. Another way to say this is that destruction and misery are the very sources of the way people live in the world. Just look at the world and listen to the news today. Isn't today's world filled with misery and destruction? Isn't the impact of our generation only more destruction and misery? Society is filled with this because people's living is based on it.

### Fallen Man's Existence

"And the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes" (vv. 17–18). Today, people in the world exist without a fear of God, and do not know the way of peace. To fear God is to respect His every decision. In other words, God may clearly be leading us in one direction, but without a proper fear, we will insist on another way. We may clearly know what is in the Lord's heart, but we will insist on something else according to our heart. Oh, how we

need the Lord's mercy that we may walk the way of peace with a fearful and obedient heart our whole life!

I would especially like to encourage brothers to learn to trust in the Lord. If you have been called by the Lord, you should have a desire to serve the Lord full-time. When you serve the Lord in a full-time capacity, you can know the way of peace in a way few other people do. When people buy a house, they think they will have safety. When people get a doctorate degree, they think they have a great future. When people are promoted, they think they are closer to fulfilling their dreams and plans. However, if people knew what the way of peace was, they would kneel down and tell the Lord, "I want nothing but to serve You, Lord. What is my future? Of what use is my doctorate degree? What good is my career? What value is there in wealth? I want none of these things. I only want to live in the way of peace, pursuing You and serving You." I can say from my own experience that this kind of life is the most valuable life a person can live.

### The Need for Salvation

Romans 3:19 says that the whole world will be held accountable before God. This means that the whole world will be brought under the judgment of God. Notice that it does not say the world is under God's condemnation, but under His judgment. We know that the world is under God's condemnation, but Paul does not say that here. He says that the whole world will be brought under the judgment of God.

However, God does not desire to judge people but to have them submit to Him. God does not want people to perish but to repent. Oh, how much God hopes people would repent, turn to Him, and gain Him today! Judgment does not please God. The purpose of judgment is to shed light on God's mercy, so that people could know God's abundant love, receive His prepared redemption, and obtain His complete salvation.

As verse 20 tells us, the more the Law is revealed, the more we are able to see our sin, and the more we should see we are under condemnation leading to judgment. In turn, this will cause us more and more to feel a need for God's salvation (vv. 21–22).



SECTION THREE

JUSTIFICATION



## An Overview of Justification

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*

—Romans 3:21–24

*And these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.*

—Romans 8:30

### WORD STUDY

To understand justification, we must also understand righteousness. The two words in Greek are very similar and are derived from the same root, *dikaios*, which means “equitable, innocent, holy, or just” (Strong, #1342). The Greek word for “righteousness,” *dikaiosunē*, means “the character or quality of being right or just” (Vine, 535). The Greek word for “justify,” *dikaioō*, means “to render just or innocent” (Strong, #1344). Thus, to justify someone is to make

that person right or righteous. When God justifies us, it means He has made us righteous according to His supreme standard—Himself (Vincent, 3:39–40).

Romans 8:30 shows the process God brings us through. Everything God has done in this verse is spoken of in the aorist tense, indicating that the actions have already been accomplished in God's eyes (Alford, 2:399). Essentially, this verse gives us a snapshot of our status before God and shows us that justification is a fact that cannot be changed.

However, in Romans 3:24, the Greek word for “being justified” is in the present tense, which indicates an ongoing process without regard for beginning and end (Wallace, 751). In other words, we are not only justified permanently before God but are also being justified today. This shows that although justification does permanently deal with our status before God, it is also a process for us to subjectively experience.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

What is justification? To answer this question, we should first consider the very being of our God. He is spirit, love, and light (John 4:24; 1 John 4:8; 1:5). His very nature is holy, and His work and operation are based in righteousness (Lev. 19:2; Hos. 14:9). There is not one thing in all that God does that can be found lacking, blameworthy, or unseemly. According to the Bible, justification is an action undertaken by God. Thus, justification must also be based in God's righteousness.

Justification is the action by which God approves people according to His righteous principle. When we believed into Jesus Christ, we who were a condemned people received redemption. All our condemnation and penalties have been borne by Christ. By believing into Him, we were justified by God in Christ.



## The Purpose of Justification

From Romans 3:21 through 5:11, Paul's focus shifts from man's condemnation to God's justification (3:20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:25; 5:1, 9). However, in 8:30, Paul again touches justification, this time in a brief snapshot. In God's eyes, everything has been accomplished, although for us the end of justification still lies in the future. Paul wrote, "These whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified" (8:30). Before the foundation of the world, we were predestined by God. In the course of time, we were called by Him. After He called us, He justified us, and eventually He wants us to obtain glory.

Predestination was carried out before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4–5), yet God's calling happens in time. Through the hearing of the gospel, God is calling people to come to Him, to believe into the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be saved. This same call was made to us. Answering His call changes our status and existence and brings the divine life into us. This life causes us to live differently from others and to pursue different things.

The reason God calls and justifies us is to glorify us. All men are born under the condemnation and judgment of God, and all men continue to live under this condemnation. However, before God's judgment is executed in time, He is mercifully calling us out from under His judgment and condemnation. He is the One who both justifies us and will eventually bring us into glory.

## The Experience of Justification

Justification is directly related to glorification (Rom. 8:30). Glorification is both the purpose and result of justification. On the one hand, justification is an accomplished fact. It was

accomplished for us once in time and will last forever. It permanently changed our status before God. On the other hand, Romans 3:24 shows us that justification is not only a matter of our permanent status—it is also a lifelong experience!

If justification were only a matter of our status, then based upon our justification, we would immediately be glorified, and in the moment of our salvation, we would be ready to leave the world to be with Christ. If this were the case, why would God leave us on the earth and allow us to go through our whole life? It is because justification is not only a judicial matter, but also an organic and subjective experience and realization. Yes, based upon our salvation, our status before God has been forever changed to “justified,” but our justification is also a fact for us to realize and enjoy over the course of our life.

This process of justification is not an overcoming and powerful spiritual experience, as we might suppose it would be. Rather, it is the experience of an inward assurance that God has justified us. We are often not fully assured of God’s justification. When we look at ourselves, we easily see our many shortages without realizing that God has already justified us.

Sometimes we may ask the Lord, “Why am I so weak? Why do I fail so much? Why do I have so many problems?” These questions show that our understanding of justification is not complete. If we correctly understand justification, we will realize that no matter who we are—whether gentle, lovely, caring, or none of these things—we do not, nor can we, justify ourselves. God is the One who has justified us.

### A Life Affected by Justification

People are complicated before believing into the Lord, and this does not change after faith comes. After believing into the Lord, many people feel that they ought to change themselves and behave like a new person. We can be very

ambitious in this way, yet without exception, we will all meet failure. We often do not realize that our way out of failure and condemnation into justification was long ago prepared for us by God. This is a wonderful thing! We who have been justified by God should boldly say, “As far as I am concerned, I have nothing to boast of or talk about. However, I am justified by God. His justification is enough for me, and it is only in His justification that I will boast.”

Those who have experienced justification can live a life filled with the assurance that this justification is firm. Suppose someone challenges our justification because we lost our temper. We could answer, “Why are you bothered by my temper? You do not justify me, nor do I justify myself. It is God who justifies me!” This may seem extreme, but isn’t it good to be so assured of our justification by God? We can abide in this justification every day. Our weaknesses do not have to create problems between God and us. Nothing should cause us to doubt the fact that God has justified us. We may be very weak, have many limitations, and fail many times, but no matter what is right or wrong about us, we can always boldly declare that we are justified by God!



## The Righteousness of God

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.*

—Romans 3:21

### WORD STUDY

Paul begins Romans 3:21 with the Greek word *nuni*, a stronger form of the Greek word *nun*, both of which are commonly translated “now” (Strong, #3568, #3570). The stronger form adds emphasis to Paul’s words and indicates a great transition in his thoughts and logic. Thus, the clause “by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” in verse 20 is immediately contrasted to the manifestation of the righteousness of God in verse 21.

Righteousness is “the character or quality of being right or just” (Vine, 535). That which is righteous matches a set standard. Here, the righteousness of God denotes an attribute and characteristic of God Himself (Vine, 535). This shows that God’s righteousness has one standard—God Himself. Yet Paul’s emphasis is not only on an attribute of God, but on the fact that this righteousness is also manifested and obtainable today through faith in Jesus Christ (Luther, 77).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Righteousness of God

To understand justification, we must first understand the righteousness of God. Righteousness is part of God's very being, a characteristic of God Himself. This righteousness is completely beyond man's reach, yet it was on display in the man Jesus Christ as He walked the earth. He was the only One to ever live out the righteousness of God. Thus the apostle John was confident in describing Him as "Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). The righteousness of God is not only a divine attribute but also a person, Jesus Christ our Lord, who has now become our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

Romans 3:21 says the righteousness of God has now been manifested, or revealed, apart from the Law. This shows that our justification is totally up to God. According to the Law, we are all condemned. Jews and Greeks are all under sin, since there are none righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:9–10). By the Law is the knowledge of sin, and by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight (3:20). However, because the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the Law, we have a way to be justified today. Thank God! Now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed!

### The Standard of Justification

Justification and the righteousness of God are impossible to separate. Justification is not based on our keeping of the Law. It is not based on our own standards, nor are we its source. The source and standard of justification are both only one thing: the righteousness of God. Justification is God's righteous approving of men according to His righteous standard, that is, according to Himself.

According to our natural reasoning, we should set our own standard for our justification. Paul would say, “No! It is not so! Give up such a thought!” Man’s standard is not high enough, and we can never earn God’s justification. There is no such hope, for the Bible has said very clearly, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). Justification has never been attained by keeping the Law, nor is the standard of justification based on man. No effort or struggle will justify us. We are all unrighteous people in the presence of a righteous God. There is no hope for any of us unless God justifies us according to His righteous standard.

God’s standard is the highest in the universe, because it is based on God Himself. His life is the highest life, and His being is the highest being. He will judge us according to His standard, which we cannot meet. But in Christ Jesus, He will also justify us according to His standard. This is justification.

The standard of justification is not found in us but in God. The Law does not justify us; God does. We do not justify ourselves; God justifies us. Ultimately, only our righteous God can justify us according to His righteous being.

### The Foundation of God’s Salvation

The righteousness of God is the foundation of God’s salvation. God does not justify us according to who we are but according to Himself and to His righteousness. If justification were according to us, it would not be firm. Justification according to God and His righteousness is solid and unchangeable. We often make decisions based on our emotions and later come to regret our actions. God justifies not according to emotion, but according to Himself and His righteousness. Even God’s love is not the foundation of justification. If justification were according to God’s love, yet He was not righteous, He could say one day, “I loved you yesterday, but I do not love you today, so I can longer justify you.” What a shaky

justification! Instead, justification is completely according to God Himself and His righteousness. The Bible shows us that God is never unrighteous and in fact can never be. Thus, whether we are lovable or not, justification founded on God's righteous standard is steady and sure.

Righteousness is the principle of God's working (Hos. 14:9). We often pray, "Lord, thank You for loving me so much!" Very few have this kind of prayer: "Lord, thank You for being so righteous!" Very few people ever appreciate that our God is a righteous God. Because He justifies us according to Himself and His righteousness, we can boldly say, "Lord, You justify me not because I am lovely, but because You are righteous. You are faithful, unchangeable, and can never deny Yourself. Because of Your righteousness, our relationship can be healthy."

### The God of Judgment and Justification

When we talk about the righteousness of God, it is easy for us to think about His judgment. Even in our purest moments, there are many unclean matters within us, and as we grow in God's life, many of our actions and motives could fall under God's judgment. For example, we may preach the gospel from two different motivations: our love for souls, or to increase the number of people in our church meetings. Gospel preaching out of love for others will please God. If it is only for an increase in attendance, it will not please God.

Even after we believe into the Lord, most of the time we find ourselves under God's judgment. We offend God every day. Even after believing into the Lord, loving Him, and serving Him, we are still inwardly complicated. When preachers give sermons, what they say may not be related to God's heart's desire, yet if they speak well, they may become arrogant. If they don't speak well, they may blame others or have self-pity. Even the best church meetings may be under the judgment of God!



However, God is not only a God of judgment, but also a God of justification! Our own situations and conditions would prevent us from coming to God, but God and His righteousness have opened the way for us to come to His presence. God is righteous to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). He justifies us! Now, we can boldly approach the God of righteousness, come forward to Him without fear, pray to Him, and rely on Him in the midst of all of our failures, weaknesses, and limitations.

### No Charge Can Be Brought

Romans 8:33 says, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.” The justification of God is based on His very being. Justification is according to His nature and righteousness. When we pray and repent for our stumbling and weakness, we may think that God forgives us because of our repentance and shedding of tears. Yet this understanding is wrong. We are forgiven by God because of His justification. Because God has justified us, Satan has no ground to bring a charge against us again. Even in our experiences of constant failures, and though we are accused unceasingly (Rev. 12:10), the Bible clearly tells us that no one can bring a charge against those who have been chosen and justified by God.

Righteousness is not only how God works, it is also God Himself. Satan never justifies us, nor can he, because he only accuses us. Other people cannot justify us either, because they are also unrighteous. Even we cannot justify ourselves. Who can justify us according to God’s standard? Only the God of righteousness can. We should tell the Lord, “I honor and stand in awe of Your righteousness, just as I cherish Your love. Your love attracts me, and Your righteousness allows me to boldly live before You without fear. Lord, thank You. Because You have justified me, no one can bring a charge against me.”



## Through Faith in Jesus Christ

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,<sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.*

—Romans 3:21–22

### WORD STUDY

An important phrase in verse 22 is “through faith in Jesus Christ.” The Greek word for “through,” *dia*, denotes the channel of an act (Strong, #1223), in this case the channel between the righteousness of God and all who believe. This channel is faith in Jesus Christ.

In Greek, the word “in” is not present. The translation of “in Jesus Christ” is based on the fact that “Jesus Christ” is in the genitive case. This case may give the phrase a wide variety of possible meanings. The safest interpretation may be that Jesus Christ is the object of our faith—we have faith *in* Him (Vincent, 3:41). However, the genitive case may imply that this faith belongs to Jesus Christ and comes to us *from* Him (Wallace, 727–728).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Justification is the act of making someone just or righteous. These verses describe God's justification—it is His righteousness revealed through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. God's justification is based on two things: His righteousness and faith.

This faith could be faith *in* Jesus Christ or the faith *of* Jesus Christ. The moment we pray to receive the Lord as Savior, our life, status, and purpose all change. This change happens because of the faith of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of God, through the faith of Jesus, is accounted to all who believe so they can be justified (Rom. 4:3).

### Faith Produces a Union

People do not generate faith within themselves. The source of faith is God, and faith is given by God (2 Pet. 1:1). According to experience, faith is not only belief into Jesus Christ, the Son of God, but is also something that unites us to Him. The Lord is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:5), and by faith we are united with Christ in life.

Before our salvation, we may never have considered believing in the Lord. However, one day we heard the gospel and freely believed into Jesus, even though we may not have understood or fully agreed with the gospel. We didn't believe in the Lord by applying only our minds to the gospel. The reason we believed is that the faith *of* Jesus became *our* faith in Jesus. The faith that belongs to Jesus entered us when we heard the gospel (Rom. 10:17), and this faith operated and worked to become the faith that unites us to the Lord.

### His Faith Becomes Our Faith

The faith that unites us to Jesus is a mystery. The faith

of Jesus in us becomes the faith by which we believe into Him. The faith *of* Jesus begins working in us before we ever have faith *in* Jesus. Suppose a believer's friend is not yet a Christian. This friend may enjoy attending church meetings, spending time with believers, and discussing spiritual things. These all show that this friend's life has been affected and that the faith of Jesus is already working. Many of us may have friends like this. We do not need to reason with them to believe in Jesus, because the faith of Jesus is already working within them. All they need to do is confess the Lord's name with their mouths, for with the mouth is confession resulting in salvation (Rom. 10:10). At that point, the faith of Jesus will become faith *in* Jesus.

No one's salvation is self-initiated. Salvation is only the result of the inward work of God. When we say, "Lord Jesus, save me," this prayer is a testimony that God has already been working in us to save and regenerate us. It is totally the Lord's grace that those who lived in sin and vanity can be saved by Him today. The reason we can believe into Him is His faith. Oh, we should all learn to thank the Lord for this! His faith enables us to believe and brings us to justification. His faith comes into us and becomes our faith.

I once heard someone give a testimony regarding the arrest of his sister during civil unrest in China. He was still very young and had heard the name of Jesus in the chapel his mother took him to every week. When his sister was taken away, he ran to his room and prayed alone: "Lord Jesus, if You release my sister I will believe in You!" Though he thought it was impossible for such a prayer to be answered, his heart was sincere. His sister was released! Yet he thought to himself, "I will wait until the future to believe."

After seven years had passed, he heard the gospel again in a church meeting. Though he did not understand exactly what was said, at that moment he felt, "I must believe into Jesus. No matter what the speaker is talking about, I will believe!" Why did such a feeling come? It was because faith had

already been in him and had begun to operate. Others did not persuade him, nor was his belief fake. The faith of Jesus Christ had been in him, and caused him to believe.

When people respond to receive Christ in gospel meetings, we may think that it was the speaker's eloquence that caused them to believe, but this is not the case. It is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit that produces faith in people, leaving them with no choice but to believe into the Lord. We can argue with people and try to persuade them, but we cannot make them believe. The only thing that causes people to believe is the inward faith of Jesus Christ. This is why many who have never read the Bible can believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior and Son of God. The faith of Jesus Christ is truly effective.

### The Great Divine Migration

The only reason we can become believers is the operation and working of the faith of Jesus Christ. It is not our will that allows us to believe, but the faith of Jesus Christ producing faith in us. God has sown the faith of Jesus Christ into us, and this causes us to become believers.

When the young boy prayed for his sister, the faith of Jesus Christ was in him. This faith was not confirmed until the day the Holy Spirit operated in him again. The faith originally in him began to sprout, and he confessed with his own mouth. When he said, "Lord Jesus, I receive You as my Savior," a spiritual migration happened. He became a true migrant from the earth to heaven, from the worldly realm to the spiritual realm, and from death to resurrection (Eph. 2:6). At that moment, his life changed forever. He became a person living in the resurrection of Christ and God's organic salvation.

