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REVISED EDITION**

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

REVISED EDITION

Translated with an Introduction and Interpretation

by WILLIAM BARCLAY

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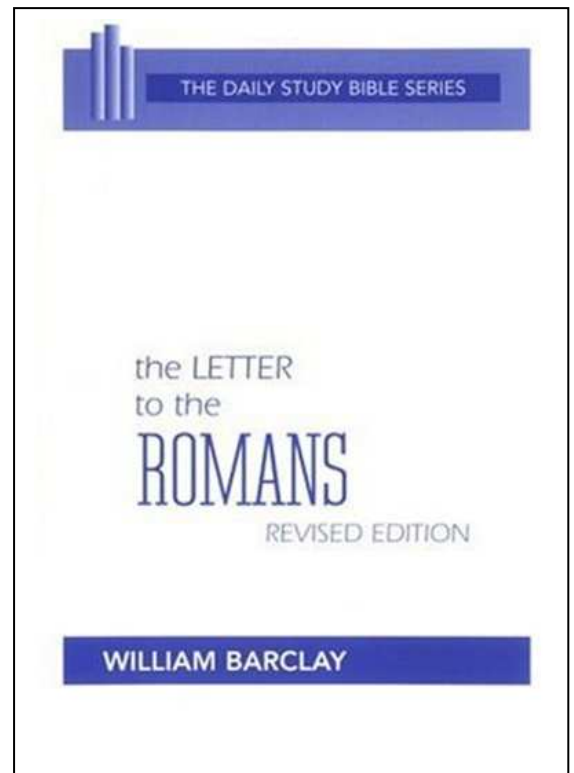
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Lesson 1 Readings

A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF PAUL

THE LETTERS OF PAUL

There is no more interesting body of documents in the New Testament than the letters of Paul. That is because of all forms of literature a letter is most personal. Demetrius, one of the old Greek literary critics, once wrote, "Every one reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but in none so clearly as the epistolary." (Demetrius, *On Style*, 227.) It is just because he left us so many letters that we feel we know Paul so well. In them he opened his mind and heart to the folk he loved so much; and, in them, to this day, we can see that great mind grappling with the problems of the early church and feel that great heart throbbing with love for men, even when they were misguided and mistaken.

THE DIFFICULTY OF LETTERS

At the same time there is often nothing so difficult to understand as a letter. Demetrius (*On Style*, 223) quotes a saying of Artemon, who edited the letters of Aristotle. Artemon said that a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, because it was one of the two sides of a dialogue. In other words, to read a letter is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. So when we read the letters of Paul we are often in a difficulty. We do not possess the letter which he was answering; we do not fully know the circumstances with which he was dealing; it is only from the letter itself that we can deduce the situation which prompted it. Before we can hope to understand fully any letter Paul wrote, we must try to reconstruct the situation which produced it.

THE ANCIENT LETTERS

It is a great pity that Paul's letters were ever called epistles. They are in the most literal sense letters. One of the great lights shed on the interpretation of the New Testament has been the discovery and the publication of the papyri. In the ancient world, papyrus was the substance on which most documents were written. It was composed of strips of the pith of a certain bulrush that grew on the banks of the Nile. These strips were laid one on top of the other to form a substance very like brown paper. The sands of the Egyptian desert were ideal for preservation, for papyrus, although very brittle, will last forever so long as moisture does not get at it. As a result, from the Egyptian rubbish heaps, archaeologists have rescued hundreds of documents, marriage contracts, legal agreements, government forms, and, most interesting of all, private letters. When we read these private letters we find that there was a pattern to which nearly all conformed; and we find that Paul's letters reproduce exactly that pattern. Here is one of these

ancient letters. It is from a soldier, called Apion, to his father Epimachus. He is writing from Misenum to tell his father that he has arrived safely after a stormy passage.

