

Unraveling the Gospel:
Exploring Romans and
Righteousness

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Chapter 1 - The Apostle

Everyone has a hierarchical structure by which they organize incoming information. The apostle Paul, the author of Romans, was no different. My own faith tradition, the Anabaptists, have theirs. They place the Gospels at the center of their faith. They like James and Peter, but not so much the apostle Paul.

Here is what one modern Anabaptist, Peter Hoover, has to say on the matter. "Martin Luther found rest for his conscience-not in Christ but in Paul, not in the Gospels but in sound doctrine...little by little I began to see where Martin Luther and the Anabaptists parted ways. Martin Luther found the Scriptures. The Anabaptists found Christ. Their discoveries led them in totally different directions. (from *The Secret of Strength*, by Peter Hoover)

This is the old argument, according to the Anabaptist, an argument in which I am and have always been reluctant to engage. Who would pit Christ against Scripture? It is a strange war, and one that is unnecessary if one understands Paul's point of view and does not try to force the apostle into the theological constructs of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, to name two prominent historical theologians.

The apostle, I believe, used the Old Testament story as a means of understanding the life and death of Jesus Christ. The gospel message, according to the apostle, is a complete return, not to a literal paradise containing the tree of life, but rather a spiritual return to the tree of life, which is Christ.

Paradise will not be revealed again in an earthly form, but will await the coming of the New Heaven and

Earth, where humanity will once again walk face to face with God. The earthly world, according to the apostle, will be where we walk and where we believe in what God has offered in Christ.

Our faith will be a faith that sees its object through a glass darkly, a dim vision informed by what has been. Informed by the story in Genesis of a time when man and woman communed with God stripped of all earthly pretense, even to the complete shedding of their garments. Those garments that are an allegory of how we hide and cover so much of who we really are.

The apostle informed and interpreted the events of Christ's life and death through the events of the Old Testament story. There are seven of these that stand out to me, and which I believe provide the necessary structure for understanding Paul's gospel.

The Creation Story

God creates the worlds in six days, bringing into existence the universe and all matter through the speaking of his word, calling life out of the "void," the "nothing" over which the Spirit of God hovers.

This creation is called "good," and this is of paramount importance to us in understanding Paul's concept of righteousness. The apostle sees God's justice, God's goodness, as something that was there in the beginning, before creation and before the giving of the first commandment in the garden.

When the history of salvation is told, this is the goal, the highest mark of the journey of return. We return to God's righteousness that existed before time and space were created.

The Tree of Life

In the middle of the garden, God planted the tree of life. Adam and Eve ate the fruit to sustain their physical bodies. This was more than daily maintenance, as we experience the effects of eating. It was maintaining their bodies in a state of eternal existence on earth, in a non-dying state.

Man lost this eating from the tree when he was expelled from the garden. There will never be a return to the fruit of a physical tree, but in salvation there is a return to the tree of life, which is Christ. A salvation that does not lead to an experiential participation in Christ by faith is not a complete gospel. Salvation must lead back to the Tree of Life.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

The fruit of this tree, unlike the tree of life, was forbidden to eat. Eating the fruit would bring about the full emergence of the self. No longer would the man and woman be in a state of innocence where they simply followed the structure of the garden and obeyed simple commands. The fruit of this tree brought a maturity to the human self, a full emergence of its identity, and with that emergence, the ability to evaluate and make decisions about what is considered right and wrong.

Man's self would become the source of all forms of iniquity and corruption and must be fully dealt with in salvation.

The Commandment

Adam and Eve were under a simple commandment. They were not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The commandment in the Garden did not give them life or maintain their bodies in a state of eternal existence. The commandment was simply the line in the sand, beyond which lay the emergence of the self, and beyond that the lands from which man's unrighteousness would emerge.

The apostle, I believe, has these steps fully in view as he presents the gospel message. The self of man is utterly corrupt and incapable of making moral decisions on its own that are pleasing to God. This is not to say that the self cannot make choices that please God, but they are not choices of its own making. What man decides is right is never right. The right choices are the choices to pursue the righteousness that lies back in the garden defined by the righteousness of God.

Later, this would become a righteousness defined by the commandments of God, but this was never intended to be a righteousness separate from the righteousness of God that lies outside of any commandment. That man has made the law, and the righteousness contained in the law an end in itself is one of the issues that the apostle must vigorously address in order to properly present the gospel message.

Nowhere, however, does the apostle intend that man should cease to choose the righteousness of God or to live according to the righteousness of God.

The Fall of Woman

Eve was the mother of all mankind and is our mother. Eve's temptation is our temptation. God gave her the gift of noticing and speaking for the anomaly, for the unusual, for what is different. The serpent draws her emotions into the web of his deception by his story of the tree standing alone in the garden. Adam knows that the tree exists, but he has other duties that are more important and must be attended to.

Eve, on the other hand, listens to the serpent talk about the problems posed by this tree, which God claims will bring death and sorrow. Eve's maternal instincts are aroused, and her pride is called upon to exert herself and solve this problem. What if God is wrong, and what better person than herself to set the matter right by eating from the tree and proving once and for all that this is really a big fuss over nothing.

Eve ate, and so does all of humanity, convinced that it can embrace all manner of forbidden subjects and live to tell the tale unscathed. The motherly embrace is the warm embrace of the disenfranchised, the outcast, the deformed, not to carry them to change and redemption, but to give them life in their natural state, to declare them right in themselves for being what they are.

The apostle spares no blows in pursuing this matter. The maternal instinct must be restored to its proper order. We must see and behold what we have embraced and what has resulted from our prideful assertion that to love all things is to make them righteous. Only God knows where those boundaries lie, and we do not.

The Fall

Adam knows better than to believe the stories of the serpent when Eve appears with the apple in her hand. He can clearly see that she has already eaten and is fully committed. He is neither persuaded nor convinced, yet Adam eats.

Why does Adam eat? Perhaps first because of his love for Eve, but this is not the deepest answer, nor is it the one that attracts the apostle's attention. Adam eats because his gift from God is the ability to work, to tend the garden, to make things right. He lifts himself up in pride and takes on a task that God has not assigned to him, that of repairing disobedience and the coming onslaught of evil.

He is all of us when we look the world and evil in the eye and declare that we can handle it. We, full of our gifts from God, can embrace evil, take the lawbreaker under our wing, and make things right. The truth is that we cannot, and the apostle knows this problem, this assumption must be dealt with as we return to the tree of life.

Man's claim that he can repair the fall and regain the lofty heights by his work must be utterly overthrown. Pride will have no place in the gospel message. This does not mean that the gift of work has been taken away. Man must still walk or run toward righteousness. He must work because he was created to work, but the lie must be removed. It is God who redeems, not the work of man.

The Cherubims at the Gate

When God drove the man out of the Garden, He placed angels with a flaming sword that turned every which way. This was done to guard the tree of life, lest man return in his fallen state and eat of the fruit and live forever in his sinful state.

Even with this restriction, man's body took a long time to die because he had once eaten from the tree of life. In those days, people lived for hundreds of years, and some of them lived for almost a thousand years before they died. Nevertheless, man died in the end.

Obviously, those angels are no longer standing outside the literal Garden of Eden, but the principle remains. The way back to paradise and the tree of life is guarded by angels with flaming swords. This sword is the Word of God, which cuts to the bone and marrow, separating the soul from the spirit.

The apostle wielded this sword mightily, slicing and dicing and cutting everywhere. Man cannot eat of the tree of life until he is cut to pieces. This is obviously an unpleasant experience that man would try to avoid.

We like to pick a scripture that applies to us, perhaps one that fits our culture and upbringing, and one that we can accept with a minimum of pain and discomfort. This will not work in the heavenly scheme of things. Spiritual growth and advancement are inextricably linked with facing the unpleasantness of the Scriptures that we do not find attractive.

We can be assured that this will be a lifelong process, thoroughly laced with the grace of God, who

knows how to comfort the broken-hearted. The process remains, however, and the apostle will not hold back his sword in the presentation of the gospel message, for nothing less will do. Neither our whimpering and crying nor the walls we have built around our favorite divine word will spare us the blows.

The Question of Sacrifice

Immediately after life begins outside the garden, we encounter the issue of sacrifice. Cain and Abel are to bring their best to God and burn the items on an altar, watching the hard work go up in smoke.

Abel is a shepherd and brings his best, perhaps the lamb dearest to his heart, or the ram most ruddy in its prime.

Cain tills the ground. He grows things, which is no lesser task, but Cain gets in trouble with God because he does not seem to bring his best to offer on the altar. Perhaps Cain laments the waste in his heart, or more likely, he never gives it his all in the first place, growing weak and sickly plants in his fields. Why grow the best when the best will go up in smoke, disappearing into the empty sky?

There is a great fuss, which leads to the killing of Abel, and things go downhill fast from there. Sacrifice is one of the causalities, or rather the concept of sacrifice. In the beginning, the idea is of the highest kind, that is, to give the best to God and to give the best back to Him.

This concept is deeply rooted in the reality of the Fall, where the self emerged and brought into existence all kinds of injustice. This problem could not

be avoided or ignored in the redemption of man. Therefore, salvation was at the heart of the original concept of sacrifice. The best of man represented his fallen self, which he brought back to God and offered as a burnt offering, clearing the way for an eventual return to Paradise.

This idea was quickly lost as man fell deeper and deeper into sin, a sin that man helped to create along with the serpent. Sacrifice became not that of man offering the best of himself back to God, but rather that of man offering his best to appease the wrath of a God who was angry for reasons of his own making and doing. Thus, things deteriorated until the altars of the Jewish temple were drenched with the blood of thousands of bulls and goats.

The apostle sets out to restore the original concept of sacrifice, without denying that God went along with history for His own reasons, but the lesser must give way to the greater. We must understand that the sacrifice of Christ is more than the appeasement of God's righteous wrath against sin. The blood of Christ is more than the blood of animals. The blood of Christ washes away the sins of the self.

The gospel message must go beyond a mental belief in the sacrifice of Christ to appease the wrath of God to a sacrifice of the self that we can offer because that wrath has been appeased and because the self can now be cleansed of its sin. That we find the Lamb of God on the top of these two mountains, as Abraham did when he lifted his knife to offer his only son, should come as no surprise. The work of man will never be crowned as king, but the sacrifice must be made. We must lift the knife and mean it.

The self will live again only when it is offered on the altar of God. This offering under the gospel is an acceptance of a work that God has already done by the death of his Son on the Cross. For we have died with Christ.

Chapter 2 - The Scriptures

Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,

Rom 1:2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,)

Rom 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

Rom 1:4 And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

Rom 1:5 By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name:

Rom 1:6 Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:

Rom 1:7 To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Rom 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

Rom 1:10 Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

Rom 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

Rom 1:12 That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Rom 1:13 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Rom 1:14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

Rom 1:15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Rom 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Chapter 3 - Commentary on Romans 1:1-16

The book of Romans is not the first of the apostle Paul's letters to the churches, but it is placed first in the canon. No one knows for what reason, but at least in part because of its length and theological significance. In addition, Romans is perhaps the place most Christians turn for a definitive definition of what the gospel is.

The book begins with the apostle introducing himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, a called apostle, and one who has been given the task of proclaiming the gospel of God. A message, the apostle informs us, that God had promised through the prophets in the Jewish Scriptures.

The message concerns the coming of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was born of the lineage of David, that is, of the physical lineage of King David, someone who was born of a relative of King David and who passed on that physical link to Christ.

We know from Scripture that God was the Father of Christ, and that Mary was the mother of Christ. How this union between a spiritual God and a physical Mary came about is not fully explained in Scripture. Other than to say that the Spirit of God descended upon Mary and that she conceived a child. This is not to suggest a literal physical union, or a literal sexual union between God and Mary, as depicted by the gods of mythology who took human form and mated with humans. God remained a spirit, a spirit with the power to impregnate a human being without physical contact, in a way quite different from the gods of mythology.

This union took place in a spirit of holiness, a holiness that remained upon Christ throughout his life on earth and was confirmed both by the power of his mighty deeds and by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

This Christ is the one, the Apostle claims, who gave him both the grace and the apostleship to maintain and call forth the obedience of faith from all nations. This obedience of faith is for the sake of the name of Christ, to which his readers are called, namely those in Rome who are beloved of God, the saints on earth. Saints whom the apostle blesses with the peace and grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These saints in Rome, the apostle declares, have a faith that is spoken of throughout the world, and he continually mentions them to God in his prayers, including the request that he one day visit them, and that he do so by means of a successful journey. The apostle longs to see them very much and to give them some spiritual gift that would establish them in the faith. The apostle quickly adds that this gift would also comfort him as he participates in their further establishment in the faith.

The apostle assures the Romans that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. This gospel, this message, is the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes in the message, whether that person is a Jew or a Greek.

This gospel, the apostle says, contains the righteousness of God revealed or brought forth from faith to faith, just as it is written in the Old Testament that the just shall live by faith.

So, let's unpack things, because we're already deep into controversial territory regarding the meaning of the gospel. The term "the gospel" simply means the message. But what is the message? There is far from agreement on this within Christianity. The current emphasis is on the simplicity part, meaning the simplicity of faith, which largely means a mental acknowledgment of the existence of physical facts. Namely, that Christ lived and died on the cross as payment for our sins. This must be believed in the heart and spoken with the mouth.

If this were a gateway to an expanded explanation of the gospel, I would have no objection. The problem is that this statement has become the gospel. There is little more offered. The results are what the apostle feared would happen if more spiritual gifts were not given. There is stunted spiritual growth and weakened Christian lives.

The fall of mankind was a complicated and intertwined affair, like watching a tall building brought down by the placement of explosives by an expert technician. God was in full and complete control, and if the fall was so complicated, should not salvation be a thousand times more complicated? These are my instincts, and in fact this is the record if we were to simply tell the story.

To find this story, one must return to Genesis, and the first proper question would be what does the apostle mean by the "righteousness of God" revealed in the gospel? If you are familiar with Christianity, you are probably already waving about your answer, which probably has to do with fulfilling the righteousness of the law, because you would already be familiar with

what much of Romans is about, which is the law, meaning primarily the Jewish law, but again, there is controversy. I personally believe, along with Martin Luther, that "the law," according to the apostle, means primarily the Jewish law, but it includes every law, everywhere, and pertaining to all times and places. Wherever the commandment appears, there is the law.

The apostle is not speaking here of a righteousness of God acquired in Christ by His obedience to the Jewish law or any law. This interpretation is read into the text because Christians want to read it into the text, not because the interpretation is in the text. The apostle speaks of a Genesis concept of righteousness.

There is, and must be, a righteousness of God that has nothing to do with any law. It is primarily wrapped up and contained in the very essence of God. What God is, is what is right. What is right is what God is, although it is not quite approachable from that angle unless you live in time and space. Outside of the world of matter, right does not exist before God exists. God is, and therefore right is what God is. The other way doesn't work.

This is the ground on which the serpent's speech to Eve in the Garden of Eden is made against the character of God, and this is the ground on which the great war between God and Satan was fought and is still being fought. How is right established?

What distinguishes right from wrong other than the declaration that things are so? And in the beginning that would have been God. This is the old accusation and the old offense. Why can my opinion not be equal to yours, or equal to God's, if your opinion and God's

opinion are based only on what you and God want to happen, modeled, of course, on what you already are and what you already want to happen?

Some of the greatest thinkers in Christianity have wrestled with this issue, trying to get God out of this moral dilemma. It is my opinion that we should let God defend Himself, which He has done quite brilliantly, if we are not too blinded by our own fear to see the matter fully. When we lose that original definition, the message or the gospel is cheapened considerably.

God fearlessly stands by his assertion that the things he says are right because he says them, that they are best because he thought them, and that he does all things by the counsel of his own will because there is no higher counsel or recourse.

If we are to get our journey through Romans on the right track, we must begin where the apostle begins. We must accept the purpose of what he presents. The righteousness of God, revealed by the Son of God in the gospel of God, is a righteousness that precedes the giving of any law.

When God creates the universe in the book of Genesis and brings our world into being with the passing of each day, He does not test His progress by the measure of any law. There is no law yet. There is only God, creating in his own image and likeness, calling things good as he goes. The first law is not given until man is created and placed in the garden.

Even then, the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a protection against evil. The commandment does not sustain the

life of Adam and Eve. They do not derive nourishment from the commandment. They do not analyze and examine their state of being in relation to the commandment. Their life is derived from their walk with God and from eating the fruit of the tree of life. The commandment is incidental and unrelated to the daily functioning and well-being of the garden, including the man and woman.

The commandment marks the line, the boundary, beyond which evil begins, and also marks the beyond from which evil approaches. Evil was not the corruption of the tree of life. Evil began in man with the emergence of the self, which could and did function in the land beyond the commandment. For his transgression of the commandment, man was cast out of the Garden, and his way back into the Garden was blocked by angels with drawn swords.

"He shall not eat lest he live forever," God said, meaning live forever in his present state. So, what was and is man's present fallen state? The answer is twofold. He has broken the commandment, and he has created an existence of his own self separate from God. A self that can evaluate, analyze, and decide independently of God's input. Salvation must also be twofold. There cannot be a singular focus on some simplistic aspect, much as we desire simplicity.

The question of salvation then becomes, first and foremost, whether God is willing for man to return to the tree of life. For the tree is the full restoration, not the replacement, of the payment for the broken commandment. The answer is a resounding yes. God desires a return, and in the gospel message the way has

been shown as Christ, the tree in the garden, who is our goal for a return to the attainment of eternal life.

Meanwhile, outside the boundaries of the commandment, man destroys and ruins everything he touches. This is not the result of breaking any more commandments, for no commandments have yet been given to him. Cain kills his brother Abel out of the wickedness of his own heart and because he has taken sin upon himself. A sin that lies at his doorstep, ready and willing to embrace Cain and utterly defile him.

After the Garden, there is no commandment given by which man can get a second chance to obey and thereby cleanse himself or re-qualify himself as worthy to eat of the Tree of Life again. Why is this? And the answer is very simple and obvious. There is no commandment, because no commandment can undo the creation of the self that now exists apart from God.

Any complete presentation of the gospel must include the resolution of this problem. The problem facing man outside the garden is a separation not primarily caused by the breaking of the commandment. The commandment opened the way to the offense for which there is now no remedy. The offense is the emergence of the self, capable of committing and imagining evil. Mere forgiveness or payment for the broken commandment will not resolve this matter.

This is the problem. How can the self be made righteous again? Keeping another commandment will not suffice. Nor will punishing someone else for the broken commandment accomplish the end goal. Only the cleansing of the fallen self, of itself, will restore access to the tree of life.

The way back begins with Cain and Abel by introducing the concept of sacrifice. This is a concept deeply ingrained in the psyche of ancient mankind. The instinct to bring the best before God and burn the offering. Why is this? Again, the answer is simple once the purpose is understood, and in the beginning, immediately after the expulsion from the Garden, the purpose can be seen most clearly. The sacrifice must be of the best kind, because the best kind represents the self, and the self must be voluntarily offered back to God. A forced sacrifice will be of no use.

From there, as the beginning, where the purpose of the sacrifice could be seen so clearly, the road quickly goes downhill. This should in no way be construed as an unplanned situation with God or something out of His control. He is completely in charge. The downhill is in the plan.

This instinct to sacrifice could be, and quickly became, related to the broken commandment. Man had believed the lie of the serpent in the garden, a lie that clouded the character of God. With this lie firmly rooted in man's heart, the switch of the sacrifice being related to the commandment instead of the self quickly grew.

God became an angry God in the Old Testament, with a hair-trigger temper. This was not a false portrayal, but a true portrayal. God acted angry, and he had a hair trigger temper. He now wanted a sacrifice to satisfy his wrath and violated justice. Man, quickly adapted, if he ever fully understood the original purpose of the sacrifice, and willingly went along with the concept.

That God played along is an indication that He knew exactly where this was going and had been in the original plans. It was about much more than satisfying His wrath, but it had to appear as if it was only God's wrath, primarily to entrap the pride of the devil who had brought the original charge against God's character. There were other reasons as well, all woven into a truthful and honest presentation of salvation that only God could weave.

What must now be told is the full message of God, the full gospel entrusted to the apostle, which is a rescue from the entanglement of the redemption story with the commandment. A necessary entanglement, but equally necessary is the rescue, and this is the beginning of the rescue, the beginning of the return to the tree of life.

Righteousness does not originate in the commandment, it originates beyond the commandment, because God contains righteousness, not the commandment. The question is fully answered by the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world. What the shadows cast by the smoke from the altars of sacrifice obscure from our view is the twofold nature of the sacrifice and, ultimately, the twofold nature of Christ's sacrifice.

Must justice be satisfied? Is God so offended by the breaking of the commandment that he cannot simply forgive the matter without requiring payment? On these rocks the ship of Christianity has been tossed and turned for many ages. The best minds have been applied, and the solution arrived at is one of simplification, not of answering all questions.

What has been done, and is being done, is to abandon the concept of God's righteousness existing apart from the commandment, that is the law. Apparently the two things, the commandment in the garden and the tree of life planted in the garden can simply not be reconciled in the theological mind.

Added to this is the issue of what transpires in the story of the Old Testament. God sets out to act as if the totality of his righteousness is entirely related and wrapped up in the commandment. The sacrifice itself loses its clear definition with Cain and Able, and degenerates to nothing more than appeasing God's wrath for the breaking of the commandment. Implicit in the concept is that if the commandment could be kept, or if someone would keep the commandment, that this would equate righteousness.

This concept then, that of appeasing God's wrath for the breaking of the commandment, from what I can see, has become almost universally the gospel message. We are told that Christ has suffered and died for our sins, and that the debt is paid, and that we are good to go. A righteousness obtained by eating once again from the tree of life is completely abandoned, and accompanying this thought is the totally abandonment of any sacrifice of the self, back to God. Sacrifice is now associated exclusively with appeasement, not with the cleansing of the self that emerged in the transgression. This is a much too small and distorted lens.

The theological term most often used for this concept is penal substitution. The problem is that penal substitution is true. What penal substitution claims, that Christ died for our sins and paid the full penalty

and thereby appeased the wrath of God, is in fact true. Christ did this. He kept the law completely, so He was declared righteous by the law, not by His own nature. He was therefore a worthy sacrifice, so judged by the law, to pay the penalty for our sins, a penalty that God required.

So where are we? Does the righteousness of Christ exist only because the law granted him righteousness? Is sacrifice nothing more than appeasement? Does self-examination no longer matter? Most of Christianity seems to think so. At least from what I can see. This is the framework in which the rest of the apostle's letter to the Romans is interpreted. Everything is seen and distorted through this lens.

I do not agree, nor do I read Romans through this lens. The gospel the apostle proclaims is not in the least formally locked into the commandment. The apostle is trying to bring the gospel message to its full scope and power. A scope and power that is easily subdued by saying that Christ did nothing more than pay for the sins of the world.

As George MacDonald, always the Scotsman, so vigorously protested, "Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves. Not from injustice, much less from justice, but from being unjust."

I believe that the events described by the theory of the penal substitution occurred. The reason is to gain victory over sin and over self. A topic that should probably be covered in a separate chapter.

Chapter 4 - Penal Substitution

There are, I suspect, many people who are unaware of the details, though I would be surprised if there are Christians who are not affected by the far-reaching implications of the theory. Penal substitution has worked its way into the very fabric of Christian theology.

The theory took formal shape around 1000 A.D., when Anslem of Canterbury picked up bits and pieces of Christian thought about the atonement from here and there and formulated the official doctrine. Formally known as the Latin theory, it is also known as the theory of satisfaction or penal substitution.

Based on the Old Testament system of sacrifice and the substitutionary death of sacrificed animals, the theory survived in practice as a suppression of all other views. By the time of the Reformation, the Latin view, through various detailed and legal arguments, had supplanted the original "classical view" of the early Church to such an extent that the men of the Church had forgotten the note of victory carried by the early Church Fathers. This note of victory was rediscovered by Luther and is mentioned in both Luther's theology and music. An example of this portrayal in Luther's music would be "A Mighty Fortress in Our God," a joyful revelation of God's triumph and victory over Satan.

The first two verses go like this.

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

The significance of Luther's discovery, however, was lost on Luther because of his lack of awareness of the position of the early church—an oversight that allowed Luther's followers to modify Luther's victory note to fit the Latin model. These conclusions about Luther are made by Gustaf Allen in his book, *Christus Victor*, and are quite lengthy, detailed, and conclusive.

George MacDonald, the Scottish novelist and theologian whom C.S. Lewis considered his master, made a valiant effort in the nineteenth century to unravel the tentacles of this theory.

Macdonald said this, “God will not conquer evil by crushing it underfoot—any god of man’s idea could

do that—but by conquest of heart over heart, of life over life, of life over death, of love over all.”

The dismantling of the theory has been the goal of those who object, as far as I can tell. An attempt to puncture or implode the theory. The problem is that the theory is quite airtight and fits well into the structure of the Old Testament. Which has been its sustaining power, I suppose. Macdonald's quote is testimony to this reality. God did indeed crush Satan under the heel of Christ, as prophesied in the garden, but MacDonald is also correct in noting that the concept is one that seems subordinate to the God of heaven and earth.

A better approach to the theory is to point out its incompleteness. The miracle of God is not His power, for God's power did not defeat sin. When Satan was cast out of heaven with a third of the angels, it was not the end of the war, but the beginning. The miracle of God is His faith in Himself. To believe that he can overcome that which is not himself, which is to overcome the darkness that is sure to arise from allowing the existence of a self that is not his own.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* makes much of Satan's reveling in the idea that even if God should crush his head and destroy him utterly, Satan's memory would live on in those who came after him. That he would always be known as the first of the rebels, the king who reigned over them all in his courage to challenge the Almighty.

Implicit in this idea is that evil cannot be defeated by power alone, contained, yes, but not defeated. Nor is evil defeated by the payment offered for the broken commandment. Satisfaction for the sins

associated with the commandment is as inconclusive as is power to end the war.

Here is another quote from George Macdonald.

“Christ died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves. Not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust.”

Again, Macdonald points out the inadequacy of the satisfaction theory, and he is right. The theory is inadequate. Does that justify dismantling it? Perhaps the strength of the theory compels that conclusion, but I think dismantling is a mistake. The weakness of the theory is its claim to sovereignty, its attempt to dominate the whole of history. In fact, the theory is necessary, for the theory explains how Satan was brought to the negotiating table, so to speak.

Suppression could not fully defeat the rebellion because the Fall had not only penetrated the commandment but had also brought into existence the full emergence of the human self, an emergence that the devil had already experienced. The broken commandment is one level of transgression, but the sins that follow the emergence of the self are the deeper transgression.

Jesus said in, Mat 15:17-20 “Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

The decision made in the highest councils of heaven and kept in the strictest confidence was to use the blood of the Lamb. The life was in the blood, and God believed that His life would triumph over the product of any other life. We know this because it was done. The plan was to attract Satan's participation by making it appear that it was all about redeeming the broken commandment. Because Satan's participation was necessary to crucify Christ. Calvary could not be a cosmic suicide and retain its value, and Satan would not cooperate if he suspected the real plan.

The poison must be fully extracted and developed in the adversary, or the effort would fail by default. Satan, or those who came behind him, would keep their best hidden, ready to unleash a new attack of corruption. We know this because it happened in biblical history. A reason other than the obvious must be given for the attempt to eliminate evil.

God prepared for this from the beginning. He framed the struggle between good and evil not as a struggle between one life and another, but as a struggle between right and wrong. This struggle arose out of the demand for obedience. Here we have the real illusion predicted by philosophy, and the devil was the universe's first philosopher, as his arguments in the Book of Job prove.

The commandment set God on a course of failure because the success of the commandment depends on the obedience of the created self. This failure in the Garden by Adam and Eve, and their inability to repay the resulting penalty due to Heaven for the transgression, sets up the full acceptance of the

penalty and payment by Christ, and is the bait that drew Satan in.

Therefore, the Latin model of atonement is not wrong and serves the eternal purposes of God. However, the Latin model is not the end of God's purposes, but the means to God's purposes, which is the victory over Satan and the complete cleansing of the created self through the blood of Christ. Satan, because of his arrogance and pride, and because of his hatred and bitterness toward God, could see no purpose for the blood except as payment for sin. Blinded by this hatred and bitterness, he saw God's sacrifice of His own Son as nothing more than God's acquiescence to his own insane insistence that right must be right and that every transgression must be paid for in full. That this penalty was paid to God Himself by the Son only serves to cement the matter in Satan's mind as God the tyrant, willing to sacrifice anything, even His own Son, to his lust for power and dominion.

God waged war in the Old Testament, a war He knew He could not win, to triumph in a final face-to-face battle. At Calvary, God did not roll the dice, but the devil was convinced that God was cashing in the chips and was willing to settle for a truce that the devil could live with. God used the law to achieve victory, so God is right, and this truth cannot be circumvented. The penalty for the broken commandment must be paid. Justice must be satisfied, but justice was only the gateway past the broken commandment, back to the tree of life, which is Christ.

Here is a dramatic rendition, drawn from the pages of Scripture, of those last hours of Christ's

suffering, as laid out in my book, *Why Heaven Chose to Suffer*.

The devil waited in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus entered with his disciples. The mist of Hades rose from the ground and curled low around the olive trees. Above the grounds the angelic guard was heavy, watchful, alert, and ready to intervene if called upon.¹

"Stay here and pray that you will be protected,"² Jesus told his disciples, moving deeper into the garden.

The devil approached, holding a cup, a foul, roiling mixture containing every lie, perversion, and corruption ever invented by a diseased mind.³

"The best we have for you, my lord," the devil said with a grin. "A drink specially prepared by my hand - for a king."⁴

Jesus looked into the cup. Fear gripped him. Horror shuddered through his body. "I cannot do this,"⁵ he gasped.

The devil grinned. "I understand your fear, but we have no deal unless you drink."

"I will consult my Father,"⁶ Jesus said.

The devil bowed low in mockery. "As you wish, but there will be no further negotiation on my part."

Jesus waved him back and fell to his knees in agony. "I know we planned this," he whispered to heaven, "but this is too much. You and I have never touched sin before. We have never seen the stuff up close or smelled the stench of its decay. I have never felt such fear or hatred as I have just felt. I cannot drink. There must be another way."⁷

The heavens answered. "There is no other way, son. I know I am not here to feel what you feel, but you must trust me as we have always trusted each other. We have always been of one mind. We have always done things together, but you must do this alone. You are a man, and as a man you must do what we have never done. You must obey."⁸

Jesus hung his head and wept. He wept until his shoulders trembled. Finding no peace, he rose and walked back to his disciples, seeking human contact, some comfort in his grief. They were asleep. He managed to rouse Simon Peter and scolded him. "Couldn't you watch with me for an hour? I need your help."⁹

Simon Peter stared at Christ in a stupor. His senses were overwhelmed. Too many strange things had been said and done that night. Jesus left them and returned to prayer. He begged and cried for another hour, for another path, for another evaluation, but the heavens were silent. He stared at the grinning devil waiting with the cup in his hand. Sweat broke out all over his body. Cold shuddered through him. The corpuscles on his skin burst in his agony, mixing his sweat and blood.¹⁰ The angels hovered above him, watching, waiting.

He wrestled, worked through the resistance, felt for the first time what men feel when they wrestle with God: the impossibility, the hopelessness, the sheer panic. Peace did not come, but a numbness set in. He motioned for the devil to come closer.

"Are you ready?" The devil looked skeptical.

"I will drink it."¹¹ Jesus took the cup in His hands and drained the contents to the last drop.

The devil took the empty cup and examined the contents.

"I have drunk it," said Christ.