This is faith! Even after believing, things can cause us to be dejected, frustrated, or disappointed, but we are never able to give up faith. In fact, though it may seem hard for us to believe at times, even then we are unable to give faith up. How

small our faith is does not matter, because the faith is not even ours—it is of Jesus Christ. Faith does not come from us but from Christ, and *our* faith is only the result of *His* faith working in us.

We ought to pray, “Lord, we worship You! Everything has been done by You. I have nothing of myself to boast in. It is You who gives me faith, and it is Your faith that operates and works in me. It is Your faith that gives me the experience of the wonderful divine migration! Praise You, Lord!”





## For All Those Who Believe

*But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.*

—Romans 3:21–22

### WORD STUDY

The Greek words for the phrase “for all” in verse 22 are *eis pantas*. *Eis* is a common Greek preposition that literally means “to” or “into” (Strong, #1519), and it is most often used to indicate spatial movement. In this sense, *eis* would imply that the righteousness of God is directed toward all who believe. However, *eis* can also carry a more figurative sense to denote a purpose or result (Thayer, 183–184). In other words, it could mean that the righteousness of God is for the benefit or advantage of all who believe.

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

*Eis* is a very important Greek word throughout the book of Romans. Consider 3:22 from an eternal point of view.

According to Ephesians 1:4, God chose us in eternity past to be holy and blameless. In other words, we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. In time, however, we found ourselves dead in trespasses and sins, and conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh (Eph. 2:1–3). We were powerless under the world and sin, had no hope, were without God, and were by nature children of wrath (2:3, 12). However, the mercy of God brought the righteousness of God to us, and it became ours. It was not something we achieved or could ever hope to attain on our own. The righteousness of God is revealed and given to all who believe, not by works, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

### Christ Our Righteousness

Romans 3:21 says that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the Law, and verse 22 says that this righteousness is for all who believe. God is righteous, and righteousness is God Himself. The word *eis* indicates that the righteousness of God, or God Himself, is now the possession of all who believe.

This thought is also found in 1 and 2 Corinthians. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Later, he wrote to them, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). The righteousness of God has come to us in the person of Christ Jesus, and in Him it has become ours. Not only has Christ become the righteousness of God for us, but in Him we also become the righteousness of God. Praise the Lord that the righteousness of God is toward all those who believe!

## Falling Short of God's Glory

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

—Romans 3:23

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word here for “glory,” *doxa*, means “dignity, honor, praise, worship” (Strong, #1391). It can also be thought of as “splendor, brightness, or majesty” (Thayer, 156). Although the phrase “glory of God” could indicate the glory given by God, it may also indicate the glory of the revelation of who God is and what He does. In fact, the Bible often uses this phrase, “glory of God,” to denote the revelation and manifestation of God Himself. When God reveals Himself, it is glory. Thus, this verse shows us that all people have failed to reach and obtain the manifested character of God, especially His righteousness (Vine, 267; Rogers, 322).

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

The key phrase of this verse, “the glory of God,” is closely related to “the righteousness of God” in the previous verse (v. 22). We can say that the glory of God is the result of

the righteousness of God exhibited in all who believe. God justifies us not only for our sake but also for His glory. God does not stop at justifying us, but also desires that His righteousness in us would testify of His glory.

### Manifesting God's Glory

Mankind is the highest of God's creation because man was created according to God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). God's image indicates His inner being, including His divine attributes. God's likeness indicates the form of God, which is the outward manifestation of His image. The purpose behind the creation of man was for God to have a creature to bear His image and likeness and to display His glory to the universe. This was God's original will for man.

When God created man, He wanted man to live in accordance with His will and heart. Such a living would manifest the very image and likeness of God—His glory. Tragically, man fell and now lives under God's condemnation. All sin can be described in one way—people falling short of the glory of God. In other words, we all fall short of the ability to exhibit God's divine attributes. However, God wants to justify us! He wants His righteousness to belong to us through the faith of Jesus Christ. Justification is totally according to God's righteous being, standard, and working, and this justification allows His righteousness to be manifested to the universe through all those who believe. This testimony of God's righteousness is a testimony of His glory. Thus, justification brings us back to the original purpose behind God's creation. How wonderful is this justification!

## By the Grace of God

*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*

—Romans 3:24

### WORD STUDY

This verse mentions three things and their relationship to one another:

1. Being justified
2. His grace
3. The redemption which is in Christ Jesus

The words “being justified” and “by His grace” are related by the phrase “as a gift.” “His grace” and “redemption” are related by the preposition “through.”

The Greek word for “justified” in this verse, *dikaioo*, is in the present tense, portraying the action of justification as a progressive event without regard to its beginning or end (Wallace, 751). This could denote the repeated action of justification upon sinners, or it could denote each sinner’s lifelong experience of justification.

The phrase “as a gift” is derived from the Greek word *dōrean*, which means “gratuitously, freely” (Strong, #1432). This shows that justification is a gift from God that people can freely obtain. The phrase “by His grace” indicates that the origin, or source, of this free justification is God’s grace (Alford, 2:343). The Greek word used here for “grace,” *charis*, literally means, “graciousness, favor, or, gift” (Strong, #5485). The Greek word for “through,” *dia*, denotes the channel, or means, of an act (Strong, #1223). Although the source of our justification is grace, the only way it can come to us is “through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.”

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Source of Justification

As soon as people believe into Christ Jesus, they are justified. There is no difference between people in this matter. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Now all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (v. 24).

The grace of God is the source of our justification, and the redemption in Christ Jesus is the means by which this grace is realized in us. It is because of grace that the Lord Jesus became our Redeemer. By the redemption in the Lord Jesus, grace becomes reality to us in justification. To say it another way, grace came to us through the redemption in Christ Jesus to justify us freely. Just as the redemption in Christ Jesus is given to us freely, justification is also freely given. The redemption in Christ Jesus was accomplished once for all on the cross, and in like manner justification is freely given to us once for all. By the grace of God and through the redemption in Christ Jesus, we are freely justified for eternity. This grace is so wonderful!

## Our Enjoyment of God

Grace is our enjoyment of God's presence (Rom. 1:7, John 1:14). It is different from mercy. Mercy indicates kindness or compassion for which we are not worthy. Grace, however, is simply enjoyment. We can even say that grace is the result of our dwelling in God and enjoying Him.

Grace is our enjoyment of the unlimited triune God Himself plus everything He has experienced and accomplished. God's eternal will not only involves us becoming holy and blameless before Him, but also involves raising us up with Christ to sit together with Him in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:4, 2:6). This was God's will from eternity past. Now in time, God's mercy brought the faith of Jesus Christ into us and made us believers. Today, all the divine and heavenly reality of our God and His will can become the grace that we enjoy and experience.

## God's Person

The first thing available for us to enjoy is God Himself. God is so rich, and His very person is grace to us. All of His attributes can become grace for our enjoyment, including His eternity, wisdom, power, endurance, and changelessness. His wisdom is grace. His power is grace. His changelessness is grace. His unlimited supply is grace. Our God's very being is grace, able to be enjoyed by us!

## God's Experiences

The second thing available for us to enjoy as grace is everything our God has gone through and experienced. In the course of time, God became a man, Jesus Christ, and lived out grace and truth (John 1:14). Everything He experienced can become our grace today.

Have we ever thought the Lord's experiences could become our enjoyment? When we are detested, despised, or forsaken (Isa. 53:3), it is a time for us to enjoy grace. When we have no beauty that would attract others (v. 2), we can enjoy grace. Just as the Lord Jesus was detested, we can deal with being detested. Just as He was despised, we can look past being despised. Just as He did not have a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20), we can be comforted when we feel the same. Just as He went through all of these things, so we can also pass through them, following in His footsteps. In our earthly experiences, everything He has gone through can be grace for us to enjoy.

The ability to find enjoyment in such situations is surely not according to our concepts. This enjoyment is heavenly and divine, and very different from many of our religious thoughts. For many of us, the experience of grace is based on material blessings, such as a house, a car, a good job, or a good living environment. God indeed measures many blessings to us, but what He wants us to enjoy is Himself—His being, His experiences, and His accomplishments. In today's world, there are many Christians who have experienced outward blessings yet still feel inwardly empty. Such believers must search out, find, and know the heavenly enjoyment of God as grace.

### God's Accomplishments

The third thing available for us to enjoy as grace is everything our God has accomplished. What are these accomplishments? On the cross, He accomplished redemption. As He hung on the cross, Christ said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). There are many descriptions in the Bible concerning the Lord's accomplishment on the cross. He abolished the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph. 2:15). He dealt with the world (Gal. 6:14). He crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:24). He terminated the old creation



and produced a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). He destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and has released those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14–15). Then He was raised from the dead and became the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15), the One enthroned in the heavens.

Because Christ became the life-giving Spirit in His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45), everything God has accomplished can become our enjoyment. The life-giving Spirit transmits to us the very person of God, along with all His experiences. When we enjoy God as grace today, all He is, all His experiences, and all His accomplishments become reality within our spirits.

### A Lifelong Experience

Romans 3:24 says that we are “being justified,” indicating our lifelong experience of justification. This experience is simply grace coming to us through the redemption in Christ Jesus. When we enjoy God Himself, His experiences, and His accomplishments, we enjoy justification. Justification is not only a fact we obtained the moment we confessed our sins and came to Jesus, but should also be a lifelong experience. Day by day and hour by hour, we can enjoy the riches of God’s grace and experience the reality of God’s justification through the redemption of Christ Jesus.

Today we can love the Lord, follow Him, and consecrate ourselves to Him because we have been justified. This justification is given to us freely. It originates in grace and brings the grace of God to us. Grace is like a spring of water, flowing to us through the redemption in Christ Jesus. Justification allows all the riches of God—His person, experiences, and accomplishments—to become our experience and enjoyment today.



## The Redemption in Christ Jesus

*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*

—Romans 3:24

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used here for “redemption,” *apolutrōsis*, is composed of two words: *apo*, meaning “from” (Strong, #575) and *lutrosis*, meaning “ransom” (Strong, #3083). Together, the two words mean “to redeem by paying the ransom price” (Vincent, 3:42–43). Redemption could indicate ideas such as the release of a captive from torture after a ransom is paid or the liberation of a slave through payment for freedom. Redemption is used in the New Testament to denote our deliverance from the retributive wrath of God through the death of Christ (Thayer, 65).

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Justification has many aspects to consider. For example, justification is not achieved through our attempt to fulfill the Law (Rom. 3:21). Rather, justification means that the

righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the Law and is now unto those who believe through the faith of Jesus Christ (v. 22). Justification is also the experience of the grace of God coming to us (v. 24). Yet the most important aspect of justification is the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The redemption in Christ Jesus is the means, or way, justification comes to us; justification is “through” the redemption in Christ. This redemption was accomplished by the righteous One, Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1–2), the incarnated triune God (John 1:14).

### The Paid Ransom

Though justification comes freely to us today, it was not freely obtained. The very meaning of redemption is the liberation that comes from a paid ransom. For us justification is free, but for God justification required a price. Because of His love for people, He paid the price to purchase and redeem us back to Himself (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). He justified us not only for our need but also to meet His desire.

God created man to fulfill a purpose. God’s desire was that people would rule over all things for God, manifesting His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26). Man’s existence, meaning, and purpose are all related to God and should be for God. Because man sinned and fell away from God, he has lost the lofty purpose of his existence, and for this reason must be redeemed by God. God did not pay the ransom price and redeem us simply to take care of our sin. Rather, redemption relates to our very existence and brings us back to God’s original purpose. Redemption is an extremely high and profound topic.

### How God Accomplishes His Will

Romans 8:28–30 shows that justification is the process by which God accomplishes His eternal will. All of God’s

work is wrapped up in justification, and justification is only through redemption. Thus, God's work and will are only accomplished through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Without this redemption issuing in our justification by God, neither God's work nor will could ever be accomplished or fulfilled. Justification does not only issue in salvation for us, but it is also crucial to accomplish the will of God.

God would say to us, "My justification of you is related to My eternal will. I know your weaknesses, your failures, your limitations, and the many ways you have offended Me. However, My will requires the justification I have accomplished. I will lead you lifelong to experience this justification, not only for your sake, but also for the sake of My will."

In response, we should say, "Thank You God! I used to be condemned, but You now justify me!" This statement is the joyful expression that should well up within us when we consider how God has brought us back to Himself. We once were far away from God, had nothing to do with Him, offended Him, lived in sins, were bound by the world, and were under God's condemnation. Yet we have been shown divine mercy and, according to God's selection and will, were justified freely through the redemption in Christ Jesus. This is what we can boast in! Praise the Lord for such a redemption and justification!



## Displayed Publicly as a Propitiation

*Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.*

—Romans 3:25

### WORD STUDY

Of the term “propitiation,” M. R. Vincent remarked, “This word is most important, since it is the key to the conception of Christ’s atoning work” (Vincent, 3:43). The Greek word used here for propitiation, *hilastērion*, means “an expiatory (place or thing); mercy seat, propitiation” (Strong, #2435). Its only other New Testament usage is in Hebrews 9:5, where it is translated “mercy seat.” The word is a direct reference to the cover placed over the ark of the testimony in the Old Testament.

God first instructed Moses to build the mercy seat in Exodus 25. It was to be placed over the ark of the testimony, overshadowed by two cherubim of beaten gold. Then God said a most remarkable thing: “There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to

you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel” (Exo. 25:22). Thus, the mercy seat was where God and man could meet. It was where God could show mercy to His people.

Romans 3:25 tells us that Jesus Christ was displayed by God as a propitiation or mercy seat. He is the place where man and God can come together. The phrase “in His blood” indicates the process Christ went through to become this mercy seat—His sacrificial death on the cross (Rogers, 322).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Because of sin, we became enemies of God (Col. 1:21). Therefore, God set Jesus as the propitiation to solve the problem between God and man. The propitiation is the Old Testament mercy seat on the ark of the testimony, the place for God to show mercy to people (Exo. 25:22). In the Old Testament, it was called the mercy seat. Here in the New Testament it is called a propitiation.

### The Place of Reconciliation for God and Man

Christ is the fulfillment of the type of the mercy seat: a place for God and man to meet, to be reconciled, and to be mutually satisfied. How wonderful! God became the man Jesus and went through a process to become the mercy seat. When God sees this mercy seat, He can justify us. When we see this mercy seat, we know that God has justified us.

God set Jesus as the mercy seat to demonstrate His righteousness and to justify us. How sweet this is! The moment we believed into the Lord, this mercy seat became the ground for us to stand upon lifelong. In fact, our spiritual growth can never be separated from this ground, this mercy seat.



The writer of Hebrews made it very clear that the sacrifices of the Old Testament could not completely satisfy God (Heb. 10:4–6). However, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was completely satisfying to God and never has to be repeated. At the mercy seat, the God who justifies us and we who are justified are both completely satisfied. Because God has set forth Jesus as the mercy seat, we can see and share in the joy of God, much as children can see and share the joy of their father. Through Jesus Christ we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). He has forever taken care of our problems with God. How wonderful this is! Through this mercy seat, there can now be a harmonious relationship between God and man.

### In His Blood

The foundation of propitiation is the redemption in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, “Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood” (Rom. 3:25). In the New Testament age, Christ is the mercy seat displayed by God. How could Christ satisfy all of God’s demands and produce peace between God and man? He could only do this through His blood shed on the cross.

Jesus is our merciful and faithful High Priest. He made propitiation for our sins and accomplished eternal redemption by entering the holy place through His own blood (Heb. 2:17, 9:12). In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was placed upon the ark, above which were two golden cherubim, indicating the glory of God (9:5). Under the mercy seat were the tables of the covenant (v. 4), the testimony of God testifying of His holiness and righteousness.

The high priest entered into the Holy of Holies once a year to sprinkle the blood of a bull and goat above and around the mercy seat to bring in peace between God and man (Lev. 16:14–15). This sprinkling of blood not only reconciled all the problems produced by the Israelites’ offenses to God, but also

satisfied three aspects of God's demand: holiness, righteousness, and glory. Based upon even this imperfect propitiation, God met man at the mercy seat, man received help from God, and God revealed His heart's desire to man.

In the Old Testament age, the priests sacrificed sin offerings on behalf of people by slaughtering bulls and sheep before the Lord. Additionally, the day of atonement was a day of special sacrifices, after which the high priest could communicate directly with the Lord. Leviticus 16:14–15 tells us of the preparation for this moment:

*Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on the mercy seat on the east side; also in front of the mercy seat he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times. Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.*

Why did the high priest sprinkle the blood seven times? In the Bible, the number seven signifies the completeness of God's work. A support for this is that, by the seventh day of creation, God completed His work and rested (Gen. 2:2). Sprinkling the blood seven times typifies the completeness of the redemptive work of Christ. Under the covering of Christ's blood, there is reconciliation and complete satisfaction between God and man.

### The Riches of the Ark

One of the pictures in the Old Testament most densely filled with types is the tent of meeting, which typifies man's experience of God and enjoyment of salvation. The tent of meeting had three sections: the courtyard, the holy place, and

the Holy of Holies. Together, the holy place and the Holy of Holies were called the tabernacle. The shedding of the blood of Jesus fulfilled the type of the altar in the courtyard, and Jesus as the propitiation fulfilled the type of the mercy seat upon the ark in the Holy of Holies. The blood applied to the mercy seat satisfied the righteous demand of God so that man could meet with God and enjoy all the riches within the ark (Lev. 16:15–16).

In the type set forth in the Old Testament, the high priests had to go through a process to come into the Holy of Holies where they could stand at the mercy seat. They first had to go to the bronze altar, a type of consecration, and then to the laver, a type of cleansing by the Holy Spirit (Exo. 30:18). Then they could enter the tabernacle.

If we do not put ourselves on the altar, we will not be able to enter the tabernacle. If we are full of self-considerations and self-ambitions, we cannot enter the tabernacle. Only those who do not seek their own things and instead fully consecrate themselves to the Lord under the cleansing of the Holy Spirit can enter the tabernacle. Within the tabernacle we can enjoy life, typified by the bread of the Presence, receive light, typified by the golden lampstand, and experience fellowship with God, typified by the golden incense altar.

Only with these experiences of the holy place can we enter the Holy of Holies. Only one thing was in the Holy of Holies: the ark of the testimony. Three things were placed in the ark: the tables of the covenant, a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded (Heb. 9:4).