"Apion sends heartiest greetings to his father and lord Epimachus. I pray above all that you are well and fit; and that things are going well with you and my sister and her daughter and my brother. I thank my Lord Serapis [his god] that he kept me safe when I was in peril on the sea. As soon as I got to Misenum I got my journey money from Caesar--three gold pieces. And things are going fine with me. So I beg you, my dear father, send me a line, first to let me know how you are, and then about my brothers, and thirdly, that I may kiss your hand, because you brought me up well, and because of that I hope, God willing, soon to be promoted. Give Capito my heartiest greetings, and my brothers and Serenilla and my friends. I sent you a little picture of myself painted by Euctemon. My military name is Antonius Maximus. I pray for your good health. Serenus sends good wishes, Agathos Daimon's boy, and Turbo, Gallonius' son." (G. Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri, 36.)

Little did Apion think that we would be reading his letter to his father 1800 years after he had written it. It shows how little human nature changes. The lad is hoping for promotion quickly. Who will Serenilla be but the girl he left behind him? He sends the ancient equivalent of a photograph to the folk at home. Now that letter falls into certain sections. (i) There is a greeting. (ii) There is a prayer for the health of the recipients. (iii) There is a thanksgiving to the gods. (iv) There are the special contents. (v) Finally, there are the special salutations and the personal greetings. Practically every one of Paul's letters shows exactly the same sections, as we now demonstrate.

(i) The Greeting: Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Php. 1:1; Col. 1:1-2; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:1.

(ii) The Prayer: in every case Paul prays for the grace of God on the people to whom he writes: Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Php. 1:3; Col. 1:2; 1 Th. 1:1; 2 Th. 1:2.

(iii) The Thanksgiving: Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; Php. 1:3; 1Th. 1:3; 2 Th. 1:3.

(iv) The Special Contents: the main body of the letters.

(v) Special Salutations and Personal Greetings: Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 13:13; Php. 4:21-22; Col. 4:12-15; 1 Th. 5:26.

When Paul wrote letters, he wrote them on the pattern which everyone used. Deissmann says of them, "They differ from the messages of the homely papyrus leaves of Egypt, not as letters but only as the letters of Paul." When we read Paul's letters we are not reading things which were meant to be academic exercises and theological treatises, but human documents written by a friend to his friends.

THE IMMEDIATE SITUATION

With a very few exceptions, all Paul's letters were written to meet an immediate situation and not treatises which he sat down to write in the peace and silence of his study. There was some threatening situation in Corinth, or Galatia, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, and he wrote a letter to meet it. He was not in the least thinking of us when he wrote, but solely of the people to whom he was writing. Deissmann writes, "Paul had no thought of adding a few fresh compositions to the already extant Jewish epistles; still less of enriching the sacred literature of his nation. He had no presentiment of the place his words would occupy in universal history; not so much that they would be in existence in the next generation, far less that one day people would look at them as Holy Scripture." We must always remember that a thing need not be transient because it was written to meet an immediate situation. All the great love songs of the world were written for one person, but they live on for the whole of mankind. It is just because Paul's letters were written to meet a threatening danger or a clamant need that they still throb with life. And it is because human need and the human situation do not change that God speaks to us through them today.

THE SPOKEN WORD

One other thing we must note about these letters. Paul did what most people did in his day. He did not normally pen his own letters but dictated them to a secretary, and then added his own authenticating signature. (We actually know the name of one of the people who did the writing for him. In Rom. 16:22 Tertius, the secretary, slips in his own greeting before the letter draws to an end.) In 1 Cor. 16:21 Paul says, "This is my own signature, my autograph, so that you can be sure this letter comes from me" (compare Col. 4:18; 2 Th. 3:17).

This explains a great deal. Sometimes Paul is hard to understand, because his sentences begin and never finish; his grammar breaks down and the construction becomes involved. We must not think of him sitting quietly at a desk, carefully polishing each sentence as he writes. We must think of him striding up and down some little room, pouring out a torrent of words, while his secretary races to get them down. When Paul composed his letters, he had in his mind's eye a vision of the folk to whom he was writing, and he was pouring out his heart to them in words that fell over each other in his eagerness to help.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

THE EPISTLE THAT IS DIFFERENT

There is an obvious difference between Paul's Letter to the Romans and any other of his letters. Anyone coming from, say, a reading of the Letters to the Corinthians, will immediately feel that difference, both of atmosphere and of method. A very great part of it is due to one basic fact-- when Paul wrote to the Church at Rome he was writing to a Church with whose founding he had had nothing whatever to do and with which he had had no personal contact at all. That explains why in Romans there are so few of the details of practical problems which fill the other letters. That is why Romans, at first sight, seems so much more impersonal. As Dibelius put it, "It is of all Paul's letters the least conditioned by the momentary situation."