The two looked at each other, mortal combatants. The devil saw nothing but the form of the man's body, but he knew that the putrid mess was in Christ's stomach because he had seen the mixture go down. In his mind he saw a thousand years of lambs slaughtered on Jewish altars. There was nothing here to alarm him.

"You have drunk it," agreed the devil.

His eyes gleamed as he left the rest unsaid. The Jewish lambs had the sin applied to the outside of their skin and the blood smeared on top. This man drank sin. The poison was in him and would seep up and out until every part of his body was defiled.

"We have a deal," said the devil, "and your friend is coming.

Jesus returned to his disciples and roused them when Judas appeared in the distance leading a small mob armed with swords and torches.

Judas approached and cried, "Hail, Master!"¹² He stepped up and kissed Jesus on the cheek.

"Would you betray a friend with a kiss?"¹³ Jesus asked.

The devil chuckled. "Consider this your welcome into our world."

Notes

1. Matthew 26:53
2. Luke 22:40, a paraphrase
3. John 14:30
4. 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 2:17–18, a paraphrase
5. Hebrews 4:14–15, a paraphrase
6. Luke 22:41–42, a paraphrase
7. Hebrews 5:7, a paraphrase
8. Hebrews 5:8, a paraphrase
9. Matthew 26:40, a paraphrase
10. Luke 22:44
11. Mark 10:39
12. Matthew 26:48, a paraphrase
13. Luke 22:48, a paraphrase

The story of the next few hours has been told in many ways and in many amazing formats: the trial of Christ, the scourging, the judgment pronounced by Pilate, and the final trudge up the rocky hill of Golgotha.¹ The conclusion was forgone, sealed in the garden when Christ drank the cup. They crucified him between two thieves, fulfilling the Scripture: "He was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sins of many" (Isaiah 53:12).

He groaned on the cross, the nails piercing his flesh, and begged the silent heavens, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

The hours crept on, the agony of the iron through bone and skin, men pushing up and down on their knees, sucking air into their lungs. The angelic

guard was long gone, and demonic hordes had gathered from every corner of Hades. The strongest and fiercest jostled for the front row, spitting and spewing their hatred. This was what victory looked like for Hell.²

Sometime around noon, darkness crept over the land, heavy and oppressive.³ The demonic hosts rejoiced in their power, seeing future conquests falling ripe into their hands.

"He will die soon," said the devil, "and the world will be ours again.

They drooled in anticipation. The Son of God would be dead with their poison in his loins. Even they had not dared hope for such folly from the Almighty.

For three hours, darkness held the land in the grip of night. At three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit; and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46).

In a flash of light and glory, he was gone, heading down into the earth, toward Hades. The ground shook and closed behind him. The stunned demons stared at the naked body on the cross. What had just happened? The poison should have worked its way into the body by now. He belonged to them.⁴

The answer came in about an hour, when the soldiers approached the bodies to break the legs so the men would die. The bodies had to be removed before dusk, when the Jewish holy day began.⁵

"This one in the middle is already dead,"⁶ one of the soldiers shouted to his commander.

The disbelieving centurion approached to verify the observation, but just in case the man on the cross was faking, the centurion thrust his spear into the man's side, into his stomach. As the spear was withdrawn, blood and water gushed out and ran down the legs and over the cross. The water came from a man who was dying of thirst.⁷

The devil noticed this and approached. He touched the blood and water with his finger, unmixed and distinct. Light touched him and he understood. He had been caught in his own snare. The conditioning of a thousand years had blinded him. He had seen sacrifices on Jewish altars for too long. His guard was down. He had assumed, and the assumption had been fatal. The blood of this lamb did more than cover sin, the blood cleansed. His cup of hellish brew had been turned into pure water.

He howled his fury to the heavens. He knew now what was happening in Hades below. He saw it all slipping away, his prisoners and our world.⁸ There would be no reconquest. The books of the law were closed. The matter was settled, paid for, and forgiven.

Hell would be vanquished when he returned, its gates shattered and broken, the prisoners taken, the keys gone.⁹ This was not a game of one sympathetic character against another. Something else had happened. Something he had never dreamed was in the cards was staring him in the face. How could he have been so blind?

He had lost the war. Evil could now be wiped away as if the incomprehensible vileness had never existed.¹⁰

As Gustaf Aulen said, "If the classic idea of the Atonement ever again resumes a leading place in Christian theology, it is not likely that it will revert to precisely the same forms of expression that it has used in the past; its revival will not consist in a putting back of the clock. It is the idea itself that will be essentially the same: the fundamental idea that the Atonement is, above all, a movement of God to man, not in the first place a movement of man to God. We shall hear again its tremendous paradoxes: that God, the all-ruler, the Infinite, yet accepts the lowliness of the Incarnation; we shall hear again the old realistic message of the conflict of God with the dark, hostile forces of evil, and his victory over them by the Divine self-sacrifice; above all, we shall hear again the note of triumph."¹¹

I have presented, I hope, at least the possibility of a theory that meets the expectations of the esteemed Gustaf Aulen.

Notes

1. Matthew 27
2. Psalms 22:1–24
3. Luke 23:44
4. Matthew 27:50–54

5. John 19:31–32
6. John 19:33, a paraphrase
7. John 19:34
8. Ephesians 4:9
9. Psalms 68:18
10. I Corinthians 6:11
11. Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor: An historical Study of the Three Main Types of The Idea of Atonement*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003, page 158–159

Chapter 5 – The Scriptures

Rom 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

Rom 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them.

Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Rom 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Rom 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Rom 1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Rom 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

Rom 1:25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

Rom 1:26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:

Rom 1:27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

- Rom 1:28 And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;
- Rom 1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,
- Rom 1:30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents,
- Rom 1:31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:
- Rom 1:32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Chapter 6 - Commentary on Romans 1:18- 32

The apostle moves directly from the righteousness of God to the unrighteousness of man. The righteousness of God is a righteousness that is in God, outside of any law. It is a righteousness that was first manifested in the act of creation, when the Word of God was spoken from God's mouth, when God called creation into existence out of "nothing."

Creation is called "good" because creation comes from God, and God is "good" or righteous in Himself. This is a goodness, a definition that comes not from the measurement of some law that dictates what is good and what is not good, but from the reality that creation comes from God, and since God is good, His creation is good.

Likewise, man's unrighteousness is not in breaking a commandment, but in himself, in the works that come from his heart. This is the essence of what is not good. The wrath of God, the apostle says, is against that which is not good. This unrighteousness and ungodliness come into focus by measuring man's actions against God's actions, not primarily by measuring man's actions against a law. People can see what God has created, the order, beauty, and majesty of creation. They themselves are God's creation. Humans can see how things are and how things work in God's creation. They can see what is good, or what is true and righteous in its most basic form. But man creates differently.

The world created by God is a truth that is the common knowledge of all mankind. No teaching of the law is needed to reveal the truth of nature. No measurement by any law is necessary. The apostle

speaks of a state of unrighteousness created by man after he broke the commandment in the garden. Keeping the commandment did not produce man's original righteousness in the garden. Man's goodness came from God.

Man's breaking of the commandment did not destroy that created goodness. Rather, the commandment had prevented man's self from developing into a functioning whole capable of discerning good and evil. Once man ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, he was no longer in a state of righteous innocence, simply doing as he was told, but his self had evolved into a self capable of thinking and deciding for itself.

Man could now look at God's creation and decide whether he would conduct his actions, his works, in accordance with God's creation, or whether he would create his own creation and call it good. A creation that would be a twisted and broken form of God's creation. Man was not given the ability to create new matter within the material world, but to break it down and build a new existence out of the broken pieces. This is the world of wickedness and unrighteousness, declared so by God because this world is not like His own.

All the effort and noise made by the Eastern religions about finding man's higher self and moving to a higher plane is foolishness. Man is already there. That was man's greatest sin in the Garden, becoming like God, not breaking the law. Man became a god, able to decide whether he would call this or that good or evil, and live his life accordingly. The journey to Paradise is a journey backwards and upwards. It is a turning away

from man's own self and selfish desires, and a return to the truth revealed in its basic form in God's creation.

Admittedly, the expression of truth is not limited to creation alone, but a man or woman who refuses to begin there, who will not acknowledge the reality that exists before his or her eyes, has little hope of finding any further truth.

A modern culture that cannot tell the difference between man and ape, between male and female, between an uphill road and a downhill road, has little to go on in its search for life and meaning. To say that one prefers the downhill road to the uphill road is one thing, but to stop seeing the difference between the two, to deny the reality of what one has chosen, is to become truly lost.

To find God, one must see again, beginning with the material world to which all are exposed and contain within themselves, regardless of the degree of their fallenness. The only thing that would change this reality would be to completely lose the image of God in some way or form.

The way to comprehend the deep things of life, the spiritual things, the things that do not fade away with the turning of another sun, requires this exercise in basic truth telling. You must stop lying. You must stop saying that what happened did not really happen.

One must stop calling failure, the pain of one's choices, the agony of one's loneliness a mirage or a shadow that is not. When man creates his own world, he also creates a reality about which he cannot speak the truth. He calls the downhill road the way to heaven.

He masks the pain. He covers the sorrow. He calls it into existence, and it does not happen.

The apostle then moves on to another important point. That of gratitude. Man begins to go down the path of his own destruction when he sees the work of God in creation and refuses to acknowledge God by a simple act of thanksgiving. This seems like a small thing to argue about. As if thanksgiving would accomplish much, but the apostle identifies the lack of thanksgiving in the face of God's gifts, the gift of the air we breathe, the gift of the beauty of the forest, the gift of the majesty of the plains and the grandeur of the mountains, as the gateway to creating our own world.

Once humanity has freed itself from the recognition of God, it feels free to begin the construction of its own universe. This is done by turning to oneself, by looking away from the face of God in the heavens above, to looking at one's own soul and one's own thoughts. A confidence in one's own abilities wells up within a man and overflows everything, from his mind to his emotions. His own heart joins in the betrayal, and he begins to sing his own praises to himself. He consults his own thoughts and is greatly impressed by what he sees. He sees himself as the wise of the wise, a man who is high and exalted. He thinks and admires his own thoughts, and in this he becomes a fool.

Ancient man in his deluded state reached back and laid his hand on the gifts God had given him, back to the wood of the forest and the rocks of the mountainside. Modern man considers himself far above this primordial act, but man has not changed in the least. What has changed are the tools for which

man reaches. The cave man longed for an idol of wood and stone and declared it to be the god in whom he would trust. Modern man fashions things out of protons and neutrons and declares them to be the hope of the future, the star that will not disappoint him.

Ancient man was wrong, and modern man is still wrong. Only God can save him, and the rejection of the Almighty brings not progress but regression. With God gone, wood and stone lose their luster, and the splitting of the atom leaves the soul empty. With God gone, the good things contained in the created worlds also cease to function properly. The apostle points to the issue of human sexuality. A power by which the next generation of children is brought into existence. The power from which man derives both healthy and righteous pleasure.

This power, cut off from the reality of God's presence, becomes deformed. A power that would have been and is maintained in a spirit of gratitude. The apostle presents the common practice of same-sex sexuality as his primary example. Without the presence of God, the glory and passion with which a man contemplates and embraces the beauty of a woman's body is instead directed toward the lean and muscular buttocks of a man.

The sexual attraction of man for boy or man for man is nothing new. But despite its long historical existence, such love has none of the moving pathos of ancient or modern literature. Nothing compares to the love between a man and a woman.

Take the Song of Solomon as an example. (7:1-9) There the man gazes upon the naked glory of a woman and describes it, beginning at her feet and

moving upward to the crown of her head. Each unfolding section is described in intricate detail in language unrivaled by any description a man has ever given of another man's body. The depth of both physical and emotional satisfaction is simply unparalleled in same-sex attractions.

Likewise, without the presence of God brought about by thanksgiving, women turn away from the overwhelming presence of the man to the soft and pleasing contours of a fellow traveler. What they find is not the harbor of home, but the rough waters of unsatisfied passion.

The woman who glorifies the man in the Song of Solomon is also unparalleled in this respect.

“Who is this,” the woman asks, “that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant? Behold his bed, which is Solomon’s; three score valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Isreal...My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of water, washed with milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires...His mouth is most sweet: yes, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” Song of Solomon 2:6-7, 5:10-14,16

Having left God, man is now in a land of his own making and choosing. He creates things using the creation of God as his building blocks to construct

things that God never made or will make. These are actions and choices far beyond the bounds of any commandment. A mere commandment cannot keep up with or fully define the unrighteousness of man. The unrighteousness of man is a thing that comes from himself and out of himself. He is the source of what he has made, and in doing so he openly declares that he himself is unrighteous, for it is what comes from his own actions.

These are initially done outside of any law. No one needs a law to perform actions that are made according to his own pleasure. He defines these actions by the measure of his own pleasure, not by disobedience to what he should or should not do. He has sex with whomever he wants to bed based on his ability and access to the object of his desire, not because he should or shouldn't have said sex. The driving force is himself. He undermines another man because it serves his purpose. He takes because he wants to take, not because he is told he can or cannot take what he desires.

What the apostle is tracing for us are the lands beyond the garden of Eden. The lands that Cain walked through after killing his brother Abel. Through the rough, abandoned lands whose contours were created by Cain and his descendants. These are not lands defined by the Law, the Law would come later. A time would come when God would name and call out the lines and shapes of man's creation, taking personally the role, that Adam had abdicated. This is the role of bringing order and meaning out of chaos by speaking in the simplest terms about what matters is and has become.

This is a role that any man or woman can take up again, because evil is all around them, whether it is defined by the law or not. This calling and naming can be done simply based on the natural order of creation. There is something that calls us back to the garden of Eden and to the righteousness of God that is much deeper than any intellectual appeal to reason, which is the way of the law.

Creation, first and foremost, contains this call. A visceral appeal to our senses, the pull of sentimentality when we see the vastness of the heavens above us, in full display with the moon in charge in a clear and open starry sky. This call to something higher than ourselves, an unexplained and inexplicable voice that cannot be denied. We are made for something better than the life we mostly live. There is nothing in our way to prevent us from moving in the direction of that call.

Granted, there are sometimes threats to life and limb that stand in the path of such movement, but here the principle of sacrifice quickly comes into play. What has meaning for us? The bare bones and often miserable existence that is ours, or the call that we hear. A call that is obviously real, for there are the stars above us, gloriously twinkling in their immovable places, telling us the message. Moving toward the call and leaving behind what the old life consisted of becomes the defining factor, not conforming to an external rule for living.

The Law of God would come later and serve its purpose, but the Law is not the voice that calls us home, for the Law does not lead us to the tree of life. The law leads us to ourselves. A law can only define a

line to walk towards. Reaching the line does not in any way confer life or provide justification for the fallen self.

Therefore, the law can only provide a guide that points toward home, a journey that can be undertaken before and must extend beyond any direction the law can provide. The distance between the tree of life and the line drawn by the law can and is a road that only the pull of the heart drawn by the righteousness of God can navigate.

It is the height of folly to deny the reliability of God's law in providing a direction in which the righteousness of God lies. The inability of the law to lead us all the way home does not diminish its ability to tell us about the direction in which home is to be found. In many cases, the presentation of the law can make a clearer and more lasting impression on human consciousness than a more distant reliance on a more general penetration of the voice of creation.

Death itself, to which all creation is subject, serves as another warning that things are not as they should be. There is a violence in death from which modern man is often shielded, but not so with ancient man. In the days of Noah, violence filled the land. Instead of turning around and seeking another way through life, mankind doubled down on their self-serving, narcissistic choices. They took pleasure, the apostle says, in using violence and other abuses of their fellow man to further their own interests. The one who could land the hardest blow from the most perverse angle was considered the most blessed and the happiest.

During this turmoil and general breakdown of culture, Genesis tells us that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah did this not by following a spoken or written law, but by living righteously because he walked with God. What does it mean to live righteously and walk with God? How does a person know how to do this without having every step spelled out?

The answer lies in listening to the voice of creation, which was available to everyone if they had chosen to listen, but also to the voice that the apostle will introduce in the next section, the voice of conscience. Man can choose to act arbitrarily and without thinking of the consequences, but when he listens, and sometimes even when he doesn't listen, the condemnation he feels pressing upon his spirit is overwhelming. This is a totally involuntary choice, a voice that is placed within each man to point him in the right direction. In the end, it is the journey that is begun that is important, the direction in which the man is moving, not the exact place he is.

That is why it is said of the ancients and of Noah that he was a good man for his time. A man or woman living in a violent culture may, by a small act of kindness, move much further back toward the Garden of Eden, where the Tree of Life is, than a modern man or woman who prides himself on his or her compassion. Such a modern man or woman may never have stopped to consider that he or she is surrounded by a cultural structure that perpetuates his or her beliefs and to which he or she can submit without taking a step on the journey back to God. This is especially true when that submission results in an elevated status among their friends and acquaintances.

The journey back to God did not make Noah a popular man, nor has the journey since then done anything remotely related to elevating a man or woman in the eyes of their surrounding culture if their surrounding culture is headed in the opposite direction.

Here is also the renewed complaint against penal substitution. When elevated to express the fullness of the gospel message, penal substitution eliminates this journey toward righteousness. One is simply transported into the righteousness of Christ at the moment of faith, regardless of one's present status on the ground. This is all well and good, except for one major problem.

The righteousness of Christ, which is often defined in Christian thought more by implication than by actual theory, is established based on Christ's keeping of the law. Christ kept the law, we are told and was therefore found righteous. As if righteousness could be produced by the law. When the truth is that the righteousness of Christ predates the law and exists entirely apart from keeping the law. It would be more accurate to say that Christ gave the law its righteousness than to say that the law gave Christ its righteousness.

There are reasons why Christ paid the penalty for us breaking the law, but they are not to spare us the journey to righteousness. We must turn our faces toward heaven and walk with the power that is within us. Will that be enough? No. In the end, we must be carried by the grace of God, but we must still walk. That is part of the journey and part of breaking our pride and confidence in ourselves. We find the lamb, as Abraham did, at the top of every mountain we climb,

but that does not negate climbing or sacrifice. To say otherwise is to reduce salvation to a largely mental concept, leaving the rest of life to live with the ravages of the fall.

Chapter 7 – The Scriptures

- Rom 2:1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.
- Rom 2:2 But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.
- Rom 2:3 And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?
- Rom 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?
- Rom 2:5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;
- Rom 2:6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:
- Rom 2:7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:
- Rom 2:8 But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath,
- Rom 2:9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- Rom 2:10 But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:
- Rom 2:11 For there is no respect of persons with God.
- Rom 2:12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

Rom 2:13 (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Rom 2:14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Rom 2:15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Chapter 8 - Commentary on Romans 2:1-15

Having established man's sinfulness and unrighteousness as a reality that comes into existence and emanates from man himself, the apostle has concluded the first chapter with one last major point. Man is aware of God's disapproval of acts that violate God's created order, and even with this knowledge, man goes a step further and takes pleasure in those who commit these acts.

What is of interest to us is that the apostle has man taking pleasure not in the acts themselves, but in those who perform these acts. The choice to take pleasure is expressed by the self focusing on others and not on itself. The self performs these acts and takes pleasure in those who also perform them.

This is an important analysis, because one would expect the pleasure in perverse acts to be expressed primarily in the acts themselves, not in the acts of others. Are we not told that making one's own choices, doing one's own thing, and going one's own way brings the height of pleasure? Yet in practice it does not, because the world that the self creates does not increase pleasure in the long run.

There may be a momentary spike of pleasure when the creation is misused, but the natural pleasure in God's creation is quickly diminished. The self can readily know this when the truth is spoken both inwardly and outwardly, for the actions occur under the full knowledge and control of the self. This is where the self first encounters the judgment of God and the knowledge of God's judgment.

We feel this judgment when we create our own world. Things are deteriorating around us, yet the self persists in these actions. Why does the Self persist in actions that the Self hates, and this is using hate in a mild sense of the word? The answer is simple. The self does not want to dislike its own creation. Desperately. The self strongly objects to this unwanted reaction. This is the root of man's anger against God. The anger aroused by the knowledge that the lands beyond the garden are of much lesser quality and dimension than those within God's creation.

Hence the lie. Hence the beginning of the inability to tell the truth about us. Hence the projection onto others to mask our own failure. Thus, the self reasons. "I will take pleasure in others, in those who, like me, have chosen to rebel against God."

Thus, pleasure itself is perverted. The self creates its own pleasure by taking pleasure not in its own creation-which it hates, but in the self of others who also hate their creation. Pleasure has thus become entirely fictional, completely unmoored from matter or reality, expressed in an action that reveals the only source from which the self can take pleasure. The act of choosing to create the work of one's own hands.

The journey back to the Tree of Life begins here with the self's sacrifice of what it loves, that is, itself and its choice of itself, and a turning to what God loves. This choice to return is not made in a vacuum but is supported and guided by the inbuilt inclination of creation, written into the fabric of every human being.

We hate our own works by the gift of God. This means that to turn to the light or the laws of God is to choose the works of God. This is the truth that begins

to free. From the beginning we choose something that is not of ourselves. Once the journey has begun, the question of self and love of self is by no means closed. For this reason, in the second chapter of Romans, the apostle moves on to the subject of the law.

The conceptualization of the law has already emerged in the apostle's definitions of those wildernesses that lie beyond the boundaries of the Garden of Eden. Names are used such as slanderers, haters of God, despisers, envious, murderers, contenders, deceivers, whisperers, and unrelenting. Man has been cast out of the garden and forbidden to return less he eats of the tree of life in his fallen state. A fallen state where he has created his own worlds and his own iniquities.

There are questions that could be raised as to why God ventured into the use of the Law, considering how difficult the subject is and how tangled the webs we weave are. The first and foremost problem is that using the commandment to define even a vestige of righteousness, which is what any law does, runs the risk of making sin a thing of God's hand. Man is quite ready and willing to shift the blame for his mess onto God's shoulders.

That the theory of penal substitution should take this bait and become so prominent in Christian thought only underscores the point. Under penal substitution there is no allowance or tolerance for any definition of sin outside of commandment breaking. The question of the self and its own creation is completely ignored by the dictates of what are in reality the dictates of Greek philosophy, not biblical guidance. Augustine in the fourth century and Thomas Aquinas

in the thirteenth are among the giants of Christian theology who led the way in this direction.

Such a conclusion leaves open a glaring accusation, namely, that without the commandment there would be no sin. While the apostle later states in Romans that "without the law there is no transgression," the apostle does not say that without the law there is no sin. The apostle is presenting the definition that transgression provides as a blessing that the law brings, and one of the reasons the law is used by God is that the presence of sin can easily exist unnoticed in people's lives. The apostle does not mean that sin does not exist in the absence of the commandment, only that its detection can be so. These are the tangled webs that the apostle seeks to untangle.

The second pressing problem related to the definition of evil through the naming of evil by the law is that of judgment. This is not to say that the judging that is condemned is the act of defining evil, a judging that declares what is right or wrong by establishing what is evil or good, and any other such measurement made in relation to God's work or our work. These things can rightly be called judging, but they are not the kind of judging that attracts the apostle's concern, a concern that was echoed by Christ in his strict instruction not to judge in Matthew chapter seven.

The judgment that brings condemnation to others and to us is the conclusion we so readily draw from the first false conclusion, namely, that sin consists entirely in the transgression of the law. If sin is created by the law, then sin is erased by keeping the law. The goal has been reached.

If sin is simply the transgression of the law, and this is not to say that sin is not the transgression of the law, for sin is the transgression of the law, but sin is so much more than the transgression of the law. The sin that created our fallen worlds came from our own hands, with the obvious help of the devil. The lands beyond the garden were not created by breaking the commandment in the garden. The commandment was there to restrain the emergence of the self from which these iniquities would arise.

If sin consists entirely in the transgression of the law, then obedience or compliance, even simple outward compliance, is equivalent to God's righteousness. This was the conclusion reached by the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, but it was far from Christ's definition of God's righteousness. Nor does the apostle preach that the created righteousness contained in the law is the end of our journey to the garden.

The issue of the created nature of right and wrong, when right and wrong are defined by the commandment, is quite advanced and was first raised by Satan in reference to Job. God pointed to Job at the gathering of the gods and asked Satan if he had noticed Job. He is a "perfect man and rejects evil," God proclaims.

Satan replies with the question, "Does Job serve God in vain?" meaning, does Job not work in a prepared environment. An environment where God rewarded the right choices and punished the wrong ones. This was indeed true. The fact that Job did not buckle when Satan changed the environment by rewarding Job's good choices with bad results does not change the truth of the original accusation.

For this is still true of our own lives, and this is how the journey out of our own selves begins. Things do not go well when we create our own worlds. This is the primal alarm that first warns us of God's judgment and motivates us to take a different path. That this motivation is entirely self-centered, that it is in our own best interest to change course and reject our own evil actions, does not negate its validity or its origin in God's design. It is, however, a design that cannot go on forever.

The righteousness conferred by keeping the law is a major problem. The self has now tasted of righteousness, created though it is, and has once again bitten into at least a version of the fruit of the tree of life. The self has done this without having reached the garden. The self has also done this out of a superficial motivation and exercise of its own will. This is the situation set up by God that is ripe for misinterpretation.

Yet God knows what He is doing, and He is doing what He is doing for our good. Compliance with the commandment is where the self will have to pass another major test on the journey back to the Garden. Will you and I draw the wrong conclusions, unwarranted by what we have experienced so far? Will we consider ourselves completely righteous and turn in such a spirit to condemn another for not keeping a law that one is keeping? What we would really be doing is laying the foundation for building our own Garden of Eden.

This is not to say that one cannot point out that the law should be obeyed, but condemnation of others is unwarranted from our point of view. Condemnation

is incomplete because we do not know where others are on the journey home. Did not Christ take the thief nailed to the cross next to him directly to paradise? Moreover, this condemnation is also vigorously opposed by the apostle, but on what basis?

The simplest and most common understanding is that of condemning someone else for doing something that is being done by the one who is judging. Yet the question is, does practicing what you preach satisfy the apostle's argument? I believe that it does not, because if practicing what you preach satisfies the objections to judging, then compliance with the law equals God's righteousness. If full compliance with the law before you condemn gives you the right to condemn, then you have arrived. Obviously, it does not, so we are back where we started.

This angle does not work either. The apostle cannot mean that we may be following the particular law we use to condemn someone, but we are not in fact in compliance with all matters of the law. Does keeping the whole law, the whole scope and breath, equal God's righteousness? If one could, and obviously one cannot, keep all the details of the law, in every shadow and twist of its requirements, would one be righteous as God is righteous?

To put the question another way. Was Christ righteous by keeping the law completely? Because Christ kept the law to its fullest and most complete extent. Did Christ obtain His righteousness by keeping the law completely? I think we know the answer, which is a definite negative, but the shadow of penal substitution casts a long shroud over the whole matter.

In practice, we act as if full compliance with the law would grant us God's righteousness. Penal substitution claims that Christ was able to accomplish this impossible task-which He did and thus was declared righteous-which He was not, because the righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of God, which is outside the law. We are then told that this righteousness-which is a fictitious righteousness-because the law did not transfer any righteousness to Christ. We are told that this legal righteousness, known as forensic righteousness, is transferred to us by faith, or credited to our account, without any involvement of the self.

I submit that this is a distortion of the apostle's argument. The apostle's claims go much deeper and are much more frightening. The apostle is saying that even if we keep the law, we have not attained the righteousness of God. Neither is the righteousness of Christ, which is given to us by faith or by grace, a legal righteousness, but a righteousness that is righteous by nature. What the apostle is saying is that even if we keep the law, we are still doing the same thing as the one who does not keep the law.

How is this possible? Is compliance not the same as doing? In the apostle's argument, it does not. Compliance is not doing. Compliance is primarily not doing something that you would do in the absence of the law. That by pointing out that our fellow man has not arrived because of his non-compliance, we have implicated ourselves in the same thing even in our compliance.

Here is how the apostle arrives at such a conclusion. He does not see the righteousness of the

law being transferred to us by keeping it, because there is still the question of the self from which the unrighteousness came in the first place. How are we to change ourselves? Does compliance change us? Perhaps superficially, in that we no longer commit an unlawful act, but the question that must be answered is whether the transfer is complete. If the law were removed? If we were acting on our own? What would we do? The essence of the self must be changed for doing to change.

The biblical understanding is that this change is not possible by compliance, but rather by gift or grace, by the transfer of God's nature. Therefore, the fact that we judge someone else by claiming that they have not arrived at change, while we claim that we have arrived by virtue of our compliance, is the log that must be removed from our eye, according to Christ. The log must be removed before the discussion can continue.

There is no one good but God, Christ said to the religious people of his time. We cannot acquire goodness or the righteousness of God by means of the law or by works. Nor is this transfer a legal one. The transfer must be in real time and in real terms as a nature that does good. This is the apostle's claim.

These are, of course, far-reaching claims. That the created righteousness contained in the law can be acquired at the level of our works is the underlying urgency we encounter at the beginning. Something must be done about what we are doing. We are not yet thinking about what must be done about us. In the end, we must be redeemed not only from the wrong things we do. We must be redeemed from the self that does the wrong things.

This knowledge is not gained by rejecting God's law, but by fully embracing God's law. It is in obeying that we learn that we have not yet reached the goal. How else is this lesson learned? Certainly not by avoiding the works of God, even though our first steps only measure the direction in which we are headed. For the highest is in the middle of the garden. A garden in which direction we do not know, nor could we find our way home if we tried.

The whole undertaking depends on the goodness of God, on His call to our hearts, first in our desire to turn away from what we hate, and in our built-in inclination to turn toward what we should seek and pursue. The catch will always be that we would not have sought that direction on our own, nor could we maintain that direction on our own, let alone reach our destination.

The reality is that when a man or woman encounters the first small measure of God's righteousness that comes from keeping the law, there must be an accompanying realization that the incorporation of God's righteousness into his or her own being has not yet occurred. Otherwise, the journey is derailed. At least to some degree, the self must become aware of its inability to make such a transfer, a realization that manifests itself in not judging another for not having arrived.

What follows is the first full flowering of grace. The self, in its humility and self-abasement, is granted the first taste of the fruit of another land, a small incorporation within itself of that blessed state of freedom, a state it has not arrived at nor reached by its own means. With this self-awareness comes the

knowledge of having been carried here by grace and of having received such a thing as a gift from God. What also happens is the awakening of the knowledge that nothing can loosen the chains of the self, its grotesque appetites, its perverted understanding and reasoning, but the hand of God and His divine providence and care.

God demands that we come to Him. God demands that we do so, whether the call comes to us through the voice of creation or through the voice of the law. To do otherwise is to quarrel with God, and to quarrel in vain. To refuse to act and to move toward righteousness is to reject the truth and to bring upon our heads a judgment and a sure punishment. That this judgment is coming and will be distilled by God based on the deeds done by the self in the creation of its own world. We must agree to the dismantling of our own creation. We must agree to give up what we have created and ultimately what we have become.

That there is in every man and woman a knowledge written by God, a knowledge that our own world will not last forever. With that knowledge comes the desire for a world that has foundations, a world that has lasting permanence. A world that we will never reach without further divine help and assistance.

That the works of another world, the world we left in the garden, must be taken up again. That we must begin to create another world, however poorly our initial imitation may be. That we begin the journey home, whether the call comes through our direct contact with the laws of God or through the faint voice we hear calling from our own created beings.