The Ten Commandments written on the tables of stone portrayed God's nature and being. The manna typified Christ as our heavenly enjoyment. The budded rod typified our experiences of the sovereignty of God in the resurrection of Christ. The tables portrayed God's being, the manna indicated God's supply, and the budded rod indicated God's operation, discipline, leading, rebuking, ruling, and restricting. We can experience all of these in resurrection today.

In the center of the tabernacle was the ark of the testimony, in which the three mentioned items had been placed. God's revelation of Himself, His supply and enjoyment for us, and His power, support, and leading in resurrection were all within the ark. However, all three can only become our reality through the propitiation, the mercy seat. We should thank the Lord for becoming the mercy seat so that His being, supply, and sovereign operation can all become our experience.

### Through Faith

The first part of Romans 3:25 reads, "Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." The foundation of propitiation and reconciliation is the blood of Jesus; the means by which we experience propitiation is faith. In other words, Christ became the mercy seat by the shedding of His blood, and now we can experience this mercy seat through faith. Faith does not come from other people, nor can it be self-produced. Faith is the result of the operation and work of God within us. May we allow God to operate and work within us so we can enjoy the reality of our mercy seat, Jesus Christ our Lord and Redeemer.

## Demonstrating the Righteousness of God

*Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

—Romans 3:25–26

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word for “demonstrate” and “demonstration” in these verses, *endeixis*, is a noun meaning “an indication, declaration, or proof” (Strong, #1732). In other words, the goal and aim of setting Christ as a propitiation (mercy seat) was to prove, declare, and point to God’s righteousness (Alford, 2:343). Christ’s sacrifice pointed both to God’s righteous nature, in that He punished sin, and to the bestowment of God’s righteousness upon us as the act of justification.

The end of verse 26 brings together both thoughts of the revealing of God’s righteousness. God must be “just,” or “righteous” (Strong, #1342), in His dealing with sin, but He also desires to be the “justifier”—the One who pardons and makes righteous (Strong, #1344). The public display of Christ

as a propitiation was the avenue for God to be both just and the justifier. God's righteousness "is put forward as a ground of mercy, not as an obstacle to mercy" (Vincent, 3:47).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Two important phrases are found in Romans 3:24–25: "being justified as a gift" (v. 24) and "this was to demonstrate His righteousness" (v. 25). Our justification by God is actually a demonstration of His righteousness. Justification is for the purpose of this demonstration. Justification is not only for us and our need, but also for God and His need. Justification is not centered on us, but rather on God.

Verses 25 and 26 are joined by the Greek word *pros*, translated here as "for." *Pros* literally means "toward" and is used mainly to indicate the concept of space and direction. However, it can also be translated "unto" or "in order to" (Strong, #4314). Therefore, we can say that God, in His forbearance, passed over the sins that were previously committed in order to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness. In other words, God held back His wrath upon those sins because His eyes were fixed on Christ's coming sacrifice—the moment God's righteousness was firmly declared and demonstrated.

Although the mercy seat established by God in the Old Testament was able to temporarily bridge the gap between God and mankind, the living Christ who is today's mercy seat is not only eternally effective but is also a demonstration of God's righteousness now.

### A Present Demonstration

Verse 26 gives two reasons for the demonstration of God's righteousness—"that He would be just and the justifier." The demonstrating of His righteousness is firstly a testimony

that He Himself is just, or righteous. Our God is a God of righteousness. His being, nature, constitution, and work are all righteous, and righteousness is the principle behind all of His operations.

When we thank God as our justifier, we should realize that His righteousness was demonstrated when He set forth Jesus as the propitiation. He is not only the justifier, but also the just. We should tell the Lord, "Thank You. You are righteous! When You saved me, You were righteous. As You lead me, You are righteous. Your approval of me is also righteous. You are the righteous God. Your righteousness has been demonstrated, and this testifies that You are the righteous One."

The second reason verse 26 gives for the demonstration of God's righteousness is so that He would be "the justifier." God is not only righteous but also justifies us in His righteousness. He is the operating God who justifies those who have faith in Jesus and believe into Him. Praise the Lord, our just God is also the justifier!

Sometimes after doing something offensive to God, we reason in our heart, "Since I offended God in this way, would He still forgive me?" We should not think this way! Such a thought comes because we do not see that God is both just and the justifier. Our justification is not apart from His righteousness.

Sometimes we may also say to God, "Thank you for choosing me, but I think You unfortunately chose the wrong person. I am useless and often disappointing to You." We are actually several thousand times worse than we think. If God would loosen His hand even a little, we would find out that we are more pitiful than we could ever imagine. But He does not justify us according to our successes or failures. He justifies us according to His righteousness and because He is righteous.

God is righteous and will justify all who believe and have faith in Jesus. Because of His righteousness, He not only justifies us before Him but also brings us into the enjoyment and reality of justification. Hallelujah for such a righteous God!





## The One Who Has Faith in Jesus

*For the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

—Romans 3:26

### WORD STUDY

In the phrase “has faith in,” the word “has” is translated from the Greek preposition *ek*, which literally means “out of” (Strong, #1537). *Ek* often indicates the source or origin from which an action proceeds (Wallace, 742). In other words, the person Paul references in this verse is literally “out of” faith in Jesus. The following are two alternative translations of this phrase:

1. “One who belongs to faith in Jesus” (Alford, 3:344)
2. “Him which is of faith in Jesus” (Vincent, 3:49)

J. N. Darby translates this verse in the following way: “For the shewing forth of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus.”

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The People of Faith

Romans 3:26 does not merely say that we are those who believe in Jesus, but that we are those who are of the faith of Jesus. We are people of the faith of Jesus. We belong to faith and are produced by the faith of Jesus. This has nothing to do with our being good, bad, right, or wrong. Faith is like a realm in which we live. For example, when I say, “I am an American,” it shows that I belong to America. Similarly, we are the people of the faith of Jesus—we belong to faith.

This verse is very rich. There are two persons in this verse—the righteous God who justifies and someone who has been justified and is now of the faith of Jesus. However, do not think Paul is only referring to a single believer; in fact this “one” is a corporate person that includes all who believe into the Lord. There are two ways to look at the one who is of the faith of Jesus—a single person who has faith in Jesus Christ, and a corporate one who is made up of all the believers belonging to the faith of Jesus.

The type of Adam and Eve can help us understand this matter. Eve was taken directly out of Adam, indicating that she was totally related to him. In the same way, the church has come directly out of Christ. We were born of the Spirit in the faith of Christ, and thus we are the people of the faith of Jesus Christ. In His being, we now live in a realm of faith where faith not only operates within us but is also reality to us.

### Everlasting Faith

Praise the Lord! We are a people produced by the faith of Jesus Christ, and as such we are becoming constituted with this faith. The faith of Jesus not only produces faith in us, but is also an everlasting faith that will never depart.

Our faith is the outflow of the faith of Jesus Christ. After believing into the Lord, we may find that we still love the world, that we are weak, and that doubts regarding our salvation creep into our minds. Nevertheless, the faith in us can never be lost. This faith is not only able to save us but is also of the highest quality and dwells in us as an everlasting faith.

The faith in us is everlasting! Eventually, we all face questions and difficulties, no matter how long we have been following the Lord. We may ask, “Lord, can I really trust You?” Though we may not always feel like the Lord is trustworthy, within us will come the response, “My Lord *is* trustworthy!” This response comes from the everlasting faith dwelling in us. Our faith is not a matter of gritting our teeth and forcing ourselves to believe, nor is it an issue of others telling us to believe. Rather, it is the faith of Jesus Christ which dwells in us, issuing in an everlasting faith, that continually affects our lives today.

### Constituted with the Faith of Jesus

Based on the Greek, this verse indicates that we are “out of” the faith of Jesus Christ. Faith is our origin and content. This is the faith of Jesus operating in us and the faith of Jesus becoming our constitution. These are not two exclusive ideas. On the one hand, the faith of Jesus operates in us; on the other hand and at the same time, the faith of Jesus is constituted in us, becoming our very being.

Paul says in verse 26, “The justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” God is righteous, and His principles, operation, and leading are all righteous. Even more, however, God is also the justifier, the One who justifies us. God will make those who are of the faith of Jesus righteous in His being. We are in the realm of the righteous One, Jesus Christ, and have the faith of Jesus Christ operating within us to constitute us as righteous.

Though we are judicially justified before God, our experience of this is our being constituted with His righteousness. This experience is according to the righteousness of God displayed in Christ. In other words, judicial justification results in our becoming experientially constituted with the righteousness of God found in the very person of Jesus Christ. Today we can boldly say, “I am righteous! The faith of Jesus not only dwells in me as everlasting faith, but it is also the source of righteousness in me and brings me into the righteous being of God.” How wonderful this is! Righteousness will be constituted in us through the everlasting faith dwelling in us. We should praise the Lord for this! God is righteous, and He clothes us with His righteousness to justify us and constitutes us with His righteousness to make us righteous. God is righteous, Christ is righteous, and we too are being made righteous.

In the Greek text, the word for “justifier” is a present participle, indicating an action that is currently being acted out (Wallace, 751; see also Alford, 2:344). This reveals that God is in a process of justifying those of the faith of Jesus Christ. God is righteous, He has judicially justified us, and He is now experientially justifying us.

This is important because it shows that the constitution of righteousness in us is a lifelong process. In other words, justification is not only a one-time thing, it is also a lifelong experience. Romans 8:30 says, “These whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” From the day we were called until our final glorification, all of our experiences are wrapped up in justification. Because God is righteous, He cannot alter His justification or withdraw it from us. Because God has judicially justified us, He will also continually constitute us with His righteousness.

When Paul talks about justification in Romans, it is a high matter. The absoluteness and assurance with which Paul considers justification are far above our own comprehension.

When we see God, we will say, "I am righteous!" As we see ourselves now, we can still say, "I am righteous!" We are justified in the righteousness of God, and we are being constituted with His righteousness. How wonderful this Christian life is!



## Justified by Faith

*Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. <sup>31</sup>Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.*

—Romans 3:27–31

### WORD STUDY

In this section of verses, Paul mentions “faith” five times. In verse 27, there is a “law of faith” contrasted with the law of works. Paul is not supposing there are two laws—one of works, another of faith—but that there is one supreme law of redemption, and this law enjoins faith (Vincent, 3:49–50). In verse 28, “by faith” is translated from the Greek word *pistis*. Because it is used as a dative noun here, it could indicate the manner in which we are justified—in faith—or the cause of our justification—on the basis of faith (Wallace, 730).

Verse 30 states that God will justify the circumcised, or Jews, “by faith,” *ek pisteōs*. The Greek preposition *ek* can be literally

translated “out of” and is often used to indicate the origin or source from which an action proceeds (Strong, #1537). In this phrase, the source of God’s justification is faith.

Verses 30 and 31 use the phrase “through faith,” *dia pisteōs*. The Greek preposition *dia* can be literally translated “through” and primarily denotes the channel or means of an act (Strong, #1223). Thus in this phrase, faith is the means by which justification comes to us today.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Boasting Is Excluded

Paul tells us that boasting is excluded (v. 27). In the Old Testament, God testified and manifested His righteousness through the mercy seat over the ark of the testimony. In the New Testament, He brings justification to us by the faith of Jesus working in us. Our justification is not according to what we have done but is totally related to what Christ has accomplished. In what could we possibly boast? Where is our boasting? Paul writes, “It is excluded.”

In the matter of justification, there is nothing of ourselves we can boast of at all. Our only boast is in the life and glory dwelling in us. It is through Jesus Christ that we can be so bold. We should tell the Lord, “This truth is so precious. You have made my life so meaningful. Lord, I praise and thank You! You allowed me to gain You, the living God of righteousness!”

### The Essence, Source, and Means of Justification

Between verses 28 and 31, three different phrases are used to describe the relationship between faith and our justification.



In verse 28, “by faith” indicates that faith is the essence, or core, of our justification. In verse 30, “by faith” indicates that faith is the source of our justification. Also in verse 30, “through faith” indicates that faith is the means by which we experience and enjoy justification. Justification is an organic matter, meaning it is related to our life and living. Our God of righteousness, through the faith of Jesus which dwells in us, leads us to experience justification by our abiding and operating in His faith. God’s word is very clear—justification is totally a matter of faith. Faith is its essence, source, and means.

Faith is the essence of justification. As we experience justification, our faith constitutes us with the One in whom we believe. The One we believe in is Jesus Christ, and the essence of the salvation we gained by believing into Jesus Christ is Christ Himself.

Faith is also the source of our justification. Over our lifetime of following the Lord, our every step must have faith as its source. It is out of the faith given by the Lord that we can love Him, follow Him, consecrate our whole life to Him, and hold fast to Him. It is out of the faith given by the Lord that we can live a life with Christ as our content, reality, enjoyment, joy, and testimony. Without faith, none of these experiences exist. Faith truly is the origin of all these, and it is only out of the faith given by the Lord that we can experience them.

Faith is also the means by which we experience justification. Faith initially brings the Lord to us. Faith then becomes the source of our love for the Lord, yet the process of our loving the Lord lifelong is entirely “through faith.” In other words, our love for the Lord begins with faith and continues only by faith. This is true for loving the Lord, this is true for following the Lord, and it is true for all our experiences as we follow the Lord. Faith is the source of all these experiences, but apart from faith, we will lose the means by which we have these experiences. Without faith, we can never experience this healthy process.

We are justified, not by our behavior or works, but by faith. Justification is not according to a law of works, but according to the law of faith (v. 27). This was the apostle Paul's conclusion (v. 28) and should give us confidence and assurance lifelong.

## The Crediting of Righteousness

*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. <sup>8</sup>Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”*

—Romans 4:1–8

### WORD STUDY

In this section of verses, forms of the Greek word *logizomai* appear five times, and is translated into various forms of “to credit” and “to take into account.” *Logizomai* means “to estimate, conclude, impute, reason, reckon” (Strong, #3049) and first appears in verse 3—“it was credited to him.” Abraham’s action of believing God (his faith) was accounted to him for righteousness, and in verse 8 a blessed man is one

whose sin is not taken into account by the Lord. *Logizomai* was a word often used in reference to accountants, and it could indicate the idea of entering something into an account book. Faith is not the equivalent of righteousness, but by faith God credited Abraham with a status of righteousness that Abraham did not have (Rogers, 323). This whole subject of crediting, especially in verses 4–5, is treated by way of a contrast between grace and debt (Vine, 512). The focus of this passage is God’s crediting of righteousness to Abraham through faith by God’s grace.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Transmission of Faith

In Romans 4, Paul presents a testimony of justification, that is, Abraham’s subjective experience of justification. Verses 1–3 show that Abraham was not justified by God because of his behavior, but because of his faith. He had nothing to boast about before God.

Abraham did not originally have faith, nor was he originally a man of faith. Rather, he began his journey after being called. While he was still living in Mesopotamia, the God of glory appeared to him and said, “Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you” (Acts 7:3). Note that the God of glory appeared to him. This appearance was a divine transmission, transmitting God Himself into Abraham. As God appeared to him again and again, faith was produced in Abraham, and this faith was credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Abraham was not justified according to his flesh or behavior. Rather, his justification was the result of the appearance of the God of glory and the transmission of faith into him (Gen. 12:7; 17:1; 18:1).

## For the Kingdom of God

Romans 4:3 says, “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” This verse was taken by Paul from Genesis 15:5–6, which says, “And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

Abraham’s justification was according to his faith, but his faith was according to God’s promise regarding his descendants. Justification was related to his descendants. Genesis 12:1–2, containing the first promises of God to Abraham, reveal that Abraham’s descendants would not only be numerous but would also become a great nation. Of the many blessings God promised, this matter of a great nation was the first. Abraham’s justification was by faith, and it was to produce a nation and kingdom—the kingdom of God.

We see in the Bible that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness. The fact is, however, that over the course of his life, he did many unrighteous things. For example, he betrayed his wife Sarah not once, but twice (Gen. 12:10–20; 20:1–18). What is most unbelievable was that his second betrayal immediately followed God telling him, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife will have a son” (18:10). If we were Abraham, the father of faith, and God told us that we would have a son next year through Sarah, what would we have done? Abraham surely should have carefully guarded his wife. Where would the promised seed come from without Sarah? Since all of God’s promises were related to her, how could Abraham sell her so easily? This was like selling the promise of God! However, even in this situation of weakness and failure, the Bible calls Abraham one who was justified.

Outwardly, he forsook God's promises, yet wonderfully God did not forsake him. God preserved his whole household by His sovereign authority (20:3–7).

In Romans, Paul used Abraham's experience as a testimony of justification. He did not write of a man who sinned, nor did he mention any of Abraham's weaknesses. Instead, he wrote of Abraham as a man who followed God. Even though Abraham did many things offensive to God after his calling, it seems God was not angry. Even more interesting, the Bible does not record any repentance of Abraham or any condemnation from God. What an amazing thing! We think condemnation results from our sins, our weaknesses, our failures, and our offenses against God. However, according to God's view, it does not matter what kind of situation we are in; He will still justify us for the sake of His kingdom.

Let me repeat that justification is for the kingdom of God. This is what we see from Abraham. Did he have weaknesses, limitations, and failures? Yes. Did he also have victories? Yes. However, none of these are important. What is important is that he lived a life directly unto God, related to God, for God, for God's kingdom, and for God's testimony. Because Abraham was such a person, he had a very high value in God's eyes. Justification is not only for our personal salvation; it is also for the kingdom of God. We should tell the Lord, "I am willing to live for Your kingdom, and I ask that all I do would benefit Your kingdom. I ask that my living would testify of Your kingdom and would reveal it to others." The result of this prayer will be a certain kind of life and living—a living in justification.

### According to the Grace of God

Justification is the result of the transmission of faith, it is related to the kingdom of God, and it is according to the grace of God. Grace is not obtained by working for it (Rom. 4:4–5).

The grace of God is that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross, through which He accomplished our redemption and by which He freely justifies us. Therefore, we can say that His redemption not only justifies us but also allows us to live lifelong in His grace.