We may put that in another way. Romans, of all Paul's letters, comes nearest to being a theological treatise. In almost all his other letters he is dealing with some immediate trouble, some pressing situation, some current error, some threatening danger, which was menacing the Church to which he was writing. Romans is the nearest approach to a systematic exposition of Paul's own theological position, independent of any immediate set of circumstances.

TESTAMENTARY AND PROPHYLACTIC

Because of that, two great scholars have applied two very illuminating adjectives to Romans. Sanday called Romans "testamentary." It is as if Paul was writing his theological last will and testament, as if into Romans he was distilling the very essence of his faith and belief. Rome was the greatest city in the world, the capital of the greatest Empire the world had ever seen. Paul had never been there, and he did not know if he ever would be there. But, in writing to such a Church in such a city, it was fitting that he should set down the very centre and core of his belief. Burton called Romans "prophylactic." A prophylactic is something which guards against infection. Paul had seen too often what harm and trouble could be caused by wrong ideas, twisted notions, misguided conceptions of Christian faith and belief. He therefore wished to send to the Church in the city which was the centre of the world a letter which would so build up the structure of their faith that, if infections should ever come to them, they might have in the true word of Christian doctrine a powerful and effective defence. He felt that the best protection against the infection of false teaching was the antiseptic of the truth.

THE OCCASION OF PAUL'S WRITING TO ROME

All his life Paul had been haunted by the thought of Rome. It had always been one of his dreams to preach there. When he is in Ephesus, he is planning to go through Achaea and Macedonia again, and then comes a sentence obviously dropped straight from the heart, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). When he was up against things in Jerusalem, and the situation looked threatening and the end seemed near, he had one of those visions which always lifted up his heart. In that vision the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, Paul. For as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). In the very first chapter of this letter Paul's desire to see Rome breathes out. "I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Rom. 1:11). "So, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Rom. 1:15). It might well be said that the name Rome was written on Paul's heart.

When he actually wrote the Letter to the Romans, the date was sometime in the year A.D. 58, and he was in Corinth. He was just about to bring to its completion a scheme that was very dear to his heart. The Church at Jerusalem was the mother Church of them all, but it was poor, and Paul had organized a collection throughout the younger churches for it (1Cor. 16:1ff; 2 Cor. 9:1ff). That collection was two things. It was an opportunity for his younger converts to put Christian charity into Christian action, and it was a most practical way of impressing on all Christians the unity of the Christian Church, of teaching them that they were not members of isolated and independent congregations, but of one great Church, each part of which had a

responsibility to all the rest. When Paul wrote Romans he was just about to set out with that gift for the Jerusalem Church. "At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints" (Rom. 15:25).

THE OBJECT OF PAUL'S WRITING

Why, then, at such a moment should he write?

(a) Paul knew that the journey to Jerusalem was not without its peril. He knew that he had enemies there, and that to go to Jerusalem was to take his life and liberty in his hands. He desired the prayers of the Roman Church before he set out on this expedition. "Now I appeal to you brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judaea" (Rom. 15:30-31). He was mobilizing the prayers of the Church before he embarked on this perilous undertaking.

(b) Paul had great schemes simmering in his mind. It has been said of him that he was "always haunted by the regions beyond." He never saw a ship at anchor but he wished to board her and to carry the good news to men across the sea. He never saw a range of mountains, blue in the distance, but he wished to cross them, and to bring the story of the Cross to men who had never heard it. At this time Paul was haunted by the thought of Spain. "I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain" (Rom. 15:24). "When I have completed this [that is, when he had delivered the collection to the Church in Jerusalem] I shall go on by way of you to Spain" (Rom. 15:28).