Chapter 9 – The Scriptures

- Rom 2:16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.
- Rom 2:17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
- Rom 2:18 And knowest *his* will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
- Rom 2:19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
- Rom 2:20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- Rom 2:21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?
- Rom 2:22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?
- Rom 2:23 Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?
- Rom 2:24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.
- Rom 2:25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.
- Rom 2:26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?
- Rom 2:27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?
- Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

Rom 2:29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Chapter 10 - Commentary on Romans 2:16- 29

The day is coming when God will judge the secrets of all men by His Son Jesus Christ. This warning is a reminder of the archangels standing at the gate of the spiritual Garden of Eden, holding before them a sword that cuts in every direction. This is the heart of why we do not really want to return home. We would rather settle somewhere in the desert of our making and call those lands our home. This is why the first taste of righteousness that we encounter in accordance with God's laws is so intoxicating. We are sure that the self has done enough, that the self has found the waters around which to build its Garden of Eden, and that God must be satisfied.

This is why the theory of forensic justice is so appealing. A theory directly related to penal substitution. Man likes the theory of a legal righteousness that comes from an impossible standard imposed upon him because man, along with the devil, harbors a deep and unresolved hatred against God. To the natural intellect of both man and the devil, God has created a world that is grossly unjust. The demands of servitude and righteous living defined by the way God does things seem deeply unfair.

The idea that God would at least hint at his own unfairness by admitting that the legal and created structures of the law could not be satisfied by simple compliance. A compliance that he is willing to take upon himself seems like an appropriate conclusion to the whole matter. The idea that God would then transfer this legal justification to humanity without any change in the behavior of any man or woman would be

an admission by God that the whole thing was impossible and unrealistic to begin with.

This whole legal maneuvering comes from the Old Testament sacrifices where a bull or a goat was killed in place of the guilty sinner. What God does and what God implies by His works must be true in some way. Therefore, I do not believe that we can ever eliminate the concept of "in place of" from our thinking, as some have tried to do over the centuries. I know that George MacDonald, the Scottish novelist, poet, and minister, tried his best, while at the same time objecting strenuously to the grotesqueness of the idea that God's wrath must be appeased by the blood of His Son. A modern Anabaptist, J. Denny Weaver, professor emeritus at Bluffton College, makes the same attempt, objecting on the basis of the violence inherent in blood sacrifice. Neither attempt, in my opinion, leads to a solid answer.

I do not think we can avoid the conclusion that God revealed Himself in the Old Testament as a God whose wrath must be appeased by a blood sacrifice. Why this was done is another matter, but it was done, and the account must contain the truth. What is at issue with me is the transfer of righteousness, which was never implied or stated. The righteousness of the animal slain on the altar was never transferred to the guilty sinner. Here we have made an unwarranted assumption.

The work of Jesus Christ is never presented as legal justification, but as legal appeasement. It is the theologians who have made this assumption. When another man takes the place of a convicted murderer, the charge of murder is legally satisfied. But the man

who committed the murder is still capable of murder. The guilty person has not been given the innocence heart of the man who replaced him. In the same way, the righteousness of Christ is not legally imputed to anyone through His sacrifice to appease the wrath of God.

This possibility could only exist if the righteousness of Christ had been legally imputed to him by his keeping of the law. Which it most emphatically was not. The righteousness of Christ is not established by keeping the law. It is a righteousness that exists outside the law and can be transferred to the sinner by gift or by grace. There is a transfer of the nature of Christ to the sinner, but this is a separate transaction based on the sinner's faith, not on the sinner's acceptance of a legal righteousness forensically transferred to him.

The work of Christ is how God will judge the secrets of men, the apostle asserts. Our hearts must face the sword that cuts in all directions, leaving us sliced and diced. Nothing of us will survive our encounter with the Word of God. A Word whose supreme expression is His Son Jesus Christ.

Glory, honor, and peace await us in the paradise of God, the apostle tells us, but those lands lie beyond the cutting sword, not with a legal justification gained by keeping the law. We must press onward and upward on the road that contains the twists and turns and stones necessary to completely expel and offend the self. The road home will fully expose our own wretchedness in terms that even we can understand, until there is no more cover to hide under, no more

bush to hide behind, and no more excuse to blame God for our troubles.

The sacrifice of the Lamb of God is sufficient to appease the righteous wrath of God, a wrath against sin that existed and continues to exist. There is much debate within Christianity about what happens next. If the wrath of God is simply a legal matter, triggered only by the transgression of the law, then we are good to go, at least for those who are the elect, since this obviously cannot apply to all mankind. Otherwise, as the apostle says, God could no longer judge the world.

A much better answer is that this legal maneuver was never the whole story. The penal substitution was more like a cover for what was really going on, a smokescreen, a preparation for the final cleansing of sin. The fact that God will still judge those who refuse to forsake their sins should give us pause. The legal appeasement of God's wrath is the time we are now living in, a chance given to every man and woman to come to God and receive not a legal justification, but a cleansing from their sin. For the wrath of God is stirred up by the existence of sin, which exists with or without the transgression of the law.

The wrath of God is against all unrighteousness until such unrighteousness is cleansed, not merely covered up by a legal maneuver. This was a misunderstanding that was left unanswered in the Old Testament because the devil could imagine such a legal transaction, since he refuses to acknowledge the existence of sin in the first place. Let us not fall into the same pride and foolishness. The wrath of the Almighty against sin was not fully appeased until a sacrifice was found to take away sins.

Blood is available. The blood is sufficient to wash the most wicked clean, but that does not answer the question of whether we will accept the washing. If we accept, the blood that cleanses the poison of sin will not spare us, for we, along with the devil, are the source of sin.

The truth is that the sacrifice of the Lamb was to provide the means by which the self could be assisted in its necessary relinquishment. This was done in many facets and on many levels. These were provided so that the self could see that even its best efforts to imitate the works of God could not suffice as a remedy. That in the end the self must take on a new nature, a new self, after the old has been cast off, a casting off that began with the first steps toward Home.

We must see that as many as have sinned outside the law, which in the apostle's concept is primarily the Jewish law, will perish in their own works done outside the law unless they turn from the deeds, they themselves hate. We must also see that as many as have sinned, knowing the requirements of the Jewish law, or any other concept of right and wrong, will perish in their sins, being judged by that law, unless they likewise turn from the deeds which they themselves hate.

That all men are equal in this judgment. That there are those who have heard the voice of God in the natural creation, and those who have heard the voice of God in some divine command, or as the voice of their own conscience. That in all these cases, those who hear the call to leave their own ways and take up the learning of the ways of God will earn God's approval only if they truly turn from their own selves.

That this learning must be an actual transformation of the character of the doer, not a mere outward conformity to an action which does not spring naturally from the self. That the degree to which this lesson is learned is measured by the degree to which the self learns the lesson about itself. That the only way to cease condemning others is to cease assuming that we have attained righteousness by conforming to God's law. In this way we escape our own condemnation.

That the moment we attribute virtue to ourselves for our works is the moment we condemn others for their lack of virtue and receive a quick reminder from God that a log has filled our vision that will destroy everything. It is also the moment when God will cease to attribute virtue to our actions, for it is the moment when we have stopped the journey to congratulate ourselves and once again build another garden of our own making.

For indeed, the day of judgment is coming, when all works will be judged by the justice of God, to see what kind they are, to see whether a little of paradise has gone into them, or whether they are again nothing more than the inspiration and effort of the self. To this end, the apostle strikes with his own flaming sword. He speaks to the Jew, but he means every man or woman who would ever come after him, who would embrace the righteousness of every law, every definition of what is truly right and good.

"You are a Jew," the apostle declares. That is, you are a keeper of the law, and that is not to say that you are not to keep the law. Modern Christian culture has been waging a war against works, beginning, as far as I can tell, about five hundred years ago with Martin

Luther. I have great respect for Luther and his insistence that faith must stand alone. The man set out to rescue the purposes of God from the religious men who were trampling them underfoot. A much-needed task from which many have benefited.

Luther was right. Faith must stand alone, but Luther's theology of "passive righteousness" abandoned the Jewish narrative altogether and sought to place faith outside the story of the Law. Luther said, "Therefore the totality of a Christian's wisdom is to be unacquainted with the law, ignore all works of active righteousness. (Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians) The result was what a brilliant man like Luther should have foreseen. Ceasing to do the righteous deeds of the law is as much a work as doing them. The law must be transcended, not destroyed, in our journey back to the garden.

"You rest in the law," the apostle continues, and this is obviously a huge problem. One is to rest in God, not in the law, and we are certainly not to glory in the law. This is where the condemnation comes from that law-keepers tend to heap on others. The damage is done by zealous people who have approximated a degree of righteousness for themselves. A righteousness they have gained from the law. The wreckage is overshadowed only by the damage done by the doctrines associated with the war on works. Both make a terrible mess of things, and the results are openly displayed all around us. They are there whether we choose to observe and speak the truth or not.

The self is at the bottom of this mess. We cannot boast that we have reached the Garden of Eden because we have tasted the righteousness of the law or

rejected the righteousness of the law. We have no right to profess a complete understanding of God's will or to claim His complete approval of us based on our works. All because we have been taught a law, however righteous that law may be.

The self cannot take confidence in itself, or in its leading the blind, in its shining a light in the darkness, in its teaching the foolish, or in its ability to teach all forms of knowledge and truth from the Law. Because the law does not have the ability to change us. Not really change us. Change us so that we can run on our own, or walk without falling, or swim without drowning.

The apostle's sword strikes and cuts away. Do you really practice what you preach? I mean really. The answer might be yes and no. Do you steal? Do you commit adultery? Do you honor idols? Do you dishonor God? Did circumcision really cut off more than a piece of flesh? That is the question. Because that is what the physical circumcision of the Jew was supposed to represent. Cutting off a piece of himself. An important piece. Did the cut really do anything other than cause discomfort to the body?

I suppose this is an argument that could go on all day, but the apostle is serious. He does not believe that you can accomplish this necessary cutting off of yourself by acquiring the righteousness of the law. The apostle will make his case more fully in chapter seven of his letter, but for now, let's look at the well-known difficulties of transforming compliance into established behavior.

Behavioral psychology has studied how habits are formed and maintained. The "habit formation"

model suggests that behaviors can become automatic through constant repetition and reinforcement, but of course the question remains. When is repetition and reinforcement sufficient for an entity to function on its own? Another level of questioning would be, how strong is this structure built through repetition and reinforcement? Can it withstand adversity? Hardship? Dislocation and loss?

Another way in which compliance becomes established behavior is through social norms. Individuals are more likely to obey laws in the first place, and to continue to obey them in the long run, if their peers obey them. The behavior becomes self-sustaining, but the same questions apply. How strong is the structure? Can the behavior survive the dissolution of the surrounding culture? Life and experience suggest otherwise. Remove an individual from his learned environment and he will conform to the new form that is imposed upon him.

Divine Command Theory attempts to make this transition from conformity to established behavior by impressing upon the self the certainty that the command comes directly from the mouth of God. This was true when the Law of Moses was given to the children of Israel. If this theory produces obedient people in the sense that they are truly changed, then the smoking mountain and the pillars of fire should have done the trick. The fact is that these terrifying displays of God's direct involvement in the Law did little to produce long-term behavioral change. This tells us all we need to know about the viability of the theory, even though it is still a favorite method of the revival preacher or the pastor thundering from the pulpit.

The fact that this is the theory most often used by men or women who wish to force compliance with their own theories and laws only tells us of the continuing deviousness of man. A cunning that persists even in the face of past failure. For there is no record in history to justify the hope that this theory will eventually work. The same can be said of Natural Law Theory, which attempts to transmit moral laws through community and the presentation of supposedly universal moral truths.

In sum, no sure method has been found for translating a moral obligation from a superficial compliance to a concrete action of the self. An action that springs from the will of the being. Every method has been tried, from the expression of divine will to rational understanding, to reflection on the divine image, to covenantal commitments, to emulation of ethical examples, to communal practices. Each of these frameworks provides a unique path through which lasting change can occur with little known success. What success there is seems unstable, supported by a surrounding structure that is itself subject to degradation.

The apostle concludes the chapter by focusing on the uncircumcised, those who have not had an important piece of physical skin cut from their bodies and proposes a scenario. What if the uncircumcised were able to fulfill the righteousness of the law through their natural knowledge given to them by their upbringing? Either through their conscience or through their abhorrence of their own unrighteousness.

The apostle does not say that the gentiles have achieved this kind of action, either in compliance or in

a clear transfer to established behavior, but he asserts that such a possibility exists. Therefore, since the possibility exists, it is clearly shown that the Law is not the end of the journey, since the chokepoint of the Law can be bypassed by other means. That one can achieve established behavior by other methods that do not use the law delegates the law to a role other than that of being the garden where the tree of life grows.

The apostle continues to strike with his sword. This means, he says, that the true Jew is not the Jew who has had his foreskin cut off but whose heart remains unchanged. The true Jew is the one who has had the cutting away of his heart, a necessary cutting away not of the flesh of the self, but of the essence of the self.

The operation of the Spirit of God on the self of man in a cutting away of his own being can never be performed by the hand of man. The self can make a sacrifice of itself and of that which is its highest value, but the death of the self cannot be a suicide. The work must be done by God through His grace and accessed by faith.

There is earthly praise given to those who attain the righteousness contained in the Law, for this righteousness is within the reach of the self. What the self will do with this praise is another test on the way to the tree of life. Will the self release this honor offered to itself and submit to the operation that only God can perform? An operation that must be performed if life is to be obtained for the self. The sword is ready to cut every path. A sword that cannot be avoided.

Finally, and this is what the modern church has forgotten in its war against works. God is not trying to

eliminate works, but the self. We are called to a land where the mighty works of God are done. The only reason our works are not allowed in is because we defile everything we touch. Once we are cleansed of ourselves and our sin, the real work has only begun. Let us never forget this.

Chapter 11 – The Scriptures

- Rom 3:1 What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit *is there* of circumcision?
- Rom 3:2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.
- Rom 3:3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?
- Rom 3:4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.
- Rom 3:5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? *Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance?* (I speak as a man)
- Rom 3:6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

Chapter 12 - Commentary on Romans 3:1-6

Having laid the foundation for his claim that no law can ever change the nature of the human self. A claim that the apostle will further develop in this chapter by establishing the utter corruption of the self, and finally in chapter seven with his closing arguments about the impossibility of there ever being a successful transition from compliance to a true absorption of the righteousness of the law into the human self.

Then what is the point of the law? asked the apostle. Why did God engage in these years of conversation and interaction with the Jewish nation? Why did God speak His law to the Jews if there was no chance of transforming the self into the image of God through the law?

There was every benefit, the apostle replied. First, there is the advantage of knowing at least some measure of the mind of God, of understanding at least a little of where we as fallen human beings have failed, and in which direction we must go if we are to extricate ourselves from our fallenness.

Granted, the human conscience also serves this purpose, and the record written in the created universe also speaks with the voice of God. These are valid methods of gaining access to God's will, but this understanding comes in weak and uncertain terms compared to the clarity that can be achieved by speaking directly with words that humans can understand.

The historical record is clear on this point. No nation or people group has done as much to advance and sustain itself in a civilized manner as the Jews. The

growth of Christianity after the resurrection of Christ owes its rapid expansion to the foundation provided by the Jewish tradition and scriptures.

The ancient cultures that surrounded the kingdom of ancient Israel, the Persians, the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Moabites, and the Phoenicians, to name a few. These great cultures have come and gone, and only the Jewish people remain as a viable and cohesive identity. Islam survives because of its connection to the Jewish tradition and is hindered in its civilizational progress in direct proportion to its hostility to that same connection.

The other thread of ancient civilization that has had a major influence on Christianity is Greek philosophy, rooted in Socrates and Plato. Greek philosophy is largely considered in academic circles to have arisen independently of Jewish thought. I, along with a few others, have our doubts. The greatest and most enduring influence of Greek philosophy may well be attributed to its engagement with, and exposure to, the writings of King Solomon in particular. The great king lived about 1000 BCE, and Socrates lived about 469-399 BCE. The Jewish Scriptures would have been almost complete by then, with Malachi written in 440-400 BCE. The idea that Socrates and Plato were not exposed to or influenced by King Solomon's writings seems unreasonable.

Andrew Simmons has this to say about Plato's Republic: "Plato tried to introduce his great leader as a man that uses his great human reasoning ability. He believed that man's wisdom could create a society that was perfectly just, but he did not want to admit that man could never be perfectly just".

Obviously, Plato disagrees with the apostle's conclusions, but the roots of the argument are hardly original to Plato. Here are three quotations, one each from Job, King David, and King Solomon. The arguments are undeveloped in the Old Testament but are expressed in terms of integrity being something that can dwell in a man's heart without being the man's heart. Plato may have simply disagreed, believing that the integrity of a man's heart must be established.

Job 27:5 God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me.

Psa 7:8 The LORD shall judge the people: judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity *that is* in me.

Pro 11:3 The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.

What seems much more likely is that the Greek philosophers were trying to improve upon vague concepts of the divine Deity that they may have picked up from exposure to the Jewish Scriptures. There is the whole question of how God was portrayed in the Old Testament. Let us say that the destruction of the Canaanite civilization does not sit well with the modern mind, and probably did not sit well with the Greek mind.

Improvement was needed, and Greek philosophy set out to provide the new version. That the early church later went along with it did not legitimize the effort. God, in His apparent folly, was much wiser than the wisdom of men. A point for which there are now well-founded theories even in the academic world.

Carl Jung correctly pointed out that the fool precedes the savior.

My own point of observation on this question of a Jewish foundation for civilization would be the time when we visited Indian ruins in New Mexico. These were ruins from the early fifteenth century. There was little to see but holes dug into the hillside with adobe structures protruding from them. I was struck by the smallness of the rooms, the bare-bones construction, and the primitive artwork on the ceiling of one cave.

What was on display was a culture completely divorced from any contact with the Jews and their scriptures, unlike the Asian cultures that were also within reach of Jewish influence and into which the apostle Thomas had penetrated in India. Here were men and women made in the image of God, living in holes carved in the rock wall, without the cuteness of the fictional Hobbits. Meanwhile, Europe, with its rich Jewish foundation, sailed the oceans, invented the golf ball, oil painting, the printing press, muzzle-loading rifles, whiskey, and parachutes, to name a few. The record is clear, the world is improved even on a basic civilizational level with the introduction of God's laws.

With this as the opening statement of chapter three, the apostle moves on to a subject that still puzzles Bible interpreters. What is this faith of God that could possibly be rendered ineffective by man's unbelief? The statement about faith is made in connection with the introduction of God's law, that is, the speaking of His words, which took place most prominently from Mt. Sinai. Obviously, God speaks, but what does God believe?

The question of whether God believes in anything is a subject on which the Old Testament is silent. As far as I can tell, there is not even a whisper anywhere. Both the commentators Barnes and Matthew Henry take God's faith to mean His faithfulness to His promises and prophecies. Yet the Greek word used for faith is translated by a wide margin as faith in most other places. Our problem is understanding what this faith of God is, not that the apostle said there was something in which God had faith.

Most of the difficulty stems from the fact that the apostle is raising a point that was not explored or addressed in the Old Testament. There were reasons for this, related to many things, but primarily because much of the mechanics and ultimate goals of the atonement were kept secret until the crucifixion. It is believed that this was done to keep the knowledge from the devil. Paul is the apostle who explores these realms with his visions of the third heaven. Paul does this primarily in Hebrews, but here is another case. No one else in the New Testament brings up the faith of God. At least to my knowledge. This is unique with Paul.

Since the apostle brings up the subject, I believe we can now talk about God's faith, and especially His faith in Himself. This then leads to the true answer of what God has faith in, which is endangered by man's unbelief expressed in time and space. God believed that man could and would obey His laws when He spoke them to man. This faith is obviously challenged when created man does not believe and obey. Nor could this faith be validated after created man's disobedience unless created man himself could both conform to the

law of God and actually do it. A premise the apostle is in the process of demolishing.

Which leaves us with the faith of God in jeopardy from the perspective of time and space. Which also brings us back to the theory of penal substitution and the stranglehold it has on Christian thought with its claim to total primacy. This is what keeps us from seeing the faith of God, because penal substitution claims that the righteousness of Christ is established by a legal conformity to the law.

This would require the existence of doubt under penal substitution as to whether Christ would fulfill the righteousness of the law, an idea totally incompatible with the divine. For God, to believe is to remove all doubt. Therefore, once again, Penal substitution is not an end-all, do-all theory.

We know this because the righteousness of Christ preceded the law and is only verified, not established, by the law. This is what is meant in the biblical sense when we say that Christ fulfilled the law.

This brings us back to God's faith. If God believed that man, that is, man in his humanity, with his physical weakness, with his limited understanding, and with his natural appetites and inclinations intact, could do what the righteousness of the Law required. Then, obviously, created man, both in his fall and in his pre-fall state, has failed God, and God's faith is called into question unless a man can be found who will neither fall nor need redemption.

That man was found in the uncreated Christ Jesus, who became fully man, both fully human, and fully divine. Christ's divinity is what makes the

difference in whether he fell or not, but here we must tread carefully to stay in line with the apostle's argument.

Penal substitution claims that the only issue is legal commitment to the righteousness of the law. That is, the righteousness contained in the law must be legally fulfilled and thus transferred to the one who obeys. But Christ was righteous before He faced the law as a man. He was tested, yes, but the righteousness of the law was never transferred to Him, for He already possessed that righteousness.

It follows that the new man, the new creature born in the image of God, receives this inbuilt righteousness not by legal transfer, but by divine birth as a son or daughter of God. That is why the old creation must be born again, of water and the Spirit, Jesus said. This is how the righteousness of Christ is transferred to created man. The transfer is by gift or grace, not by works that grasp at or works that demand a reward, but the transfer is real. The new man is now doing the works of God.

This is where the whole merit mess comes into Christian thinking. Man is seen as needing merit, which is true. We need merit because we do unrighteous deeds, and we do unrighteous deeds because of a deficiency in ourselves. No number of right choices will overcome this deficiency. Neither will the transfer of merit from another person overcome the deficiency.

What we need is what Christ had. A divine nature that does not sin at all. A divine nature that, when tested, does not disobey because it is righteous. We disobey and then believe that accumulating merit

will restore our integrity. We can indeed collect merit and cherish that merit, but the journey is not complete until we have become like Christ.

Both the Catholic and Protestant faiths struggle to extricate themselves from this quagmire. Catholics collect merit from their own good deeds, which are obviously considered insufficient - at least for most people.

The saints, on the other hand, have spent time in hardship and disciplined living, and thus accumulate much more merit than is needed to save their own souls. These merits then become available for transfer to other needy souls. Mother Mary obviously has a bushel of extra merits because she bore the holy child and so many prayers are offered to her. I am not sure where Christ fits into the Catholic picture. The answers seem to vary.

Protestants, on the other hand, do not believe in saints or in praying to the Virgin Mary. They do, however, believe in the transfer of merits. They believe that Christ is the only one to pray to, and the only one to ask for this transfer of merit. Everything is done based on faith, not good works, which means that anything that might make you look more holy should be avoided.

This is not exactly true in practice, but the idea is always on the horizon. Any work that might make you look righteous, it is thought, might undermine your faith and should be spurned. This is because lack of faith hinders both the transmission of merit and the maintenance of the transmitted merit. A strange circular firing squad soon develops in which good works are the victims.

This is where the Anabaptists broke with both Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century. They rejected any salvation that did not result in the actual transfer of a new character. They looked not for merits, but for a new life from God capable of producing good works.

As Leonhard Scheimer wrote in 1527, a man who was beheaded for his faith, “no one can drink it, (meaning the cup which Christ drank) without his neighbor taking note that he is totally changed.”

Michael Schneider, imprisoned in the castle at Passau in Bavaria wrote, “Those whose sins have been forgiven should live no longer in sin. This is what Jesus Christ, our Lord, teaches us. Those who fall back into sin break their covenant with God. Even greater pain and suffering will be theirs—and their loss will be forever.”

A south German Anabaptist wrote in the mid-1500s. “Oh God Father, on heaven’s throne, you have prepared for us a crown if we stay in your Son, if we suffer with him the cross and the pain, if we surrender ourselves to him in this life and if we struggle continually to enter his community. You tell us what we need to know, through your Son, if we have community with him...You have your beloved Son to us to be our head. He has marked out for us the road we should take, so that we would not lose our way and find ourselves outside of his community...His flesh and his blood, the food he gave us, must be understood like this: In eating his flesh and blood, the Spirit brings us into community with him...God redeems us together with Christ. He serves us through his Son. His Son is

the rock and the cornerstone of the house of his commune...”

An unnamed Anabaptist wrote in the early 1500s: “Look at Christ the friendly knight! Look at the captain! The battle, when you come to this place, is fierce. The enemies—the world, the flesh, sin, the devil, and death—close in around you. But leap to your captain’s side! He will kill the enemies! He will help you out of all distress.”

(quotes are from *The Secret of the Strength*, by Paul Hoover)

Were they perfect? Did they think of themselves as perfect? Had they arrived at some perfected garden and a total perfection of the flesh? I think not. They failed. They struggled, but they understood that the Law was not a place of rest. That the Law was not an oasis where they could accumulate merit for themselves even by the works of Christ, but a voice calling all believers into the perfection of Christ, a perfection which was a thousand and a thousand light years beyond the righteousness of the Law.

Our unrighteousness and our unbelief, the apostle rightly asserts, does nothing but display this righteousness of Christ in ever greater glory. This is not a legal glory brought about by a legal transaction that fulfills the mere legal obligations of the law. If this were true, then the obligations of the law would be satisfied, either in full or in part, and God could no longer judge mankind for their sins, even though those sins would never cease.

This is a false construction of the apostle's thinking. Christ's righteousness as a man was

contained in Himself. The righteousness of Christ is the righteousness of the divine Father.

Our acceptance of this righteousness in any measure or form requires faith and the renunciation of our sins and ourselves. We must agree with God until the sword at the gate of the garden, which cuts in all ways and in all manners, leaves nothing of us.

Chapter 13 – The Scriptures

Rom 3:7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

Rom 3:8 And not *rather*, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

Rom 3:9 What then? are we better *than they*? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

Rom 3:11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Rom 3:12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

Rom 3:13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Rom 3:14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

Rom 3:15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:

Rom 3:16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:

Rom 3:17 And the way of peace have they not known:

Rom 3:18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Rom 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Chapter 14 - Commentary on Romans 3:7-20

The apostle now moves on to a counterargument that was raised against the apostle's teachings during his ministry. This is what was said. If man's sin makes God look better the worse the sin gets, then should we not go about sinning to the utmost? Would God not be pleased, since it would make Him look greater and greater? This argument was used to discredit the apostle's ministry by showing the crazy extremes to which Paul's gospel would lead the believer.

The apostle responds to the objection by saying that this kind of thinking is worthy of condemnation. This is true because there are several levels of misunderstanding involved. First is the idea that any of our actions increase God's goodness in the first place. God's goodness is already complete, and what we do through our sin is make God look better and better in our clouded and muddy world. Our skies obscure what has always been there. Removing the cover does not increase the brightness of God, it only increases our view of Him.

Secondly, do we really think that God wants an increase in sin to make Him look better? This speaks to His heart and is a high and grave insult to the character of God. Mankind, by sinning, does nothing but demonstrate how corrupt it is and how willing it is to misunderstand everything that pertains to the goodness and righteousness of God.

The apostle then proceeds to use this point as a basis for defining the total depravity of the self in greater detail. It should be noted that there is immense controversy in Christian thought as to whether man is

totally depraved. At issue is the question of goodness and the theological arguments surrounding that question. There is agreement, I believe, on the rule that like responds to like. In other words, if man does not contain some measure of goodness, he cannot respond to the goodness of God. Goodness can only respond to goodness.

Does fallen man contain any measure of goodness? That is the question. If the answer is negative, then the Reformed faith is correct in asserting that goodness must be implanted in man before he can respond to God. This implantation cannot occur if there is any consent or desire on the part of man, for otherwise the goodness is corrupted by the inclusion of man's non-goodness, which means that even his choices are corrupted. This would mean that there is no such thing as free will in the true sense of the word. On the other hand, in order for free will and free choice to exist, man must possess a certain amount of goodness even in his fallen state.

There are many ways in which those who believe in freewill solve this problem. One is to claim that the apostle did not really mean that man is totally corrupt. I would not be in that camp, but I do dispute what the apostle means by man. Total depravity in the Reformed sense means the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, down to his physical feet and hands. I do not agree.

I believe there is a distinction between the self of man and the rest of him. We are more than our essence. We have a body that was made by God and that did not choose to disobey God, because the body cannot choose anything. The body desires and has

passions and was greatly corrupted in those desires by the fall, but the body did not participate in the fall by its own choice. The body had no choice in the sense that Eve's hand chose to reach out and eat the apple. Therefore, the body retains a measure of its original goodness, corrupted as it may be by man's fall.

I do not see how it can be otherwise, or how else we can retain all the teachings of the apostle. No other explanation makes sense to me. The self, the essence of man, is totally corrupt. The self is attached to the body and has been given the feelings and desires of the body as its property. This attachment was made by the will of God, without the consultation of the self. Therefore, there is something that the self always has that responds to the goodness of God. Namely, the physical body, which God called good in creation. Only a total loss of humanity would negate this reality.

Such a condition apparently occurred in the days of Noah, when the angels of God mated with the daughters of men, and giants were born of their union. I say "apparently" because there is no unanimous agreement in Christian thought on this subject. It depends, I suppose, on how much credence you give to the book of Enoch, which is quoted at least once in Jude. I believe that the theory is correct, and that these were the Nephilim, creatures who had lost their humanity, and who had also lost their chance of redemption, for only a self that owns humanity can respond to the salvation of God.

The apostle swings and cuts with his sword. The body retains its goodness, but the essence of man is not righteous. There is no one who, on his own, following his own instincts and listening to his own

reasoning, would find the way back to the garden. Every man, left to his own devices, loses himself, and even with the instructions God gives him, he perverts them and leaves behind him utter ruin.

The essence of man is useless to God. There is nothing in man that adds anything to God or contains anything that God needs. There is no one who does anything good out of his own inclination. There is only one reason we would be called back to the garden, only one reason we would be offered life, and that is from the good heart of God, from the compassion that comes from His own righteous and perfect Self.

The essence of man is an open grave, a rattle of bones as he moves, the stench of death heavy in the air. When man opens his mouth to speak, only lies and false promises come out. He speaks and nothing happens. He shouts and nothing happens. There is bitterness in his thoughts, and his mind itself can only think falsehood. The poison of the serpent oozes from under his lips.

The feet of man's body are commanded to act quickly. They are commanded to hunt down the innocent and shed the blood of those who have done no wrong. The body is corrupted by self and sin, not the other way around.

The heart of man leaves only destruction and misery in its wake. When he seeks the things he desires, there is no righteousness in his thoughts, not even the shadow of heaven can be found. Peace does not follow his actions, even the good ones. Everything the self touches is corrupted.

The self of man fears only for itself, for its security, for its gratification, and for its self-aggrandizement. The self of man is empty, and nothing can fill the yawning chasm, not even the Law of God can shovel in enough goodness to quench the fires of hell. What the Law does is to bring the goodness of God within man's reach to demonstrate that the self cannot handle it without defiling it, and that the self cannot even begin to duplicate the works of God of its own violation. At best, there is a copy, an imitation, an attempt to be like the Supreme God.

The yawning grasp that man exercised in the garden when he reached for the forbidden fruit in his desire to rise higher, to climb the mountain of God, is the same desire he exercises now whenever the goodness of God is within reach. There is nothing good in man's building of a garden, even when he uses the righteousness of the law. It is just another attempt to make himself like God again, when he is completely unlike the Almighty.

Therefore, the apostle says, the whole world is guilty before God. They are guilty when they act, when they talk, when they humiliate themselves, and when they try to do good. They show for all to see that they are lying, that they are not what they say they are. They are not the best, the highest, or the noblest.