The faith of those who believe in “Him who justifies the ungodly” is credited to them as righteousness (v. 5). What does “ungodly” mean? Looking at Abraham again, we can say that his begetting of Ishmael from Hagar was his weakness. However, from God’s point of view, this was not only weakness but also ungodliness. Abraham’s taking of Hagar as a wife was ungodly in God’s eyes, and in no way did God stand with it or approve of it. Yet although Abraham did something ungodly, it did not wipe out his justification. Abraham experienced “Him who justifies the ungodly.” This is the grace of God.

In God’s eternal purpose, justification is a wonderful thing and completely according to God’s grace. Any action of ours can at any point become ungodly, and thus offend God. Although we have believed into the Lord, how many things have we done that do not please God, even from the time we believed? We offended God before we believed, and we do things that are offensive to Him even after believing. We may overcome occasionally, but we mostly have many failures and weaknesses, and many things we do offend God. Our natural and fallen man does not want God, does not desire to live before Him or to have a healthy relationship with Him, cannot please Him, and is very ungodly.

Paul writes that a believer’s “faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). This is completely according to the grace of God. If we have such an understanding about justification, we will worship the Lord. Unless He gives us His grace, we are unable to come to His presence and live before Him. Without His grace, we are unable to call upon Him or pray to Him. Without His grace, we are unable to seek His mercy. His grace allows us to love Him, serve Him, and pursue Him

today. It is all by His grace, and it is according to grace that He has justified us.

### God's Accounting

In Romans 4:6–8, the Greek word *logizomai* is used twice. The first usage is God crediting righteousness (v. 6); the second is God not taking into account sin (v. 8). A person to whom God imputes righteousness is the same person to whom God does not impute sin. In other words, for God to justify us, He has to account us as being sinless. Unless God accounts us as being sinless, He cannot justify us.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites' sins were merely covered by the sprinkling of the blood of animals on the mercy seat (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:4). In the New Testament, the believers have the reality of that type by the redemption in Christ Jesus. We have the propitiation of Christ Jesus, our sins have been forgiven before God, and our consciences have been cleansed (Heb. 9:12–14). Compared to the Israelites in the Old Testament, we are much more blessed. If those whose sins were merely covered are called blessed, how much more are we who have been redeemed, forgiven, and cleansed? If the Israelites of old could give glory to God in their condition, how much more we can give glory to God!

The Lord does not account sin to us. This promise is very precious. We will always feel unqualified for our Savior's justification. However, God's word will forever stand: "I will remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12). Our own accounting does not matter; only God's accounting matters. God still speaks this word to all who have been justified by Him today. What a blessing!



## A Seal of the Righteousness of Faith

*Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." <sup>10</sup>How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; <sup>11</sup>and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, <sup>12</sup>and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.*

—Romans 4:9–12

### WORD STUDY

Circumcision is called a sign, a seal of the righteousness of the faith Abraham had while uncircumcised (v. 11). The Greek word used here for "seal," *sphragis*, means, "a signet, or, by implication, the stamp impressed to mark privacy or genuineness" (Strong, #4973). The word could imply that circumcision was given to Abraham to stamp and certify the righteousness he obtained in his faith

(Alford, 2:349). It could also imply that circumcision was an external certification that validated and clearly attested to the outside world the covenant between Abraham and God (Rogers, 323). In this way, it was an outward sign that people around Abraham could see showing proof of a covenant with God.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Paul mentions both a sign and a seal (Rom. 4:11). Circumcision was a sign that Abraham received. It was also a seal of the righteousness of the faith he had.

Abraham was justified not while he was circumcised, but while he was uncircumcised (Rom. 4:10). This follows the sequence in Genesis, in which Abraham was justified in 15:6, yet he was not circumcised until much later in 17:24. If Abraham was justified in uncircumcision, however, why did he have to be circumcised at all? God gave circumcision to Abraham for a seal of the justification he had received while still uncircumcised. His circumcision was a sign and a seal of the righteousness of faith. It was given to be an outward testimony that he was justified by faith while he was uncircumcised.

Today, circumcision is a matter of the heart (Rom. 2:29). Thus, faith should produce a seal within us. However, this inward seal should also have an outward testimony of our justification through our daily living. In other words, our inward seal should have an outward manifestation. Many believers have been saved for years, yet there is no clear seal of the righteousness of their faith, for there is no visible testimony of justification seen by others. If the people of the world could see the seal of the righteousness of the faith in us, they would say, "This group of people is special. They indeed are of faith."

## Justification Lived Out

The sign of circumcision is a seal, an outward testimony for others to see. It testifies that by faith we have been justified by God. Even more, however, it testifies that justification is our enjoyment, our realm, and our living.

Abraham had not only the seal of justification by faith but also a living of justification by faith. May we have the same living! Through such a living, others would see that we are the seed of Abraham—chosen by God, justified by God, living in the realm of justification, and full of the reality of justification. We should not be content with merely a judicial and objective justification; we should also have a subjective and organic testimony of our justification. We should thank the Lord for His justification and seek to have an outward testimony of the seal within us. Dear brothers and sisters, may justification be lived out and testified by us!

## Steps of Faith

Abraham is the father not only to the circumcision, but also to those who walk in the steps of the faith he had (Rom. 4:12). Abraham not only had the righteousness of faith (v. 11), but also steps of faith. Each step of faith testified that his life was one of trusting in God, not in himself. In the same way, we can say that as we follow in his steps of faith, each step is a testimony that we do not trust in ourselves but in God.



## The Heir of the World

*For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

—Romans 4:13

### WORD STUDY

In this verse, the promise to Abraham or his descendants was that he would be heir of the world. The Greek word used here for “world,” *kosmos*, literally means, “orderly arrangement,” but is also used to imply the world “in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitants” (Strong, #2889). In the Bible it is used to denote the earth, mankind, Gentiles (as opposed to Jews), the present condition of human affairs, and the sum of temporal possessions (Vine, 685).

However, the phrase “heir of the world” does not actually appear in the Old Testament promises to Abraham. Of this, H. Alford wrote, “This specification of the promise has perplexed [many] Commentators. The actual promise (Gen. 12:2–3; 13:14–17; 15:18; 17:8) was the possession of the land of Canaan. But [the Jews understood] that much more was intended in the words which accompany this promise than the mere possession of Canaan” (Alford, 2:351). In other

words, God promised more to Abraham than the occupation of a small area of land. Considering the accompanying words of God's promise to Abraham, we can say the promise included the land (13:17), a people, and a nation (17:4–8; 22:17).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Our Inheritance of the World

Abraham's example was very relevant to Paul as he wrote about justification. God not only justified Abraham (Rom. 4:3), but He also promised that both he and his descendants would inherit the world. Thus, justification is closely related to the inheritance of his descendants.

Abraham's faith was not only objective, doctrinal, and theoretical, but was also subjective, experiential, and practical. Likewise, our justification should not only be judicial and positional, but also organic and experiential. In this subjective aspect, the faith God has transmitted to us issues in many divine things, among which is our inheritance of the world.

### The Land, a People, a Nation

A general Christian definition of "the world" is a system that God has condemned (1 Cor. 11:32). However this is not what God was referring to when He promised the world to Abraham and his seed. To understand what God meant, it will be helpful to look at some passages of God's speaking to Abraham in Genesis related to this promise:

*Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you. (13:17)*

*As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come forth from you. I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. (17:4–8)*

*Indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. (22:17)*

These verses indicate that the blessings God promised to Abraham have at least three aspects. The first aspect is that of the land, the second is of the people, the third is of a nation. These three aspects together form the world Abraham was promised to inherit.

In total, the world includes the land, the people, and the nation. The land was created by God and is valuable. Yet without people, the value of the land cannot be realized. Thus, people are necessary. When the land and people are put together, a nation will be produced. Together, the land, people, and nation constitute the world. When God justified Abraham, He not only saw a man who was now righteous, He also saw the heir of the world. Through Abraham, God desires to gain descendants—people of faith. Through Abraham and his descendants, He would like to gain a land and a nation.

God's justification of us is not only to give us a righteous status, but also to accomplish His will through us, which is to inherit the world. God wants to gain a land, a people,

and a nation through us. He promised all of these when He justified us, yet our lifelong walk with the Lord involves our gaining of this promise. According to God's promise, everyone who is justified is part of Abraham's descendants who will inherit the world (Rom. 4:16).

### Steps of Faith

Before Paul brought up this inheritance of the world, he mentioned Abraham's steps of faith (v. 12). These steps of faith indicate our living and testimony and that our inheritance of the world is closely related to our living. The steps of faith mentioned in Romans 4:12 are our living in grace, by faith, and on the ground of justification. Justification does not only concern our status but should also issue in a certain living—a living that testifies of our justification, lived out by faith.

Abraham was justified by God then lived before God by faith, walked on the earth with steps of faith, and lived out the reality of justification. In reality, the living out of justification is a living by faith. If we are willing to consecrate ourselves to the Lord, give everything to Him for the sake of His will, and live before Him by faith, He will be entirely responsible for us. We can completely trust in Him and in His provision. The Lord Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they?" (Matt. 6:26). May we be those who can entrust themselves entirely to the Lord and walk by faith for His benefit. Our walk is not over when we are justified. We are also heirs of the world who live out our justification to gain the land, to gain the seed, and to become a great nation, thus manifesting the glorious testimony of God.



## Becoming Heirs

*For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; <sup>15</sup>for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. <sup>16</sup>For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.*

—Romans 4:14–16

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word in verse 14 for “heirs,” *klēronomos*, literally means “a sharer by lot, that is, an inheritor... by implication a possessor” (Strong, #2818). Properly speaking, an heir is one to whom something has been assigned. However, they have not yet possessed or entered into the promised object (Vine, 300). Anybody can be chosen to be an heir. However, later in Romans we find that the heirs of God are His children (Rom. 8:16–17). Thus, “it is by virtue of their substantial unity with the father that the children come into participation of his possession” (Alford, 2:392).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Promise Received by Faith

Paul makes the seemingly odd statement in Romans 4:15 that without Law, there is no violation. Such a statement could cause us to wonder about the existence of transgressions before the Law was issued to Moses. The fact is people certainly had transgressions before the Law was issued. However, these transgressions were not yet exposed. The Law exposes our transgressions, which is why verse 15 says that “the Law brings about wrath.” According to verse 16, however, the reason we can become heirs of God has nothing to do with the Law. Rather, it is by faith and according to grace, so that the promise of God can be guaranteed to us.

The promise mentioned here is the promise of the “inheritance of the world” (v. 13). Such a promise is not only guaranteed to those of the Law, but also to those of the faith of Abraham. The Israelites, those of the Law, received the promise of the inheritance of the world by faith. Likewise, we also receive by faith the promise of the inheritance of the world.

### Heirs in Life

The existence of an inheritance implies heirs, and heirs are related to life. Here, Paul shows us that our justification is not only a matter of our objective status before God, but is also a matter of the life within us. This is like the relationship between parents and children. A child does not only have the status of a child, but also shares the life of the parents.

The forgiveness of God is one thing, and our receiving of God’s life is another. As soon as we believe into the Lord, these two happen, and in a healthy situation they are manifested simultaneously. Yet even without an outward manifestation, both aspects are there. Justification is not only a

matter of our status before God, but also of our union with God in His divine life.

When we believed, God forgave all our sins, and His divine life entered into us to unite us with Himself. Through this union in His divine life, the triune God sowed into us everything He went through and accomplished. At the moment we believed, we received the imperishable seed mentioned by the apostle Peter: “For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). Every seed contains life, and the life within the seed we have received will grow to manifest our union with God in life.

### The Realm of the Divine Life

After being justified, we began to live in a realm of life. We can call the moment of believing our great transfer, for we were moved from death to resurrection and from darkness to light (Col. 1:12–13). We now stand in a new position and live in a new realm. The moment people genuinely say, “Lord, I receive you as my Savior,” they are justified judicially and brought out from the realm of darkness. The realm they are brought into is a divine, mystical, heavenly, and eternal realm of resurrection life.

In this realm, there is breadth, length, height, and depth (Eph. 3:18). It is a sphere in which we can live, move, and experience many things. When we believe, God immediately brings us from the realm of condemnation to the realm of justification, the mystical realm of the divine life. Only those justified by God are in this realm. We may still have many weaknesses and may not have much realization of justification in our experience yet. However, we should not worry. From the moment we enter into and live in this realm, God will begin to give us ever deeper experiences of His justification.

## The Growth of the Divine Life

As soon as people believe into the Lord, they are justified. There are actually two things that are changed in this moment: their status and their source of life. These are the two sides of justification. We might say, “Thank the Lord! My sins have been forgiven, and all the problems I had with God have been solved!” This is correct, yet it only focuses on the aspect of our status and position. Justification has another aspect—the aspect of life. As far as our status is concerned, justification changes the realm in which we exist. With respect to the aspect of life, justification is related to our lifelong spiritual growth.

Paul tells us in Romans 8:17 that we are the heirs of God. As heirs of God, we will inherit the world (4:13–16). The heirs are the descendants of Abraham who will gain the promises of God: the land, people, and nation for God. Yet while a descendant is a result of a union in life, an heir denotes a growth of life to come (Gal. 4:1–5). The inheritance is related to the divine life. The divine life is a divine seed sown into us to grow and make us full-grown heirs of God. When we grow into and manifest the promises of God, then we are heirs qualified to inherit the world.

## The Living of the Divine Life

From the aspect of life, justification should be realized in us continuously. When we believed, we received God’s divine life, the life of the Son of God came into us, and we became sons of God (1 John 5:12; Gal. 4:6). To have the life of the Son of God is one thing, but to live the life of the Son of God is another. The realization of justification is our living out of the life of the Son of God.

Healthy parents are always full of hope for their children. If the children appreciate their parents’ hearts and do not worry

them, they will be a source of joy to their parents. However, if the children become involved in things like drugs, gambling, or stealing, they will cause their parents grief and sorrow. If we do not live out the life of the Son of God, we are like children who do not appreciate their parents' hearts. We would be sons of God in status, yet not sons of God who live according to God's heart's desire. His desire is for us to live in the divine and mystical realm of life, allowing the reality of justification to grow and develop in us that we would manifest and testify of His life.

### The Experience of the Divine Life

Justification should be a lifelong experience. As stated earlier, justification is the realm in which we now exist. However, it is entirely possible to exist in a realm without experiencing it. For example, I know some Chinese who have migrated to Canada. According to their status, they now reside in Canada. However, they moved to Chinatown and live just like they lived in China. They may reside in Canada, but they have not enjoyed the riches Canada has to offer. Our experience of justification can be like this. If we are not careful, we can live a life in which there is no difference from our life before believing. The realm we exist in today is so high! It is a heavenly, divine, mystical realm of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, we can still live far from God today. Though we have the status of justification, we may fail to apply and experience the riches of this justification and fail to manifest its reality in us. We should strive for a life full of rich experiences of the realm in which we now exist.

In the realm of justification, there are many riches that we need to apply and experience lifelong. Justification will then be realized in us. Justification is not as simple as we think. It not only concerns our outward status, but also our inward experiences. It is not only a status, but also a living. This

living is related to the growth in life for the experience and realization of the divine life in us.

We should learn to live and walk in the divine and mystical realm of life, not simply to just exist in it. By this living and walking, we will enjoy all the divine and rich supply of this realm and subjectively experience the reality of justification. Such experiences lead to our growth and maturity in justification.

## The Experience of Life and Death

*(As it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*

—Romans 4:17

### WORD STUDY

In Romans 4:17, Paul describes God in two ways:

1. The One who gives life to the dead
2. The One who calls into being that which does not exist

Many commentators believe both descriptions refer to the ability of God to cause a son to be born to the aged Abraham (Alford, 2:352–353). The second description surely refers to this, as God promised Abraham a seed and heir before Isaac even existed. However, the writer of Hebrews gives us a different way to understand the first description:

*By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called.” He considered that God is*

*able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type. (Heb. 11:17–19)*

When the writer of Hebrews considered the story of Abraham offering up Isaac (Gen. 22), he wrote that it was Abraham's experience of trusting in God as One who could give life to the dead. In light of these verses in Hebrews, we could say that the first description of God in Romans 4:17 refers to Abraham's experience of God in offering up Isaac, while the second refers to Abraham's experience of God when he begot Isaac.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Crucial Experiences of God

When Paul says God calls into being that which does not exist (Rom. 4:17), he is referring to God's promise of a son to Abraham when Isaac did not yet exist. When we read the book of Hebrews, we can see that when God is called the One "who gives life to the dead," it is referring to the story of Abraham offering up Isaac (11:17–19). It was in the presence of this One who "gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" that Abraham became "the father of us all" (Rom. 4:16).

For Abraham to become the father of many nations, he had to pass through two experiences, one involving the seed (his descendants), the other involving resurrection. The seed was a matter of life; resurrection was a result of his consecration. Abraham begot Isaac, an experience of the God who calls into being things that do not exist. He also offered Isaac on an altar and received him back, a figurative experience of the God who gives life to the dead.

Abraham was promised to be an heir of the world through the righteousness of faith (v. 13). How could Abraham inherit



the world? This world was not the outward and visible world condemned by God, but the land, people, and kingdom of God. Two things were needed to bring this world in: life and the testimony of the kingdom. For Abraham to beget Isaac, life was needed. When he offered up Isaac, God promised the strong testimony of the kingdom of the sons of Israel (Gen. 22:16–18).

Abraham produced Isaac, Isaac produced Jacob, and Jacob produced the twelve tribes of Israel. Without Isaac, neither Jacob nor the twelve tribes of Israel would have existed. Yet Isaac was not only born of Abraham, but also offered up by Abraham. In the begetting of Isaac through Abraham, God produced the seed of life. In the offering up of Isaac, God promised the strong testimony of the children of Israel. Both were necessary to bring in Jacob and the twelve tribes.

In terms of life, we are the seed, or descendants, of Abraham. In terms of the kingdom of God, we are the people of that kingdom. The divine life will eventually grow in us into the testimony of the kingdom. In this process of growth, two experiences of God are necessary: the experience of the One who calls things into being that do not exist, and the experience of the One who gives life to the dead. Both experiences are necessary and form principles that the heirs of the world can never escape. Without the experience of God as the One who calls things into being that do not exist, the seed of life cannot be brought in. Without the experience of God as the One who gives life to the dead, the testimony of the kingdom cannot be produced.