Why this great desire to go to Spain? Rome had opened up that land. Some of the great Roman roads and buildings still stand there to this day. And it so happened that, just at this time, there was a blaze of greatness in Spain. Many of the great figures who were writing their names on Roman history and literature were Spaniards. There was Martial, the master of the epigram. There was Lucan, the epic poet. There were Columella and Pomponius Mela, great figures in Roman literature. There was Quintilian, the master of Roman oratory. And, above all, there was Seneca, the greatest of the Roman Stoic philosophers, the tutor of the Emperor Nero, and the Prime Minister of the Roman Empire. It was most natural that Paul's thoughts should go out to this land which was producing such a scintillating galaxy of greatness. What might happen if men like that could be touched for Christ? As far as we know Paul never got to Spain. On that visit to Jerusalem he was arrested and he was never freed again. But, when he was writing Romans, that was his dream.

Paul was a master strategist. He had an eye for the layout of territory like a great commander. He felt that by this time he could move on from Asia Minor and for the time being leave Greece behind. He saw the whole west lying in front of him, virgin territory to be won for Christ. But, if he was to launch a campaign in the west, he needed a base of operations. There was only one such base possible--and that was Rome.

That was why Paul wrote this letter to Rome. He had this great dream in his heart and this great plan in his mind. He needed Rome for a base for this new campaign. He was aware that the Church in Rome must know his name. But he was also aware, for he was a realist, that the reports which reached Rome would be mixed. His opponents were not above spreading slanders and false accusation against him. So he wrote this letter to set out for the Church at Rome an account of the very essence of his belief, in order that, when the time came for action, he might find in Rome a sympathetic Church from which the lines of communication might go out to Spain and the west. It was with such a plan and such an intention, that in A.D. 58 Paul sat down in Corinth to write his letter to the Church at Rome.

THE LAYOUT OF THE LETTER

Romans is at once a very complicated and a very carefully constructed letter. It will therefore help us to find our way through it, if we have in our minds an idea of its framework. It falls into four definite divisions.

(i) Rom. 1-8, which deal with the problem of righteousness.

(ii) Rom. 9-11, which deal with problem of the Jews, the chosen people.

(iii) Rom. 12-15, which deal with practical questions of life and living.

(iv) Rom. 16, which is a letter of introduction for Phoebe, and a list of final personal greetings.

(i) When Paul uses the word "righteousness," he means a right relationship with God. The man who is righteous is the man who is in a right relationship with God, and whose life shows it.

Paul begins with a survey of the Gentile world. We have only to look at its decadence and corruption to know that it had not solved the problem of righteousness. He looks at the Jewish world. The Jews had sought to solve the problem of righteousness by meticulous obedience to the law. Paul had tried that way himself, and it had issued in frustration and defeat, because no man on earth can ever fully obey the law, and, therefore, every man must have the continual consciousness of being in debt to God and under his condemnation.

So Paul finds the way to righteousness in the way of utter trust and utter yieldedness. The only way to a right relationship with God is to take him at his word, and to cast oneself, just as one is, on his mercy and love. It is the way of faith. It is to know that the important thing is, not what we can do for God, but what he has done for us. For Paul the centre of the Christian faith was that we can never earn or deserve the favour of God, nor do we need to. The whole matter is one of grace, and all that we can do is to accept in wondering love and gratitude and trust what God has done for us.

That does not free us, however, from obligations or entitle us to do as we like; it means that for ever and for ever we must try to be worthy of the love which does so much for us. But we are

no longer trying to fulfil the demands of stern and austere and condemnatory law; we are no longer like criminals before a judge; we are lovers who have given all life in love to the one who first loved us.

(ii) The problem of the Jews was a torturing one. In a real sense they were God's chosen people, and yet, when his Son had come into the world, they had rejected him. What possible explanation could there be for this heart-breaking fact?

The only one Paul could find was that, in the end, it was all God's doing. Somehow the hearts of the Jews had been hardened; but it was not all failure, for there had always been a faithful remnant. Nor was it for nothing, for the very fact that the Jews had rejected Christ opened the door so the Gentiles would bring in the Jews and all men would be saved.

Paul goes further. The Jew had always claimed that he was a member of the chosen people in virtue of the fact that he was a Jew. It was solely a matter of pure racial descent from Abraham. But Paul insists that the real Jew is not the man whose flesh and blood descent can be traced to Abraham. He is the man who has made the same decision of utter yieldedness to God in loving faith which Abraham made. Therefore, Paul argues, there are many pure-blooded Jews who are not Jews in the real sense of the term at all; and there are many people of other nations who are really Jews in the true meaning of that word. The new Israel was not a racial thing at all; it was composed of those who had the same faith as Abraham had had.