The self will never justify itself with the deeds of the law, because practicing the deeds of the law only makes things worse. In this way, the purpose of the law is brought into focus. The law does not exist to make people righteous, but to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. The law was given to show what men refuse

to see, what men refuse to say, that they are totally and utterly corrupt.

What does this mean? How does this translate into the right action? The answer since Martin Luther has been, in one way or another, to stop doing good works. This, and this alone, opens the way for a person to believe, we are told. Any appearance of good works is vigorously attacked and condemned as filthy rags. The implication, at least, is that any good works under our control should be banished and burned at the stake on sight.

This was Martin Luther's interpretation of "passive righteousness," which Luther called the place where faith truly stands alone. I guess the first argument would be whether faith should stand alone. This certainly sounds like Paul's position based on his writings. The position was so strong, Luther claimed, that he added a little line in his German translation about "faith alone" in verse 28 of the above scriptures. (allein durch den glauben).

This point, if it had ever been raised, was wiped out in the early church era by the Apostle James' pesky comment that Abraham was also justified by his works when he sacrificed his son Isaac on the mountaintop. Ever since, the ball has been tossed back and forth between Paul and James, with people choosing sides on the basis of, one assumes, their love for good works. That is, the degree to which they find righteous actions compatible with their upbringing and training.

What has been lost is the direction in which Paul was going. You can argue about this if you like, but I think there is a place where faith stands alone. I say this for two reasons. First, since Paul brought the faith

of God into the equation, God clearly had faith before He performed His mighty works in creation. As they say, things come back to where they started. If God's faith stood alone before creation, then to complete the circle, man's faith must also stand alone before he begins to act righteously.

Secondly, Luther insisted on this position based on simple logic. This is the logic. If man's self defiles things when he disobeys the law of God, then those works must cease, and if man's self defiles things when he obeys the laws of God, then those works must also cease. There must be a place where a person stands completely free of works and is able to truly believe.

This is what Luther said, "Therefore I strip myself of all active righteousness, mine as well as that of God's law, and embrace only the passive righteousness, the righteousness of grace, based on God's mercy and His forgiveness of sins."

(Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians)

The question is, was Martin Luther the Reformer faithful to Paul's vision of faith? I believe that Luther was, but that he was wrong in his application. The definition of "passive righteousness" is correct, but it is applied in the wrong place in Luther's scheme of things. Luther places "passive righteousness" at the starting point of the journey back to the garden, not at the cross, which comes after the law.

In order for this explanation to make sense, let us go back and see what the goal is for achieving "passive righteousness. The self must cease from all works. This could be called the death of the self. Man becomes completely unproductive. This is indeed the biblical goal, no question about it, and another reason

why Luther correctly sees the need for "passive righteousness.

How then does a man come to his death? That is the next question. Since this death must be modeled in some way and connected to the death of Christ, the first answer would be that since the death of Christ was not suicide, the death of the self cannot be a suicide. Wouldn't that be exactly what we have, if the self could bring about its own death by ceasing to do works, good or bad? My answer would be yes, and that is why Luther has things wrong. One does not begin the journey to faith by ceasing from works.

Here is where Luther's war between faith and works, instead of faith and the law, makes its first foray into futility. Luther abandons the law while still using the language and definitions of the law. He challenges us to understand the concept of "passive righteousness" by using our works, or lack thereof, as our measure of progress. We will never arrive at the glories contained in the gospel by believing in man's works instead of God's work. In this case, the work of Christ on the cross.

By "passive righteousness," Luther means a life lived without works, which under the law was a choice to do or not to do. Luther uses the law for guidance while trying to kill both self and the law. Granted, Luther achieved the appearance of "faith alone" by cutting away the visible works. But the method used is not Pauline. Not doing good works to leave faith alone is, by the definition of the law, a work of man. The maneuver eviscerates the law by the means of the law, which Paul never did.

Faith is left standing alone, but supported by a man's lack of works. At any moment a man can continue with his works and faith is no longer alone. Such weak hands cannot destroy the law by human action. Luther should have followed the path that Paul took to the cross, where "passive righteousness" comes into full glory, not as the work of man, but as the work of God.

Within Christianity, the war between faith and works has never been settled and will never be settled because it is the wrong war. The issue is not works, but where they come from the self or from God. The Pauline action is one of defending God and degrading the self.

Paul moves toward the cross within the framework of the law, and when he speaks of faith, Paul, unlike Luther, stays within the law. This is what the active voice dictates. The hearing agent must either act or not act, both of which are active responses to an active voice. Hearing God cannot produce a passive result, and faith is not possible without hearing God. We are left with the utter impossibility of gaining "faith alone" by doing nothing.

God's response remains the same, the urgency increased by our actions. There is a way to deal with the self which is the cross of Christ. We cannot crucify ourselves, although some have tried. We cannot torture ourselves to death, though some have tried. We cannot cut off bodily limbs and expect deliverance. Jesus' words to this effect were simply an attempt to show us the absurdity of constantly blaming our bodies for our sins. We cannot put an end to ourselves, but God can. He has declared us crucified with His Son.

The cross is the place where faith without resulting action occurs, because at the cross faith is based on a completed action of God. To cease from our own righteous works before the cross in order to obtain a "passive righteousness," as Luther attempted, is to accept the granting of God's righteousness that depends on our actions. That is, to stop doing our own works. We are then back to works saving us.

This problem is probably what drove either Luther or his followers into the Calvinist camp. There the attempt is made to get around this dilemma by limiting the granting of righteousness at the cross to a few select souls predestined from eternity past. This only deepens the confusion. For now, faith is in the crosshairs. By this reasoning, faith must also have been predestined, otherwise faith is a work, since faith is defined here as doing nothing. Add to this that the righteousness granted at the cross is not literal in this understanding, but forensic, and we are in an even worse quagmire.

The truth is that at the cross, God will accept the act of faith from the self, just as God has always accepted faith. That act was and is a decision by the self to trust in a work already done. What God will not accept at the cross is what He has not accepted all along, any work of the self, completed or uncompleted. Thus, we have the granting of a "passive righteousness," something that has not happened before. This means that at the cross, all future works of the self become completely the works of God. The works are completely freed from any contaminating influence of the self.

One might immediately ask the question. How do you know if you have reached this high mountain of grace? How can this kind of faith be verified? To which my first answer would be that this is why the Scriptures emphasize fruits and not works in any evaluation of the status of the new creation. Historical Christianity has occasionally flirted with various kinds of spiritual experiences that claim to produce or verify a total eradication of the flesh. I am not in that camp, nor am I even close to being convinced. John Wesley and, I believe, Charles Finney, great evangelists as they were, did more harm than good with their teachings on the eradication of the flesh.

We have ourselves until the work of God is fully accomplished in our being, and only God knows where that line will be. What is certain is that our faith and trust can be fully placed in a God who will not rest until this transformation is complete.

I am certain that Martin Luther inadvertently led us to the place where "passive righteousness" exists. What should follow is the ability to produce the works of God without fear of contamination from the self. The question I ask is why this position could not be attained simply on the basis of faith, and all the theoretical and forensic acts that go into the legal transfer of the righteousness of Christ to the believer be applied here.

At present, the righteousness of Christ is largely seen as a legal righteousness that is transferred without any spiritual or material substance being transferred. That is, in terms of any works that appear after the transaction. Obviously, I think there is something wrong with this concept, but the concept is already

there and apparently fully accepted in Christian thought.

Why not apply a legal position to our death on the cross, a position that would be transferred to the believer without any works? In this case, the works would be non-works, meaning that one does not have to stop working in order to possess the position. This is my opinion. This is a legal transfer that requires no action on our part. What we would lose is, among other things, our fear of works.

Because right now there is a deep fear of works in Christian thought. I would even say that the fear approaches the level of terror, and not without reason. Terrible damage has been done by zealots who were on fire for God and good works. Things have gotten so bad that there are whole movements going on and churches are being filled, places where all they preach is love and no works.

They are really parasitic places that feed off the great Christian culture that underlies the West. These movements cannot by themselves produce quality lives. Things have gotten to the point where revival is virtually impossible, because revival is born and birthed through the preaching of the laws of God.

We need a revival. God knows we need revival, but I doubt we are going to get it with the direction we are going.

Chapter 15 – The Scriptures

- Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
- Rom 3:22 Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:
- Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
- Rom 3:24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
- Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
- Rom 3:26 To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
- Rom 3:27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.
- Rom 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.
- Rom 3:29 *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:
- Rom 3:30 Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.
- Rom 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Chapter 16 - Commentary on Romans 3:21-31

What has now been revealed to all men is the righteousness of God, which is manifested in Christ Jesus, and has been laid bare for all to see and to believe. The righteousness of Christ is a righteousness not established by the law. The righteousness of Christ exists and existed before the law and completely apart from the law. This righteousness has been testified to in the past by the prophets who have spoken of its coming to mankind.

The angels who descended from heaven on the eve of His birth sang joyfully to the shepherds, announcing the birth of the child who would bring righteousness, life, and forgiveness to mankind. This is the Son of God, a Son presented to all mankind, to all nations and to all peoples. The righteousness of God is no longer available only to one family or to the descendants of one man, who was Abraham in the apostle's world. All are called to believe in His name.

All men are called, the apostle asserts, because all men are sinners. All men left to their own devices will not find their way back to the Garden of Eden. Even those men and women who do begin the journey back to the Garden, whether through the prompting of their conscience, the voice of God in nature, or the divine revelation of the Law, do not actually have the power to become righteous. That is, they do not do and act in a way that is pleasing to God of their own accord.

Only Christ, of all the men who have walked on this earth, has this testimony. God spoke from heaven to confirm this reality. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Christ Himself made a similar statement when He said, "I always do the things that please Him." Christ did the will of God. It was a life lived out of His nature, not by conforming to any law given by God or conceived by the mind of man.

What does this mean? Is the journey back to the Garden of Eden in vain? Are we forever condemned to a sinful self? Obviously not, but how to continue the journey according to the Law is the question. This is where the disagreement lies. The Protestant world has been at war with works for many centuries. I am less familiar with the Catholic and Orthodox versions of Christianity, but they seem more amenable to a Christian maintaining a heartfelt effort directed at good works. From my vantage point, those works seem deeply corrupted by the self, and there is the problem again. Are Protestants justified in destroying works altogether?

My answer would be no. There is no biblical reason for man to stop striving to do the right thing, even with the full glory of the gospel revealed to us. For if faith is the justifying factor, which it is, why must works cease for faith to flourish? Sure, if they are useless works of the self, but that is a secondary point. My question is about the self trying to do the works of God. Just on the surface of things, the requirement that righteous works end for faith to exist is itself a work.

To me, this is the great flaw in the Protestant belief system. This is their hidden unbelief in the full light of faith. This sounds like a strange thing to say, considering that Protestants claim to believe in faith alone. But it is true. Why else would they demand, as Martin Luther did, that righteous works cease?

It is the self that needs to be defanged, not righteous works. To this end, the apostle presents the clarity of the work of Christ, not to destroy righteous works, but to free them from the power of the self and the law. The whole structure of the journey back to the Garden of Eden remains. This includes the initial decision of the self to embrace righteousness, motivated by little more than a benefit to the self. That God would stoop so low is, I admit, a great wonder, but he does. He invites us to begin the journey home because it is better for us to embark on the journey than to remain where we are. The hell we create becomes the reason why we should give up the works that create our hell.

None of this structure changes with faith. What the sword swings at is our faith in ourselves. Not in going up the mountain. Not in choosing to sacrifice our present desires for the best that is in God or the best that we can grasp now. Those things remain. The desire to work is built into the physique of man. To lie on one's bed when one is perfectly able to get up and to take comfort in the works of God from the warmth of the covers is questionable behavior. But is this not what the "faith alone" scenario teaches?

Probably the answer would be no, but my response is that there seems to be no structure within the Protestant world by which good works can be maintained while keeping a firm grip on our faith in God. This is my question. Why not give up the war on works? Why do righteous works destroy faith? Are righteous works so powerful that they destroy everything? Is it not really the self that destroys everything and not the works? I would suggest that the

apostle is making this very case, not advocating the destruction of righteous works.

To this end, the apostle begins to lay out the details of the work that Christ did in his redemption. These are the works of God done to clear the way home for every soul who seeks righteousness and true holiness. The Jewish law was not the Garden of Eden, nor will any man-made law be a Garden of Eden. The serpents always return, invited by the corruption of our own being. This is another like that responds to like, and for which there is no known earthly remedy.

The justification offered to us, the apostle asserts, is by faith, and by faith alone. The works of righteousness do not add anything, only that they are important to us. One could bring up the apostle James at this point as additional evidence of the usefulness of righteous works, but that just makes things go around and around with no conclusion. The purpose of the journey is to escape corruption, and it is not logical to claim incorruption by faith if the corruption on the ground is not affected in some way. Works are very important to the seeker of immortality and eternal life. Intensely. This intensity only underscores the need to insist on the claim that "faith alone" is the justifying factor.

I ask again. Why must the seeker stop seeking righteousness in order to believe? Is this not works disguised as non-works, which are the same under the law? Is not the confidence associated with any works shifted from God to man? I would answer in the affirmative. The call to faith will be an ever-present call until we cross the great chasm of death, and perhaps beyond.

The constantly insistent and urgent message of the gospel is that no one does this by his own strength, will, or plan. The gospel belongs entirely to God, both in conception and in execution. This is God's salvation. He is the one who placed in us the desire for goodness, for health, and for healing. Without the record of creation placed in us, a record that cannot be corrupted unless we cease to be human, we would not even know that the hell of our own creation is not our home.

We are justified freely by grace, the apostle asserts. This is not a legal justification conferred by a legal paper from a legal judge, but the conferring of justification by nature. We have been put in Christ. This is obviously a spiritual position, not one that has been fully attained in practice. All attempts to claim complete perfection of the self in this life have always failed. Which brings us back to faith. For one of the characteristics of faith is that faith is placed in something that is not yet fully seen with natural eyes.

To say that the righteousness of Christ is a legal righteousness that is fully imparted at the moment of faith is to nullify faith. This is true because legal righteousness is fully imparted at the moment it is given. We never have to see this legal righteousness in this life, and apparently, we will never see the actual righteousness in the next life either, although theologians seem to be fuzzy on the issue.

The righteousness of Christ, as a righteousness contained in His nature, does not result in an immediate appearance in the physical world. Instead, faith increasingly becomes sight, but the point is that any questioning of the final position will derail the journey. The obstacles to be overcome in our practical

transformation into the image of Christ are simply too great to be overcome without faith. They cannot be overcome by confidence in our own works.

There is no measure to which God has not gone, the apostle claims, in his work to accomplish our redemption. Christ is even presented as the "atoning sacrifice. An image based on the Old Testament sacrificial system, in which an innocent being is sacrificed in place of the guilty, thus satisfying the wrath of the offended deity. This is, to say the least, a bloodthirsty view of God, requiring the shedding of innocent blood to cool his wrath. But this is the picture presented, and despite the objections to the contrary, I accept the premise that there is always truth in what God does.

I see no reason to depart from this point. God clearly said in the Old Testament that He was pleased with the death of His Son. However mean that may seem, it is not a misrepresentation. The error in our understanding lies in the legal aspects of this appeasement.

I reject the whole legal argument. There was nothing legal about it because the transgression was not legal at its core. The commandment did not create sin. The commandment defined sin. The wrath of God was real, and the satisfaction of God's wrath was real, but the legal aspect was never verified by God. That was the trap for Satan to fall into, and he fell into it. The shame is that theologians followed Satan's example instead of expecting something better from God.

The better thing, the apostle explains in much more detail in Hebrews, was not the legal satisfaction for sin, but the cleansing of sin, which could never be

achieved by legal maneuvers. This changes the whole question of how the sinner comes to the atonement in terms of appeasing the wrath of God. With the legal angle, the wrath of God was the only thing that needed to be dealt with, and the wrath was satisfied, so end of story. Which does not quite work, so there was the whole construction of the limited atonement mess.

On the other hand, with the cleansing of sin being the purpose of the shed blood, or at least the highest purpose. Which is what I believe. What we are left with is the potential for the cleansing of the sins of each individual sinner, for which we all qualify, because the potency of sin has been dealt with. The blood of Christ was tested against the essence of sin in the Garden of Gethsemane when Christ drank the cup.

The blood was found to completely cleanse and remove sin, which means every single sin the sinner may commit qualifies. A cleansing that does not take effect on the sinner unless the sinner desires such cleansing. What remains is the work of God, fully done, fully complete, and fully tested against sin. This remains for eternity whether the sinner chooses to access that work by faith or not.

The gospel and the works of the gospel are not things that God imposes on man, but a freely given offer for which the sinner does not need to perform any works in order to obtain them. They are accessible by faith alone. This glaring and blazing truth remains clear and bright throughout the journey back to the Garden of Eden. Works are not the issue, for works cut both ways.

The sinner can choose to produce none, settle down, and try to enjoy life as best he can, without

concern for righteousness. The results are what they are and vary from individual to individual. But the question is never in doubt. This version will produce a hell on earth without any deviation.

The other option is to turn toward home and away from what we love, which is our own works and the creation of our own hands. The journey will test us, not to mention the Word of God, and the sword will cut us in every direction. The only shelter is found in going through and reaching the other side of the law. Unless we settle down somewhere and stop the journey God has put us on to create our own garden, or some version of it. To settle down, one must look down, away from the self-curing light cast by the eternal fields to the ground from which we eke out our meager living.

To leave hell is the impulse left in us by the goodness of God. To settle down is a curse for which the self will pay an eternal price of destruction and everlasting woe, however wrapped the self may be in the garments of pious and created righteousness. Overwhelmed with love of self, the one who paused to build his own garden will, with the fallen Adam and Eve, procure fig leaves to cover his own nakedness. The only option offered by God is to leave ourselves once more and face the dazzling light of heaven. Nothing we have is ours, faith cries in our ear. Nothing unless God gives it to us.

Absolutely nothing. Even if we stop on the path of life and righteousness, we will gain nothing. In fact, the consequences of doing nothing will quickly overwhelm us. What drives us is a divine movement that draws us toward the holy heights and toward being purified by our faith of ourselves. In the end, the work

of God will be completed by holy hands. We must believe this or the journey will be derailed.

The result is that no boasting is allowed. This is not a theory whose equilibrium God tries to maintain in a vacuum. It is the brutal reality of life. The only thing that keeps our journey toward righteousness from becoming a train wreck is keeping our eyes of faith firmly fixed on the goodness of God. Any attempt to avoid the wreckage through inaction, and hell will surely find us. This is a lesson that is driven home daily. Man cannot find his way home without the directions God has freely given to all men. God is not the God of a chosen people. God is the God of righteousness, and He has completely cleared the way for our journey back to the Garden of Eden.

This is not to say that the price will not be high, for it will be. The sacrifice required is still the best you have, and what does a man have that he values more than his own life? The result is not a do-nothing faith, a life with the fires of hell only slightly dimmed. The result met by an embrace of the truth that begins with a willing presentation of that which is of great value to the consuming fires that burn from the throne of God. This has its own reward. The fires of hell return nothing, but the Spirit of God leads to eternal life.

Nothing born of matter is lost, but nothing of our world will ever live unless it dies first. This is the inviolable law of the eternal worlds. Nothing will go beyond time and space without death. This is a death we cannot die. This is a death we can never will, but it has been willed for us, it has been done for us. Believe and go and tomorrow put one foot in front of the other, for what you seek has been found, and what you long

for has been accomplished. Heaven is indeed on the horizon. The first rays are even now breaking over the mountains of our world.

In our journey past the law, the apostle says, we have not abolished the created righteousness of the law. What we have done is to reach out and grasp the uncreated righteousness of the living Son of God. We have done this by faith. We did so because the gift was too great to earn or to acquire with wages. Only grace could give such a treasure to such an unworthy vessel.

Chapter Seventeen - The Scriptures

- Rom 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
- Rom 4:2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.
- Rom 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
- Rom 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
- Rom 4:5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
- Rom 4:6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
- Rom 4:7 *Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
- Rom 4:8 Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.
- Rom 4:9 *Cometh* this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.
- Rom 4:10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.
- Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:
- Rom 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised.

Rom 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Rom 4:14 For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

Chapter 18 - Commentary on Romans 4:1-14

Having laid so much of the foundation upon which the presentation of the gospel is given, the apostle launches into a heartfelt exaltation of this journey home made by faith. A journey that takes place completely and unhindered in the life of a sinner who has accepted the righteousness of God and deeply desires to possess it.

For here is the burning question. Why should we do good works if they don't earn us righteousness? Well, God has already answered that question, apparently in anticipation of the question, but more likely because we wouldn't start the journey back to the Garden of Eden if there was nothing in it for us. God has set it up so that good works benefit us. Good works improve our lives. Good works make things better for us and for those we love. Even learning to love someone other than ourselves improves things in the long run.

These are all conclusions and insights that we would not and do not come to on our own. No amount of searching would reveal them to us unless God had already done so through His own violation. We would not find the right thing unless God wanted us to find the right thing. Once the right thing is found, the first understanding of sacrifice is found. Choosing the right thing that has been revealed to us will require us to accept something and act on something that we would not do on our own. This will cost us, but we do it because of the benefit to ourselves.

So, sacrifice costs us and benefits us at the same time. First, we give and then we receive. The transaction is not very clearly defined at the beginning,

and perhaps never is, so the concept of promise is introduced. We are promised, that is, we give something that we have, something that we love and may love dearly, and something better will be given back to us.

The promise may not be so clear to us. We may not see exactly what the result will be, but the promise is there. Where we have been led now, by the hand of God, is the possibility of faith. There is this new thing before us that we have not thought of, that we do not necessarily like, but if we do this thing that we are told, life will be better. Will we believe it? Will we believe enough to act on that belief?

The apostle asserts that our lives are improved the moment we decide to believe, which means to fully commit, because belief precedes even the conscious will to act. We only see the action and feel the improvement when the action is complete, hence the room for misunderstanding. Are we blessed because we believed or because we acted? The belief is hidden from our view, so we are inclined to think that the action came because we chose to act, but the action did not, the apostle asserts.

Faith came first. We chose to believe before we acted. When we chose to believe, we chose something that was not of ourselves, in the sense that we didn't think of doing it, otherwise what is there to change about what we are doing to get a blessing? What we miss is that at the moment of belief the act is already complete, because it is complete on God's side, which is the obvious point, but the act is also complete on our side. We have the capacity in our position, through the good things given to us by God, namely our physical

and mental strength, to complete the action. Otherwise, it is all a moot point.

The strength we have within us to accomplish this task is not of our own making. It is a gift given to us by God. This strength is there at the moment of faith, even though we have not yet performed the action. When we do the action, we think it is our strength, but it is not. If we have not been given the power to do it, we could not do it. There is nothing in us that has the power to complete the task and receive the blessing. We are using borrowed strength. Therefore, there is no justification for us in action, but only in faith.

Well, we object, we should at least get some credit for choosing to obey. After all, we chose to obey, and the answer is that you get credit for believing, but not for obeying. Obedience has its own blessing for you. The obedience and the resulting blessing is yours. This will be your motivation to continue and the basis for the question that God wants answered. Now that you have tasted His righteousness. A very small dose, to be sure, but a taste. Do you like His ways more than your ways, because this is just the beginning.

The next round will follow the same path. Only the intensity of the rounds will increase, and the intensity of the sacrifices will increase because now you have more to give. So why should we obey God even if the action does not justify us? Well, the answer is still the same. Because it benefits you. The alternative is very clear. Do you want to live in a hell of your own making? Do you want to live with yourself? Are the wages of sin worth the price to you? There is simply no

way out of the journey except to live in hell. Will that be the choice?

Obviously, these are primitive arguments, and one who has not even heard of Christ could pursue them. This is precisely the point the apostle made in the first chapter. The journey can be begun, but it cannot be continued for long, and it certainly cannot be completed without an encounter with the Son of God.

Meanwhile, the apostle returns to the beginning of things to note that this has always been the way God has worked. Faith was not something new that God added since the arrival of His Son on earth but was always the way that man had access to the things of God. That the matter was obscured and dusted over by the works of our own hands was not God's fault.

The extent to which God allowed things to continue in an obscure manner was for the accomplishment of His purposes. These purposes have not always been fully explained, but we can glimpse them by observing how history unfolded between God and Satan in their intense warfare.

If the father of the Jewish nation, Abraham, had been justified by his actions, then he would have something to boast about. This would be true because actions require strength, and our strength comes from God. Without the gifts God had given Abraham, no actions could have been completed, so Abraham does not get credit for his works, but he does get credit for believing in the promise of God.

This is where the apostle James comes in with his assertion that Abraham was also justified by his works. The logic is that without works, faith would have

been incomplete and therefore dead. Even the devils believe in God, James continues, but they do not obey. In this sense, their faith is dead, or their faith is dying, which might be a better way of understanding the apostle. There is no execution of faith.

Is there then justification in a man's works, in spite of the above arguments, and in spite of the apostle Paul's strong assertions to the contrary? Obviously, there is, but not before God, as the Apostle Paul states, and as I have agreed in the arguments above. Good works benefit us. We feel justified in improving ourselves through outward conformity, and that is where the fangs of the serpent bite hard. We are in great danger of camping right there and calling that land our home.

That this justification is allowed or granted to us by God, at least in the sense that we feel it and grasp it firmly, is shown by what the apostle James said. I do not know if the apostle James fully intended this to be the result of his statement, but it is the best way I can see to fit it into the complicated arguments of the apostle Paul. At the very least, the inclusion of the apostle James' comments has served as a bulwark against which the claims of "faith alone" have been tested in the historical Christian context.

Another point that is often overlooked in the opening verse of chapter four is the establishment of what the apostle means by the word "flesh." The rest of the chapter, and even the rest of Romans, I believe, adheres to this meaning of the word. Abraham is presented as working out the issues of faith and works while in his "flesh."

Much confusion arises later when the apostle begins to use this word, "flesh," abundantly in chapters seven and eight. The assumption is that the apostle means to imply that the word means "sinful," as in sinful flesh, but this is not the case.

What "flesh" means to the apostle when writing in Romans is the whole of man, not including himself. In other words, everything the self has been given to function with, including its body and its soulish strength. Support for this can be found in chapter one, where the apostle uses the word in connection with Christ, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh. This cannot mean sinful flesh, nor can it be limited to bodily flesh. Hence my conclusion that the word "flesh" in Romans means man's soul and body, joined together and given to his self for the function of the self.

Another scriptural support could be found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, where the prophet speaks of God making the soul of Christ an offering for sin. This would be consistent with Hebrews, where Christ is seen as offering His body for the sins of mankind. The two together make up the "flesh" in the apostle's meaning. Neither can be sinful in any sense. I am aware that "flesh" is also used in other places to mean sinful flesh, and this is what causes the confusion.

Returning then to the subject of faith, the apostle cuts and slashes with his sword, driving home the point that as far as God is concerned, the self cannot be granted eternal righteousness and justification based on works. The apostle brings in the words of King David to support his argument, where

the king said that the man who has his sins covered is blessed and is no longer considered guilty. This sounds very much like the legal imputed righteousness of the Reformed conclusions. The concept is that of covering, not washing away as the Hebrews have it after the resurrection. The idea is to simply not count the man as guilty, even though he is very guilty.

This is a legitimate concept presented in the Old Testament, but the nature of the concept is temporary not permanent. Is a legal covering all that salvation was about? Satan certainly thought so, but should Christian theologians have gone down this road? My answer is that I think not. Much better things were afoot, and the apostle testifies to this by immediately bringing the Gentiles into the equation.

If the plan of salvation had been only legal and not actual, then the gentiles would have been excluded forever. I know that this is not the way things are put together in most of the Protestant world. But let us unpack the issue and see what happens. If transgression is only legal, then those who are not subject to the law cannot sin. Problem number one.

If the payment for sins is only legal, then those who have not transgressed cannot be granted remission. Problem number two. There is simply no way to make someone guilty of sin without the Law, nor can you grant remission if there is no transgression.

If the transaction with Abraham and his seed was only legal, then there is no point in breaking the legal contract with Israel, as Christ did on the cross, by paying the debt and abolishing the authority of the Law. None of this can be done unless it was always in the works to begin with. Problem number three. From

the beginning, the plan of salvation contained a deeper and richer purpose than the legal structure God established with the nation of Israel.

The circumcision of Abraham, the apostle claims, was only a seal placed over the righteousness that Abraham possessed before he was circumcised. A seal cannot be the contents of the vessel. A seal can also be broken to open what is inside, and what was inside the jar was the righteousness of God imputed by faith. What was inside was not legal righteousness; that was the seal.

This opens another theme that the apostle would develop in other letters he wrote, especially to the Galatians and Colossians. The imagery of the seal placed over the righteousness of God drives home the created nature of the righteousness contained in the law. The seal can be broken, and so can the created law. In this case, broken means abolished and not disobeyed. While the commandment of circumcision was in effect, the commandment could not be broken, but when the seal had served its purpose, the commandment was done away with.

This is another little understood consequence of the apostle's insistence that faith, not works, is the source of righteousness. If works are the source of justification, then once a commandment is given, that commandment can never be taken away. Things become very fixed, both in the hearts of men and women and in the eternal scheme of things. If a man is brought in based on having obeyed some law, then fairness and justice require that all men must equally obey that law which produced that work.

This plan would have been a horrible mess, to say the least, but most importantly, it would have excluded the Gentiles unless they were also brought under the law that had given justification. The weight of the whole thing would have crushed the spirit of man and brought about all sorts of abuses associated with human power.

A pertinent example, which is still present today, is when the Church takes upon itself the power to transmit grace through the visible sacraments. The abuses are mitigated by our present environment of freedom, but the Middle Ages were rife with vile acts committed by popes in withholding God's grace from believers.

Therefore, Abraham became the father of all believers who would lay hold of the righteousness of God. These would by faith reach beyond the boundaries of the law into the center of the spiritual Garden of Eden and partake of the fruit, which is the life of God.

From the beginning, God knew that the system He set up would bring men and women home to Himself. That system began, and continues, through the various forms in which the Law appears, whether through the conscience of man, or through the voice of creation, or in its most literal expression as the divine voice speaking in the commandment.

Nowhere along this journey is there a place for a man or woman to settle down and plant his or her own garden. If the call to our faith did not come first, then the settling down could occur, and God would be limited to certain people who, by whatever means, were more capable in their application of righteous laws. The self would not be dealt with, and therefore it is not of

works, so that the works of God might be fully and completely fulfilled.

This is grace, and grace more abundantly, which springs up not only for us, who otherwise would be left to live with ourselves through works, but also for all the nations and people of the world who are blessed by the faith that can rise freely in their hearts in response to the call of God.

Chapter 19 – The Scriptures

- Rom 4:15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, *there is* no transgression.
- Rom 4:16 Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,
- Rom 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, *even* God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.
- Rom 4:18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.
- Rom 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:
- Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;
- Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.
- Rom 4:22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.
- Rom 4:23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
- Rom 4:24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;
- Rom 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Chapter 20 - Commentary on Romans 4:15-25

The law works wrath, the apostle claims, and he is right. This is said, of course, within the legal framework, when justification is achieved by keeping the law. In the apostle's world, he is referring to the Jewish law, but the principle applies no matter what the law is or how the law is understood.

The apostle's interest and purpose are to propagate and spread his gospel, if possible, throughout the world. He must set the parameters within which he is to work which are beyond the confines of the law. For the law causes unpleasant emotions to abound, emotions that will hinder any large-scale spread of the gospel. This is because transgression of any legal definition of right and wrong must be punished by whatever means are available, be it legal sanctions, imprisonment, or some form of rejection by the surrounding community.