### Our Birth and the Altar

In order to become the testimony of the kingdom, we must experience the God who gives resurrection life to the dead. It is not sufficient for us to only have the life received by faith. We also need the experience of death typified by

the altar. Many Christians do not struggle with the aspect of life but with the aspect of death. We need to be put to death (Gal. 5:24). In other words, we need to die to ourselves, to the world, to money, to human sympathy, to our future, to our hopes and dreams, to the earthly things we put our confidence in, to religion, and to all people, things, and objects that are apart from God. We all need to pass through the altar, to be given a status of death, and to allow God to raise us from the dead. We need this experience in order to grow from the initial life we received as heirs unto the testimony of the kingdom.

When Abraham offered Isaac, he was indeed ready to kill him (Gen. 22:10). This is extremely hard to believe and understand. God had called Abraham with a promise that he would gain a seed and become a great nation. How could God ask him to offer up his son of the promise? Yet Abraham followed God's words, and Isaac was obedient to his father. When Isaac was bearing the wood for the burnt offering and following Abraham to the mountain, he asked his father, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (v. 7). Abraham looked at him and must have thought in his heart, "Is it not you?" However, his answer was, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (v. 8).

When they reached the mountain, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood. Then he bound Isaac, his son according to promise, and laid him on the altar. "Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (vv. 9–10). Only at the last moment did God provide a ram to sacrifice in place of Isaac. This is an incredible story! Yet very few realize that all heirs of the world must pass through such experiences of death.

We who are to inherit the world should know the life produced by God's calling "into being that which does not exist." However, we should also know the kingdom produced by death and resurrection. Life is one thing, the kingdom is

another. Life produces an heir, while the kingdom produces a testimony. The inheritance of the world involves these two things simultaneously. No one can inherit the world without life, nor can anyone inherit the world without the kingdom. To inherit the world, we must become heirs in life and then become a testimony of the kingdom. To produce the testimony of the kingdom, we must offer ourselves up as a burnt offering upon the altar. We should not only have experiences of life, but also of death.

The testimony of the kingdom comes from experiences of death. To become God's heirs, we need the life of God, which is a matter of faith. However, while faith makes us heirs of God, it does not completely bring us into our inheritance of the world. We still need to pass through the altar and experience God as the One who "gives life to the dead." This experience manifests the testimony of God's kingdom in resurrection. Our lifelong Christian experience can be summed up this way—born to be God's heirs and dying to become God's testimony. With experiences of both life and death, the reality of justification will be manifested and we will be able to inherit the world.

There are two conditions for the reality of justification to be manifested: one is life, the other is death. Without life, justification will only be judicial to us, not experiential. Without death, justification will have no reality or manifestation in us. Many Christians today have a lot of life but not much death. They have many experiences of God as the One who "calls into being that which does not exist," yet not many experiences of Him as the One who "gives life to the dead." However, death is not a preference but a necessity. Those who love and serve the Lord today must willingly pass through hardship and allow themselves to die upon the altar. The inheritance of the world issues from experiences of both life and death. Life unites us with God, and experiences of death allow us to have a healthy existence, produce a healthy labor, and cause us to live out the testimony of the kingdom.

## The Value of Justification

The result of justification is our inclusion in the promise to inherit the world, a promise given by God to Abraham and his descendants (Rom. 4:13). If we rest in the status of justification yet have not inherited the world, God is not satisfied yet. The value of justification lies in our inheritance of the world, and God will only be satisfied when that is accomplished. To inherit the world, we must not only have life, but also death.

How did Abraham become “a father of many nations”? It was by experiencing the God who not only “calls into being that which does not exist” but also “gives life to the dead.” The promise of becoming a father of many nations was the result of experiencing life and death. Our experience of justification is the same.

The manifestation of the kingdom of God is not only a matter of life, but also of death to ourselves and the world. It not only depends on how well we live with God, but also on how much we die. We can surely praise the Lord for giving us His divine life, justifying us in this life, and making us heirs of the world. However, we should also pray to Him, saying, “Lord, I am willing to go to the altar and die.” When we can pray like this and experience it, God will work in us to give “life to the dead,” resulting in the manifestation of the testimony of the kingdom of God and leading to our inheritance of the world. This is the value of our justification.

## Growing Strong in Faith

*In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.”<sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; <sup>20</sup>yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. <sup>22</sup>Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.*

—Romans 4:18–22

### WORD STUDY

This inspiring passage demonstrates the strength of Abraham’s faith in the context of the all-powerful God (Alford, 2:353). Abraham was fully assured that God was able to perform that which He had promised (v. 21). The passage begins with Abraham’s believing “in hope against hope.” The Greek word translated here “against” is *para*, which can also mean “contrary to,...beyond” (Strong, #3844). In other words, Abraham was beyond a point of hope, yet in hope he had faith.

Abraham, without becoming weak in faith, contemplated his and Sarah's physical limitations (v. 19). The Greek word used here for "contemplate," *katanoeō*, can be thought of as a "fixing of the eyes upon" (Vincent, 3:56). Yet despite the obvious limitations he saw, Abraham did not waver at God's promise. Rather, he grew strong and was empowered in faith, giving glory to God (v. 20). H. Alford wrote, "Paul does not want to prove that Abraham was in his sound senses when he believed the promise, but that he was so strong in faith as to be able to overleap all difficulties in its way" (Alford, 2:354).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Hoping Against Hope

Paul explains that Abraham in hope believed against hope (v. 18). In the account of Genesis, God appeared to Abraham and promised Himself as Abraham's great reward (Gen. 15:1). Abraham answered, "O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" (v. 2). The word of the Lord came to Abraham, and he "believed in the Lord" (v. 6). Years later, God again appeared to Abraham with a promise that he would have a seed. This time Abraham fell on his face and laughed (17:17). Referring to the child born outside of God's promise, he said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" (v. 18). When we study Abraham's answers to God, it seems there were many times Abraham had lost faith in God's promises. Yet Paul wrote in Romans that he "in hope against hope believed." This statement carries deep spiritual meaning.

When the aged Abraham fell on his face and talked with God, this was his faith. Even though he thought God's words were laughable, he could not walk away from Him. Today, God may lead us to a point where we see no hope at all and no way to go on. Yet our God, who is so intimate with us and

wants to make His heart known to us, transmits faith into us so we cannot help but live before Him. Abraham never questioned God or complained to Him. Against hope, in hope, he simply believed.

To “believe in hope” means we may not be able to believe what God has said, but we are not able to leave Him either. Many times our outward circumstances make us despair, but the faith transmitted by God into us produces an inward trust in Him. This trust may not be strong, but it is a trust we cannot deny. This is why although Abraham laughed out loud and Sarah laughed within herself (Gen. 17:17, 18:12), the Bible still records that they believed what God had promised (Rom. 4:18; Heb. 11:11).

Abraham’s faith was faith in hope. When God said to him, “You shall beget a son,” Abraham’s answer was, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!” This may have seemed like a good answer, godly and wise, but it did not have God in it. However, God did not become angry with Abraham but instead continued to affirm His promise to him. This is why following the Lord is so wonderful. Those who claim to overcome in every situation may have never truly overcome. Real overcomers may be those who fail the most. If, in the midst of our many failures, we can still trust in the Lord, look unto Him, and seek Him, we are believing in hope.

According to Romans 4:18, it was this kind of faith that made Abraham the father of many nations. His life was not filled with many victories; rather, he had many failures and a lot of unbelief. However, even in failure after failure he still did not leave God. Even in his unbelief, he still lived before God. This was Abraham’s faith.

### Believing in Unbelief

Abraham’s condition was truly pitiful—“he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead...and the deadness of

Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19). Nothing may seem physically weaker than this. However, Paul said that Abraham was not weak in faith—he believed in unbelief. Abraham may have felt unable to believe the promises of God, yet he could not help but believe. We often experience the same thing. On the one hand, in ourselves we may at times be unable to believe. On the other hand, we cannot help but believe. This is faith that is not weak.

The experience of faith's victory may be very different than we expect. We think strong faith is belief from the moment of our confession to the end of our life. However, in reality we often fail, and after considering our lives we may say, "Lord, I cannot believe that I still love You and that I am still following You." In following the Lord, nothing is more mystical or more enjoyable than faith. Those who follow the Lord are often like Jonah, a man in the Old Testament who fled from the presence of God (Jonah 1:3). What is most amazing is that, like Jonah, no matter how far or how often we flee from the presence of God, we cannot totally leave Him, for the faith sown into us is not weak.

When Abraham heard the promise of God, he fell on his face and laughed, saying in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Gen. 17:17). Abraham laughed aloud, yet Paul says in Romans that Abraham was not weak in faith. Abraham's faith was not heroic—he did laugh—yet he remained before God.

Abraham's laughing at God's promise and his plea for Ishmael show that Abraham may not have understood why God was doing what He was doing. In Abraham's mind, he and his wife were too old to beget a son. He may have thought, "God, I already had a son, Ishmael. Is that not good enough? He is healthy and was born of me. Should not the promise be through him?" Abraham did not understand why Ishmael, a son born to him, did not seem to count.



As we follow the Lord, we may not understand many things. We may ask things like, “Has attendance at church meetings increased? Is the church prospering?” Very few ask, “Is what I begot Ishmael or Isaac?” Ishmael was the result of Abraham’s efforts apart from God, while Isaac was the fruit of God’s promise. We should ask, “Did I beget something of myself or of the promise of God?” We often pay little attention to this matter, but God cares very much about it.

To God, only the son born through Sarah counted. He insisted on this. Today, God wants us to work, to serve, and to be fruitful, yet only that which is born through Sarah will be counted. If we have worked tirelessly, yet what was born by our labor was nothing but Ishmael, its value will not be high in God’s eyes. Be careful! In all of our spiritual pursuing and serving, we must have God. Our labor must be related to God, and we must rely on Him and walk with Him. Then our labor and service will count in the presence of God.

### Being Strengthened in Faith

From the Old Testament we can see that Abraham did not always believe God’s promise, yet Paul wrote that Abraham did not waver at the promise of God in unbelief. Instead, he grew strong in faith (Rom. 4:20). This is truly wonderful! On the one hand, Abraham laughed. On the other hand, he became strong in faith. How could this be? Abraham’s unbelief was revealed in his laughing. Since his laughing was before God, however, he was strengthened in faith.

We should learn from Abraham. As soon as we hear God speak, we should respond to Him. If we do not understand what He says, we should learn to “laugh.” Abraham’s laughing was an expression to God of his unbelief. He brought his unbelief to God. We should learn to pray like this: “Lord, when I look at this age and the condition of the church, I feel very weak and frustrated. Although You said that You

will build Your church, I cannot believe it will happen. All I can do is laugh. Despite my unbelief, I do not want to leave You—I still love You, I still love Your church, and I am still willing to serve You.” If we can laugh before God in this way, many wonderful things will happen, many impossible things will come true, and many things which are hard to accomplish will be done. This is the kind of faith Paul wrote about here and should be our lifelong experience.

### Giving Glory to God

Paul says that Abraham grew strong in faith, giving glory to God (Rom. 4:20). Giving glory to God was the fruit of Abraham’s faith. Abraham’s life was a testimony of being justified by faith. In this justification, God worked in him to strengthen him in faith, and Abraham became a man giving glory to God.

A brother recently passed away who was a great help not only to me but also to many others. Whenever I think of his labor, I think of his fruit—the many brothers and sisters who received help from him. He is an example of someone giving glory to God in his life. He never boasted and said, “Look at my faith!” Rather, he often testified of his weaknesses. In the midst of his weaknesses, his faith bore fruit, giving glory to God.

Real faith is produced in our weaknesses. Our faith is just like Abraham’s faith—everything is the opposite of what it seems it should be. When the Lord is moving and we think we can keep up on our own, we find that we can’t. Yet when we feel the most unable to keep up with the Lord, we are somehow able. We are unable to believe when we should, but when belief seems the most impossible, somehow we truly believe. When we should consecrate ourselves, we cannot. When we seem unable to offer ourselves up, we somehow do. In this kind of process, faith can bear much fruit, giving glory to God.

Paul says that Abraham was fully assured that God was able to perform what He had promised (v. 21). How could Paul know this, since Genesis does not mention it? When Paul looked at Abraham's life, it seems he looked at the result rather than the process. He focused on Abraham as the transformed father of faith. He did not mention how Abraham laughed, how he betrayed his wife, or how he begot Ishmael. He only gave us the result that Abraham became the father of many nations, and that he was fully assured that "what God had promised, He was able also to perform."

We should also learn to look at things as Paul did. We should not focus on others' victories or failures today, but on their fruit after ten, twenty, or thirty years. We often overvalue today's process, yet for Paul, what counted was the result of a person's whole life. If a brother gives an amazing message today, we may think he has done a magnificent job that can never be matched. If his next message is not as good, we may feel that the perfecting he received in the church was in vain. Fortunately, Paul did not look at things this way, and neither does God. God doesn't care how well we give a message; He is not looking at our victories or failures today. Instead, He is looking at how we will be in thirty years, at the fruit and result of our entire life.

Abraham actually went through a very long process before he was fully assured of God's ability to fulfill His promise. In the beginning, he seemed to believe God's promise, yet he tried to beget a son by his own strength. When he found his way did not count with God, he laughed at God's promise of a son through Sarah. He could not even tell God he did not believe; he could only laugh. That was his conversing with God. Therefore, when Paul says that Abraham was fully assured, I do not believe it was with a strong and firm voice. Paul only showed us that Abraham was caught by the Lord and could not escape. He against hope believed in hope.

Eventually, Abraham was fully assured that "what God promised, He was also able to perform" (v. 21). The experiences

involved in this process were very deep. Abraham's travels, his laughing, his begetting of Ishmael, his circumcision, his betrayals of his wife, and all of God's work in him are all wrapped up together in verse 21. How do we gain such assurance today? It requires passing through many experiences in which faith is transmitted into us from God. Such faith fully assures us that what God has promised He is also able to accomplish.

For Abraham to be fully assured, he had to go through these many experiences in which he felt he could not get away from God. He may have felt there was no way out, yet these experiences worked out a full assurance in him. A fully assured faith was the fruit of a lifetime of experiences for Abraham and resulted in the fruit of faith and glory to God. May our lives also bear the same fruit of faith, giving glory to God.

## Raised for Our Justification

*Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, <sup>24</sup>but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

—Romans 4:23–25

### WORD STUDY

Romans 4:25 is an important verse for our understanding of justification. In this verse, our transgressions are linked to Christ being delivered over (betrayed to His death), while our justification is linked to His resurrection. In both phrases, the words are joined by the Greek preposition *dia*, which could here imply either a causal or a purposeful relationship (Strong, #1223, also see Alford, 2:355). In other words, Christ was raised either because we had been justified, or He was raised for the purpose of our justification.

H. Alford wrote that this preposition, *dia*, should be understood differently in the two phrases. He said, “Our Lord was delivered up (to death) for or on account of our sins (i.e. because we had sinned). He was also raised up (from the dead) for or on account of our justification (i.e. not because

we had been, but that we might be)...In the former of these, He was made a sacrifice for sin; in the latter, He elevated our humanity into the participation of that Resurrection-life, which is also, by union with Him, the life of every justified believer. So that, when taking the two apart, the Death of Christ is more properly placed in close reference to forgiveness of sins, His Resurrection, to justification unto life everlasting" (Alford, 2:355).

This understanding of the verse attaches immense importance to the resurrection of Christ. As H. Bushnell wrote, "For it is only by the rising that His incarnate life and glory are fully discovered" (Vincent, 3:57). Christ was delivered up to death that we might be forgiven before the judgment seat of God. This is the judicial aspect of justification. Christ was raised, however, so that we may be brought into eternal life, which we can describe as our subjective experience of justification today.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Paul gives a conclusive word regarding justification in Romans 4:23–25. The key realization from these verses is that Paul links our justification with Christ's resurrection. In other words, justification and resurrection go together. When Paul mentioned justification to the Romans, he emphasized both the judicial and organic aspects, and this organic experience of justification is only in resurrection. Based on verse 25, we can say Jesus was delivered over for our judicial redemption, and He was raised from the dead for our organic experience of justification.

### Justification Applied in Resurrection

Jesus was raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). This

means that it is only in His resurrection life that we experience justification. We were once dead in our offenses and sins (Eph. 2:1). The greatest limitation that God has given to people is death. However, the Lord Jesus entered into death, passed through death, and came out of death to destroy the limitation of death in His resurrection. Now, we have been made alive together with Christ (v. 5). Because Christ was raised from the dead, today we can live with Him and in Him, and in His resurrection we can apply our justification.

When we believed into the Lord, we were justified by God. As far as our position is concerned, we have been transported into a divine, mystical, and heavenly realm of life. Within this realm we can abide in the resurrection of Christ and apply our justification. God has already justified us outwardly and inwardly. Whether we overcome or fail, we are justified. When we read the Bible and pray, we are justified. When we are lost and wandering in the world, we are justified. Even if we should lust for the world, we are still justified. Regardless of our outward situation, God has already justified us. Inwardly speaking, we have been born again of the incorruptible seed (1 Pet. 1:23). This seed, Christ, has passed through death, has been raised from the dead, and has overcome death. This seed in us is in resurrection and glory, is full of strength, and is full of the power of resurrection. This is what will eventually bring us to a full inheritance of the divine and heavenly reality of justification.

A person who applies justification in resurrection can boldly declare, “O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). We are not only judicially justified, but are also more than conquerors in all things (Rom. 8:37). This does not mean we do not have failures or weaknesses. We still have many weaknesses, limitations, and failures, and we still do many things that offend the Lord. Yet within us is the power of resurrection that enables us to apply the reality of justification.

### Allowing the Life of Justification to Grow

We need this kind of understanding: justification comes from the redemption in Christ Jesus and through His resurrection. It is related to both Christ's death and resurrection life. Those who have followed the Lord for many years can testify that they experience death all the time, yet they also continually experience resurrection life. In fact, this is our lifelong experience of justification. We are justified not only judicially, but also organically, which allows the Lord's resurrection life to dwell in us, operate in us, flow out from us, and grow and mature in us. No matter what our situation, we should always desire to grow in the life of justification. This life can only be found in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. We should tell the Lord, "I want to trust in You, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things into being that do not exist. I want to trust You so that I might allow the life of justification to continually grow in me in the resurrection of Christ." The experiences we have in the resurrection life of Christ will lead us to the reality of justification in us.