(iii) Rom. 12 is so great an ethical statement that it must always be set alongside the Sermon on the Mount. In it Paul lays down the ethical character of the Christian faith. The fourteenth and fifteenth chapters deal with an ever-recurring problem. In the Church there was a narrower party who believed that they must abstain from certain foods and drinks, and who counted special days and ceremonies as of great importance. Paul thinks of them as the weaker brethren because their faith was dependent on these external things. There was a more liberal party, who had liberated themselves from these external rules and observances. He thinks of them as the brethren who are stronger in the faith. He makes it quite clear that his sympathies are with the more liberal party; but he lays down the great principle that no man must ever do anything to hurt the conscience of a weaker brother or to put a stumbling block in his way. His whole point of view is that we must never do anything which makes it harder for someone else to be a Christian; and that that may well mean the giving up of something, which is right and safe for us, for the sake of the weaker brother. Christian liberty must never be used in such a way that it injures another's life or conscience.

(iv) The fourth section is a recommendation on behalf of Phoebe, a member of the Church at Cenchreae, who is coming to Rome. The letter ends with a list of greetings and a final benediction.

TWO PROBLEMS

Rom. 16 has always presented scholars with a problem. Many have felt that it does not really form part of the Letter to the Romans at all; and that it is really a letter to some other Church which became attached to Romans when Paul's letters were collected. What are their grounds? First and foremost, in this chapter Paul sends greetings to twenty-six different people, twenty-four of whom he mentions by name and all of whom he seems to know very intimately. He can, for instance, say that the mother of Rufus has also been a mother to him. Is it likely that Paul knew intimately twenty-six people in a Church which he had never visited? He, in fact, greets far more people in this chapter than he does in any other letter, and yet he had never set foot in Rome. Here is something that needs explanation.

If Rom. 16 was not written to Rome, what was its original destination? It is here that Prisca and Aquila come into the argument. We know that they left Rome in A.D. 52 when Claudius issued his edict banishing the Jews (Acts 18:2). We know that they went with Paul to Ephesus (Acts 18:18). We know that they were in Ephesus when Paul wrote his letter to Corinth, less than two years before he wrote Romans (1 Cor. 16:19). And we know that they were still in Ephesus when the Pastoral Epistles were written (2 Tim. 4:19). It is certain that if we had come across a letter sending greeting to Prisca and Aquila we should have assumed that it was sent to Ephesus, if no other address was given.

Is there any other evidence to make us think that chapter sixteen may have been sent to Ephesus in the first place? There is the perfectly general reason that Paul spent longer in Ephesus than anywhere else, and it would be very natural for him to send greetings to many people there. Paul speaks of Epaenetus, the first-fruits of Asia. Ephesus is in Asia, and such a reference, too, would be very natural in a letter to Ephesus, but not so natural in a letter to Rome. Rom. 16:17 speaks about difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught, which sounds as if Paul was speaking about possible disobedience to his own teaching, and he had never taught in Rome.

It can be argued that the sixteenth chapter was originally addressed to Ephesus, but the argument is not so strong as it looks. For one thing, there is no evidence that the chapter was ever attached anywhere except to the Letter to the Romans. For another thing, the odd fact is that Paul does not send personal greetings to churches which he knew well. There are no personal greetings in Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians, all of them letters to churches he knew well; whereas there are personal greetings in Colossians, although Paul had never set foot in Colosse.

The reason is really quite simple. If Paul had sent personal greetings to churches he knew well, jealousies might well have arisen; on the other hand, when he was writing to churches he had never visited, he liked to establish as many personal links as possible. The very fact that Paul had never been in Rome makes it likely that he would try to establish as many personal connections as possible. Again, it is to be remembered that Prisca and Aquila were banished by edict from Rome. What is more likely than that, after the trouble was over, six or seven years later, they would return to Rome and pick up the threads of their business after their stay in other towns? And is it not most likely that many of the other names are names of people who

shared in this banishment, who took up temporary residence in other cities, who met Paul there, and who, when the coast was clear, returned to Rome and their old homes? Paul would be delighted to have so many personal contacts in Rome and to seize hold of them.