The legal application of the law always provokes intense emotions, usually negative, although they can be positive. The positive occurs when the emotions are experienced by those implementing the legal structure. These emotions occur in the initial stages of encountering and applying the law, usually exclusively to oneself. Exclusivity occurs because those who seek such a law usually do not have the power structure arranged behind them.

Consequently, they have no means to apply the law they seek to others or to punish those who resist. When their non-threatening status is understood by the authorities, there is usually room for personal application. The emotions of application are expressed with feelings of euphoria as judgment is applied to

chaos, and order arises from confusion in the lives of the participants.

The self is quick to take credit for this transformation as the sweet taste of righteousness, in whatever diluted form righteousness is presented, passes over the practitioner's palate. The misunderstandings begin immediately because the self is sure that a place of righteousness has been reached and that relief from heaven has arrived. That relief has arrived is the problem. Well, it has, but it has not. For this is the path most must take in their journey back to the Garden of Eden.

The alternative is to have no law, no definition of right and wrong, and therefore no transgression, as the apostle says. By implication, there is no wrath from the application of the law. The hope in such an environment would be that people would make progress toward righteousness, either through the voice of creation or the voice of conscience. The fact that this happens does not negate the reality that mass social progress is made only through the application of the law.

This is why every mass movement is such an intense affair, and the definition of a mass movement is known as a revival movement within the church. The laws of God during a mass movement, or sometimes on the other side of things, the laws of a Hitler or a Marx and an angel, are brought within reach of mankind. A sense of righteousness is tasted, often in a low form, a form easily understood by the masses.

The result is the zealous application of the law at hand and the law vigorously promoted by the leaders of the movement. Emotions run high, and what goes up

will surely come down. What is most needed in a revival movement is a strong dose of humility brought on by the demand of faith. What needs to be proclaimed loudly and clearly is that works are not what gives anyone their righteousness.

This is a necessary caveat that the promoters of the movement usually do not make. They are often insecure people who have suffered considerable hardship on their way to being accepted by the masses. The last thing they want is to see their own authority or influence diminished. This is a result that would occur if they taught faith, for faith gives no credit to the practitioner of the law, and by reflection gives no credit to the leader who is in charge. What should be done then? The answer is to insist on faith and humility. The answer is certainly not to stop teaching what is right or wrong.

Without the teaching of faith in relation to the law, the negative effects of a church revival movement on the surrounding culture and community are considerable. The movement becomes divisive right out of the gate. This happens whenever a new form or structure is introduced in relation to a new law. Although there may also be a reformation of an old law. In this atmosphere, strict adherence is demanded of all those associated with the movement, and the surrounding community of individuals is excluded on the same basis.

Because of the large number of people involved in a revival movement, the usual problems associated with equal application of the law are exacerbated. The hurt feelings from real and imagined wounds abound, both inside and outside the movement. The sheer

number of wounded is staggering, and these are people who are trying to follow the dictates of the movement, the good people. The rebels leave or never join, in some cases feeling justified by the inequality and arrogance on full display.

Severe punishments are meted out for the smallest offenses, usually accompanied by severe rejection. High and lofty promises are made to induce compliance, and those who do not comply are prophesied against in one way or another, with predictions of utter failure and ruin. This only accelerates and exacerbates the wounds. Whereupon layers of complexity are added to an already overloaded system.

All of this could have been prevented in the first place with a humble spirit that is firmly grounded in the truth of justification by faith alone. Again, one wonders why God would use such a dangerous vehicle to spread His gospel. Perhaps the self-serving appeal of the law is the only way to get our attention? Coupled with the fact that the vehicle of the Law always self-destructs if it is not being driven correctly, it seems to be the best way to do things. Personally, I would not dare question the wisdom of God in this or any other matter.

The impossibility of ever bringing the blessings of Abraham to all nations through the Law is well established. It is clear to the apostle. Grace can only come by faith and not by works. This does not mean that grace can come without works. That is the error of Protestant Christianity, and that was not the error of the apostle. The law must be passed through, must be passed by, not obliterated by our hand.

We are called to believe in God, to raise our eyes to heaven, even when the best law is within our grasp. For this is the problem. The vision we see, the works we hold in our hands, are true. The easier we can do the work, the brighter our vision grows. The problem is that this vision is much too limited, much too small. This is true, as difficult as it is for us to see this reality. The things we are building are nowhere near big enough, great enough, or strong enough to match what God wants to accomplish.

That is why faith must not be diminished. Faith keeps calling us forward, pointing out the inadequacies of what we have put our hands on to create. The God we are dealing with is the God who raises the dead, the apostle tells us. Can we raise the dead? Hardly? Not in a million years. But that is the level of work that God wants to do through us. We will not get there by falling in love with our own works and looking down on the garden we are building.

We are dealing with a God who can call into existence things that do not exist. Can we do that? No. Nor will we ever acquire such power as we carry out our beloved law. As sweet as the righteous fruit that is between our lips, we are eating something that God gave us, not something that we called out of nothing.

The urgency is for humility, for brokenness of spirit. An acknowledgment from the depths of our being that we have not yet arrived at our intended home. Heaven is still out there, and we will never land on those shores without faith. No ship we build will ever survive the storms between here and there. Death is too strong and evil too wicked for our puny vessel to traverse such a wild ocean.

Abraham looked to heaven, to the voice that spoke to him from on high, and he believed that God could do what was promised. This faith was credited to him for righteousness, not the deeds that followed. But the deeds did follow. Abraham was circumcised. Let us not forget that. Faith does not mean that we stop doing what is right.

Abraham did not falter before the promises of God. Abraham did not look at his own withered and aged body, or at Sarah's aged and withered body, and say to himself that God could not give him a son. Maybe this is our problem, the vast and unimaginable greatness of God's promises. Perhaps they make us feel inadequate? Maybe they make the work of our hands seem so useless in comparison? To which I would add. Maybe we should feel this way?

Why should not every temptation be dangled in front of us, every motivation to test us, to see if we will choose ourselves over God? After all the goodness we have tasted, after all the righteous nectar we have been given. A goodness and a righteousness given to us that we know was not our idea, nor the product of our hands. Will we turn away from such a banquet, from such a feast still promised before us, to the barren and meager desert of our own selves? Will we believe and put all our trust in God?

Chapter 21 – The Scriptures

- Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
- Rom 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
- Rom 5:3 And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;
- Rom 5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:
- Rom 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
- Rom 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.
- Rom 5:7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.
- Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- Rom 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.
- Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.
- Rom 5:11 And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Chapter 22 - Commentary on Romans 5:1-11

God has justified us through faith in Jesus Christ, says the apostle.

The God who gave us everything calls us. The God who raised his Son from the dead. A Son who was killed for our transgressions now welcomes us home. Will we come? Will love of self win? Will the desire for our own way prevail?

Must we always have our fingers in the pie? We have been given every motive, every incentive that heaven can provide. Despite our own wickedness, we have a God who offers us His own nature in exchange for our folly and waywardness.

Why should we not shoulder our cross and march toward grace and the full power of grace? Why should the cost to ourselves caused by our own foolishness or the foolishness of others turn us aside? Do not the trials of this journey settle us down, take off the rough edges, and begin to prepare us for what lies ahead? Are we not called to a great hope? A hope incomparable to any hope that is awakened in us when we hold the works of our own hands in our clenched fists. This is a hope that will be fulfilled. For God has promised us a land beyond the sun, a life more abundant than the green hills of this world can provide.

We are completely without strength of our own. We know this with absolute certainty, or we will learn the lesson well on our journey back to the Garden of Eden. What we have has been given to us, and these possessions were not given at the moment we became worthy. Rather, they were given while we were still wicked. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Not only did Christ die for us. The power we needed to believe in the work of God was given to us before we chose or gave any indication that we would choose to walk toward God.

This is the kind of God we are dealing with. A God who would give us love along with great and gracious gifts while we were still ungodly. This is a very strange thing because no one in our world acts like this. That is how different we are from the God we are dealing with. We have chosen to bestow our love and affection on those whom we consider beautiful and worthy. This is not how God has dealt with us. He gave us many good gifts and bestowed His great affection on us while we were still His enemies.

This is our God, a God who did all these things for people who did not yet love Him in return. Who would do this for a people, many of whom would never return His affection. Yet God has done this, the apostle assures us, and since he has done this in the past, what will this God do for us in the future? This is the deep and abiding call of faith. The voice that calls us to the mountains of the supreme God. Our works, however necessary and sweet they may be in our mouths, will never lead us to those high and holy heights.

Christ died and shed His blood to buy us back from the possession of the devil. This was not the only reason why the blood of Christ was shed, but it was one of the reasons that made sense to the devil. God has all power. He could have taken us back by force without any payment, since we were His creation in the first place. But legally, our world had been taken by Satan, and with Satan's conquest, "goodness" had been lost. It was a goodness that was in us but was not us. A

goodness that God had placed there at the time of creation when He formed our bodies and souls with His fingers and breathed the breath of life into man.

This was the goodness contained in man and creation that God would not give up. To complete the deal, the devil was asked to accept the death of the Son in exchange for the lost kingdom of this world. The price offered was the highest heaven could pay.

Reconquest was out of the question because of the problems associated with the exercise of power. These are complicated arguments concerning force and power, but the simplest way to understand the problem is that the exercise of power always leaves open the charge of tyranny. Because of this problem, the lost world was bought from the devil and could not be reclaimed by war.

Thus, we, the fallen, were reconciled to God on all levels. We were bought with blood. We were cleansed with blood, and we were justified with the blood of the Lamb. These are the finished works on the part of God, ready and available for us to access by faith. Every legal and imaginary obstacle to our return to full fellowship with the Almighty has been removed. Only one question remains: do we love ourselves more than we love God?

Chapter 23 – The Scriptures

Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Rom 5:13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.

Rom 5:14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Rom 5:15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, *which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.*

Rom 5:16 And not as *it was* by one that sinned, *so is* the gift: for the judgment *was* by one to condemnation, but the free gift *is* of many offences unto justification.

Rom 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

Rom 5:18 Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life.

Rom 5:19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Rom 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

Rom 5:21 That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter 24 - Commentary on Romans 5:12-21

Our father Adam, the apostle says, was driven out of the Garden of Eden because he sought the realization of his own self and brought sin into the world out of his own self with the obvious help of the devil. From this inheritance we received the self that brings sin from its own source. This brings us death because of our own sinfulness, a death passed on to us by our natural birth.

There is a great controversy in Christian thought about the existence of death before the existence of sin. I am not sure of the reasons for this, but the penal substitutionary theory, when placed in a dominant position, seems to demand that death did not exist before the transgression occurred in the Garden of Eden. Depending on the translation of verse twelve, this conclusion could be reached and is reached by many with great vigor.

There are many scriptural reasons to question this timeline. First, there is the biblical definition of death. There is the death that happens to us, which is our non-being from our existence here on earth, and into which we were introduced by the sin of Adam, but this is by no means the extent of the biblical view of death. The apostle himself, in Romans chapter eight, alludes to death as corruption, which is something more than nonbeing, a corruption to which the entire creation has been subjected by the will of God.

This leaves us with two important points. Death is nonbeing, and death or nonbeing results in corruption or decay. This is something that cannot happen, namely decay, if the nonbeing does not exist. Therefore, you cannot say that decay is the direct result of sin, unless you believe that nonbeing is the direct

result of sin. In fact, this is what is believed by those who believe that death did not exist before the transgression in the Garden. They believe that before the fall in the garden, nothing in the material ever ceased to exist.

This position is extremely problematic from a practical point of view, but more so because this belief relates to Christ. For while Christ was protected from the results of nonbeing, namely corruption, He partook of death, or nonbeing. One cannot in any way, shape, or form believe that Christ partook of anything sinful. For the same rule applies to His taking on our humanity. He did not take on sin, because being human is not being sinful. It is the self that introduces and causes sinfulness.

This conclusion, that death, or at least nonbeing, preceded the transgression in the garden, is well supported by other scriptural premises. They are easy to see when there is no Holy Grail of penal substitution to protect. The very fact that a special garden was built for Adam and Eve implies this. There is also the existence of the Tree of Life in the center of the Garden, which keeps the man and woman from dying. Why do they have to eat in order not to die if there is no death? Why must they tend the garden if there is no death and decay?

There is the question of the knowledge of death in the Garden of Eden, which the man and woman seem to possess without any explanation. God does not explain death to them when He warns that they will surely die if they eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nor does the devil explain death to Eve when he appears with his temptation. Seems like someone needed to give a little tutorial on what death is, if death does not exist. I mean, really, they eat plants

and fruits every day. They know what non-existence is in its most basic form.

The strongest evidence, however, is the placing of the entire creation under the bondage of decay, and this is done by the will of God, the apostle claims, not by an act of sin on the part of man. That this is so is perhaps the greatest complaint that mankind raises against God, namely, the existence of suffering in the created worlds.

The desperate efforts of the Christian world to shift the blame for the existence of suffering away from God and onto the shoulders of humanity really fool no one. The blame is God's, whether He allowed suffering to occur because of our sins or because He wrote decay into the universe. I would rather believe the latter than the former. I think God is big enough to handle the burden. He has his reasons, and his reasons are perfectly good. He does not need our help to clear up a misunderstanding.

We are really nothing. This is the truth that the apostle drives home. God is everything and he does good beyond what we can imagine. Before we even heard the divine voice of God calling to us, a voice that spoke to us through some means that told us what was right and what was wrong. Before that, we were surrounded by sin, sin of our own making. Sin was there before we knew what sin was. The results of sin were there long before we knew what sin was, or what the sin was called, or in which direction we should go to escape the hell that was the result of our sins.

All this happened to us because we were the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. We came from the seed of one man that was passed down to us, even though we had never made the same original choices

that our father had made. We lived out of ourselves because that was all we had to live out of, but we had not chosen to be what we were. Our father Adam had made that choice. That is how we got into the mess we were in.

This begs the question, why or how are we considered sinners? The biblical answer is that we are sinners by nature. We were sinners from the moment we were born because we have a nature that, left to its own devices, will commit sin. This leads to the next question, which is a question of justice. How is this fair? Why are we not given a choice in the matter? It seems like someone should be asking us if we want to run this gauntlet or not.

In that sense, life itself is the wound we are born with. Because no one asked us. Which brings us back to the point that God does what He wants to do without asking us, and He does that in everything He does. Argue with that and you have a worse mess than you already have. Bitterness will not get you anywhere. Checking out by your own hand is not going to make things better either. Life in Heaven is such a great gift that it justifies suffering. Heaven expects gratitude from us, not bitterness.

We have what we have, and this is what we have. We have a self that cannot do good on its own. Our selves must be told or instructed by some measure. Here the apostle expands again the concept of law to include all law, that is, all definitions of right and wrong. Where there is no such instruction, the apostle claims, there is no transgression. I think this is what the apostle means, although there is some disagreement in Christian thought.

This is not to say that sin does not exist without instruction, but that the self is not guilty until it knows right from wrong. Reason must enter into the equation and understanding of the mind. That was the position of the original Anabaptist movement, and I believe they were right. The counter in their day was the existence of infant baptism. A baptism that was necessary, church officials claimed, as a means of transmitting grace and washing away the original state of sin in which we were born.

I disagree, primarily because baptism is not biblically designed to carry such a burden. Grace is at work in a baby's life from the moment he is born, and grace will cover sin until there is a knowledge of right and wrong. This knowledge will come soon enough through the various means by which such instruction comes. Solid teaching from a godly father and mother will go a long way toward setting the child on the right path.

However, the final solution to the problem of sin must be presented along with any instruction in righteousness. The whole thing is open to misunderstanding and can easily produce something that is not the desired end. The appeal to reason, however, is clear in the apostle's arrangement, which is consistent with his whole understanding of how we approach God. We do so with our reason alive and well, and by means of an appeal to understanding. We must consent to the will of God as we come to know the will of God.

The way into our mess is the way out of our mess. We needed a new Father, someone who was human and untainted by the transgression in the Garden of Eden. We needed someone who was like God, someone who thought like God and acted like God

out of his own nature. This someone had to know God as his Father, otherwise how could he possess these qualities.

This someone had to be human like us, otherwise he could not lead the way back to the Garden. A man had caused the fall, and a man must bring about redemption. A man who also had to be the Son of God, an impossible goal, and yet this is what God wanted to accomplish when he sent his Son into the world to die for us.

For the way man fell is the way man must rise. We are fallen because we received a fallen nature from our father. This is a nature that only produces sin, and we must be saved by the imputation of another nature that is like God and therefore pleases God. The sins of the old nature must be washed away. They must be forgiven, and the lost must be redeemed from the hands of a cruel master.

Salvation follows the fall. We were given a fallen nature by our father Adam, a nature we did not ask for or seek. It is a nature we possess, but we are not required to act according to that nature. We can choose otherwise. We can choose a different world and a different will. In the same way, in salvation we have been given a new nature. It is a nature that we did not seek, nor did we ask for, but it was given to us. We possess and have this nature in the sense that God has fully prepared this nature for us and declared it to be ours.

In the same way, we are not required to act on this nature. We do not have to take the gift from God's hand. We can continue to follow our own fallen nature. When we do, judgment sits upon that nature. A judgment pronounced upon our fallen selves because of

the guilt of one man. In the same way, life has come to our redeemed selves through the perfection of one man, even Jesus Christ our Lord. For in our fallen nature, we do the works of sin, but in our new nature we do the works of God.

Because of the sin of one man, even our father Adam, death came to all, but through the life of one man, even Jesus Christ, life was given by grace. Life came as a gift from God. If one man could cause as much destruction as our father Adam, how much greater must be the good caused by the life of the Son of God who brought us salvation.

One man disobeyed God and many died, but one man obeyed God and through his obedience the gift of righteousness came to many. The law was given, and this law would contain the definitions of right and wrong so that sin would clearly appear as sinful. Wherever this definition appears, even their sin has become exceedingly sinful. This would seem to be God's way of emphasizing the reality of sin, but what He is really doing is showing us His exceeding and abundant grace.

For whenever man becomes aware of his great sin, God impresses upon him the knowledge of His even greater grace. For this is the will of God, that where once sin reigned, bringing death to all mankind, now grace should reign, bringing the righteousness of Christ within the reach of all mankind. This righteousness of Christ is a righteousness that He does not possess because of the imputed virtue of the law. The righteousness of Christ is a righteousness that leads to eternal life, a life that is His by nature.

This is what is offered to us by our faith in the name of the Lord.

Chapter 25 – The Scriptures

Rom 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Rom 6:2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Rom 6:3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Rom 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Rom 6:5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness* of *his* resurrection:

Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Rom 6:7 For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Rom 6:8 Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:

Rom 6:9 Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

Rom 6:10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Rom 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Rom 6:13 Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God.

- Rom 6:14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.
- Rom 6:15 What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.
- Rom 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?
- Rom 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.
- Rom 6:18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.
- Rom 6:19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.
- Rom 6:20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.
- Rom 6:21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.
- Rom 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
- Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Chapter 26 - Commentary on Romans 6:1-23

The apostle moves into a defense of works in chapter six, which should settle the matter for us, for the discussion was never about works, but about the self. To go deeper into the matter, the apostle proposed a radical question, this time presumably posing the counterproposal himself. The question is asked in the light of what has been said about grace and the gift of salvation being complete and the law being abolished. Are we free to sin? Are we free to do what we want?

What we wanted before our contact with the law of God was to do what we wanted, which was sin. Every choice we made, even in obeying God, resulted in some twisting of the material under our hand. That was who we were and that was what we liked to do. Should this continue, which means, should we be freed to exist fully in ourselves? That is the question.

The apostle's answer is an emphatic negative. The sin, that is, the works that we produce either by not doing good or by doing our own works, whether good or bad. This work would cease forever. What would not cease is the good works done through us. There is a big difference. The difference is whether we have a part in doing the good works.

The truth is that a vast majority of the good contained in all the good works we have done did not have its source in us. The good had been placed there by God, and we had used the good and called it our own. That would change. We would be taken out, not the good works. The good works would continue.

The apostle's basis for saying this is not that good works had no value before. They always had value

to the extent that they were good, that is, that they came from and were done according to the laws of God. The good contained in the good works could never be credited to our account in the sense that we retained the goodness, because we were not good. That was the problem. Goodness cannot be transferred without depletion from entity to entity, whether spiritual or material, unless both the recipient and the giver are good.

Nor would there be any claim that perhaps there were still better works to be done to establish our righteousness. We were being completely forsaken. Nor would there be any wondering on the part of the apostle as to whether our problem of sin might be solved if we would perhaps cease from all works.

Rather, the claim is that good works will continue, that good works will never cease. That a way had to be found where we could produce good works that were not needed as justification to make us good. That was the problem.

Therefore, sinning after participation in grace does not count as a victory. If sinning continues, what was the point of the journey? The righteousness of God is more than the righteousness of the law, but the righteousness of God is not less than the righteousness of the law.

The answer given by the grace and mercy of God was to give us a new nature, the nature of Christ. This is obviously not where all the legal imputed righteousness takes us, but that is another reason why the thinking is wrong. The apostle makes his claim based on the death of the self. This is the same reason that Martin Luther failed to see.

If the self is dead, the apostle says, then the source of sin is dead. When this has occurred, then the sinning has stopped. There is no need to stop working to prove this. It just is, because God said so. Kill the self and you have killed sin. Period. Simple, yet not so simple.

To help us think and believe, the apostle points us to baptism and one of the purposes of baptism, which is to illustrate the death of the self in a practical way. Here we immediately hit one of the swirling controversies in Christianity that never quite goes away. Does literal immersion or literal pouring of water either wash away sins or cleanse the self of its original sinfulness? The Catholic faith claims so, and so does much of the rest of the non-Protestant world.

There are even those in the Anabaptist faith who affirm the literal washing away of sin under the waters of baptism, and even the occurrence of the new birth in immersion. Early church writings are cited as evidence, along with the strong language used by the apostle.

In relation to the early church, there was a reason why the Emperor Constantine in the third century wanted to wait until he was on his deathbed to receive water baptism. That way, he thought, he might not sin again until he passed over the river. The emperor himself had not come up with the idea of water baptism to wash away his sins. The original Anabaptist movement, I believe, did not agree with this analysis, and neither do I.

In my studies, however, I have come to realize that things change after the cross and the appearance of the new creation. This new way applies to each of the

sacraments, which also did not exist before the death and resurrection of Christ. Beyond the cross, the physical works seem to lead in every act of faith, but I still believe that this requires the existence of the new creature in Christ before the act can be performed with any spiritual significance.

The apostle said that "as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death. The only way this could mean that literal water does the cleansing or is the source of the grace that is imparted, would be in an environment devoid of faith. The apostle does not mention faith in this passage. If the water cleanses and transmits, then the water cleanses and transmits, and an unconverted man or woman could step into the water and be born again.

I suppose this is why there are stories of Catholic Church officials sprinkling water on the converting pagans in mass, whether they believed or not. Perhaps the logic was, and is, that the fact that the individual is there and believes that the water cleanses them makes it so.

I think a much better option is to hear the apostle as saying that water baptism expresses a faith that is already there. A faith that is placed in the sacrifice of Christ and not in water baptism. Although the language here and in Acts is strong enough to force an understanding that there is a measure of grace that is transmitted through submission to the sacrament.

This does not change the fact that water baptism is a literal, material act that represents a spiritual journey that the believer has already taken to the cross of Christ. The focus, I believe, is not on water baptism as a transforming agent, but on the death of

Christ into which we have been transported at the moment of faith, not at the moment of going under the water. The death of the self is represented by the submersion of water baptism.

The apostle points out that the believer must believe in this death in order to live as if the self were dead, otherwise why would the believer be baptized? The death of the self occurs or has occurred separately and apart from water baptism. The death of the self occurred on the cross and is accessed through a spiritual identification with Christ. This spiritual identification is a spiritual baptism represented by physical water baptism.

The death to which the apostle refers in verse two does not occur in water baptism. It is represented. If death occurred in water baptism, then the phrase in verse five would not say "in the likeness" of His death. The apostle claims that "the likeness" is what happens when you are immersed in water, or poured upon, if you are a pourer.

The likeness means an abstract resemblance. What the resemblance does not mean is a literal occurrence while under the water, or while being dipped under the water. The same is true of the likeness that baptism is to Christ's resurrection. Are we willing to insist that one has been resurrected with Christ when one is lifted out of the baptismal waters?

The affirmation of a present watery resurrection with Christ is nonsense. In the form of a likeness, as a representation of what is to come and what is to happen now, namely the living of a new life. This is what happens in baptism in relation to the resurrection

and would also apply to the washing away of sins and the birth of the new creation.

The apostle points to water baptism to give us a literal illustration of what has happened spiritually. We have been crucified with Christ, so the old man is dead. We are now free to do an abundance of works without fear of self-contamination. As the apostle says, whoever is dead is free from sin. The fuss over whether the water in baptism cleanses sin and brings about spiritual death is an unfortunate and serious distraction.

For this is what we lack. Freedom from self-contamination is a great and impossible claim. A freedom that can only be achieved through the work of God. I wonder if most Christians really believe this. The claim just seems too preposterous and impossible in its implications. Which brings us back to an earlier point. Why not apply all this forensic and legal transactional stuff here instead of with the appropriation of righteousness? The legal position applied here would be much more biblical, and I believe would produce much better results.

We do not need to see exactly how this works in the beginning. The apostle will explain more in chapter eight, but if we do not believe here, we will not believe the even more absurd claims in chapter eight. At least that is the way it looks to me.

Meanwhile, the apostle is charging ahead, his sword swinging wildly, slashing in all directions. If we have died with Christ, then we have also been raised with Him, at least to a spiritual position. A bodily resurrection has not yet taken place, but it will. This position of being dead to self, the apostle claims, is not

something that Christ has to reestablish every day. It was done once on the cross, and it is done. End of story. Believe it and get to work.

Nowhere is there any mention of not doing any works. That would be one of the old annoying tricks of the self. Being lazy and all that, hiding under the covers when a lion is supposed to be prowling the streets. Why do we fear to work? We are already dead, so the lion can do no worse. Be bold and of good courage. To be alive is to move. Rest is usually a sign of either sleep or death.

We should count ourselves dead, the apostle says. That sounds a lot like doing some kind of forensic work, perhaps on a daily basis. We are to set out with tools in hand because we have been made alive in Christ. No longer does sin reign in our soul and body to defile everything we touch. Is this not great and glorious news? Should it not be shouted from the mountaintops?

We are free, but free for what purpose? What is freedom? To do what we want? Yes, but not the desires of the old self. That self is dead. We are free to be, to fly, to be what we should be, to be what we were made to be. We yield now. We no longer grasp and pull to ourselves, but we give because we must give, because we have been given so much. At the top of the list, at least in our estimation, is this freedom to fully expand and move into what we now long for.

Always before the longing and desire turned sour. In the execution, the bud was plucked from the flower, and we were left empty-handed. Sin, the old poison, oozed from our hands. The stain remained

wherever our fingers touched. That stain is gone. The poison is neutralized. We are indeed free.

Not quite, of course, because the old body still functions and we still breathe the breath of this world, but we have gone beyond the law in our journey back to the Garden of Eden. Heaven is in us, and we have heaven in our sights. We know this because we can surrender to God and do good. We do, and good follows the work of our hands. Before, our work was always a work of sin, no matter how diligently we tried.

We have now become the servants of righteousness, the apostle claims, but he immediately dislikes the limitation of his language to explain the matter. I speak in the former terms of your bondage, he said, because of the limitation of your vision in seeing your position in Christ. You are servants, yes, but you are no longer servants at heart. You have become sons.

You have become what you want to be. Deep down you know this. You look at the works of God that have come out of your life since your faith has been exercised, and you like what you see. You like the works, not in a self-centered, self-possessed sense of fulfilling some need that only makes things worse. These works - you actually like them. Completely. In the depths of your soul, you like them because they are like the works that God would do if He lived in you, which He does now.

The apostle's appeal is to righteousness and to our innate desire for righteousness. That is the crux of the matter. Our love of self is the most important thing that haunts us. We equate freedom with finally being able to do what we really want to do. Freedom in God's world is not that at all. He wants nothing that is our

original idea. So how can we ever be free from our point of view?

The truth is that we never will be. At least in this world, and I say this only because I do not fully understand the works of God. Nor do I believe that they have been fully revealed to us. My feeling is that the redeemed will retain their knowledge and awareness throughout eternity that everything they have, and love has been given to them as a gift.

The only comfort given to the self in its journey of self-denial is the promise of God that all that is sacrificed on His altars will be returned in double portion. To what extent we encounter this as a reality before death, I am not sure. It depends on the individual, I suppose, and how his journey with God progresses, and to what depth God's grace is plumbed. The complete merging of the original identity of the self and the regenerated self, given by God is a tricky business. Presumption is out of order.

Certainly, the apostle makes no such assumptions. He still uses the term servant for the original self, even as that self walks in the lands beyond the law. At the end of chapter seven, a strong case is made that we will never lose the need for our reason to be guided by the laws of God in this life. That reason in this life will always be used to determine what is the will of God. It is only when we try to do the will of God that reason loses its dominance.

Is this a valid method? Obviously, it is biblical, but the fear of going astray is extremely high in Christian circles. For there are many who indulge in all kinds of depraved behavior and wave about their supposed fruit as proof that they are on the right path.

They love better now, they say. They now have more peace. They now include all people and nations in their world because they no longer judge anything as right or wrong. Well, everything except judgment. That is always wrong, they say, and so is the condemnation of any behavior, no matter how obviously harmful to the individual and the community.

I suppose there is no way to completely suppress the ways in which the self deceives itself. We do have biblical methods for ensuring the straight and narrow path, namely, the fruit-bearing path and the use of reason or logic. If the fish still escapes, perhaps that is the way it is meant to be. We do not make the rules, God does. What should not be discouraged is our faith in God's act of transplanting a new nature into our hearts. A new nature that will produce righteous works from its own source.

This is not a subject that anyone can avoid, because the stakes are simply too high. The apostle closes the chapter with this stern admonition. We must do something about the depravity of our own works. Doing nothing will not help because it is still a work of the self. Jesus spoke of a severe punishment for the man who buried his talent in the ground rather than lose what little money he had.

We did not choose the playing field, but the playing field is ours. The works of the self produce death, but the gift of the new nature is full access to eternal life through the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 27 – The Scriptures

- Rom 7:1 Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?
- Rom 7:2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband.
- Rom 7:3 So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.
- Rom 7:4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.
- Rom 7:5 For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.
- Rom 7:6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not *in* the oldness of the letter.
- Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.
- Rom 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin *was* dead.
- Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.
- Rom 7:10 And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death.

Rom 7:11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*.

Rom 7:12 Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.

Rom 7:13 Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

Chapter 28 - Commentary on Romans 7:1- 13

We now venture into the minefield that is Romans chapter seven. This is not a passage like, say, the Song of Solomon, where the text is understood but rejected. This is about understanding the chapter, because in a dominant penal substitutionary view, nothing about Romans seven makes sense. All this talk about doing what we do not want to do and not being able to do what we want to do just does not fit.

For one thing, under a dominant penal substitutionary belief, taken to its logical conclusion, there is a belief in the total depravity of man, that is, body, soul, and spirit. With this belief, there can be no choice by the will to do what is good. The choice would be corrupted and would be meaningless anyway, since there would be no chance of success in the first place. There would not even be any reason to consider whether the law is to blame.

Second, there is the belief in the necessity of God's implanting both righteousness and faith by fiat, without the consent of the will. This is necessary because of the total corruption of man and because of the entire legal nature of transactions. Legal is done on paper without the transfer of matter in the real world. What follows is that if God transferred righteousness to man, along with faith, which means the will does not choose the good. What follows cannot be an inability to perform by the transferred goodness.