Throughout our life of following the Lord, no experience or hardship can separate us from the judicial status or organic life of justification. Knowing this gives us a high appreciation of justification. We should tell the Lord, "I cannot believe a fallen, weak person like me has received Your redemption. I cannot believe that You would continually work in me to make the life of justification grow and to give me daily experiences of Your justification. Lord, I marvel that I can live in justification by living and walking by Your resurrection life. Lord, I cannot help but worship You!"



## Peace with God

*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

—Romans 5:1

### WORD STUDY

This verse provides an interesting study of Greek tenses. Paul wrote the phrase “having been justified by faith” in the aorist tense. The aorist tense presents action as a whole, or, as a summary. It is like a snapshot of an action, without much regard to its internal workings. Aorist often indicates something in the past (Wallace, 753). Thus, the phrase, “having been justified by faith” may point to an already completed action (Rogers, 324). Building off this accomplished fact, Paul wrote the phrase, “we have peace with God,” in the present tense. The present tense in Greek has no regard for the beginning or end of a progressive event, and generally indicates an event currently happening (Wallace, 751). Thus, peace with God can be enjoyed now, as “a consequence flowing from justification by faith” (Alford, 2:356).

The Greek word used here for “peace,” *eirēnē*, literally means, “peace, quietness, rest” (Strong, #1515). This word occurs in almost every book of the New Testament and is

used to mean several different things. It could mean the harmonized relationship between God and man accomplished through the gospel, or it could mean the sense of rest and contentment that is the consequence of such a relationship. In some verses, like this one, it may be hard to distinguish between these two ideas (Vine, 464). We can say this peace with God contains two aspects: the outward, judicial peace achieved by reconciliation, and an enjoyable and experiential peace that springs from the judicial fact.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Enjoyment of Justification

This verse should be very precious to us. It reveals that the first result of being justified by God is our entering into peace with God. The peace here is not only a judicial peace, meaning the absence of enmity between God and us, but is also a peace that we can enjoy and experience in our day-to-day living. It is an experiential peace based on our harmony with God. Justification is given to us through the redemption of Jesus Christ and is available for us to enjoy lifelong as peace with God. Based on our status of judicial peace, we are able to experience a harmony with God in our daily living.

We may illustrate our peace with God with the relationship between parents and their children. Sometimes parents must rebuke their children. When their children confess and apologize, however, the parents always embrace and comfort them. This is judicial peace resulting in an experiential peace. Not only is the problem between the parents and children taken care of through the rebuke and apology, but peace is also experienced in the embracing and comfort. Our relationship with God is also like this. God justified us so that we could have judicial peace with Him, allowing an experiential peace to be produced. Judicial peace is a one-time

and permanent removal of the enmity between us and God, while the peace of life is for us to experience lifelong. Our justification operates in us to bring us into the peace of life, which is the application of our judicial peace.

### The Beginning of Sanctification

We can consider this verse as the beginning of a transition in Paul's thought in the book of Romans. The end of his focus on justification is 4:25, in which Jesus' death was related to judicial redemption and His resurrection linked to our organic salvation. This was the concluding word on the purpose and description of justification. In chapter 5, Paul begins to transition from the topic of justification to sanctification. Sanctification is the experience and constitution of a justified person on the way to being glorified by God. We can say the result of justification is sanctification, while the result of sanctification is glorification.

Although the overall topic of Paul's writing begins to shift to sanctification, the first half of chapter 5 can still be considered the effective operation of justification. A result of justification is our peace with God, which is also the start of our experience of sanctification. A person who has been justified by God dwells in peace with Him. The enjoyment of harmony with God, the peace of life, is the enjoyment of justification and the beginning of the experience of sanctification.



## The Grace in Which We Stand

*Through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*

—Romans 5:2

### WORD STUDY

This verse states that we have “obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.” The Greek word used here for, “introduction,” *prosagōgē*, literally means, “admission, access” (Strong, #4318). This word is used in the Bible only in Paul’s writings—here in Romans 5:2 and twice in his letter to the Ephesians (2:18, 3:12). W. E. Vine elaborates on this word, saying that it “denotes ‘access,’ with which is associated the thought of freedom to enter through the assistance or favor of another” (Vine, 7). In this case, our access into grace is made possible through Jesus Christ, and we now enter grace by faith.

Paul writes of grace in a remarkable way in this verse, mentioning it as something we stand in and have access into. In this way, grace is conceived as a field into which we are brought (Vincent, 3:58). We can say that grace is a realm in which we can stand, move, and live.

Our obtaining of an introduction, or access, into grace is written of in the perfect tense. The perfect tense describes an event which, although completed in the past, has results existing in the present time (Wallace, 754). The present result of our access is our standing in grace. From this grammar, H. Alford calls this grace the “grace of justification, apprehended and held fast subjectively” (Alford, 2:357).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Standing in Grace

Romans 5:2 is quite clear—by faith we are standing in the realm of grace. A person who has been justified by God stands on the ground of grace through the death and resurrection of Christ, in union with the divine life.

In Ephesians 2:6, Paul wrote, “[God] raised us up with [Christ], and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Why did Paul use the term “stand” in Romans 5:2 and not “sit”? Why do we sit in the heavens yet stand in grace? To stand introduces the idea of action. To sit indicates that there is nothing left to do. In Ephesians, everything has been accomplished by God, which is why we can sit in the heavens. Standing, however, indicates our living, our walking, our hoping, and our growing. God measures out His grace to us for our experience, enjoyment, and application, and for our living and walking by the grace of God.

The principle behind organized religion is the controlling of behavior and living. However, we who have been justified by God are in the principle of grace. By God’s grace, we were brought into His justification (Rom. 3:24), and His justification brings us to stand in His grace. God justifies us through His grace, and because of our justified status He can supply us with His grace.

God's grace and righteousness are closely linked. Without God's grace, the righteousness of God would be utterly unattainable, and without God's righteousness imputed to us, we would be unable to experience the grace of God. By the grace of God, we are led to the status of justification. By the righteousness of God imputed to us, we are led to grace. God's grace allows us to live a life united and mingled with God, and His righteousness allows us to come boldly to His presence. We are not only saved and justified by God, but also have access into the realm of grace where we can stand, live, and enjoy the grace of God.

Grace is always related to our enjoyment of God. Yet Paul did not say we are *applying* this grace now. Rather, he said that we are *standing* in grace now. This shows that grace is not only for our enjoyment, but is also the realm in which we stand and live. According to Romans 5:2, grace has become a realm for us to stand in.

For example, when people stand in America, they are in the realm of America. America becomes the realm in which they can walk, live, struggle, labor, and grow. Likewise, we who have been justified by God are in the realm of grace, in which we can walk, live, struggle, labor, grow, and mature. This realm has four aspects: it is the realm of resurrection, the divine and mystical realm, the realm of current grace, and the realm of life.

### The Realm of Resurrection

The essence of the realm of grace is resurrection. Because it is a realm of resurrection, it cannot be destroyed or damaged by anything. This realm can overcome all things, even death. When we stand in the realm of grace, we stand in the reality of resurrection. Not only is the life of resurrection within us, but the realm of resurrection surrounds us. This realm of resurrection cannot be swept away by death, limited by

weakness, or destroyed by any person or thing. It is the realm of resurrection power and life!

### The Divine and Mystical Realm

This realm is also a divine and mystical realm. It is divine because God Himself is its content. It is mystical because it is related to God's eternal purpose, which is a mystery hidden for ages in God (Eph. 3:9).

Our experiences show that grace is both divine and mystical. The fact that we can love the Lord, consecrate ourselves to Him, and entrust ourselves to Him proves that the realm is a mystery. Every experience a person goes through with the Lord is mysterious and hard to explain by human logic. Everything God does is mystical and hard to comprehend. The most mysterious thing is the interaction and relationship between mortal man and the eternal God. We who are justified have a mysterious existence. Our living in God's will is mysterious, every prayer is mysterious, every contact with God is mysterious, and every step of spiritual growth is mysterious. Even every time we tell the Lord, "I love You," it is mysterious. In the realm of grace, the triune God is our full supply—who He is, what He has gone through, and what He has accomplished have all become real and applicable to us. This in itself is very mysterious.

### The Realm of Current Grace

Paul used the perfect tense in Romans 5:2 to say that we *now* stand in the realm of grace. By faith we have access into the grace in which we are now standing. This grace is available right now—it is a current realm. Christians saved fifty years ago were standing in this grace then. Today when they read this verse, they can still say they are standing in grace.



Fifty years ago, this grace was current for them. Fifty years later this grace is still current. Grace is always for the present; it is always current grace. The realm of grace is always our current realm and is always for our present situation and condition. In our whole life of following the Lord, we can always enjoy current grace.

### The Realm of Life

This realm of grace is also the realm of life. The apostle Peter wrote, “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Pet. 1:23). In the realm of grace, we have the incorruptible seed within us that can grow and mature. Paul wrote, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6–7). This seed is sown and watered by God through His servants, yet it is God who makes it grow. Though many servants of God labor together with Him, Paul said they considered themselves as nothing.

The servants of God are nothing. Christians like to boast, saying things like, “Our church has a very spiritual man, and we all follow his leading,” or, “Our church has a very spiritual man who builds us up and helps us to grow.” Such statements show an insufficient understanding of the fact that we stand in the realm of grace in which God is the One causing any growth. In the realm of grace, only God gives life and only God causes life to grow.



## The Hope of the Glory of God

*Through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.*

—Romans 5:2

### WORD STUDY

Following his statement that we now stand in grace, Paul wrote, “we exult in hope of the glory of God.” The Greek word used here for “exult,” *kauchaomai*, literally means “to (make) boast, glory, joy, rejoice” (Strong, #2744). This phrase could be translated as: “we boast in hope of the glory of God” (Darby Translation).

It is important that Paul wrote that we boast in *hope* of the glory of God. He also wrote later in Romans, “For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it” (8:24–25). Hope points toward something in the future. The hope of the glory of God points to our sharing of God’s glory when He returns in His kingdom (Alford, 2:357). By implication, our boast as we stand in grace is not our present condition or environment. Rather, our boast is in the glory of God to come.

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### The Hope of the Glory of the Coming Lord

The first two verses of Romans 5 give a wonderful description of the result of our justification. Firstly, we have peace with God and stand and live in the realm of grace. Secondly, our very existence in this realm becomes a boast because of the hope of the glory of God. A person justified by God should have an inward boast that comes from the hope of the glory of God.

Today very few of us have the thought, “I will boast because of the hope of the glory of God.” Most of us only consider our own future and benefit, and certainly in these things we have very little to boast of. However, a person who really understands justification will have a boast in the Lord’s glory and can tell Him, “Lord, I hope for Your glory, the glory of Your coming again. I wish You could come back even right now.” Though we have many weaknesses, failures, and limitations, and though we may do many things that offend God, we have been justified by Him. Because God has justified us, we can wait and long for His coming again. In fact, the glory of His coming again becomes our boast today.

The apostle Paul was an example of someone who boasted in the hope of the glory of God. By the end of his ministry, all the churches in Asia had forsaken him (2 Tim. 1:15). Yet Paul still boasted and said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future 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” (2 Tim. 4:7–8). Paul said this even though he surely had weaknesses and failures. For example, when he went to Jerusalem for the last time, he was persuaded by James to purify himself and other men, to enter the temple, and to wait for the priests

to offer the offering for them (Acts 21:26). After seeing how strongly Paul taught that these things were no longer necessary (Eph. 2:15), it is hard for us to explain why he would go through them. We can assume that when he reflected on this experience, he did not feel very victorious. Paul was well aware of his own failures and limitations, so in 2 Timothy he did not say that he had won the good fight, but that he had *fought* the good fight. He did not say that he had won the race, but that he had *finished* the race.

Why did all the churches in Asia forsake Paul? There may have been a negative environment in the churches at that time brought in by Judaisers. At that time, believers who did not walk according to the Law may not have been acknowledged by those who did. If they wanted to be accepted by the churches, they would have to compromise and put themselves under the Law. It may have been in the midst of this situation that Paul wrote that there was laid up for him the crown of righteousness. How could he be so bold in such a negative environment? It was because his existence, his living, his operation, and his labor were all in the justification of God.

Paul's boldness did not lie in how effective his work was, even though his work is effective even today. His boldness did not lie in how many people were affected and helped by him, although all Christians today are affected and helped by his labor. His boldness did not lie in how many churches he established, though he established many in a very short time. Rather, his boldness totally lay in God. He boasted in the hope of the glory of God.

### The Hope of the Constitution of the Glory of God

Later in Romans, Paul wrote that justification leads to glorification (Rom. 8:30). Justified people have a hope and boast in the glory of God. This becomes a motivation to pursue

Christ, to serve Him, and to labor for Him our whole life. In other words, an inward constitution of the hope of the glory of God constrains us our whole life.

Abraham did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but became “strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20). The phrase, “giving glory to God,” is not a tired Christian slogan, but an indication that we who have been justified by God will one day become glory unto God (Rom. 8:17–18). This glory is both objective and subjective. It is not theoretical or merely doctrinal; it is a living hope that results in a glorious testimony! Our boast is that we will one day become and manifest God’s glory. Our growth today is simply the process for this glory to be constituted in us.

We should boast, “The glory of God will be manifested through me!” When we overcome our limitations, we often feel boastful. However, if our failures make us treasure the preciousness of justification more, then even our failures cause us to boast in hope. The process of justification is a process of boasting—not in ourselves, but in God who justifies us! God not only justifies us, but also wants to operate in us for us to have more of Him, to be more like Him, to live Him out more, and to testify of Him more. Every failure and shortcoming we pass through today can be an opportunity for us to boast. Even if we still have weaknesses and limitations, we can each boldly declare, “Whether I am victorious, limited, strong, weak, honorable, or shameful, I can always boast in the hope of the glory of God!”

God not only gives us a status of justification but also a life of justification, and He allows us to experience the growth of His life in us and the constitution of His glory. This allows us to bear glorious fruit, to become His glorious manifestation, and eventually to testify of His glory. Oh, brothers and sisters, what a glorious God we have!

## Exulting in Tribulations

*And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance.*

—Romans 5:3

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used here for “exult,” *kauchaomai*, was also used in verse 2 for our exalting in the hope of the glory of God. This word can be translated “to boast” (Strong, #2744). Paul boasted and rejoiced in his tribulations; his boasting was a triumphant rejoicing and confidence in God (Rogers, 324).

The Greek word used here for “tribulations,” *thlipsis*, carries the thought of pressure and can also be translated “affliction, anguish, burden, trouble” (Strong, #2347). The word refers to the distress brought about by outward circumstances (Rogers, 324), in other words, our inward reaction to hard outward environments and situations.

### REVELATION AND APPLICATION

A justified person stands in grace and hopes in the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). This hope actually requires a process

through which we learn to boast. Though we may expect this process to be glorious, it is also full of tribulation.

As we stand in the realm of grace, we also have an outward walk, which Paul associates here with tribulation. The phrase “exult in our tribulations” could also be translated “boast in our tribulations.” Our victories, failures, strengths, weaknesses, gains, and losses are all opportunities for us to boast. Yet even more, our tribulations are also opportunities for boasting. All the tribulations and unsatisfactory situations we face cause us to boast before the presence of God in the hope of His glory. The hope of glory brings in experiences of tribulation, and these experiences cause us to boast all the more.

Paul did not write here that we must overcome our tribulations but rather that we should boast in them. Boasting is different from victory. Victory can be situational: I may be victorious today but fail tomorrow; I may be victorious in one thing but fail in another. Boasting has nothing to do with situations. Whether situations are good, bad, smooth, rough, joyful, or sorrowful, we can always boast in God.

### The Suffering of Our Heart

Tribulations are not unique to Christians. Every human being will face them because human life is full of tribulations. In general, tribulations involve two aspects: the outward and the inward. Outward tribulation is of our flesh, while inward tribulation is of our heart. Outward tribulation is not the real tribulation. We may pass through a very difficult situation, but the real tribulation is the inward suffering our heart experienced in that situation. True tribulation is the inward suffering that issues from our outward environment.

Sometimes everything is outwardly peaceful, yet suffering can be produced within when we see the inward condition



of the church or of the individual brothers and sisters. Such suffering is a tribulation that should cause us to seek the Lord more desperately. Paul wrote, "Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28). The intense daily pressure on Paul was true tribulation.

### Related to the Growth of Life

Tribulation is not a matter of outward hardship alone but of inward suffering that issues from outward hardship. As we first begin to follow the Lord, the outward environment is what often causes us to suffer. Such outward hardship is the first step of tribulation. Yet as we grow spiritually, our tribulation more and more becomes related to the suffering in our hearts. For example, the daily care Paul had in his heart for the churches developed as he matured in Christ. As the divine life grows in us, we will begin to experience inward tribulation when we consider the condition of the church, of the individual saints, and our own spiritual growth.

At the same time, tribulation can promote the growth of life within us. For example, when an older brother rebukes a young brother in the church, this rebuking may be a tribulation to the young brother. After being rebuked, the young brother may have one of two responses. One is to murmur against the outward hardship. The other is to suffer inwardly. Such suffering should cause the young brother to go to the Lord to pray, to seek His presence, and to have more fellowship with Him. Do not look down upon suffering in tribulation. It issues in perseverance (Rom. 5:3) and ultimately in proven character and hope (v. 4).

The more we know how to properly take tribulations, the more we will be able to grow in life. Tribulation is actually a treasure. The Lord will measure out to us all kinds of situations to give us the tribulations we need. He does this with

a purpose: that we would grow more, gain Him more, know Him more, see Him more, want Him more, trust in Him more, live before Him more, and know ourselves more.

### Related to the Operation of Life

A Christian growing in life will experience tribulations. These tribulations help us realize that we limit the divine life within us and frustrate its ability to grow, operate, and testify as it ought. For a Christian struggling to grow, this can be an unspeakable suffering within.

Christians are different from unbelievers. The tribulations unbelievers face mostly relate to outward environments. However, a Christian who loves and serves the Lord will often experience tribulations related to the operation of the divine life within. In times of outward hardship, we may ask, “Why do I have such a response to these things? When I am experiencing them, why do I have so many murmurings, why am I so short of Christ, why can’t the flow of life gush up within me, and why can’t I operate?” Outward hardships reveal the shortage of life within us, and this revelation causes true inward tribulation.