Further, as we shall see, when we come to study chapter 16 in detail, many of the names--the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus, Amplias, Nereus and others--well suit Rome. In spite of the arguments for Ephesus, we may take it that there is no necessity to detach chapter sixteen from the Letter to the Romans.

But there is a more interesting, and a much more important, problem. The early manuscripts show some very curious things with regard to Rom. 14-16. The only natural place for a doxology is at the very end. Rom. 16:25-27 is a doxology, and in most good manuscripts it comes at the end. But in a number of manuscripts it comes at the end of Rom. 14; two good manuscripts have it in both places; one ancient manuscript has it at the end of Rom. 15; two manuscripts have it in neither place, but leave an empty space for it. One ancient Latin manuscript has a series of section summaries. The last two are as follows:

50: On the peril of him who grieves his brother by meat.

That is obviously Rom. 14:15-23.

51: On the mystery of the Lord, kept secret before his passion but after his passion revealed.

That is equally clearly Rom. 16:25-27, the doxology. Clearly, these summaries were made from a manuscript which did not contain chapters fifteen and sixteen. Now there is one thing which sheds a flood of light on this. In one manuscript the mention of Rome in Rom. 1:7 and Rom. 1:15 is entirely omitted. There is no mention of any destination.

All this goes to show that Romans circulated in two forms--one form as we have it with sixteen chapters, and one with fourteen chapters; and perhaps also one with fifteen chapters. The explanation must be this. As Paul wrote it to Rome, it had sixteen chapters; but Rom. 15-16 are private and personal to Rome. Now no other letter gives such a compendium of Paul's doctrine. What must have happened was that Romans began to circulate among all the churches, with the last two local chapters omitted, except for the doxology. It must have been felt that Romans was too fundamental to stop at Rome and so the purely local references were removed and it was sent out to the Church at large. From very early times the Church felt that Romans was so great an expression of the mind of Paul that it must become the possession not of one congregation, but of the whole Church. We must remember, as we study it, that men have always looked on Romans as the quintessence of Paul's gospel.

Lesson 2 Readings

ROMANS: A CALL, A GOSPEL AND A TASK

Rom. 1:1-7

This is a letter from Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart to serve the good news of God. This good news God promised long ago, through his prophets, in the sacred writings. It is good news about his Son, who in his manhood was born of David's lineage, who, as a result of his Resurrection from the dead, has been proved by the Holy Spirit to be the mighty Son of God. It is of Jesus Christ, our Lord, of whom I am speaking, through whom we have received grace, and an apostleship to awaken a faithful obedience for his sake amongst all the Gentiles. You are included amongst these Gentiles, you who have been called to belong to Jesus Christ. This is a letter to all the beloved in Rome who belong to God, those who have been called to be dedicated to him. Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans he was writing to a church which he did not know personally and in which he had never been. He was writing to a church which was situated in the greatest city in the greatest empire in the world. Because of that he chose his words and thoughts with the greatest care.

He begins by giving his own credentials.

(i) He calls himself the slave (doulos) of Jesus Christ. In this word slave there are two backgrounds of thought.

(a) Paul's favourite title for Jesus is Lord (kurios). In Greek the word kurios describes someone who has undisputed possession of a person or a thing. It means master or owner in the most absolute sense. The opposite of Lord (kurios) is slave (doulos). Paul thought of himself as the slave of Jesus Christ, his Master and his Lord. Jesus had loved him and given himself for him, and therefore Paul was sure that he no longer belonged to himself, but entirely to Jesus. On the one side slave describes the utter obligation of love.

(b) But slave (doulos) has another side to it. In the Old Testament it is the regular word to describe the great men of God. Moses was the doulos of the Lord (Josh. 1:2). Joshua was the doulos of God (Josh. 24:29). The proudest title of the prophets, the title which distinguished them from other men, was that they were the slaves of God (Am. 3:7; Jer. 7:25). When Paul

calls himself the slave of Jesus Christ he is setting himself in the succession of the prophets. Their greatness and their glory lay in the fact that they were slaves of God, and so did his.