In fact, this chapter sounds exactly like what we have been looking at all along in Romans. The self is incapable of doing good, even when it tries to do good, and the self is incapable of keeping from defiling everything it touches, even when it hates the evil it

produces. This obvious conclusion is not easily seen because of the way much of the gospel is presented, at least in the Protestant world since Anselm, penal substitution, and Martin Luther and his war against good works.

The faith that so many believe in is really another work, that of ceasing to do one's own good works and being forensically given the good merits of Christ, which Christ earned by obeying the law that we could not obey. With the above view of the gospel, Romans seven makes no sense.

Obviously, I do not agree with this definition of the gospel, nor do I believe that the apostle intends such an understanding. With the apostle's understanding of the gospel that we have been going through, Romans seven does make sense. We can take the apostle's words as he wrote them, and I believe he knows what he is doing. The apostle is not going to take us to some godforsaken land.

I see no need to look for another paradigm in which to construct this chapter, as some do in their attempts to make sense of the apostle. Even a highly respected modern day Anabaptist like David Bercot has taken this route, suggesting that Paul has taken on an impersonation role in this chapter. That is, Paul takes on the role of another person, even though he uses the first-person voice. Bercot cites a long list of early church writers in support of this, and adds to the list the modern commentator Adam Clarke, for whom I have the highest regard.

This is what Adam Clarke says: "It requires but little knowledge of the spirit of the gospel, and of the scope of this epistle, to see that the apostle is here

impersonating a Jew under the law and without the gospel.

In the presence of such esteemed company, I still disagree. I do not see the need to throw the apostle completely out of the structure of his text. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the apostle is impersonating anyone else. Nor is the apostle known to use such tactics elsewhere in his writings. At least that I know without any warning. The need for impersonation seems to arise from a need to adapt the text to the reader's perspective. A need that arises from the impossibility of believing that the text is true as written.

I concede that what the apostle says about himself could obviously be, and should be, applied to someone else. The reality that the apostle experienced while living under the law applies to anyone who attempts to live under the law. However, there is no reason to believe that the apostle did not first apply this teaching to himself and struggle with this very issue. Having entered the lands beyond the law, there is and can be a real temptation to return to the bondage of the law. That is, to return to using the power of our own souls and bodies to fulfill the law.

That, I think, is the point. A point that follows the line of thought that someone like the apostle would follow coming out of the euphoria of chapter six where the glorious freedom of Christ had been fully experienced. If we refuse to allow the apostle to tell the truth in his own way, which is to tell us about his own experience, we are not going to get the right direction that we need in order to get out of this constant pull back into living by the law.

Having said that as an introduction, let us return to the beginning of the chapter, where the apostle reminds us that a man is bound by the law as long as he lives. Why say this after the outpouring of emotion and joy in chapter six? Are we not letting sleeping dogs lie? Stirring up things that are best left alone, and the answer is obviously a negative in the apostle's mind. If you want to argue with him, go ahead, but I will not.

I think the apostle knows what he is doing, and this is what he is doing. The statement that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives seems, at first glance, to have already been satisfied. Has not the apostle spent considerable time telling us that water baptism represents our death at the Cross with Christ? Are we not then dead? Should this rule not have been fulfilled? Obviously, there is no question about the reality of our death with Christ, so why does the discussion continue?

Is the death of the self on the cross of Christ not enough to satisfy the argument? To which I would reply that if the context of the text is about personal experience coupled with divine revelation, as I understand the apostle, then there must be a reason why personal identification with the death of Christ is not sufficient to end the hold that the law has on us. I would suggest that the reason lies in the inability of the self to discern whether it is acting in its own power or surrendering to God. Further clarification from the apostle is needed.

To introduce this clarification, the apostle compares our situation to that of a husband and wife. The wife is bound to the husband as long as the

husband lives. This would mean that we are the wife, and the law is the husband. This conclusion as to who is the husband is not unanimous in Christian thought, but this is my understanding and one with which David Bercot agrees.

What must happen, then, for the law to be completely defanged and for the terror that the law holds over us to be broken, is the death of the husband, or the law. This happened, the apostle says, with the death of Christ. The law itself died when Christ died on the cross.

Exactly how this happened is not explained, only the fact that it happened. We are therefore free to serve Christ instead of the law. This is all a build-up to what comes in chapter eight, where full instructions are given on how to follow the Spirit of God, not our own guidance or conclusions on how to fulfill the law.

In the meantime, the depths of the nature of living by the law must be plumbed. We must see that the Law is dead both as an article of faith and as a practical personal reality. We must see once again, at an even deeper level, the impossibility of ever becoming a truly righteous person by obeying the law, as opposed to receiving the nature of Christ by faith.

To facilitate this understanding, the apostle emphatically states that our husband, the law, has died, and that we are no longer under any obligation to obey the husband. This is not to say that this is the end of the matter. The issue has always been how we are to be brought to a place of righteous living.

We are to marry Christ now that our present husband, the law, is dead. We are not to remain

unmarried, sent out into the world alone. This is often how those who work under the whole legal apparatus see things. They claim that the righteousness of Christ is a legal righteousness transferred to us on a legal basis, with no further obligation of obedience. The truth is that we are now called under the gospel to obey Christ just as we obeyed the law.

The only difference is that our new nature wants to obey and can obey out of its own nature if we continue to surrender our old will to the process. This is the whole spirit versus flesh scenario, a battle that will apparently continue until we cross the river of death. I know that there are some saints who seem to have come to a complete realized death of their old selves while on this earth, but that would be the exception, not the rule.

The apostle makes the bold assertion that we were already dead while we were trying to obey the law. This law referred to includes, first of all, the Jewish law, but it also includes any law that gives us the definition of right and wrong. This is a startling statement, and one that we would be inclined to doubt. Therefore, the matter must be pursued further. The difficulty of accepting the concept of the utter inability of any earnest soul to reach the Garden of Eden by moral living is immense.

Sword in hand, the apostle plunges forward. Is the law the problem, then? he asks. Is there something wrong with the law that prevents us from achieving righteousness through it? Certainly not, he answers his own question. The law serves a very important purpose in exposing sin, of which the apostle gives a personal example.

The apostle would not have come to the realization that he was sinning by his covetousness and resulting lust for what belonged to his neighbor if the law had not instructed him. Without these divine promptings, neither the apostle nor any man would know why his life was so full of hell and death. Therefore, the law was of great benefit.

The first problem that arose after his encounter with the Law, the apostle continued, was that sin, that desire to covet, came alive in him. Before that, he had gone along, coveting whenever he wanted and suffering the results, but the whole thing was muted in relation to his reason. The Law shed the light of right and wrong on the matter, and suddenly there was a real problem. Sin had come alive for him.

This is what the apostle means when he says that sin was dead before the coming of the law. He is not saying that sin did not exist. Sin was dead because sin was not recognized. This points to the lack of discernment in the self. The self should not be completely unable to see a perfectly obvious situation, a situation that is right in front of its eyes, and not be able to take in the reality. This is a huge problem.

The self without the awareness induced by an external measurement can exist with the presence of sin so completely that the sin is as if the sin were dead. Any doubt about the validity of this point can be dispelled by even a cursory observation of how people deal with sin. We can be completely blind to our own faults and errors until someone points them out to us. In this sense, sin is death until the coming of the Law.

The apostle's next statement throws even more dust into the air. What could the apostle possibly mean

when he says that he once was alive without the law? When did this happen? Bercot seems to think that this is the age of a child's innocence before the child enters the age of accountability. Another possibility suggested by Bercot's theory would be the same scenario but extended to the adult sinner who has not yet become aware of his sin. Are either of these possibilities valid? My answer would be that both conclusions, while valid in themselves, are extremely problematic as applied to answer the question here.

The apostle's next statement reveals the source of the problem. The apostle says that in this case, when the commandment came, sin did not simply come alive, but rather sin was revived. Let's pause and absorb what the apostle said. Sin revived - in other words, sin was once alive and had died, and now it was alive again. The Greek definition of the word, to regain life, supports this conclusion. The apostle is speaking of a time when sin was alive for a second time. This statement invalidates both of the above examples.

Why is this so? Because of this. A child's stage of innocence is not experienced during a time when sin is dead or was once dead. Sin cannot become alive again until sin had been alive before it was dead. Neither the innocent stage of a child, when he is unaware of his guilt, nor the innocent stage of an adult, when he has not yet observed his sin, qualifies. In both cases, the sin has not yet died after having lived. The sin has simply not been noticed or has not been reckoned with.

A much more likely setting for the apostle's example is to look back to chapter six, where the glorious state of the redeemed self was outlined. There

we saw a self living by faith in the life of the Son of God. In such a state, sin had truly lived and died and did not exist only in the unrecognized way required by our two examples of a state of innocence.

This explanation is faithful to what the apostle said and opens up the rest of the chapter to a very simple understanding. Any attempt by the renewed self to live again under any law, in the sense of trying to fulfill that law to obtain justification, will result in the revival of sin and a new death. Apparently, this danger is so serious and widespread that the apostle himself fell into the trap and tells us the story of how to free ourselves.

Is the law to blame for my state of death while I lived in sin? the apostle asks. Would he have been better off had his innocent condition been left undisturbed? The answer is a resounding no. The law is just and good and holy, and it did its work by God's design so that the hell in which we lived could be exposed. With that exposure, we could seek the help we needed.

Chapter 29 – The Scriptures

Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Rom 7:15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

Rom 7:16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good.

Rom 7:17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.

Rom 7:19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Rom 7:20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Rom 7:21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

Rom 7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Chapter 30 - Commentary on Romans 7:13-25

The journey through this passage of Scripture is so harsh and brutal that I cringe, and I suppose that is why so few want to face the full rebuke of the apostle's words. Yet, when I look at the brief history of the Church that I have been exposed to, I see the absolute devastation caused by well-meaning people. I see believers who set out with the most zealous spirit to build a righteous Garden of Eden on this earth. When I think about this, my sympathies are completely with the apostle. We need the full power of this medicine.

Something simply must be done, and I feel that our problems are related to this scripture. Perhaps we cannot exercise the proper humility and brokenness of spirit needed in a great project because we have never learned the principles in private. Certainly, the apostle is speaking of learning the lessons in a private setting. There is no record of the apostle experiencing the kinds of problems we see all around us when a religious fervor is ignited.

The movements we know of initiate a method and methodology to bring much needed cleansing to a deteriorating scene. The apostle did the same thing, but he never had the kind of meltdowns that the church in our day is experiencing. Take Joshua Harris' book, "I Kissed Dating Goodbye," and the resulting "purity" movement it spawned.

Could the motives have been better? Could the hearts have been purer? I doubt it. Joshua Harris seemed to be of the best godly material, young though he was. Lives were blessed and zeal was kindled. The goals were good, but the results were often the opposite

of what was desired. Joshua Harris himself eventually denounced the faith and became an apostate.

The same thing is happening in the secular world. As this is being written, fires are burning in Los Angeles. A city aflame from the policies of state and local governments when they put the perceived health of the environment ahead of people. Were the intentions bad? Was this done on purpose? From what I know, the answer is no. The problem is a phenomenon well enough known to have a name. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

The apostle told us this almost two thousand years ago. He told us in the harshest language he could muster. He took us on a journey to examine the pavement of that road, the hard stones, and the gutter of the ditch on either side.

The law is holy, the apostle said, and the commandment is holy and just and good. The problem is us. What was intended for our good, and indeed there was good accomplished. We became aware of our sin when we set out to practice the righteousness of the law with our own strength, by our own thinking, and according to our own understanding. Our zeal brought only death.

We meant well. In the depths of our being we intended the best. We looked at evil and said it would never happen under our responsibility, but it did. The worst happened. The very thing we hated we ended up doing. We shouted to the heavens and to anyone who would listen that we did not mean it. That we were not aiming for the gutter. That it was somehow not our

fault, and yet it was, because it happened when we were in charge.

We humbled ourselves. We confessed our sin. We told anyone who would listen that we knew there was no good in us, but we could never figure out how to accomplish the good we had told everyone would happen.

The good thing, the goal that so inspired us, turned to ashes at our feet. We put our shoulders even harder into the harness and only evil came out. We said again that it was not us. We wanted something better to happen. We wanted the best, but only evil came.

All of this occurs in the context of the mind seizing upon some revelation from God which it did not think of itself, but which was impressed upon it as necessary to fulfill. In the case of the apostle, this was covetousness. In the case of large movements, there is usually some larger goal in mind, some righteousness that is lacking in the general culture and needs to be improved.

In the case of Joshua Harris, it was not even a matter of blatant sin, such as fornication among young people, but the existence of what was presented as less than favorable dating practices. I would argue that this was a classic example of what we are dealing with. I have never heard Joshua Harris claim that he received a divine revelation, either from Scripture or from the Spirit of God, to give up casual dating.

What Joshua Harris had heard was the divine command not to commit fornication, that is, to take a woman to bed as a single person who is not your wife. This has always been a problem and will always be a

problem until the end of time. Instead of focusing on this goal, Joshua Harris did what is always done. He majored in his methods, which came to him from himself, something that worked for him, and something that he claimed had greatly improved his life.

Joshau Harris majored in "Kissing Dating Goodbye". You say, well, it was much needed. That is, something had to be done to deal with the rampant fornication and the continuing inability of young people to resist fornication. What better idea than to tighten the rules and weed out the chaff, etc.? Add a young man on fire for God who writes a book that addresses this very need, and you have a mass movement based on the ideas of the self and not on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

You can profess all you want that the Holy Spirit could have been, and to some degree was, involved in Joshua Harris' testimony and the blessings he experienced by heeding the advice in "I Kissed Dating Goodbye." Well and good, and if Joshau Harris had left things as a personal application, as a way that the Holy Spirit had given him to avoid the temptation of sleeping with a girl, there would have been no negative results.

That is not what Joshua Harris did, and it is not what we do when we violate this most basic of apostle directives. The problem is rooted in arrogance and pride of self. That is what made the Pharisees the Pharisees. Those righteous religious men of old did not set out to become what they became, and neither did Joshau Harris set out to destroy the lives he was destroying with his new brilliant idea.

Who would have thought that "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" would become the condemning, crushing spirit it has become? The stories, for example, of the damage done to the very ability of young people to meet and interact with each other for the purpose of marriage. The shattered lives left behind after the high and lofty promises of the results to be realized from a proper and controlled courtship were left unfulfilled. The many who were ostracized and punished for being less than pure. A purity defined as a public cup of coffee shared unaccompanied between an unpromised or unmarried girl and boy.

This disaster was unimaginable because we cannot control the products of the self. The results are corrupt because they are ours and because we are corrupt. The instructions on how to implement the divine laws of God must come from the Spirit of God, not from us.

This speaks to each believer's personal contact with God. This speaks to the dethronement of our arrogance and self-will that glories in a mass movement based on our book, or our speech, or our understanding of how best to obey God. What happened to Joshua Harris happens again and again. The list goes on and on. We need to call men and women back to God and back to the laws of God, not back to our understanding of how to implement them.

Which brings us back to the apostle and his struggles with this issue. Should there not be some record of where this struggle took place? I ask myself that, and I believe the answer is yes. So, I look at the record and I ask where the apostle did the damage that is being done in the churches. Obviously, there is none,

so my conclusion is that the apostle must have dealt with the problem before it became a public issue.

With that in mind, where is the personal record? A record that should lead us back to the question of what the apostle told us about his personal struggles. Well, he told us about a problem he had in this very chapter, the problem of covetousness. You may respond by saying that the problem of covetousness is a random example chosen by the apostle to illustrate his instructions. I doubt this, since the first-person voice is used in the following verses.

Where then does the apostle speak of his covetousness in his writings, and these would have to be specific instances that clearly refer to him. The answer would be, well, many times. The reason we do not see them is, first, because we are not looking for them, and, second, because they are presented as the apostle's solution to the problem.

The third reason, and perhaps the most important reason, is that we see the apostle from our perspective, looking back over the ages in which the apostle is accepted as this unquestioned authority. It did not start out that way. The apostle was not so well accepted in his own day.

He also had a very disreputable past. He had once persecuted the church, in an age when longevity in any discipline gave credibility to the practitioner. In addition, Jerusalem was the center of church authority in Paul's day, not Paul's letters as they are today.

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle speaks of being "the least of the apostles—even unworthy to be an apostle. In Ephesians, he speaks of being "the least of

all saints. The reason he gives is his past persecution of the church. But the question is, why bring it up? This is not an apology. It is a statement of position. The apostle is making his peace, his place free of covetousness, because that is the underlying issue.

There is no reason to make the statement in Corinthians and Ephesians if there is no temptation and desire to be something other than the least. What the apostle is admitting is that he desperately feels the desire to succeed, to make something of his life, and to shine among his peers.

He knows that this desire is covetous because the surrounding dominant church culture does not grant him this status. An appeal to the depth and divine anointing of his ministry is not the same as overcoming covetousness. The apostle makes these claims in several places, claiming divine inspiration for his letters. The claim does not give him status. That came later, most likely sometime after his death.

The point is that he deals with covetousness properly, with the Spirit guiding and directing him. In this case, by accepting what he had done wrong and giving validity to his state of inferiority. There are many other ways the apostle could have handled this problem. He could have come up with his own ideas, such as making some effort to improve his image in Jerusalem.

Maybe that was the point in Acts chapter twenty-one. The time when Paul made his second journey, I believe, back to Jerusalem. But notice how the apostle deals with the situation. The way God is leading him could not possibly make sense to him.

Once in Jerusalem, Paul is welcomed, but the apostle James soon takes Paul aside and has this conversation about, "We have heard terrible things about you. Things that James doesn't really believe, but they are said, namely that Paul is teaching believers everywhere to forsake the Law of Moses.

James suggests that Paul participate in a vow along with some kind of purification ritual that was about to be performed by four pious men as a demonstration that he, Paul, was indeed behaving properly and keeping the law. Circumcision had been mentioned earlier in their conversation, along with Jewish customs, so this was not an abstract construction of faith that could easily be brushed aside.

Paul takes James up on his offer. You can do whatever you want with it. That action does not fit very well with Paul's teaching on circumcision and Jewish customs. Matthew Henry points out that James and those with him made it clear to Paul that they did not require these things of Gentile believers, essentially setting up a two-tiered system for the church. Paul is not a man known to hold his tongue, and yet he does. His self-control and submission to the proceedings being conducted by a man of God of considerable reputation is remarkable.

There is simply no way that this is the usual and expected response from Paul. Nor does it fit with Paul's reasoning or letters. What I see is a man finding his way through his problem and accepting the hand that has been dealt to him. Earlier, before Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he had been given a prophecy about chains and bondage awaiting him in Jerusalem. Paul could have turned back, but he accepted what was coming as

the will of God. Even now he could speak out and rise above the authority that James has, but he does not.

What else but Paul's struggle with his covetousness is behind an amazing and totally unexpected solution to the desire for supremacy that exists in every man and woman. Namely his glorying in sufferings. In 2 Corinthians seven, as a prelude to chapter eleven, he speaks of cleansing himself from every defilement of the flesh and spirit, and of glorying in his sufferings for the cause of Christ.

Who would have thought that he would take this route, that of glorying in suffering, as an outlet for his desire to excel for Christ? A solution that has blessed and served suffering saints throughout the centuries. The apostle asks us to bear with him in his folly.

Boasting is obviously folly, but this is what the apostle will do. How else could he express his superiority and authority to draw his readers away from the false teachers?

For I am not inferior to the least of the apostles, he says. Well, that's a mouthful. On what basis? his readers would surely have asked. Are you the main speaker at the conference in Jerusalem? How many thousands attended your last meeting? Do you have the numbers for your annual fundraiser?

These were all things he could have and would have targeted in our modern terminology if he had allowed his spirit of covetousness to lead him to a solution. A solution that Paul needed. He needed a position of superiority to defeat the false teachers.

How was this position of supremacy achieved? The answer is by the leading of the Spirit of God. Listen to the apostle as he lays out his position of supremacy, and you will not feel or see the work of self that defiles and pollutes the whole effort. The apostle does this amazing work by using his sufferings for Christ's sake as his boasts to establish his position.

Listen to the man. Are these the servants of Christ? he asks. I am more. In labors I am more abundant, in stripes I have more than you can measure, in prisons I have often been, even unto death I have come. Five times I received forty stripes from the Jews, except one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. One night and one day I was in deep waters. I have often traveled. I have been in danger from the waters, from robbers, from my own countrymen, and from the heathen. I have been in danger in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren.

I have known weariness and pain. I have watched by night many times. I have tasted hunger and thirst. I have often fasted. I have been cold and naked. In addition to all these physical things, I have taken on the care of the churches. A care that came upon me daily. Someone is weak. I am also weak. Who is offended by the faith, and I am not offended. If I must glory, I will glory in my weakness.

Amazing. Absolutely amazing. Only the Holy Spirit could have taught the apostle how to walk this path and thus avoid the damage caused by self-exultation and glory.

I wonder how many leaders today would behave like Paul in a similar situation. Not too many, I would

guess. What follows from Paul's decision is a life lived and a gospel preached without the devastating results we see from so many public ministries. The way the Holy Spirit leads does not always make sense. Nor does it work to drive a movement with the energy of everything making sense. When the dots are all dotted and the t's are all crossed, we are in the most dangerous place. Disaster is around the next bend.

There is simply no Garden of Eden that can be built with our hands, with our ideas, based on the law that things do not go south. No such garden has ever sprung up under such conditions that has not been filled with snakes. Try if you can, but it will not work. Fill yourself with zeal if you want, the results are the same.

With the self in charge, mowing the grass and keeping the tree leaves green and mulching the ground will not produce the fruit of the Spirit. Snakes will appear in the branches above you. This will happen despite your best efforts. Despite your early rises and late labors in the scriptures. You cannot build the Garden of Eden, only God can.

The apostle tells us when he saw the first glimmer of hope. That moment came when he was willing to accept that he could only rejoice in the law of God according to his inner man. He faced the reality that he had no ability in his own being to do the works of God or to produce good. It is a law, he says. He faced the music—a law. He is familiar with the law. He knows what law means. Laws cannot be broken. He lets the full understanding sink in. If I want to do good, I cannot live out that good under my own direction.

Evil is within me, deep and inescapable by my own actions. I am held captive by the sin within me. I am a wretched man, for I cannot change myself. But the apostle finds his hope. God can, and God did through Jesus Christ. The apostle knows what this life is all about because he has already walked in freedom from the corruption of self. He now fully accepts the implications of this truth.

This is the apostle's conclusion. I can only serve the law of God, the righteous law of God, with my mind, that is, with my reason. That is to say, that one must do this, and this is our guard against the errors of those who claim to walk in freedom, but who commit sin.

The reason of man can never be detached from our walk with God. Man's reason must seek and find what is the will of God, or what he understands to be the will of God. This idea will be developed later in chapter fourteen. Faith and reason are not enemies, nor are they ever separated. Faith transcends reason because faith is mightier than reason, but faith never destroys reason.

We must apply ourselves in seeking what is the will of God. We must cut away all the rest, all the voices of men who cry out to us, but we must not try under the sentence of death to live the life of righteousness unless we are under the guidance of the Spirit of God. We cannot free people from the power of the self until we are free ourselves.

Chapter 29 – The Scriptures

- Rom 8:1 *There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
- Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.
- Rom 8:3 For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:
- Rom 8:4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
- Rom 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.
- Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace.
- Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.
- Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.
- Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

Chapter 30 - Commentary on Romans 8:1-9

The triumphant and glorious note has returned to the apostle's voice with the opening of Romans chapter eight. There is no longer any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This applies to them as well as to their works. Zero condemnation. None, because they now have a godly nature, and they do godly works.

The essence of a nature that has life is that it does, it performs, it works. To say otherwise is to contemplate the idea of death, of not being, of doing nothing, of languishing. The old nature was alive, but it only worked corruption. To say that the new nature is not alive is to speak a lie, an extreme lie, for the new nature is alive with the life and power of God.

How is this accomplished? That is the question, and the apostle answers immediately. Those who are in Christ no longer walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Here walk means to deport oneself, that is, one's works. They have escaped condemnation for their works because they no longer do them in the flesh. This brings us back to the question. What is the flesh?

The simple answer is to look at how the apostle has defined the word up to this point. The essence of the self was the I of chapter seven. I do this and I do that. I permit that which I would not permit, and so on. The I is the Self, and the flesh has been the mechanics by which the Self functions. That translates into everything related to the body and the soul, which is the will, the mind, the emotions, and the body.

Everything the self uses to function is given as a gift from God. Therefore, they are good, but they are defiled by the commands given to them by the self. They can be further defiled by the corruption of sin to the extent that their passions are corrupted. To the extent that this happens, they can hold the will of the self in bondage by their unnatural demands.

There is also the realm of the demonic which can take control of the flesh and hold sway over the self. These bondages must and can find deliverance in the blood of the Lamb, but the discussion here is limited to the first defilement of the flesh. That is, the defilement of works produced by the self, not the flesh.

Usually, the term flesh is understood in Christian thought to mean only the corrupt passions of the body making their demands upon the self, but the apostle is not saying here that the passions of the body are the cause of the corrupt walk. They may be if the passions are followed, but in the apostle's concept of no longer walking in the flesh, he does not mean to stop following the passions of the body.

What the apostle means is that the self is no longer using the body to carry out orders given by the self, and these orders are not affected by the passions of the body. The commands themselves are corrupted because the self causes the corruption when it uses the means it has to carry out the commands of God, which are its soul and body.

To the extent that the flesh expresses its desires to us, and to the extent that those desires are contrary to the will of God, the body is included in the apostle's description of the flesh in other places. For to walk after, or according to, which is a better translation, is to

indicate conformity or agreement with a source of authority from which the information is derived.

Our bodies are not in and of themselves a source of authority in the sense that they speak of their own volition. Our bodies have built-in tastes and desires that were put there by God and are good. There is nothing wrong with taking care of them. A person must drink water, and a person must eat bread. To the extent that the body is defiled by sin and under demonic influence, it can become a powerful source of passion that speaks to us and can lead us astray. The same is true when the mind and emotions cry out for attention.

There is biblical recognition in other passages of these passions of the body and soul. They are rightly called the flesh when they become dominant and provide direction contrary to the will of God. In such cases, the self can be accused of following the flesh and must and will be cleansed of these desires, but this is not the issue the apostle is dealing with here. The corruption escaped in Romans is the corruption of the commands that the self gives to the body and soul to carry out.

The body and the soul are under the command of the self, or the essence of man. They have no will of their own. They are the power used for execution and the mechanism by which the works of the law are performed. This is the self that walks according to the flesh. It is the self that sees what needs to be done and comes up with the details of how to do it.

Any simple analysis of how we try to obey a law of God will reveal this process. There is no simple doing of the law, because there is nothing simple about

conforming ourselves to a totally foreign way of doing things. Take, for example, the commandment not to take the name of the Lord God in vain. What exactly does that mean, and how is it done? By keeping our mouths shut? By controlling our temper?

We must speak. Can milder versions of cursing be used? What is cursing? Is huffing and puffing and shaking our fists at the sky a violation? What about all the little mild expressions we use to express our frustration? The list goes on and on, and the apostle says, "Stop trying to carry out the laws of God by the means of your flesh. You will only fail."

Instead, acknowledge the truth that you have heard in the law. Admit that the law is right. Use your mind to determine this. Do not just believe everything you are told. There are many people who have many ideas about how everyone should live. Reject their control, the apostle instructs, especially in Galatians and Colossians. Do not obey them when they talk about keeping days and eating food and on and on. They are just telling us their own ideas of how to be righteous.

Nevertheless, do not separate your reason from determining what is the will of God and what is not. Base your search for understanding on what God has said in His Word. Once you have determined what is the will of God, surrender that knowledge to the Spirit of God who dwells in you, the apostle instructs. Allow the Spirit to give you instructions on how to carry out the will of God. These instructions will not be corrupted.

It may sound simple, but it is not a journey that is easily begun or completed. That is why so much detail has gone into the journey up to this point, so that

we can see clearly what the issues are and what needs to be done. There are basic starting points, but we are to turn away from ourselves, from our own reasoning about how things should be completed and wait for further instructions. This way of living removes all condemnation and provides total freedom.

Admittedly, the anger of others toward such a person may be fierce, for opposition can come from all sides if we do not listen to them. But inner peace and complete peace with God can be realized. The law of the Spirit will guide us and note that the apostle claims that there is a law of the Spirit. The Spirit does not make up His own mind but tells us what the will of God is. Following the instructions of the Spirit will keep us free from the law of sin. This is not done by ceasing to do good works, but by removing the corruption from those works.

For the law could not remove this corruption from us, not because the law lacked the proper instructions, but because the law had only ourselves to work with. The apostle claims that the law was weak through the flesh. On the surface, this might sound like the law was unable to produce righteous works in us because the self was unable to perform the works required by the law because of the weak facilities it had with which to perform them.

This, I believe, is the general understanding required by the penal substitutionary framework. For penal substitution has no place in this instance for a corrupt self. I was surprised to discover this because I had always thought that the penal substitutionary framework included the self in its total depravity theory.

I suppose this conclusion might be vigorously disputed by some, but the logic applied here by penal substitution is clear. What the penal substitution sees is an uncorrupted self when it hears the law and then gives an uncorrupted command to the body for execution. The pure command fails only because the body is too weak to carry out the command.

I do not think so. If you follow the thought expressed by the apostle, this is not the conclusion. The law was weak because the law could not directly control man's flesh. The law cannot command our bodies to obey. Nor can the law control our reason or will, which together must decide whether to obey and then give the command to the body. The self is the primary corrupting agent that corrupts any commands the self gives to the body in carrying out the commands of the law.

To remedy this problem, God sent His Son into the world as a man. He became one of us, but not one of us in our corruption. His being and nature remained unspoiled because He was unspoiled from the beginning. He was one with God. The man Christ Jesus was fully human along with His full divinity. He walked in our world and did the works of God without corruption.

Notice here that Christ Jesus had the same soul and body that we have, and any physical weakness contained in that soul and body did not prevent Him from obeying the Law. The difference was that He directly controlled His soul and body. Christ Jesus did not find in His soul and body an inability to obey God that had to be overcome by divine power.

This dispels the penal substitutionary understanding of this issue, namely, that the law could not be executed in us because our body and soul in their God-created form were too weak to do the work.

With the works that came from the holy nature of Christ Jesus, He condemned the corruption that was in our works and the sin that was in us. The Son did this so that we might gain the ability to fulfill the righteousness of the law. We gained this ability when He gave us a new nature and the opportunity to consider ourselves dead. We are now able to do the works of God under the control and direction of the Spirit of God.

For those who try to fulfill the righteousness of the law according to their best thinking are only seeking their own interest. They do not seek the interest of God. Because these two things cannot be combined. We cannot perform works with our own strength and wisdom without corrupting our works because we have infused them with ourselves. We can only perform the righteous works of God under the direction of the Spirit of God.

Our decision to perform righteous deeds by our own wisdom will always produce death. Only those who yield to the instructions of the Spirit of God will find life and peace. For our own mind and reason is an enemy of God. Our own purposes and goals are not subject to the law of God, nor can they be, for they are ours. For this reason, those who follow their own best thinking cannot please God.

We are no longer in the flesh, the apostle declares, trapped in a world where we focus on doing the things we can and think we should do. We are now

in the Spirit. That is, we listen to the Spirit, to whom we yield our bodies and souls as vessels for His use. The Spirit now commands and we obey. We surrender to Him all that we are and rely on Him for the courage to carry out the command.

The difference is not so much that we need the supernatural power of the Spirit to do what He asks of us, for those commands are usually within our reach. What we need His power for is to complete and perfect the work that our small contribution at the beginning provided. This kind of life cannot, by the means of our reason, see how we can ever get where we need to go by the tiny act required of us.