A justified person has a boast in the hope of the glory of God. In the process of boasting, our experience may not be full of joy, peace, and glory, despite our expectations. Rather, we often experience tribulation. Yet we should thank the Lord, for as we experience tribulation we become aware of how short our knowledge of the Lord is, how short our love for Him is, how inadequate our connection with Him is, and how far we may be from Him. This awakens our need for the Lord and gives us an earnest desire for growth. With such a view of the benefit of tribulation, we can cherish every hard environment and situation. By cherishing the process of tribulation, a boast in us is produced.

### Related to the Effectiveness of Life

Tribulations can also help the divine life operate more effectively within us. Some Christians cannot grow well spiritually because they know how to escape tribulation. Before hard situations come, they already have answers, and before they pass through a tribulation, they already know what to do. Because of this, the Lord has very little room to go on in them, and their trials will not produce proven character and hope (Rom. 5:4). We should learn not to seek an escape from tribulation. Everyone who follows the Lord looks foolish because none escape tribulation. We too must be willing to walk with the Lord through tribulation.

No one has a life that is always smooth. In other words, it is very natural and normal for adverse circumstances to come upon us. If we hold a negative attitude toward tribulation, the value of such tribulation is very low. All the environments arranged by the Lord can cause suffering in our hearts, and this suffering issues in the effectiveness of the life within us.

This is surely my testimony. When tribulation comes, I cannot help but draw nearer to the Lord. When tribulation comes, I pray more, have more fellowship with the Lord, and spend more time with the brothers and sisters. When tribulation comes, I cannot help but build a deeper relationship with the Lord. The way God's life becomes effective within us is through tribulation.

Brother Lawrence was a kitchen worker at a monastery in France in the seventeenth century. He experienced much tribulation. He was never satisfied with his inner life. He always asked, "Why am I so weak? Why am I so limited? Why am I offending God all the time? Why am I not in one accord with the Lord? Why can't I please the Lord?" Such inward suffering was a real tribulation, yet anyone who has read the book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, will testify that his tribulations resulted in the effective working of life within him.

God justifies us and gives us peace with Him. Today we stand in grace, that is, in the divine and mystical realm, and experience the triune God as our unlimited supply. We should tell the Lord, “In my daily experiences, I want to have You! Whether smooth or adverse environments come, I want to gain You through them. Lord, I want to grow well in life. I want to be one with You, to have the same mind as You, for You to be magnified in me, and to allow Your glory to be manifested from me. Lord, I also desire that my tribulations would produce the effectiveness of life both in and from me.”

### Related to the Service of Life

According to the Bible, man has three parts—body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). All three can be touched by the experience of tribulation. Unbelievers only experience two kinds of tribulation—that of the body, and that of the soul. However, Christians have been made alive in spirit (Rom. 8:10), and so they face two kinds of inward tribulation. One is of the soul, the other is of the spirit. Of the three kinds of tribulation, outward tribulation of the flesh has the least value, while tribulation of the soul has some value. The third kind, that of the spirit, has the greatest value.

Tribulation in the spirit is the inner suffering experienced by a person who lives in the spirit and serves God in life. The Lord Jesus was troubled in His spirit and said to His disciples, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me” (John 13:21). The Lord’s being troubled in spirit was a tribulation in spirit. Every servant of the Lord should experience suffering from both their own lack of growth and from that of the ones they serve. When we see that the ones we serve are not growing, we should be troubled. When we see that they do not love the Lord so much, we should be inwardly troubled. When we see that their experiences before the Lord

are not deep, profound, or rich, we should be troubled within. A servant of the Lord lives in tribulation of the spirit.

Paul served God with his spirit (Rom. 1:9) and often experienced tribulations in his spirit. When he came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, although a door was opened to him by the Lord, he had no rest in his spirit because he did not find Titus (2 Cor. 2:12–13). While Paul was in Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols (Acts 17:16). He went bound in spirit to Jerusalem (20:22). He also testified, "Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?" (2 Cor. 11:29). His deep concerns were a tribulation in spirit.

### Related to the Price of Life

Those who follow and serve the Lord will find that tribulations seem to follow them. This is the price of life. If we love the Lord, many people will despise us. If we follow the Lord, many will misunderstand us. If we serve the Lord in the spirit, many will rise up against us. Even if we consecrate everything to the Lord, almost no one will show sympathy for us. Many times even the believers we are with will look down upon us. For as long as we follow the Lord and live a life without regard for anything else, we will surely experience tribulation (John 15:20).

Tribulation is good for people who truly love the Lord. Such people do not accept tribulation passively, but actively allow the suffering of the tribulation to affect them in a positive way. When these people see the condition of the church and of the individual brothers and sisters, tribulation comes to them. When they see a believer who has no spiritual understanding, who lacks assurance of salvation, or who does not love the Lord, they begin to suffer in spirit. Our churches should be filled with those who experience this suffering of

the spirit. We should soberly tell the Lord, "I do not ask for tribulation, but I ask to gain You more in the tribulations that will come. I am willing to positively live in tribulations for the sake of Your testimony, the growth of other believers, and the need of those around me."

The way of following the Lord is full of tribulation. If God was willing to be incarnated, there is no price too big for us to pay. If the Lord Jesus could die for us on the cross, there is no tribulation too much for us to endure. We should learn to relate everything in our daily living to the Lord. Whenever we are related to the Lord and serve Him in life and spirit, tribulation will come. When it does, we should tell the Lord, "I am willing to consecrate myself to You. I ask that You would accomplish the work which You want to do in me. You have promised us that tribulation will bear glorious fruit. Lord, thank You. If people do not understand me, appreciate me, or want me, I will still praise You. I am willing to positively approach the tribulations You have measured out for me. May my heart be filled with the suffering that comes from being one with You. Lord, I am glad to walk with You on a path filled with tribulations. I give myself to experience Your justification and to testify of Your glory in tribulation."

## Perseverance, Proven Character, and Hope

*And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup>and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

—Romans 5:3–5

### WORD STUDY

The Greek word used in verse 4 for “perseverance,” *hupomonē*, can also be translated, “endurance, patience, waiting” (Strong, #5281). It is composed of two other Greek words: *hupo*, meaning, “under” (Strong, #5259), and *menō*, meaning, “to remain/abide” (Strong, #3306). Thus, the word *hupomonē* literally means, “remaining under” (Vine, 200). The phrase “tribulation brings about perseverance” shows us that tribulation produces an ability to remain under what God has measured to us.

The Greek word used for “proven character,” *dokimē*, can also be translated, “test, proof, trial” (Strong, #1382). Its primary use in the Septuagint involves the description of metals, indicating the remaining pure portion of metal after it has been tested and refined (Vine, 36; e.g., Zech. 11:13). The

word can also imply trustiness, an approved person or thing, or genuineness (Strong, #1381; 1382).

These verses in Romans display a process that begins with tribulations, that purifies and refines us, and that ends in hope or “confidence” (Strong, #1680). H. Alford calls this confidence “fresh hope” that is generated from our character (Alford, 2:357).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Tribulation Produces Perseverance

According to the Greek language, “perseverance” means “to abide under.” Those with perseverance are able to abide under all the things, environments, and situations God has measured to them. For example, as God’s creatures we were put under the law of God’s creation. Our willingness to abide under the law of creation is a kind of perseverance.

The different parts of the meaning of perseverance refer to its different aspects. “To remain/abide” is related to our life, while “under” is related to our obedience. In other words, life and obedience go together in the phrase “to abide under.” Perseverance includes both our obedience and our being alive when we are under tribulation. We often focus on the rocky and hard environment of tribulation, but God is more concerned with our obedience and life, regardless of the environment. Under God’s sovereignty, all the tribulations which come to us have one purpose—that we could be obedient and alive in them.

The Word of God tells us that tribulation produces perseverance. Those who have perseverance are alive under all the situations measured out to them by God. It is easy to be alive under smooth environments, but we must learn to be alive under tribulation as well. Whether people reject or like us, we can still be alive to the Lord. Whether people welcome or



exclude us, we can still be alive in Christ. Whether environments are smooth or rough, we can be alive. Whether everything is for us or against us, we can be alive. Being alive under tribulation, in Christ and before God, is called perseverance.

### Boasting in All Hardships

The word “exult” in verse 3 can also be translated “boast” (Strong, #2744). We who are justified by God can boast. We can boast in both smooth and rough environments, and when we are either strong or weak. This boast is Christ, who is our hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Yet even as we boast, our inward feeling can sometimes be hard and bitter. This inward tribulation can produce perseverance, allowing us to always boast and be alive under all kinds of situations, people, and hardships.

Our problem is that we often find it hard to put ourselves under tribulation. As soon as we face a little difficulty, we feel we cannot live any more. Watchman Nee’s sister-in-law once told him, “Look at how people are criticizing you!” He had a good answer. He said, “I am worse than they say.” The fact is we are much worse than our behavior shows, because many bad things in us take time to be revealed. If we were in Watchman Nee’s place, we might have said, “Those who slander me are like the hopeless Israelites wandering in the wilderness. Let them be! I won’t serve them anymore. I will go to the mountain and retire.” However, he knew how to remain alive while putting himself under tribulation. He continued to serve and minister as he always had. When it was time for him to pour himself out upon the saints, he poured himself out as he always had before. He understood that tribulation produces perseverance.

The presence of tribulations in our life will result in the production of perseverance. This must be our view as we pass through each tribulation, and even before tribulations come upon us. When we express a desire to the Lord for growth,

saying, “Lord, I am willing to grow; I want to grow well; I want to grow unto oneness with You,” we are putting ourselves under tribulations to come. As we go through these tribulations, perseverance will be produced, which allows us to be alive in any and all situations.

Perseverance teaches us to thank the Lord in all environments and situations. Whether smooth or rough environments come, we should thank the Lord. We should thank Him no matter whether the things we face make us joyful or sorrowful. Such gratitude and thankfulness is the result of perseverance having been produced in us through the tribulations we experience.

### Perseverance Produces Proven Character

Romans 5:4 goes on to tell us that perseverance produces proven character. In the Greek language, “proven character” implies testing and genuineness. Here it means that we are approved by God by going through times of testing. Experientially, character implies genuineness, meaning that what we say and do matches who we are inwardly.

When we think of someone with character, we may think of a person full of rich experiences who knows how to handle any situation. However, the Bible defines character as genuineness and integrity—oneness between our inside and outside. Those whose inside is in one accord with their outside have proven character.

Most people do not have enough character, meaning their inside and outside are not in one accord. In our prayer, we might consecrate everything we have to the Lord and we may be willing to do whatever the Lord charges us to do. However, it is easier to say something than to do it. As we face many practical environments in the world, it is easy to lose the reality of our consecration. Our prayer was true, but it did not become reality because we are short of character.

Character implies the changing of our constitution. People of character are those who have allowed the Holy Spirit to transform and constitute them. Such people are not in religion, their natural life, or zeal, but are in Christ, the divine life, and under the Lord's anointing. When they say they love the Lord, they genuinely love Him. When they preach the gospel, it flows out of them automatically. Their outward actions match their inward being. When we have proven character, we become closer to Christ and are able to allow Him to live through us. Character results in God's life growing in us. As our natural life decreases, the element of Christ in us increases.

### Proven Character Produces Hope

Tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. Hope is related to the manifestation of the glory of God (Rom. 5:2). After we pass through tribulations that produce perseverance and character, such character will bring in hope, which is the reality and manifestation of the glory of God. Today the glory of God is testified and revealed in His church and His saints. As this testimony, we will appear in glory with the Lord when He comes back (Col. 3:4).

Without tribulation, there would be no producing of perseverance or character, and it would be impossible for real hope to be produced. Even though we live in time, we should realize that the value of our existence is for eternity. With this in mind, we must go through tribulations so that we would eventually be filled with a hope of the revelation of glory.

Very few Christians realize that hope is the result of the process of the growth of life within us. Most Christians only hope one day to go to heaven, or that their lives will be free from tribulations and trials. Paul wrote here, however, that hope comes from tribulation! This hope, constituted within

us by the Spirit, is a desire for the eternal manifestation of God's glory.

Christians who live in this hope will never despise any environment or situation measured to them by God. All of these things are for us to learn obedience, to have a more intimate relationship with the Lord, to yield to God's sovereignty, and to produce sincerity. This is not a matter of pleasing men or knowing how to handle situations. Rather it is a matter of being one with Christ and of living the kingdom life with a proper character: becoming poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness's sake, yet rejoicing. We hope for the reward from the Lord (Matt. 5:3–12).

### Hope Does Not Disappoint

Dear brothers and sisters, hope does not disappoint. There certainly will be many tribulations we must go through, yet these will produce perseverance that teaches us to rely on God in all kinds of situations. In turn, this perseverance will produce proven character in us, a harmony of both our inside and outside. This character will then produce a glorious hope, a hope that does not disappoint. May the Lord be merciful to us so that when He comes back we would be found pure, full of reality within, and have proven character in His presence. This is our hope today and our boasting in that day.

## The Love of God

*And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

—Romans 5:5

### WORD STUDY

In Romans 5:3–4, a process was depicted by which hope is produced—tribulation produces perseverance, which produces proven character, which produces hope. Verse 5 says that this hope “does not disappoint,” or, “will never put us to shame” (Rogers, 324). The Greek word used here for “because,” *hoti*, introduces the reason hope will not cause shame or disappointment (Rogers, 324)—the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word used here for “poured,” *ekcheō*, can also be translated, “gush out, run greedily (out), shed (forth), or spill” (Strong, #1632). The word denotes the ideas of both abundance and spreading. It may be that through the metaphor of watering, the idea of spiritual refreshment and encouragement is conveyed (Rogers, 325).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

Romans 5 begins with some of the glorious results of justification, which include a glorious hope, a boast in the hope of glory, and a stand in the realm of grace. We will experience tribulations, yet tribulations will produce perseverance, perseverance will produce proven character, and proven character will produce hope. Romans 5:5 tells us that this hope will not disappoint and why it will not.

### The Pouring Out of the Love of God

In this verse, Paul connects the love of God with the Holy Spirit. Actually, the Holy Spirit produces many spiritual things in us, but here He brings the love of God into our hearts. The Bible tells us that God Himself is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Thus, as the Holy Spirit operates, He brings the very person of the triune God into us. What we experience is the operation of the Holy Spirit, and what we gain is God Himself.

Those who live in justification also live in this love. From one angle, our salvation is the result of the love of God (John 3:16). From another angle, God's love is poured out within us and saturates us until our whole being is full of love. God's love is God Himself. When we experience, touch, and gain God, we enjoy Him as love. Additionally, the fact that the love of God is poured out within our hearts means God pours Himself out into us. Through the manifestation of this love, we are able to enjoy His love and overflow with God Himself.

Only three terms are used in the New Testament to describe God's being: God is Spirit (John 4:24), God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and God is light (1 John 1:5). We can say God's essence is Spirit, God's substance is love, and God's manifestation is light. When God, as the Spirit, pours out His love within our hearts, He is abundantly pouring out His being within us.

God's love for us is because of who He is. He cannot help but love us because He Himself is love. For God's love to be poured out within our hearts, however, is a matter of our union with Him. The pouring out of God's love in this way reveals our inseparable union and mingling with God. His love is truly wonderful!

### Constituted with His Love

God's love is not only an emotional love that brings us the feeling of being beloved. It is also a love we can enjoy, experience, draw joy from, and shed tears over. It is a love that leads us to consecrate ourselves to Him. Even more, it is a substantial love that involves God Himself becoming constituted within us.

There is a song with lines that read, "Jesus, Thine all-victorious love shed in my soul abroad...While Christ is all the world to me, and all my heart is love" (*United Methodist*, #422). This song describes how God has poured into our hearts His very being as love, and the result of such a transaction is our becoming constituted with love. Through the substantial love of God, we enjoy God's holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, goodness, perfection, tenderness, wisdom, and power. Through this love, our enjoyment of God passes out of the objective realm, and God becomes no longer theoretical or too far from us to reach. Through the pouring out of God's love, we can taste all these aspects and qualities of God.

No one is qualified to partake of God's holiness, yet in the pouring out of love His holiness becomes our portion. This God, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see (1 Tim. 6:16), can be constituted in us through the love poured out within us by the Holy Spirit. This love not only allows us to love Him back but also allows us to apply His attributes and qualities and to enjoy them without fear. Eventually His

attributes, expressed in us as virtues, even become our constitution. What a wonderful love this is!

### His Love in our Lives

God's poured out love is not mentioned until Romans 5, where it is a result of justification. This may be very different from our own thoughts. We might think God's love is poured out within condemned people, and that the more they are condemned, the more they need God's love. However, when Paul discussed condemnation, he never mentioned love. We might think that God justifies us in His love, yet as Paul explained the process of justification, he mentioned God's righteousness and glory, not love. God's love is not brought up until Paul begins to consider the *results* of justification.

This fact may have to do with the way Romans is divided into sections. From Romans 5 through 8, Paul reveals our salvation in life and our experience of God's organic salvation. In this section, love is mentioned repeatedly (5:5, 8; 8:28, 35, 37, 39). To our thinking, sinners and unsaved people need love. According to God's work, however, His love is not poured out within our hearts until we have been justified. After we are justified, His love becomes a source for our growth in His life. We are justified in the righteousness of God, and we grow in the love of God.

Even more, when Paul speaks of the church life after chapter 12, love is again mentioned repeatedly (12:9–10; 13:8–10; 14:15). This is because a church life is a life of love. Especially in dealing with other believers, we should accept them all with the love of Christ (14:1, 3; 15:7). His divine love becomes the source, motivation, and reality of a Christian's spiritual growth in life. Therefore, as Paul began to write chapter 5, dealing with God's organic salvation, he firstly emphasized that the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.



## The Place of Love

The Spirit and love are inseparable. The beginning of the growth of divine life in us is the Holy Spirit's pouring out of God's love within our hearts. Even at the end of Romans, Paul wrote of love and the Spirit again, saying, "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom. 15:30). This is truly amazing! It is God who calls us, it is the righteousness revealed by Christ Jesus that justifies us, and it is the love of the Holy Spirit that causes us to grow. The ultimate accomplishment of God's work is inseparable from the Holy Spirit and love.