So then, the slave of Jesus Christ describes at one and the same time the obligation of a great love and the honour of a great office.

(ii) Paul describes himself as called to be an apostle. In the Old Testament the great men were men who heard and answered the call of God. Abraham heard the call of God (Gen. 12:1-3). Moses answered God's call (Exo. 3:10). Jeremiah and Isaiah were prophets because, almost against their will, they were compelled to listen to and to answer the call of God (Jer. 1:4-5; Isa. 6:8-9). Paul never thought of himself as a man who had aspired to an honour; he thought of himself as a man who had been given a task. Jesus said to his men, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (Jn. 15:16). Paul did not think of life in terms of what he wanted to do, but in terms of what God meant him to do.

(iii) Paul describes himself as set apart to serve the good news of God. He was conscious of a double setting apart in his life. Twice in his life this very same word (aphorizein) is used of him.

(a) He was set apart by God. He thought of God as separating him for the task he was to do even before he was born (Gal. 1:15). For every man God has a plan; no man's life is purposeless. God sent him into the world to do some definite thing.

(b) He was set apart by men, when the Holy Spirit told the leaders of the Church at Antioch to separate him and Barnabas for the special mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2). Paul was conscious of having a task to do for God and for the Church of God.

(iv) In this setting apart Paul was aware of having received two things. In Rom. 1:5 he tells us what these two things were.

(a) He had received grace. Grace always describes some gift which is absolutely free and absolutely unearned. In his pre-Christian days Paul had sought to earn glory in the eyes of men and merit in the sight of God by meticulous observance of the works of the law, and he had found no peace that way. Now he knew that what mattered was not what he could do, but what God had done. It has been put this way, "The law lays down what a man must do; the gospel lays down what God has done." Paul now saw that salvation depended not on what man's effort could do, but on what God's love had done. All was of grace, free and undeserved.

(b) He had received a task. He was set apart to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul knew himself to be chosen not for special honour, but for special responsibility. He knew that God had set him apart, not for glory, but for toil. It may well be that there is a play on words here. Once Paul had been a Pharisee (Php.3:5). Pharisee may very well mean The Separated One. It may be that the Pharisees were so called because they had deliberately separated themselves from all ordinary people and would not even let the skirt of their robe brush against an ordinary man. They would have shuddered at the very thought of the offer of God being made to the Gentiles, who to them were "fuel for the fires of hell." Once Paul had been like that. He had felt himself separated in such a way as to have nothing but contempt for all ordinary men. Now he knew himself to be separated in such a way that he must spend all his life to bring the news of God's love to every man of every race. Christianity always separates us, but it separates us not for privilege and self-glory and pride, but for service and humility and love for all men.

Besides giving his own credentials Paul, in this passage, sets out in its most essential outline the gospel which he preached. It was a gospel which centred in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:3-4). In particular it was a gospel of two things.

(a) It was a gospel of the Incarnation. He told of a Jesus who was really and truly a man. One of the great early thinkers of the Church summed it up when he said of Jesus, "He became what we are, to make us what he is." Paul preached of someone who was not a legendary figure in an imaginary story, not a demigod, half god and half man. He preached of one who was really and truly one with the men he came to save.

(b) It was a gospel of the Resurrection. If Jesus had lived a lovely life and died an heroic death, and if that had been the end of him, he might have been numbered with the great and the heroic, but he would simply have been one among many. His uniqueness is guaranteed forever by the fact of the Resurrection. The others are dead and gone, and have left a memory. Jesus lives on and gives us a presence, still mighty with power.

THE COURTESY OF GREATNESS

Rom. 1:8-15

To begin with, I thank my God for you all through Jesus Christ. I thank him that the story of your faith is told throughout the whole world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in the work of spreading the good news of his Son, is my witness that I continually talk to him about you. In my prayers I am always asking that somehow, soon, at last, I may by God's will succeed in finding a way to come to you. For I yearn to see you, that I may give you a share of some gift

which the Spirit gives, so that you may be firmly founded in the faith--what I mean is, that you and I may find encouragement together, I through your faith and you through mine. I want you to know, brothers, that I have often planned to come to you--and up until now I have been prevented from doing so--that I might have some fruit among you too, as I have amongst the rest of the Gentiles. I am under a duty to Greeks and to barbarians, to wise and to foolish. So, then, it is my eager wish to preach the good news to you too in Rome.