It is a life that is lived by constantly moving into an unknown world that our reason cannot understand. A world beyond the reach of our senses. We cannot see how much good could be accomplished by the instructions the Spirit gives us. Perhaps even worse is the fear associated with actions opened to us that do not necessarily fit the expected religious viewpoint that surrounds us.

This is obviously a dangerous thought to entertain because of the capacity for self-deception, and this is why we must always keep the law of God in mind. We are never to do what we clearly know is not the will of God. However, the capacity for self-deception is just as strong on the other side, which means what we have been taught is the normal way of expressing the will of God. This is the land into which the Spirit leads us, shattering our natural understanding of how the will of God can best be carried out.

This kind of life cannot be lived without the Spirit of God, the apostle declares. The Spirit of God must dwell in us, and if the Spirit of God does not dwell in us, then we will not be rightly led in the ways of God. This raises the question of how one receives the indwelling Spirit of God.

Obviously, the answer is by faith, but religion does not usually leave such an important question unanswered without interjecting its own wisdom. Many antics are suggested as to how one might receive the Spirit from the Father's hand.

Jesus was very clear on the matter. He taught us by telling the story of a father and his son. You are not good people; Jesus began the story. But look at how you treat your children. When your son asks for bread, you do not give him a stone. What kind of a cruel person would that make the father? If the son asks for a piece of fish to eat, will the father give the son a snake instead? Look at yourselves, Jesus said. Why should a good God not be much better than you?

The story is a sharp rebuke by Jesus for the lack of faith in his audience. If we are evil, which we are. Yet we can be so good to our children. How much more will our Father in heaven, who is good, give us good things if we ask.

This He will do, Jesus said, and what is a more important gift than the Holy Spirit. We must have him, or we will not be able to walk and live righteously. We are to ask and believe that the Father in heaven will give him to us. This is followed by listening and submitting to the Spirit's sometimes strange, but always simple instructions.

Chapter 31 – The Scriptures

- Rom 8:10 And if Christ *be* in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.
- Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.
- Rom 8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.
- Rom 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.
- Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
- Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.
- Rom 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:
- Rom 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.
- Rom 8:18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
- Rom 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.
- Rom 8:20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope,
- Rom 8:21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.
- Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

Rom 8:23 And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the redemption of our body.

Rom 8:24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

Rom 8:25 But if we hope for that we see not, *then* do we with patience wait for *it*.

Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Rom 8:27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what *is* the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to *the will of* God.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?

Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

Rom 8:33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth.

Rom 8:34 Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at

the right hand of God, who also maketh
intercession for us.

Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of
Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution,
or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Rom 8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all
the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the
slaughter.

Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than
conquerors through him that loved us.

Rom 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor
life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor
things present, nor things to come,

Rom 8:39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other
creature, shall be able to separate us from the love
of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Chapter 32 - Commentary on Romans 8:10-39

If Christ is in us, the apostle continues, then the body is dead because of sin. This means the body in a broad sense, including all that we are, the self, the soul, and the body. This is an understanding forced upon us by the text, for we are told in other places that we are dead in Christ, meaning and including the essence of the self. Therefore, the death on the cross of Christ with which we are identified cannot be limited to the material body.

We now surrender to Christ, or to the Spirit, and life comes alive in us, not death. What an amazing thing this is, because we are talking about the Spirit who raised Christ from the dead. What a power that must have been, and that power lives in us.

Because of this power in us, and because we yield to this power, then life happens in us, the apostle claims. The same kind of life happens that raised Christ. We should therefore lose all feelings of obligation to our old self and its thinking. This is what the apostle means when he uses the word flesh. The flesh is us, in all our thinking and reasoning, in all our attempts to be righteous. The vast amounts of time and energy we once spent trying to do the will of God in our lives can cease.

We are no longer the servants of the law, condemned to the work and effort necessary to execute the law, only to find the whole thing constantly corrupted. We need not forget the life we once lived, for we should remember how it was and never return to the death we once knew. We should remember the times when we struggled to find ways to tame our passions and sinful desires and constantly failed

because they were really us in the first place. We could not change ourselves.

Now we surrender to the Spirit of God and obey His simple instructions. As we do this, we find that the old restlessness in our bodies dies away. Instead, we see a life rising within us, a power we never dreamed we had, to live a better life for ourselves and for God. We live as if we are the servants of another man, which we are, for we obey the voice of the Spirit.

But a strange thing happens. The continuing commands that come from the Spirit of God take on a tone that we have never heard before. The law never spoke to us in such a voice. The law was a taskmaster, but the voice of the Spirit begins to speak like a father to his son. The new life in us responds, and we know, even though we are still servants, because we obey.

We begin to believe and comprehend what seems so impossible, even unspeakable, that we are the sons of God. What kind of a world is this? we ask. How can one obey and still live in the house of God, because the servants are kept outside? The servants do not eat at the dining table, yet we hear ourselves being invited in. What we thought we had lost forever, that conception, that realization of ourselves, that self that expressed itself in eating of the forbidden fruit, is found.

The Spirit of God, who at first, we thought was another master, another hand that gave the commands, becomes something else entirely. Along with His commands is His touch. He touches the fears and the bondage. He touches the heart. He makes alive what we never knew was dead. For we have killed more than we thought with our sin and our corruption.

What we had killed was our ability to achieve our own life, the self that the mind of God had designed for us. A self capable of climbing the mountains north of the throne. A self capable of seeing what was not and calling into existence what did not exist. We thought we could take this power for ourselves, and with this power we had twisted the best that God gave us. Now life is being given back to us. Life in a way we never imagined life. Now our self is given back to us.

The Spirit takes our hand and shows us that our suffering was not really about the suffering itself. We had not opened our hands and experienced the loss of that which was so precious to us because it was precious to us. The suffering was about the Son of God. He was the one who entered into suffering to give value to suffering, knowing that we must suffer to reach him. His footsteps on the way were what brought heaven into our pain and agony.

Even into our tears that broke our hearts. The tears of despair. The tears that saw no benefit to be gained from such a tragedy. He was there, and his light is what added value, for his presence was why we could find our way out of hell. He stooped so low to give us the chance to suffer with him, as if that were really the way it was. In truth, he was suffering with us, for what was in it for him?

We look around us and see another strange thing happening. It is as if the world around us is coming to our aid, as if creation wants us to succeed in becoming the sons of God. It is an effort from creation that speaks of self-interest. This is the thwarted agony of the grace built into the earth and the sky.

For God has placed the creation in bondage to corruption from the beginning of time. They are the ones who first called us back to God, if we would pause to look around and listen. Now they reveal their motivation. They are calling us even more urgently to continue our journey, for with our glorification will come their own deliverance.

This is why a man or woman who walks according to the instructions of the Spirit of God will find events, occurrences, natural coincidences happening around them. Things will come to their aid. Things that seem perfectly in order, in the sense that there are no flashes of lightning or shaking of the earth.

This will be the earth, the heavens joining in with whatever help they can provide to hasten the appearance of the sons and daughters of God. For with our revelation and with our deliverance will come their own deliverance from the grip of corruption.

We are the first fruits of the Spirit of God. We are the first fruits created by the Spirit, the first beings who were once in bondage and now walk free from the corruption contained in time and space. We have begun this walk in freedom and have taken our first bite of the fruit of the new Garden of Eden.

We have a groaning within us that longs for full and complete freedom, even the redemption of our bodies. We are carried by hope, for hope is not fully realized, otherwise why hope? We see, but we see partially.

This hope now fills us, and we wait with patience for our full deliverance. The Spirit helps us in this waiting as the plague of corruption and decay

continues to cling to our bodies. The Spirit teaches us not only how to live, but also how to pray as we should pray. Sometimes the weight of this prayer is beyond words, and we can do nothing but groan out our requests that our full deliverance come quickly. These groans are interpreted by the Spirit into the ears of God.

When we live our lives under the direction and guidance of the Spirit of God, we know that everything that happens around us will work out for our benefit. These are those who have chosen to love God more than themselves, and here is where the demands of penal substitution come crashing down again.

In this complicated thought process, rooted in Greek philosophy about the nature of being, the self is apparently not seen as corrupt in and of itself. I repeat that I had not seen this before, although I had been exposed to the logic.

This theory sees the self as an extension of God's own being. In essence man already has the nature of God. The self participates in what is not good by becoming less than good, or less than God, but the self never participates in corruption defined by anything other than law-breaking.

The work of regeneration is then seen as an act of restoring that which is less than good and receiving a legal absolution for transgressions, not the granting of an entirely new nature.

What also follows is this whole idea that God knows individually what everyone, as yet unborn, will do in terms of his or her decision to love God or not.

With this kind of foreknowledge, the self is not free to choose on its own, in the true sense of freedom.

This is its own argument and will come up again in chapter nine of Romans. God's own freedom is limited under penal substitution to the point where he is forced to know every detail of unfolding time and space, whether he wants to or not.

He must do this, it is argued, in order to prove that he is God. I do not dispute God's foreknowledge in the sense that God knows everything he wants to know, which allows him not to know what he does not want to know.

In fact, we are told by God Himself that He exercises this option with our sins. He throws them into the sea and forgets them. I take God at His word, whereas penal substitution forces us to disagree with the plain words that God has spoken. God knows the end from the beginning, which allows Him to create this space in the middle, which is our created world, where He can fully exercise His will, including His will to forget, if He so chooses.

What is lost with the absolute forced foreknowledge from which each individual self will choose to love God or not is the concept of the corrupted self, defined as the corruption of its own nature. Without the self corrupted nature of the self, there is no urgent need to take on the new nature of the Son of God.

A much better option, and one that is consistent with a biblical understanding, is to see God's foreknowledge as extending to the type of individual who would choose to love Him, namely, one who is

willing to deny himself and take on the nature of the Son of God. What this entails and looks like in detail and structure only the wisdom and absolute understanding of God knows and, as the text says, foreknows.

This necessary choice and all the surrounding circumstances necessary for the choice would be fully known before the birth of time but would not extend to who these individuals would be. To love God would be left to the individual's choice, made in complete freedom. What follows is that God would have known the end, and would always have known the end, and would have had complete control over the end, both of those who accept Him and of those who reject Him.

For this is the life that God prepared before the beginning of time for those who would choose Him. God knew our depravity and weakness, and He knew what kind of life was needed to bring us home to Himself. God had always known this, and He made His plans accordingly, which were plans to conform us to the image of God and to take on His nature. This was the nature of the Son of God, even Jesus Christ, who became the firstborn among many brethren.

What follows is that when an individual chooses to love God, he is not an unknown entity. An entity that God has to figure out what to do with or when to accept. This has always been known, both the type of individual, the one who could choose to love God, and how such a person is called to enter the life of God.

The call is not given at the moment of choosing to love God, but the call has always been there, written into the very fabric of the universe. The call is there, in the breath of the wind moving off the mountain, in the

brilliance of the stars twinkling overhead, and in the roar of the oceans pounding the shores.

God calls and God reaches. What God calls, with the caveat that one must respond to that call, God also justifies and glorifies. This is the promise that accompanies our decision to abandon ourselves and take on the nature of Christ Jesus, a nature that responds to the guidance of the Holy Spirit without producing any corruption.

What shall we say then, the apostle asks in conclusion. What kind of business is this? God's own nature given to us. Having an uncorrupted nature within us? To have the Spirit of God giving us personal guidance every day? If this is a reality, then God must really be for us, and if God is for us, what else matters?

The apostle adds weight to his argument. Look, he says, God did not spare his only Son to bring the life of heaven into our hearts. Since God has spared no expense in His effort to bring us back to Himself, will He not continue to freely give us the grace we need to complete the journey home? Who will stop us? No one, the apostle answers, because no one can declare us unrighteous if God has declared us righteous.

So there really is no condemnation for those who follow the Spirit of God and not their own best thinking. We need not despair in our failed efforts to fully and perfectly yield to and understand the voice of the Spirit. The Son of God Himself stands at the right hand of God, interceding for us and praying for us until we come home.

Meanwhile, we live on this earth, but we can take great courage. Nothing we go through can separate

us from the love of God, not tribulation, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or even the threat of our physical life being taken away.

We are often in distress, the apostle admits. Some believers, depending on where they live, are considered sheep for slaughter. This is literally true of a few, but in many ways, it is true of all believers. This world does not listen to the voice of the Spirit and, for the most part, does not look kindly upon those who do.

In all of this, the apostle assures us that we who love God and follow the Spirit of God will overcome the difficulties we face because God loves us. A love that cannot be taken away from us by death, or life, or angels, or principalities, or powers, or things that are, or things that are to come. For there is no height or depth or anything else in all creation that will be able to separate us from the love of God that has been given to us in Christ Jesus.

Chapter 33 – The Scriptures

- Rom 9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
- Rom 9:2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
- Rom 9:3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:
- Rom 9:4 Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service *of God*, and the promises;
- Rom 9:5 Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.
- Rom 9:6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel:
- Rom 9:7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.
- Rom 9:8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.
- Rom 9:9 For this *is* the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.
- Rom 9:10 And not only *this*; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, *even* by our father Isaac;
- Rom 9:11 (For *the children* being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)
- Rom 9:12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.
- Rom 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

Chapter 34 - Commentary on Romans 9:1-13

The apostle begins chapter nine of Romans with a lament over the condition of Israel, those who were the direct physical descendants of Abraham. He is greatly distressed that the very people who should have been the closest to God were in the process of being rejected by God. This movement away from God had been set in motion by the Jews' rejection of their Messiah, Christ Jesus.

These Jews were certain that they had God figured out because things were so clearly laid out for them. They had what they thought was irrefutable proof that they were on God's side and were, in fact, God's children. The possibility that they had misunderstood the plan was simply unthinkable. This should serve as a stern warning to anyone who thinks that he can discover either righteousness or God through his own reasoning.

The evidence behind the conclusions the Jews had reached was no trivial matter. These were not trivial arguments that could be dismissed as the ravings of mad men. The Jews had evidence. They were Israelites. They had records in their temple that carefully recorded their ancestry. There were rules and regulations to ensure the accuracy of that record. There was no mistake that could have occurred on their part.

These records linked them back to Abraham, who had been accepted by God as His chosen vessel. The glory of the Lord had repeatedly visited the earth in direct connection with Abraham. They had stories of God personally walking with Abraham and even consulting with Abraham on matters of great weight. There had been a conversation about the destruction of

Sodom, with God taking Abraham's opinion into consideration.

A covenant had been given to Abraham, along with the promise that he and his descendants would enjoy the blessings of God forever. That was why the records in the temple were so important. That the records might have another interest to God apparently never occurred to them. Namely, to prove that the lineage of Christ was directly connected to King David.

The children of Israel, and only the children of Israel, had been given the holy law of God. This law had been given to them from the top of a burning and blazing Mount Sinai. No other nation or people or person had been so favored. The prophecies that the Messiah would come to redeem the Jews were so clear that even Christ Himself said that He came not but for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

So, what was all this business about faith that Paul was preaching, because being a Jew had absolutely nothing to do with faith. The records in the temple were not there because someone believed they were there. They were either there or they were not. They were there because someone was born a Jew and lived his life as a Jew. Period. End of story.

Keeping the Law had become a matter of works alone. No one asked you if you believed in the promises of God or if you loved the righteousness of God more than your own righteousness. Such questions were foolishness in the ears of the Pharisees. You either obeyed the law or you did not. If you did not obey the law, you were not a child of Abraham.

In the mind of the Jew, the failure of this carefully constructed plan, namely that God loved only the nation of Israel because only the nation of Israel had the laws of God, did not exist. The possibility did not even register in their minds. The upside was that keeping the Laws of God made one pure in the eyes of God, and since the Jews were the only ones who had the Law and kept the Law, they were the only ones loved by God.

The circle was complete, made perfect sense, and sealed the deal. Which, of course, is a problem if you know anything at all about the corruption of the self, but that was not something the Law focused on. Telling people to obey the law was the job of the law, which would somehow have been undone if they had been told in detail about their inability to obey the law without corrupting it.

Paul did not use self-corruption as an argument in his attempt to convince the Jews that the gospel of Christ was the truth. I suppose this is because of the difficulties involved, but I am guessing, and I am guessing based on what was done, not on the basis of an explanation from the apostle. We do know that the argument was taken to a whole new level, that of the righteousness of God. Where does the righteousness of God exist, or rather come from?

Does the righteousness of God come from Himself or from the Law? We have been through these arguments in connection with the penal substitutionary atonement model, which makes the same mistakes as the Jews. The righteousness of God is not established by keeping the law but exists above and beyond any

law. The righteousness of God is established by His own character and will.

This is the part that Paul focused on with the Jews, the part about the will of God being the righteousness of God. This is a hard pill to swallow because we want God to be subject to some kind of standard that we can understand. The Jews were no different from us in this regard. They could understand the Law, and they could make sense of God if He was logical and methodical and acted according to well-established patterns.

The Jews had those patterns. Those patterns said that God was just because the law was just, and God behaved according to the law. The apostle upset the apple cart by asserting that God is just in and of Himself, all the way through, completely and utterly. The implication is that God's will is righteous regardless of the course of action chosen. This is no way to hold God accountable except by appeal to his own will. This conclusion did not and does not go down well.

To establish the principle, the apostle takes the Jew through the Old Testament, since that was the only source of authority the Jew recognized, and he proceeds to show the Jew that this is how things have always been done. The problem was that they had not been paying attention.

The first Old Testament illustration the apostle presents is the birth of Isaac. Before the birth of Isaac, there was confusion created by the birth of Ishmael from Sarah's maid. This had been Sarah's idea, which she presented to Abraham when it became clear to both that the promised son was not appearing. Perhaps

Sarah thought that Abraham might have misunderstood God and missed the point that they were to do what was legally and morally possible.

In any case, Ishmael was born and God rejected him because the child was not born of both Abraham and Sarah. That birth would have required the power of God to overcome Sarah's barrenness, not the seed of another woman provided in substitution. This is the point the apostle focuses on to establish that God was under no obligation to accept a child who was a legal child according to the rules of the day, but who was not conceived in direct accordance with His promise.

The argument is a bit thin, but it is there if you look hard enough. Namely, that a legal descendant of Abraham coming down through the centuries has many steps involved in its birth that are not under the direct supervision or direction of God. God not only wants personal faith from each individual, the apostle says, but God also wants each individual to be born of His personal attention and approval. Something like that.

Therefore, God has the right to present His promise to someone who is not a direct descendant of Abraham, and to grant grace and mercy to that individual. Obviously, the Jews would have wanted a little more proof than this, so the apostle continues.

His next example is the generation of Israelites that followed Abraham and Sarah, namely Isaac and Rebecca. In this case, Rebecca was also barren for a time but eventually conceived twins. These children struggled with each other in the womb, so much so that Rebecca went to inquire of the Lord as to the cause. Apparently, the problem was so bad that Rebecca feared her bowls would be torn to pieces.

Rebecca was told that there were two nations in her womb and two classes of people. When the children were born, one nation would be stronger than the other, and in a reversal of the order of the day, the older would serve the younger. This decision of God, the apostle claims, was made while the children were in the womb and had done neither good nor bad works. I mean, both were, shall we say, kicking and scratching away.

The decision was made by God entirely with the material at hand, which was the existence of two children, still in their original essence. You could say that only their selves existed at that point. To add insult to injury, the apostle goes on to tell his readers that not only did God make his decision as to who would be stronger than the other and who would serve the other, but God also decided whom he loved and whom he hated while the children existed only as an emerging self.

This analysis by the apostle caused much anger and uproar, not only in his day, but right up to our own. For here is the problem. The choice of who should be the strongest can be incorporated into almost any theological system, as can the choice of who should serve whom. What causes the problem is the statement that God loved the one child and hated the other. We want to know the basis for this, for all the obvious reasons.

This affects every single person on planet earth very deeply. The King James has the translation "according to election," which the Reformed faith takes to mean an arbitrary selection by God based on sheer chance. A much more accurate translation would be

"according to his choice," meaning the choice of God. This directly links God's election to His will and nature, since He does all things according to the counsel of His own will.

So, this is a righteous choice because God is righteous, but it is not random as we understand random because the choice is connected to God and what He wants. This may or may not help in terms of human comfort, because we still do not like the idea that God is only answerable to His own will. Shouldn't He wait for the twins to make some kind of choice regarding works, or better yet, for the twins to do some kind of work to impress God?

This thinking is deeply ingrained in the human psyche and is, I suppose, where the foreknowledge argument comes from in relation to this problem. I am told that the understanding of the early church was that God looked at the fetuses forming in the womb and could see into the future and knew what kind of works each would do and made his choice based on that. The problem is that this is still a choice based on the works of man, even though the works are delayed. This seems to me to defeat the apostle's argument.

I am not surprised, however, that the early church would take this position. They were quite immersed in Greek philosophy and would have felt the need to affirm the absolute necessity of God knowing everything in the future, down to the smallest detail. They felt that God would not be a God worthy of being God under any other circumstances. This is Greek thinking, and it does not allow for God to be God, that is, to choose not to know something if He so chooses.

Consequently, I disagree with the foreknowledge of works projected into the future as the basis on which God decides whom he will love and whom he will hate. The text does not require this, and there is no mention of foreknowledge in either the Old Testament story of this incident or in the apostle's text.

I would rather think that we should accept a simple reading of the text in which God looks at the babies in the womb and loves the one and hates the other. On this reading, what can this mean? On what basis does God make his decision? I think randomness is ruled out because God is not random. He is who He is, and who He is was present when He decided to love one baby and hate the other.

That being said, one quick assumption we make should be dispelled. The text says nothing about the permanence of that hatred or love if the conditions under which the choice was made changed. The point is the existence of the choice, which was not based on what the children had done.

I think the stage for this was set back in chapter eight, where the apostle speaks of those who love God, and consequently all things work together for their good. These people, those who love God, have been foreknown by God since the beginning of time. We have foreknowledge attributed to a type of people, those who either will or perhaps can love God, and not to the particular individuals who have chosen to love.

Why can't we have God look at the babies in the womb and see what He foreknew? That is, to see in real time which one of them was the type of being who would return His love, because the love of either child

is not a work, which is the point the apostle is trying to make.

Coupled with the idea that such love or hate is not permanent, should the underlying conditions change, the theory fits the overall scripture, for there is no guarantee that even the type of person who is inclined to love God will persist in salvation. Moreover, this is not a difficult phenomenon to observe in real life. There are vast stretches of time and vast cultures that seem untouched by the gospel until conditions are reached where they are inclined to accept the truth.

Maybe that just makes things worse? I feel very much in the company of Augustine and his condemnation of infants who were not baptized. That position was clearly wrong and hardly defensible by anyone, but I suspect there is truth in the perspective that God loves or hates infants based on their essence.

Having said that, I am aware that there is a great danger involved in trying to figure out God and, as a result, straying from what He has clearly said about Himself. God has clearly revealed Himself as one who is working diligently to bring all peoples to a state of being where they can believe and trust in Him.

Another point that should be made is that salvation is how we are inclined to apply this love and hate, which may not have been the original application of God in loving and hating the two children in Rebecca's womb. It may well have been a matter of choosing who would receive the birthright and, consequently, who would become the lineage through which the Messiah would come.

This choice of birthright, resulting from his initial love and hatred, would have been much less negotiable or changeable later. The same, I believe, does not apply to salvation, since there remains the possibility of the self turning to God while the breath of life remains.

Chapter 35 – The Scriptures

- Rom 9:14 What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid.
- Rom 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.
- Rom 9:16 So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.
- Rom 9:17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.
- Rom 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth.
- Rom 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?
- Rom 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed *it*, Why hast thou made me thus?
- Rom 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?
- Rom 9:22 *What* if God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:
- Rom 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,
- Rom 9:24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?
- Rom 9:25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.
- Rom 9:26 And it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people;

there shall they be called the children of the living God.

Rom 9:27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

Rom 9:28 For he will finish the work, and cut *it* short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

Rom 9:29 And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

Rom 9:30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Rom 9:31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

Rom 9:32 Wherefore? Because *they sought it* not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

Rom 9:33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Chapter 36 - Commentary on Romans 9:14-33

The apostle simply will not compromise his position. God does what He thinks is best, according to His own choice, and there is no injustice in that choice, because there is no injustice in God.

The apostle goes on to say that this choice of God cannot be influenced or decided in consultation with anyone else, nor can it be directed in its implementation after input from the fallen self. Therefore, our will or what we chose to do did not influence or affect what God did or offered to us.

This means that the nature of the offer was not changed by our action, even the action of refusal. The offer remains the same. What we have affected by refusing to love God is not God or God's love, but our condition, in that we have continued our fallen condition after the rejection.

Nor was the offer of salvation an offer that was suspended or in any way unformed before the offer was made to us. In this sense, our acceptance of the offer did not change the offer in any way. That is, the offer remains uncontaminated by the self, which contaminates everything it touches.

This reality of contamination was, in fact, why the death of the self had to occur on the cross of Christ. The death had to occur before the self could accept the offer without transferring the contamination, even though the acceptance itself did not change the offer.

Based on what the apostle told us about God hating Esau and loving Jacob before the children were born, there is reason to believe that God observes the

emerging self in the womb and makes decisions based on what he sees. These decisions have nothing to do with what the self has yet done or accomplished.

The apostle's next example for the Jewish people is the case of Pharaoh, who ruled the land of Egypt near the end of the captivity of the nation of Israel. Those were brutal times, and it could be said that Pharaoh was a brutal ruler. According to the apostle, this was a choreographed event over a long period of time in which God had first chosen a particular type of man to sit on the throne of Egypt. A man God knew would accomplish what He wanted accomplished. Which meant being cruel.

This was done by God, and a man was chosen by God who was the type of man capable of doing such things. Furthermore, the apostle claims that when Pharaoh wavered in his cruelty during the plagues that were poured out on the land of Egypt, God came to his side and hardened Pharaoh's heart so that the cruelty would continue.

This was done by God because God wanted to demonstrate His great power. A power that could not have been demonstrated had Pharaoh succumbed to the pressure of the plagues and let the children of Israel go.

This example is not considered too problematic in theological circles because Pharaoh could have done evil things of his own volition before God chose him to sit on the throne of Egypt. God would have chosen to make a bad man worse. Which is more palatable in our thinking, I suppose, but there are other valid considerations.

These questions concern the effect of outside influences on the choices of the self. What does God do with them? We can answer this question to some extent because we know what God has done. God has written the desire for righteousness into the natural nature in which each self is wrapped. Namely, his body and his general well-being. Things simply go better, and life is more enjoyable when the right choices are made.

In this sense, free will is not as free as we might think. Free will is not a god to whom one must bow the knee. In fact, God always overrides free will when the purpose of righteousness is served. The very reality that we have an inclination within us that leads us to make right choices is such an override.

God wants us to make right decisions. God wants us to love Him more than ourselves. Why not overwhelm the self with inclinations to choose God and to love God? Is this even possible? The Reformed faith seems to think so, with its doctrine of irresistible grace. The idea would be to flood the bastions and sweep away any resistance of the human will, but is it even possible?

Would a life of bliss and joy and happiness produce a will in the self that always chooses the right thing? We need not ponder this question too long. The answer lies in the experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Are they not surrounded by irresistible grace? Certainly, with all that was good and holy. There was no want or need, yet they chose themselves over God.

As far as I can tell, based first on the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived, and a great deal of academic thought applied to the question, irresistible

grace does not work to set a permanent course for a free will. Surrounding the self with bliss does not overwhelm the urge to seek one's own way.

Nor is there any indication that God desires or has chosen such a state of being. I see no reason to believe that God did not know in the Garden that the Fall was coming. He certainly made every preparation for a fall and made no effort to stop it.

This does not mean that God will not interfere with man's choice by adjusting the surrounding tendencies to make choices. Surely this would have happened to Pharaoh when the whole land of Egypt was under the grip of the plagues. There is plenty of inclination there to stop the whole thing, but God intervened.

We are not told how God intervened, only that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. This could easily have been done by counterincentives applied at just the right time. It could have been a favorite concubine throwing a fit, or a strong counselor advising against acquiescence. The list could go on and on, but the point is obvious. God intervenes in human affairs and human decisions all the time when it suits His purposes.

In this sense, God makes the self do what he wants, but God does not make the self what the self is in its essence. There is a vast difference, and there is no indication here in the apostle's examples or anywhere else in Scripture that such a thing is happening or has ever happened. The self is unrighteous and has always been unrighteous. The path to the moment of self-denial is aided and abetted by God, but the choice to love is always free.

The apostle therefore boldly told the Jews that they had no reason to complain about God's acceptance of the Gentiles by faith. Nor did the argument that they were helpless objects in the hands of an almighty God carry any weight. The objection was that if their works did not change the will of God, then they were not to blame for their condition.

To counter this point, the apostle goes deeper into his argument by using the example of the potter making pottery from a lump of clay. This was an example with which the children of Israel would have been very familiar. They would have often seen the potter at work, spinning his wheel on which he pressed a lump of clay to form a vessel.

Does not the potter have power over the clay? the apostle asked. To which the answer is an obvious yes. The clay has no power to object to the kind of pottery the potter makes from it. For the potter makes his decisions based on the type of clay under his hands. This is usually a lump of clay from which the potter breaks pieces of the size he needs for his vessels.

Since the consistency of clay is not the same, the potter makes his decisions based on what the clay is at the moment. There could be several issues involved, coloration, consistency, and texture needed for each proposed vessel. The resulting vessel could then be used for either an honorable place in the home, such as on the dining room table, or a dishonorable one, such as the slop bucket.

This is all done at the will of the potter, not at the will of the clay, nor is the clay asked to attempt to be the proposed vessel. Such a suggestion would be impossible for the clay to carry out, just as it is

impossible for us to change or make ourselves into what we should be, because we cannot see with the eyes of the potter.

It should be noted that the pesky spectrum of fatalism rises in this conversation, the instinct the apostle is trying to quell in the opening question.

The objection was whether we were helpless and doomed because our works could not influence God's decision. The apostle has answered this effectively, but has he left us deeper in the depths of fatalism by attributing God's choice to our state of being rather than to our actions? Is the wrong kind of clay not the end of the matter?

Does the helplessness of what we are not drag us deeper into despair than even our works? We seem no less capable of changing our state of being than of changing our actions. The answer would be negative, and this is why. The nature of clay can be changed by natural forces beyond its control. The same would and does apply to God.

There is the natural weathering process where rocks and minerals are broken down, changing the mineral composition of the clay and altering the clay. There is the movement of water, which affects the moisture content, plasticity, and compaction properties of the clay. There are the natural processes of soil formation, including the accumulation of organic matter and the action of microorganisms, which can alter clay properties.

All of this is to say that clay can be changed, which means that we can be changed by processes beyond our control, with the one caveat that is different

from clay. We have a will and clay does not. We can allow the processes of life to change us, which translates into these external inclinations and influences that life imposes on us.

There is absolutely every reason, based on the long history of mankind, to believe that God does spend an immense amount of time and effort in molding nations and people into the kind of clay from which He can build vessels fit for the highest honor. Namely, the kind of clay that is willing to love and submit to His lordship and salvation.

I do not know who made this quote, but it is well said. “Because God is merciful and declares the end for the beginning, He acted in a mysterious and somewhat preparatory fashion with respect to prior pagan religion and spirituality the world over; therefore, any similarities these beliefs hold with authentic Christianity are considered in light of and in the context of a spiritual preconditioning agent, thus paving the way to Christ, the fullness of light and truth.”

There is no shame in these attempts, the apostle assures the Jews. For even the failed attempts of God to influence a nation or a people do not result in a useless action. This is what the making of the dishonorable pottery means in the apostle's example. God takes the clay, which resists even natural changes in its composition, and makes vessels out of it that serve God's purposes, even if they are eventually destroyed.