Each of us should cry out loudly, "God loves me! God loves me!" God loves us not according to who we are but because of who He is. God saves us and constitutes us with His love. We should praise God loudly that the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us, and that this love will overflow out of us. Today we are living, dwelling, and walking in the divine love. This love becomes our supply, our nourishment, and our constitution. A Christian's life is truly blessed, and the experience of God's love is so enjoyable and applicable!



## God's Demonstrated Love toward Us

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

—Romans 5:6–10

### WORD STUDY

In this section of verses, the apostle Paul reveals the greatness of the divine love to man (Alford, 2:358). In verse 7, he displays Christ's death for the ungodly by showing the limits of man's love and self-sacrifice. Hardly will someone die for a righteous man, while perhaps someone would die for a good man. M. R. Vincent explains the difference between a righteous and a good man in the following quote:

[Righteous] is simply right or just; doing all that law or justice requires; [good] is benevolent, kind, generous....

Therefore, according to Paul, though one would hardly die for the merely upright or strictly just man who commands respect, he might possibly die for the noble, beneficent man, who calls out affection. The article is omitted with righteous, and supplied with good—"the" good man, pointing to such a case as a rare and special exception. (Vincent, 3:60)

While man's love is limited, God has demonstrated His divine love in that He died not for a good man, or even a righteous man, but for us sinners. Paul even uses the word "enemies" to describe us. This Greek word, *echthros* contains the primary root *echthō*, meaning, "hateful, odious, or hostile." *Echthros* is used to mean "enemy, foe, or adversary (especially Satan)" (Strong, #2190). It was while we were in *this* condition—ungodly, sinners, even enemies of God—that Christ died and shed His blood for us. What a demonstration of divine love!

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Christ Died for the Ungodly

We were born as ungodly people, even enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). We were without a healthy relationship with God and were far away from Him. We even denied, rejected, and repelled Him. But praise the Lord! Even though we were without strength or the ability to recover a healthy relationship with God, Christ died for us. He died for all who are hostile to God, who reject Him, and who deny Him. Now, by His death, our normal and healthy relationship with God can be recovered.

Verse 8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This verse is related to verse 5, where Paul wrote that God's love

has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit. In verse 5, God's love has been poured out; in verse 8, it is demonstrated. This is the difference between God's work and our experience of that work. By the work of God, that is, by the redemptive work accomplished by Christ, His love was demonstrated to sinners. Our experience of this work, however, is our gaining, knowing, and enjoying of the Holy Spirit and love of God.

### Among Men, Before God

These verses mention three kinds of people: the righteous men, the good men, and the sinners.

In describing the difference between righteous and good, we can say that righteous people are related to God and live before Him, while good people are related to others and live in good favor among them. Rarely will someone die for a man who lives before God. If there are people who live in good favor among others, however, perhaps someone would dare to die for them. This is according to human judgment. However, in God's eyes regarding redemption, it does not matter what kind of person someone is. If people do not have Christ, they are helpless and ungodly sinners (Rom. 5:6).

Today ungodly people are everywhere (1:18), yet there are also many righteous people according to human judgment. The Bible mentions both righteous people (Matt. 23:35, 25:37; Mark 6:20; Luke 1:6) and good people. Cornelius was both a righteous and a good man. He feared God and had a good reputation among the nation of the Jews (Acts 10:22). His prayer was heard and his alms were remembered in the sight of God (10:31). Even so, this righteous and good man still needed to believe into the name of Christ and receive the remission of his sins (10:43). Whether people are seen as good, righteous, or sinful, *all* must believe into the name of the Lord.

After redemption and in the realm of Christ, God thinks highly of both righteous people and good people. God cares for all people, and He is happy to contact them and live in their midst. He is concerned about how we live before Him, yet He is also concerned with how we live among others. God desires that we, as believers, would be both righteous people who live before Him and good people who care for others.

The two are closely related. It is very hard for a person who does not live before God to live in a healthy manner among other people. God wants us to care for others, yet only when we live before God can we truly care for others. However, it is easy for us to forget that our condition before God is very much based on our relationship with people. This is something many Christians never think about. If people close their door to read the Bible and pray, they might be a spiritual person in others' eyes, but their value before God may not be high. We should learn from this. God not only desires for us to live before Him, but He also hopes that we would live properly among people. If we are related to both God and people, our value will be high in God's eyes.

### God's Demonstrated Love

Paul wrote that God "demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). What grace this is! It is easy for God to demonstrate Himself to all people. Paul even says, "That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them" (1:19). However, for God to demonstrate His love to man He had to do so through the death of Christ.

Most Christians can easily say, "When I was still a sinner Christ died for me, so I was saved one day." However, the Bible says that God demonstrated His own love toward us in the death of Christ. His death was not only for our salvation but also for the demonstration of God's love. By this

demonstration, every regenerated Christian can dwell in the love of God and live a life of love. The death of Christ erased our sins and offences, and the demonstration of the love of God allows us to joyfully and peacefully live unto Him. What a marvelous grace from our Savior God!





## Reconciled to God

*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

—Romans 5:9–10

### WORD STUDY

In verse 10, the Greek word used for “reconcile” is *katallassō*, meaning “to change or exchange, to reconcile” (Vine, 513). It is composed of two words: *kata* and *allassō*. *Allassō* means “to make different, to change” (Strong, #236), and while *kata* primarily means “down,” it often denotes intensity or thoroughness (Strong, #2596). Thus, *katallassō* could be translated, “to thoroughly change.”

The thought in this verse is that by the death of Christ, we were thoroughly changed (reconciled) from God’s enemies to be His friends. By implication, we can say that until this change takes place, we are under God’s condemnation and wrath. The blood of Jesus Christ is the way by which we receive this reconciliation—the removal of condemnation and wrath. Thus, the word *katallassō* stresses the attitude of God’s favor toward us (Vine, 513–514).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Reconciliation unto Life

Reconciliation is mentioned in both Romans and Matthew. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering” (Matt. 5:23–24).

The reconciliation in these verses from Matthew is a judicial reconciliation, denoting “mutual concession after mutual hostility” (Rogers, 11). The reconciliation of Romans 5:10 is not only a different Greek word, but through the context has a much deeper meaning than judicial or positional reconciliation. Paul links this reconciliation to being saved by God’s life. It is a reconciliation that brings in the harmony of life.

It is important to realize that our reconciliation with God is not only judicial but also organic. Our position is judicially changed, and then a harmony of life is brought in. A justified person is reconciled to God through the death of the Son of God (Rom. 5:10). This reconciliation is not only judicial, but also brings in the life element of harmony.

### Satisfaction and Peace in Harmony

Reconciliation produces harmony. Consider an example of a husband and wife who are arguing. After arguing, the husband may feel that he owes his wife an apology and says to her, “I am sorry for speaking to you in such a way.” This is judicial reconciliation, yet it can restore harmony in the couple’s relationship. Without judicial reconciliation there could be no harmony. However, the harmony in life produced by reconciliation is different from the judicial reconciliation itself. Harmony in life is the satisfaction the husband and wife have

when they enjoy each other's presence after their argument has been dealt with. Such an enjoyment is beyond words.

A similar relationship exists between parents and their children. Sometimes children make a mistake that requires discipline from the parents. After the children confess their mistake, however, the parents hug them and they hug their parents. Harmony is brought back into the family. There is both a judicial reconciliation and a reconciliation of the life element in the relationship. Similarly, God has justified us judicially and put His life into us. We are able to enjoy Him as our life, and we have a relationship of love with Him that results in harmony and satisfaction.

This harmony in life is not a small thing. We have the most joy when we are in harmony with the ones we love. Likewise, God loves us and desires that we would be in harmony with Him according to our life relationship. In this way, both God and we would be satisfied, joyful, and full of peace. Even our simple prayers, like, "Lord, I need Your mercy," bring in the harmony between us and the Lord and make us feel how intimate our Lord is.

### A High and Heavenly Salvation

We were all ungodly people, and while at times we may have been righteous or good, we were weak sinners (Rom. 5:6–8). Thank the Lord! "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 8). The shedding of the blood of Christ, which demonstrates God's love, not only justifies us but also reconciles us to God that we may be saved by His life (vv. 9–10). We used to be condemned, we used to live our own way, and we used to be the enemies of God. But now we have been justified, reconciled, and we dwell in love.

Now we can joyfully boast! No matter what we have done, our sins have all been forgiven. The love of God has

been demonstrated to us, and the divine life is living in us to produce a heavenly harmony with Him. Our salvation is not judicial alone, but also produces the harmony of life in every situation. Such salvation not only releases us from sin and rescues us from the world, but it also saves us into God Himself and His eternal will. How high and heavenly such a salvation in life is! Our reconciliation with God that results in harmony in life not only brings us peace, it also brings peace to God. We should joyfully boast, “Both God and I are completely satisfied!” How wonderful reconciliation is! What a salvation we have!

### Peace and Reconciliation with God

Romans 1:18 to 4:25 is like a huge mountain. On the one hand, we are shown how we are enemies of God who stand condemned. On the other hand, however, Abraham’s justification by faith is also unveiled to us. Now from the beginning of chapter 5, Paul begins to lead us into another realm.

Romans 5:1 and 10 are sister verses because both give the results and experiences of our justification in Christ Jesus, which are experiences of our sanctification in organic salvation. Our judicial redemption in 5:1 results in peace with God, while our reconciliation with God in 5:10 brings in organic salvation for our experience. Peace with God allows us to enter into the “grace in which we stand” (v. 2), while reconciliation with God allows us to “be saved by His life” (v. 10).

Romans 5:1–2 say that having been justified by faith we have three things: peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, access by faith to stand in grace, and an exalting in hope of the glory of God. This exalting exists even in tribulation. People who have peace with God can be inwardly peaceful through everything. Whether their environment is good or bad, they have peace with God. They are in

a position of grace, and the experience of the working of God's hands upon them is heavenly grace indeed! A person who has peace with God centers on Him, desires to satisfy Him, and is willing to be worked on by Him through grace. Dear brothers and sisters, justification by faith is a glorious thing. The position we occupy because of justification-issued peace is glorious, and the application of our peace with God is a sweet life experience.

Romans 5:10 goes on to say that having been reconciled to God through the death of His Son, we "shall be saved by His life." By comparing 5:1 and 5:10, we can see that the redemption in verse 1 results in a wonderful peace, and the reconciliation in verse 10 results in a beautiful salvation in life. Peace with God gives us a joyful hope of the glory of God in all environments. This joyful hope transcends our tribulations and eventually brings us to enjoy the love of God poured out in our hearts. Our justification before God saves us from His wrath, and our reconciliation, which came to us while we were enemies, brings in His organic salvation to save us by His life.



## Saved by His Life

*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

—Romans 5:10–11

### WORD STUDY

Within the phrase “saved by His life” is the Greek word *en*. The most common translation of this word is “in,” denoting position in place, time, or state. However, it can also imply instrumentality and be translated “by” or “with” (Strong, #1722). Many translations of this verse use the word “by” or the words “by means of.” A fair translation could also be “in His life.” Such a translation would imply that it is in the realm of God’s life that we experience this salvation.

The Greek word used here for “saved,” *sōzō*, is written in the future tense, indicative mood, and passive voice. The future tense means that it is something that will come to pass; the indicative mood means it is sure to happen; and the passive voice means it will be accomplished on us by an outside source (Wallace, 746–754). Thus, the thought here

is different than the judicial redemption of chapters 1–4, which has already been accomplished by Christ. According to H. Alford, this salvation is not only objective, but also “the subjective appropriation, by faith,” of the result of redemption (Alford, 2:359).

## REVELATION AND APPLICATION

### Saved in His Life

Romans 5:9 tells us that our justification by the blood of Christ saves us from the wrath of God. Verse 10 goes on to say that our reconciliation to God through His Son’s death will save us in His life. Quite simply, a person saved in His life is also saved from His wrath. Everyone in the world is in one of two situations before God: under His wrath or being saved in His life. Yet according to the experience of those who have been justified by God and reconciled to Him, many things are done in their daily living that still provoke God’s anger. However, Paul tells us in Romans that because we have been reconciled to God, we will be saved in His life.

From God’s side, He not only prepared judicial redemption for us but also organic salvation. Having been reconciled with God, this organic salvation brings us into harmony with Him in life. Today we stand in grace and experience the love of God poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (vv. 2–5). From our point of view, however, our relationship with God may often be unhealthy. Suppose someone believed into and loved the Lord for fifty years. In those fifty years, if he did one thing every day to offend the Lord, over 15,000 offenses would be accumulated! If he offended the Lord ten times a day, he would accumulate over 150,000 offenses to God!

The way people live often provokes God to anger. The way people think, talk, and behave all offend God. It is wonderful, however, that no matter how far we seem to be from God,



we can always come back to Him. No matter how much we offend Him or provoke His anger, when we return to His presence, contact Him again, live by Him, and enjoy His life, we can experience salvation in His life.

### Unceasingly Saved

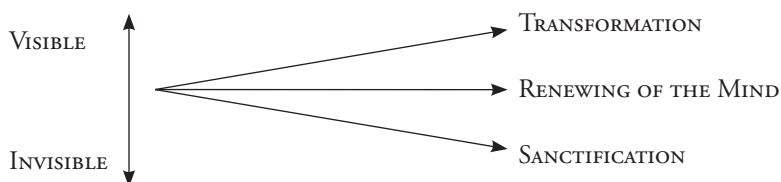
Those who live in justification are unceasingly being saved in life. This is not salvation from eternal damnation but the experience of the divine life operating in a practical living. After our initial justification, we still need to be saved in life continually. We need to grow more, operate more, walk with the Lord more, and be constantly brought into a harmony of life with God. Eventually we can say, “For me to live is Christ. I am being saved in His life. My whole life is for my growth and maturity in God’s justification.” This is the process of experiencing God’s organic salvation.

### Sanctification and Transformation

Paul’s description of the experience of organic salvation includes sanctification (Rom. 6:19), renewal of the mind, transformation (12:2), conformation (8:29), and glorification (8:30). All of these are related to our salvation in life. This life is Christ Himself. The Lord Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). To be saved in life means to be saved in the person of Christ, which mainly involves our sanctification and transformation.

Sanctification is inward while transformation is outward. Organic salvation is not a linear progression, as many people may think. We do not follow a linear path from justification to sanctification and eventually to transformation. Rather, the two processes of sanctification and transformation are simultaneous and related to each other. Below is a diagram

of three lines that share a common origin and proceed together over time. The first line, ascending into a realm visible to the world, represents our transformation. The second line, proceeding horizontally across, represents the renewal of our mind. The third line, descending into a realm invisible to the world, represents our sanctification. Transformation is related to sanctification, and the outward degree of transformation in our living is always proportional to the degree of sanctification within us.



Sanctification and transformation are not two different stages of salvation. As we are sanctified, we are transformed. It is much like a multi-vitamin pill. The vitamins are not taken separately but are taken all at once in the pill. In the same way, our experiences of organic salvation cannot be separated. As we are renewed, we are also sanctified and transformed. As we are sanctified and transformed, we are also conformed and glorified.

Inwardly we are sanctified, outwardly we are transformed, yet both are accomplished through the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). Our existence is according to our mind. The way we choose to live and the decisions we make are all things based on what our mind tells us. However, our mind is dark and needs to be renewed. The renewing of our mind changes our natural mind to match God's mind. A renewed mind changes us, and our decisions and living are affected. With a renewed mind we can be one with God, and we can testify and manifest Him. In our natural mind, we live only for ourselves, yet by the renewing of our mind, we can live for God.

## Conformed to the Image of the Son of God

In God's organic salvation, not only does our mind need to be renewed, but our image needs to be changed (Rom. 8:29). Our outward image is the manifestation of our inward being. In other words, what we are inwardly expresses itself outwardly in our image. The only way to manifest all the attributes and virtues of our Lord is to live in God's justification, experience the salvation in His life, and become conformed to the image of His Son.

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God." By causing all things to work together for good, God conforms us to the image of His Son (v. 29). Notice the words, "all things." Often, our first response to many things we meet is, "Woe is me," "Why am I so unlucky," or, "Why are things so unreasonable?" All these "whys" must displease God, because all things, both good and bad, are arranged by Him in His sovereignty for our conformation. We must understand that "all things" does not necessarily mean all smooth and easy things. The reason God allows so many negative things to fall upon us is that He wants to conform us to the image of His Son.

## Glorified and Rejoicing

Romans 8:30 says, "These whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." On the day we believed, we received justification, entered into the realm of justification, and began our experience of sanctification. From that day, we began to have a transformed living and renewed mind, and to experience conformation to the image of the Son of God. Therefore, we can boast

in the hope of the glory of God. The hope of glory is our assurance and our boasting. We “exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:11). To exult in God is to boast in God Himself.

People exult in many things—in what amuses them, in their family, in their career, or in their success. There are as many things people exult in as there are people. However, when compared to the eternal things, all of these are temporary, tiny, and without much value. Paul wrote in Romans that once we believe, we have peace with God through justification by faith, we joyfully boast in the hope of the glory of God in grace, we are no longer God’s enemies, and we are totally reconciled to God. Our existence and living now exult in God Himself. What a valuable life this is!

Christians who love and possess the Lord can exult in any situation. They can boldly exult in God Himself, in the accomplishment of Christ, and in the work of the Holy Spirit. They can exult in God’s economy, in God’s work within them, and in their labor with Him. They can be full of assurance and confidence, saying, “No matter what I will encounter over my life and no matter what situations God will measure out to me, I can always exult in God!”

Even more, this Christ is within us! He is our life and our supply—the spring that quenches our thirst, the heavenly bread that satisfies our hunger, the supplier of strength for our walk, and the guide for us to follow. For all of these, we can boast that we together have God through the Savior Christ, and we rejoice in Him!

Finally, we not only exult in Christ but also with Him! Christ announced, “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me” (Heb. 2:13). We too can each announce with Him, “Behold, I and the brothers and sisters whom God has given me.” The brothers and sisters who are in Christ together are a joy we share with the Lord.

Those who rejoice in God have the most valuable existence. They have the richest substance of life! They have the most

powerful labor! They have the greatest assurance in God! Such a life and such a living is truly the most perfect and attractive life possible on the earth today.



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