In this way the glory of God is manifested in all His actions, and God is fully revealed as both just and holy. The Jews should have known this from their own Scriptures, the apostle argues. These scriptures clearly

stated that God would call to himself a people who had not been his people. That God would call a people beloved who had not been called beloved.

As further evidence of how God works, the apostle quotes the prophet Esaias, who declared that the children of Israel would one day be like the sand of the sea. But that would not be what would save them from eventual destruction. Instead, it would be the work of God behind the scenes that would preserve a remnant that would not fall away.

In the example of the clay, this would mean that God would not allow the consistency of the lump of clay to deteriorate to the point where none of the clay could be used for God's highest purposes. We are not told what these calculations and means were, but they are of such immense vastness that we might not understand them even if they were explained to us. This is in keeping with the God with whom we are dealing.

That is why things are the way they are, the apostle tells the Jews. God is God, and there is nothing you can do about it. You might as well get with the program, and what is the program? The program is that the Gentiles, who were not part of the chosen people of God, who did not keep the law, have been granted the righteousness of God, even the righteousness that comes to them by faith.

At the same time, the nation of Israel, which vigorously pursued the righteousness of the law, failed to obtain the righteousness of God because it sought this righteousness not by faith but by its own best thinking. The paradox is there for all to see: the very God who offends us by rejecting our righteousness is

the very God who has the righteousness and the means to save us.

Chapter 37 – The Scriptures

- Rom 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.
- Rom 10:2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.
- Rom 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.
- Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.
- Rom 10:5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.
- Rom 10:6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*.)
- Rom 10:7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)
- Rom 10:8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;
- Rom 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
- Rom 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
- Rom 10:11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
- Rom 10:12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.
- Rom 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Rom 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

Rom 10:15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Rom 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

Rom 10:17 So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Rom 10:18 But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Rom 10:19 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by *them that are* no people, *and* by a foolish nation I will anger you.

Rom 10:20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.

Rom 10:21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Chapter 38 - Commentary on Romans 10:1-21

The apostle continues to assure the Jews that his heart and prayer remain the same. His longing is for the nation of Israel to come to a saving knowledge of Christ and accept their Messiah. This speaks to the non-fatalistic nature of man's relationship with God. The apostle does not tell the Jews that they are no longer loved by God and therefore doomed. He holds out hope that a way can be found to move their hearts to accept the offer of salvation.

The apostle openly declares that the Jews of his day had a great zeal for God. The problem was that they had misunderstood God and the value of their own works in the scheme of salvation. They were ignorant of God's righteousness, which they so desperately needed, and had set out to establish their own righteousness, as so many still do.

For Christ is the end of righteousness by means of any law. Rather, we are given the righteousness of God, which is contained in the new nature. As Moses explained the righteousness of the Law, it is a righteousness that is only granted to you while you are obeying the Law. The fact that one must obey to receive the righteousness means that one must continue to obey to maintain the righteousness.

This is different from the righteousness that is given to the believer. Such a man or woman does not set out to find God in the heavens above him or her, as does the one who seeks righteousness from the Law. Nor does such a man or woman, in his or her efforts to find God, dig in the earth below, as does the one who seeks righteousness from the Law. This is presumably a vivid illustration of self-abasement and humility.

Rather, the righteousness that is by faith accepts the gift of God given to him. This gift is the new nature that is righteous and dwells in his heart. The new nature speaks, even the reality of what has happened. Such a believer confesses with his mouth that the righteous nature of Christ is his and is in his heart. Such a man or woman believes in the power that raised Christ from the dead. Such a believer will experience the salvation of God.

This is a salvation that comes from receiving the righteousness contained in the new nature by faith, not the legal imputed righteousness of the law. Such a nature is given when a man or woman believes in his or her heart that God desires to give it to them and confesses with his or her mouth that he or she has surrendered and accepted the gift.

The Scriptures clearly tell us, the apostle continues, that the man or woman who believes in the righteousness of God given to him or her, even the nature of Christ, will not be ashamed. There is no difference between Jew and Greek, for over all humanity there is one God who calls them home. Therefore, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This raises an obvious need; the apostle tells us. How are people to believe in the righteousness of God if no one has ever told them about the righteousness of God? How are they to call someone they do not know? The obvious answer is that a preacher is needed, someone who will speak to the nations about the righteousness of God.

How are they to preach, the apostle next asks, unless someone sends them. This is in response to the

idea that those who have received the new nature no longer come up with their own ideas and callings. They must be sent, and God does send them. Those who are sent are described as having beautiful feet, for the gospel of peace and good news will be brought to the peoples of the world.

Not all will receive this good news, for not all seek righteousness. So the search is on for those who will hear the Word of God, for faith comes by hearing the Word. This is a word that is not only proclaimed by the preachers who are sent, but it is the same word that has been proclaimed from the heavens above us since the beginning of the world.

The whole creation has cried out, and its voice has gone into all the earth, and its words to the ends of the world. Israel, the chosen nation, is being provoked to jealousy in God's attempts to influence her to respond correctly to Him. This provocation is taking place because a people who were not the people of God are becoming the people of God, and a foolish nation who did not know the laws of God are being instructed in the righteousness of God.

The prophet Esaias was very bold when he declared that God would one day be found by those who did not seek Him and revealed to those who did not seek Him. Meanwhile, God stood before the nation of Israel, a nation that had known God and heard the voice of God but had rejected God.

God stood before them with His arms outstretched in welcome, calling them back to Himself, trying to soften their disobedient and rebellious hearts. As Jesus Himself said when He walked this earth. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and

stone those whom I send to you. How often would I have gathered you together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not.

This is the just God we have to deal with. A God who offers us peace and salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 39 – The Scriptures

- Rom 11:1 I say then, Hath God cast away his people?
God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, *of* the tribe of Benjamin.
- Rom 11:2 God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying,
- Rom 11:3 Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.
- Rom 11:4 But what saith the answer of God unto him?
I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to *the image of* Baal.
- Rom 11:5 Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.
- Rom 11:6 And if by grace, then *is it* no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if *it be* of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.
- Rom 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded
- Rom 11:8 (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.
- Rom 11:9 And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:
- Rom 11:10 Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.
- Rom 11:11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but *rather* through their fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

- Rom 11:12 Now if the fall of them *be* the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?
- Rom 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:
- Rom 11:14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation *them which are* my flesh, and might save some of them.
- Rom 11:15 For if the casting away of them *be* the reconciling of the world, what *shall* the receiving of *them be*, but life from the dead?
- Rom 11:16 For if the firstfruit *be* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root *be* holy, so *are* the branches.
- Rom 11:17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
- Rom 11:18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.
- Rom 11:19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.
- Rom 11:20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
- Rom 11:21 For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee.
- Rom 11:22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.
- Rom 11:23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.
- Rom 11:24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more

shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Rom 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

Rom 11:27 For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

Rom 11:28 As concerning the gospel, *they are* enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, *they are* beloved for the fathers' sakes.

Rom 11:29 For the gifts and calling of God *are* without repentance.

Rom 11:30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

Rom 11:31 Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

Rom 11:32 For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Rom 11:33 O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Rom 11:34 For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Rom 11:35 Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

Rom 11:36 For of him, and through him, and to him, *are* all things: to whom *be* glory for ever. Amen.

Chapter 40 - Commentary on Romans 11:1-36

The apostle opens chapter eleven with a question concerning the status of the Jewish nation in light of what has been said, namely that God has turned to another nation and people in order to provoke the Jewish nation into jealousy. Is it over for the nation of Israel? Has God cast them away forever?

The answer is immediate and emphatic. Most definitely not. This is the kind of fatalistic thinking that mankind engages in. Man does this because of our limited understanding and desire to bring all things down to a level that we can control and understand.

God will not cast away the nation of Israel because they were the type of people who were brought out of all the nations of the world to a place where they could love God. This was the long work of many generations until Abraham was found. This follows the pattern of chapter ten where the potter made vessels from the lump of clay in his hand.

What we forget is that we are not talking about an earthly potter, but about God as the potter. This potter, God, has spent a great deal of time, and perhaps ages, subjecting the clay to all sorts of influences in his attempts to bring the clay to the desired consistency from which honorable vessels can be fashioned.

The consistency that God wanted the clay to have, God foreknew before He began to influence the clay. When that consistency was achieved, and it was achieved with Abraham and his descendants. We know this because many of them chose to love God greatly.

The apostle then makes the next contention. Now that the constancy has been achieved, the constancy will not be completely lost again. What those reasons are, or how consistency is maintained without interfering with the freedom to love freely, we may never know, but the apostle points to the prayers of the prophet Elijah as one factor.

This prophet interceded for the people of Israel when things began to deteriorate. This deterioration is not minimized. This clearly teaches us that even though God succeeds in bringing the clay to the desired consistency. This does not guarantee that the clay will choose to love God, or that it will remain faithful to God after the choice is made.

The prophet Elijah described what was happening around him. The people of Israel, the clay carefully prepared to love God, were killing the prophets of God. The people of Israel, the chosen nation, the generation that God had brought to a prepared and long foretold place, were tearing down the altars of God. They even tried to kill the prophet, Elijah.

God's answer to the prophet Elijah was not to think that things were as they seemed. For the prophet had begun to wonder if he was the only one left in his generation who loved God. You are not the only one left, God assures the prophet, for I have reserved seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

This does not mean, in the fatalistic sense, that God will not allow seven thousand men to bow the knee to Baal, or that He will force them to stay on their feet. What God means is that my work is not easily undone. I have brought the nation of Israel, that is, the clay that

the potter is working with, to a consistency that I have foreseen and worked toward. This will not be completely lost.

How this preservation will be accomplished, either in the day of the prophet Elijah or in our own day, we are not told. The answer involves calculations beyond the capacity of the human mind. What is assured by God's promise is that once the clay has been brought to the pre-planned consistency, no surrounding influences will be allowed to overwhelm the clay to the extent that the desired consistency is lost.

If evidence of this process is needed in relation to the Jewish nation, a simple observation of the history of this people will clearly establish this reality. Jewish identity has been preserved over time. This is no small matter, and even the Holocaust and its horrors only served to bring the identity back into focus and to give the identity a homeland, rather than to destroy the identity, which was the intended purpose of the Holocaust.

Any honest observer, untainted by the hatred of Jews that is so easily acquired by so many, must conclude that a divine hand was involved. The apostle uses this illustration to further substantiate his claim that things have always been and will always be done by the will of God and according to His purposes. That man's entrance into the life of God is granted by God to man by the means of faith, and not by man's contribution to those works and purposes.

That the people of Israel thought they were accepted based on their good works, which they freely offered. This would obviously exclude everyone else,

since the Gentiles did not have this inclination towards God. What the apostle is saying is that the Jews' view that God was after works and that this was what the inclination was for was mistaken.

What God was looking for in the clay was not the proclivity for works, but the proclivity for faith. That in the process of influencing the nation of Israel, a process that took place under the Almighty and unknowable hand of God, the Gentile nations were also influenced and brought to the same proclivity. The Gentile nations were now ready to believe.

The nation of Israel was seeking the blessing of God through works, but this was not what the proclivity was working toward, the apostle claims. That was the misunderstanding. The proclivity that God wanted was the tendency to believe which the entire nation of Israel possessed. The fact that this inclination was rejected by most of the nation of Israel shows that the proclivity was not fatalistic, that there was no overriding inclination to believe.

The choice was left to each individual within the nation, all of whom possessed the proclivity. This was done by God because righteousness could not come from a human choice. The inclination to believe was chosen by God because faith, in its initial state, does not include the merit transferred by works.

This could be argued against using the James angle that faith needs works to complete faith. This is precisely why there must be a place where faith stands alone, which faith did at the cross of Christ, when the self believes in its own death by the hand of God. There are no other works that could possibly be added to that faith.

The very inclination to love God that was created by God's election or choice then becomes the means by which the misunderstanding occurs. The misunderstanding occurs before the rejection of faith, which is a choice that everyone in the Jewish nation possessed. Once faith is rejected and works are accepted by way of the man's or woman's own choice. A choice that makes a lot of sense to the mind of the self.

Once this choice is made, there is a blindness that takes hold in the words of the apostle. This happens because the process of works and doing works and rejoicing in one's works is like wine to a drunken man. Things spiral out of control. The apostle goes back to the Old Testament for support because obviously there will be objections from the Jews.

The apostle quotes King David, a leading and revered authority in the Jewish nation. In the Psalms, the king presents a scenario of a table laden with food, no doubt delicious food and containing nourishment for the body, but that table becomes a snare, a trap, and a stumbling block.

What follows are eyes that are darkened and backs that are bent. Such men and women stumble, but they stumble not to achieve their destruction, but to create an opening to bring this proclivity to the gentiles. This is done, one assumes, by the public display of this kind of behavior, namely the result that works produces. This in turn will sour the gentiles to good works and cause them to open their hearts to faith.

This action will then come full circle and return to the Jews, the apostle claims. The sight of Gentiles being accepted into the family of God by the

means of faith will hopefully be delivered to the Jews, but as God's way is with proclivities, there is no guarantee of a proper response.

What seemed to be a great tragedy when the nation of Israel rejected God has become the means by which the entire world has been enriched with the blessings of God. This brings us full circle back to the Jews. The blessings offered to the whole world, which were once offered only to the Jews, become the means by which the Jews are provoked to jealousy and to reconsider their understanding of God's purposes.

When this happens, namely the return of the Jews to faith in Christ, their return will be much more glorious than the original majesty and greatness of the Jewish nation. If the casting away of the Jewish nation was the bringing of life to the whole world, much more will the receiving back of the Jewish nation be as if one had risen from the dead.

The apostle then returns to his example of the potter with his lump of clay. I must say that I was not expecting this angle of argument, but this is what the apostle said. He claims that if the first breaking off of a piece of clay from the lump is usable for the highest purposes, then the rest of the lump, must also be usable for the highest purposes, even if that part of the lump rejects its highest purposes.

In practical terms, this would mean that when Abraham chose to believe God, he was the first to break away from the lump. His lump then grew in size but retained the same consistency. What followed was that much of the clay from the lump rejected faith or belief in God's promises. These would be the descendants of Abraham. Yet they retain, the apostle claims, the ability

to believe God, and moreover, they will always retain this ability simply because they are the children of Abraham.

If we doubt this example, the apostle provides another one. A tree that is say an apple tree, and if the tree is a good tree, as opposed to a bad tree, then all the branches of the good tree will be good.

The Jewish nation was a good tree, the apostle claims. Even the branches that rejected the faith were still good branches, even though they were broken off because they rejected the faith. Do not make the same mistake, the apostle warns the Gentiles. Do not misunderstand God. Do not repeat the mistakes of the Jewish people.

The Gentiles are a wild olive tree. God never did the ageless work with you that He did with the Jewish nation. You do not come from a lump of clay that has been brought to the level of consistency and quality that the Jewish nation has been brought to. You and your ancestors are not a tree that has been exposed to the kind of elements and minerals that the Jewish nation has been exposed to. You come from a scrawny tree with a twisted and deformed trunk because there was never enough water and there was never enough sunshine to develop properly.

The only reason you get into the program of God is because some of the branches of the good olive tree were broken off because of their unbelief, making room for you to be grafted into the good olive tree. You only get this chance because through their mistake you see what they did wrong, and you are seizing on to faith.

In doing so, the apostle says, the gentiles are bypassing the years of conditioning and work that went into preparing the Jewish soil and the Jewish tree that grew out of that soil. Do not think for a moment, the apostle warns. If the natural branches were not spared when they exalted themselves and chose themselves above God. Neither will the Gentiles be spared if they exalt themselves and trust in themselves rather than in God.

Goodness does not lie in one's own righteousness, the apostle says. Goodness is in God's righteousness alone. If the Gentiles turn the offer of faith given to them into an opportunity to glory in their own worthiness or perfection, they too will be cut off. Gentiles stand on the mercy of God, and on the mercy of God alone.

All nations except Israel were cut out of a wild olive tree, which is a wild olive tree by nature, and were grafted into a good olive tree. This olive tree is good by nature because God has molded and formed the consistency and essence of this tree. If those nations that were wild by nature could be grafted in, how much more easily can the natural branches that were cut off be grafted back into their own tree.

All this was done by the design of God and according to His great wisdom, so that no nation could stand by itself or by the glory of its own bloodline. Israel was rejected so that the gentiles might be brought into the mercy of God. This acceptance of the Gentiles by God will in turn change the makeup of the Jewish nation to bring them to a point in the future where they will be open to the redemption of God. An acceptance that will be in mass.

Indeed, the day is coming, the apostle assures us, when the entire Jewish nation will be saved. That day will bring to full fulfillment the prophecy that out of Sion shall come a deliverer who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. This will happen by God's choice, a choice that cannot be changed. This will be done by a God who both holds the lump of clay in His hand and controls the environment to which that lump of clay has been subjected.

The Jewish people have been enemies of God for the sake of the Gospel, that is, so that the Gospel can come to all peoples, but the choice of God remains. They are beloved for their Father's sake because they have the consistency and inclination of a people who love God. In this way, God's purposes and choices will never change.

Such is the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God. He makes judgments that are completely beyond our understanding. No one will ever be able to fully discover the ways of God. The mind of God is not knowable to man, nor has any created being ever served as God's counselor.

Nowhere in creation has any creature ever first given to God before that creature has received back from the Almighty. For through God, and for God, and to God are all things, to whom all glory and honor is due forever and ever. Amen.

Chapter 41 – The Scriptures

- Rom 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.*
- Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
- Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.
- Rom 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:
- Rom 12:5 So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.
- Rom 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;
- Rom 12:7 Or ministry, *let us wait on our* ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;
- Rom 12:8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.
- Rom 12:9 *Let* love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.
- Rom 12:10 *Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;
- Rom 12:11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;
- Rom 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;
- Rom 12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

Rom 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rom 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Rom 12:16 *Be* of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Rom 12:17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

Rom 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Rom 12:20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Rom 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Chapter 42 - Commentary on Romans 12:1-21

In Romans chapter twelve, the apostle moves from his dramatic conclusion in chapter eleven, in which he exalts and praises the works of the supreme God, to how the life of the church is to be conducted. There is to be a presentation of our bodies and souls as a living sacrifice to God. A sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to God because the sacrifice is made by the new creature, which is a living creation, a new creature made alive by the life of Christ.

This is in contrast to the dead sacrifice that the old self offered in service to God. Nowhere is there a concept of ceasing to do good works, but rather the establishment of the ground from which good works can be done without the corruption of the old self.

There is again a reminder that the Law has not been cast away. There is and always will be the need to evaluate and seek with reason what is the will of God. The execution of that will no longer belongs to the old self, but this does not negate the role that reason has and always will play in the life of the believer.

Tremendous harm has been done by many who have sought to diminish the role of reason in understanding the will of God. Such people err because they replace reason with emotion or wild theories that make no logical sense. When the error in logic is pointed out, the rebuttal is usually a firm statement that we are to walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh.

Which is a true statement but usually means something completely different from what that statement should mean. Namely, that we are to submit

and listen to the leading of the Spirit in carrying out the will of God. That we are to wait and not rely on our own understanding of how God's will can be done. This requires a constant renewal of the mind, less the reason be corrupted by the environment of this present age, or by the lamentations of the emotions of our soul and the passions of our body.

The outer part of us, the life we live in the temporal world, is to be continually conformed and transformed, not to the world around us, but by the influence of God's will being done in our lives. We are not to think of ourselves as high and honorable, but to acknowledge the grace of God so freely given to us. Without the gift of God, we would have nothing.

We are to steadfastly follow the voice of the Spirit, knowing that the Spirit will not lead every believer in the same way in expressing the will of God. We are all different, which does not mean that we do not all obey the same God, but that the abilities that develop from the exercise of that obedience will be formed differently.

We are all one body in that we all belong to one head, which is Christ. We are all different but of the same body in that we are joined together by one Spirit. Different gifts and functions are given to each member under the direction and development of the Spirit. We are then to mind our own business, for in carrying out our function we are minding and blessing the business of others.

If we have the gift of prophecy, we are to prophesy and minister to others. If we have the gift of teaching, we are to teach and thus minister to others. The same goes for exhortation and giving, followed by

all these gifts that the Holy Spirit imparts to each believer at the discretion of the Spirit.

In all this, love is to be full and complete. We are to abhor what is evil, which means to abhor evil by the process already prescribed. We are not to return to our own understanding, but to discern with our reason what is the will of God, and to leave the execution of that will to the Spirit, awaiting His instructions.

What follows is a long list of what is good and what is holy. We do not begin with a clean slate. These are things over which our minds need not struggle and wrestle. The apostle knows what he is talking about, and we can accept what he declares to be good. This does not mean that we should try again to fulfill the commandment, but rather that we should sacrifice and surrender our bodies to the Spirit as we are shown how to live out these good things.

The apostle tells us that this is the will of God. That we be kind to every member of the body. That we honor every member of the body above ourselves. That we be not slothful in business. To be zealous in the spirit, serving the Lord.

To rejoice in hope. To be patient in tribulation. That we be quick to pray. That we give to meet the material needs of those around us. That we be quick to invite people into our homes. To bless those who persecute us. That we do not curse our fellow man.

To rejoice with those who rejoice. To weep with those who weep. Not to be conceited, but to humble ourselves to walk with those who are less gifted than ourselves. Not to be wise in our thoughts. Not to return evil for evil, but good for good. To be honest with all

people. That we live at peace with all men, as far as we can.

That we should not seek revenge. That we should not show anger and wrath in our dealings with our fellow men. That if we are injured, we are to leave the execution of justice to God. With this in mind, if our enemy is hungry, we should feed him; if he is thirsty, we should give him water to drink.

With these actions, performed under the guidance of the Spirit of God, we will turn the thoughts of our enemies to the Almighty God. We will be among those given the great gift of working with God to change the consistency and tendencies of the clay around us. We can help soften the soil of someone's heart so that they can more easily believe in God. In doing so, we can join with God in overcoming evil with good.

Chapter 43 – The Scriptures

- Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.
- Rom 13:2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
- Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:
- Rom 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.
- Rom 13:5 Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.
- Rom 13:6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.
- Rom 13:7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.
- Rom 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.
- Rom 13:9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
- Rom 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

Rom 13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Rom 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

Rom 13:13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

Rom 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.

Chapter 44 - Commentary on Romans 13:1-14

Romans chapter thirteen continues the instruction on what is the will of God for believers. Again, these are not laws that we should agonize over how to execute, but rather things that we can know for certain are the will of God. Submission is then in order, beginning with our reason, followed by the sacrifice of our members in service to the further leading of the Spirit.

Every believer, the apostle informs us, is to obey his local and national authorities. This is the will of God, for God has placed these local and national authorities in their respective roles. To disobey them is to disobey God, since God placed them there, and any believer who disobeys should not be surprised to be legally punished by those authorities.

This is obviously a difficult reality for the modern mind to deal with, depending on the authority that rules over each country and local district. The application of this principle has varied over time and obviously requires the guidance of the Spirit when their dictates violate the dictates of God. The apostle himself used his Roman citizenship to negate some of the legal ramifications of dealing with Roman law.

The apostles in Jerusalem were quick to exercise their right to obey God rather than man when the local authorities ordered them to cease preaching the gospel. The principle remains, however, that civil government is the best way to maintain order among an unconverted population. That all attempts to find another method have always failed.

Civil authority has been established by God and serves under the hand and blessing of God to the extent that it adheres to its assigned duties. Which would be the punishment of evildoers as defined by the laws of God. That they look after the best interests of their people, and that these interests be those that do not violate the God-given rights of others.

That obedience to civil authority be given out of conscience toward God, and not simply to avoid civil punishment. That taxes be paid in full, for they are the servants of God in the civil sense. These are all difficult instructions in any age, but they remain as principles. To the extent that change is needed in the civil realm, that change is best accomplished by working within the system, not by armed rebellion.

To the extent that armed rebellion has been necessary to redress grievous injustices suffered by the populace, the participation of believers in that rebellion has never left a clear record of success regarding the spiritual things of God. The problem goes back to the earlier discussions of the corruption of the self, even when used in the cause of executing the holy laws of God. These problems are doubled and tripled when civil power is used in the supposed enforcement of righteousness.

We are to honor our civil authorities by addressing them with respect and distinction. We are to owe no one anything regarding the obligation to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is the will of God. How to carry it out must be done under the direction of the Spirit of God.

The will of God is that believers should not commit adultery, should not steal, should not bear false

witness, should not covet, and if there is anything else we need to know, it is that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

It is high time to go about the Lord's work, the apostle tells us. The last day of the Lord's return to earth is fast approaching. The night is far spent, and the dawn is on the horizon. We should know that it is God's will that we cast off all the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

It is God's will that we be honest people. That we walk in the light. That we do not engage in rioting, or drunkenness, or sexual depravity of any kind, or that we go about causing either civil or personal strife and unrest. We are to continually put on the works of the new nature, which makes no provision for our ways of thinking or our desires to honor and glorify ourselves.

Chapter 45 – The Scriptures

Rom 14:1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

Rom 14:2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

Rom 14:3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

Rom 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Rom 14:7 For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

Rom 14:8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Rom 14:9 For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

Rom 14:10 But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Rom 14:11 For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.

Rom 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Rom 14:13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.

Rom 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.

Rom 14:15 But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

Rom 14:16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Rom 14:18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Rom 14:20 For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed *are* pure; but *it is* evil for that man who eateth with offence.

Rom 14:21 *It is* good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor *any thing* whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Rom 14:22 Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

Rom 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because *he eateth* not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Chapter 46 - Commentary on Romans 14:1-23

Having established so much about how we are to have access to the righteousness of God through the acceptance of the new nature offered by the atonement of Christ, and having introduced the concept of the body of Christ in which we are to live out this new life.

The apostle now addresses the practical implications of living out this new life in the body. A place where we are surrounded by other believers who are not at the same place in their walk with God as we are.

This inequality is a given, since our walk with God is a personal and direct relationship with God through the gift of Christ and now through the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are to put away our old works, both good and bad, which means using our own reason and understanding to carry out righteous laws. Instead, we are to surrender our lives and bodies to the Spirit of God and wait for and follow His instructions.

This is quite a change, and the apostle is very compassionate and understands that the road ahead is difficult. Following the instructions of the Spirit of God can be a strange and unsettling experience.

It should be noted, however, that we are not talking about everyone being led by the Spirit into a rediscovery or, as modern culture has it, a deconstruction of what the will of God is. We follow the Spirit in carrying out that will which has already been discovered by the means of our reason and understanding, mediated by the Word of God.

From what I can tell, at least among Western Christians, they are convinced that the Spirit is leading them on a private journey to reduce the commandments of God to chaff. A kind of private line to the mind of God telling them that nothing really matters anymore. Such thinking is completely outside the apostle's instructions and not even remotely within his framework of thought.

The law of God is what the law of God is. That does not change, either in nature or in the moral realm. The only method by which a law is discarded is by the direction of God Himself, as God did with much of the Jewish ceremonial code, but that direction would be available to everyone and would not be subject to private interpretation. It is always within God's right to do this, since the source of righteousness is in Him and not in the Law.

However, there remains the problem of living out the directions of the Spirit as they relate to any law. Directions that are given individually. There is much less disagreement among Christians about the original law than is generally believed. This means that knowing the will of God is not nearly as controversial as it has been reported.

Being led by the Spirit of God in the application of the laws is where we have problems, because that is where the problems have always been. The apostle begins to address the problem by saying that the believer who still has a lot of his own opinions about how to implement a law of God is the weak one, because he is operating out of his own understanding. This continuation of the old ways feels like strength to the believer, but it is actually weakness before God.

On the other side of things is the believer who abandons his own thinking about how to implement the laws of God and begins to listen to the instructions of the Spirit. This believer is the strong one, and this is not an abstract statement. Such a believer is indeed the strong one. Such a believer is in direct contact with God and receives power from God to spread the growth and influence of the Spirit's leading far beyond the small work the believer is doing.

In the world of the church proper, this following of the Spirit's leading may not come across as strength at all. The opposite may be true. In the apostle's example of eating meat, the one who abstains from meat appears to be the strong one. The reasons are many. There is discipline involved. There is deprivation involved, and there is self-denial involved.

The devotee who eats meat appears to be the weak one. He has opened himself to all kinds of charges. That of giving in to his base tastes. That of indulging in questionable behavior. That of reflecting poorly on the unbeliever, who might see him packing his meat home and wonder why a Christian would eat meat.

The same scenario plays out in a thousand different ways with a thousand different issues. The apostle mentions the keeping of holy days in this chapter, but he mentions drinking, new moons, and Sabbaths in the book of Colossians. These are all situations that call for the old self to exert itself and contribute to the new life of the believer. In both Colossians and Galatians, the apostle spends a great deal of time trying to lead the believer into the life of the Spirit.

Here the apostle focuses on how to live in peace with one another in these difficult circumstances as believers try to follow the voice of the Spirit in regard to application. We are to be aware that the one who is weak in faith may not know that he is weak. The test is to receive him, but to refuse to argue about applications. This is much harder than it sounds, but these are the instructions.

We are not to judge another believer by where he stands with God. Another believer may truly believe that he has heard from the Spirit in his applications that seem weak to us. From what I can tell, the apostle is saying that God judges whether the conviction is true or not, and each believer alone knows whether he is being honest about what he is hearing.

The way is not easy, and the possibility of misunderstanding is great. What should be agreed upon, and what can be agreed upon, is the original commandment, but even this is often lost in the turmoil of application. Much of the Church proper has not made things any easier by taking a voice as the Mother of the Church and claiming equality with the voice of God.

This is a whole other issue, but it does nothing but add confusion to the instructions that are clear to every believer that they are to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in regard to application. Adding another layer of sources from which the laws of God can be given, namely the Church, only complicates things further. There is simply no basis, as far as I can see, for considering the Church proper as our mother.

The Holy Spirit fills this role to a much greater perfection, for the feminine nature is contained within

God Himself. Jesus portrayed God as a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. In the Old Testament, God describes Himself as a mother who does not forget her suckling child. To see the Holy Spirit as our mother is much more in line with Scripture, and to replace the Holy Spirit with men may well be the great sin of the Church proper.

No man lives or dies to himself, the apostle says. We are not to judge our brother on whether or not he listens to the Spirit of God in his applications. We are to show him respect and not intentionally offend him. In this chapter it sounds as if this means abstaining from meat altogether, but in other places the apostle allows the eating of meat while not in the presence of the one who does not eat meat.

The kingdom of God is not about eating or drinking, but about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. One is to seek peace with all people and not to place a stumbling block in front of those who are convinced they are obeying God when they may be following their own best understanding of how to live out the will of God.

Faith is a private matter, the apostle asserts. Living out that faith may well be a private matter, but one thing is clear. The one who follows the instructions of the Spirit will be the happy one and will be the one who has escaped condemnation. We must be very careful with this question, the apostle warns. Self-deception is always on the table.

Be fully convinced, the apostle instructs. Think deeply and often. Check your backtrack and be sure you have heard from the Spirit of God. If things are a clear

violation of the commandment, you are on dangerous ground, but that is not really the issue at hand.

The issue is one of faith. It is a matter of believing and trusting the voice of the Spirit. Do not let go of following the Spirit, but be very convinced, and that is the emphasis. I am amazed at how much God is still working with man's mind, even with the new creation, but He is. We have to be sure, we have to be honest, and we have to be convinced.

An extraordinary thing happens in that when we learn to trust the Holy Spirit, we also learn to trust ourselves. This takes things to a whole new level because God never trusted the old self for anything. Indeed, one must agree that the first light of the new morning is already breaking on the horizon. The day that awaits us on the other side of the river is one that we have not even begun to imagine.

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