After almost nineteen hundred years the warm affection of this passage still breathes through it, and we can feel Paul's great heart throbbing with love for the Church which he had never seen. Paul's problem in writing this letter was that he had never been in Rome and had had no share in founding the Roman Church. He had to make them feel that he was not a trespasser on their preserves, interfering where he had no right to intervene. Before he could do anything else, he had to get alongside them so that the barriers of strangeness and suspicion might be broken down.

(i) Paul, in wisdom and love combined, began with a compliment. He told them that he thanked God for that Christian faith of theirs which all the world knew. There are some people whose tongues are tuned to praise, and others whose tongues are tuned to criticize. There are some people whose eyes are focused to find faults, and others whose eyes are focused to discover virtues. It was said of Thomas Hardy that, if he went into a country field, he would always see, not the wild flowers, but the dung-heap in the corner. But the fact remains that we will always get far more out of people by praising them than by criticizing them. The men who get the best out of others are the men who insist on seeing them at their best.

There never was, and never has been, anything quite so beautiful as the civilization of the Greeks at its highest and its best, and T. R. Glover once said that it was founded on "a blind faith in the average man." One of the great figures of the 1914-18 war was Donald Hankey, who wrote *The Student in Arms*. He saw men at their best and at their worst. He once wrote home, "If I survive this war I want to write a book called 'The Living Goodness,' analysing all the goodness and nobility inherent in plain people, and trying to show how it ought to find fulfilment and expression in the Church." He also wrote a great essay entitled *The Beloved Captain*. He describes how the beloved captain picked out the awkward ones and taught them himself. "He looked at them and they looked at him, and the men pulled themselves together and determined to do their best."

No one can ever even begin to save men unless he first believes in them. A man is a hell-deserving sinner, but he has also a sleeping hero in his soul, and often a word of praise will awaken that sleeping heroism when criticism and condemnation will only produce resentment

and despair. Aidan was the apostle to the Saxons. Away back in A.D. 630 the Saxon king had sent to Iona a request that a missionary should be sent to his kingdom to preach the gospel. The missionary came back talking of the "stubborn and barbarous disposition of the English." "The English have no manners," he said, "they behave like savages." He reported that the task was hopeless, and then Aidan spoke. "I think, brother," he said, "that you may have been too severe for such ignorant hearers, and that you should have led them on gently, giving them first the milk of religion before the meat." So Aidan was sent to Northumbria, and his gentleness won for Christ that very people whom the critical severity of his brother monk had repelled.

(ii) Although Paul did not know the people at Rome personally he nevertheless constantly prayed to God for them. It is ever a Christian privilege and duty to bear our loved ones and all our fellow-Christians to the throne of grace. In one of his sermons on the Lord's Prayer, Gregory of Nyssa has a lyrical passage on prayer:

"The effect of prayer is union with God, and, if someone is with God, he is separated from the enemy. Through prayer we guard our chastity, control our temper and rid ourselves of vanity. It makes us forget injuries, overcomes envy, defeats injustice and makes amends for sin. Through prayer we obtain physical well-being, a happy home, and a strong, well-ordered society. Prayer is the seal of virginity and a pledge of faithfulness in marriage. It shields the wayfarer, protects the sleeper, and gives courage to those who keep vigil. It will refresh you when you are weary and comfort you when you are sorrowful. Prayer is the delight of the joyful as well as the solace of the afflicted. Prayer is intimacy with God and contemplation of the invisible. Prayer is the enjoyment of things present and the substance of the things to come."

Even if we are separated from people, and even if there is no other gift which we can give to them, we can surround them with the strength and the defence of our prayers.

(iii) Paul, in his humility, was always ready to receive as well as to give. He began by saying that he wished to come to Rome that he might impart to the Roman Church some gift which would confirm them in the faith. And then he changed it. He wished to come to Rome that he and the Roman Church might comfort and strengthen each other, and that each might find precious things in the faith of the other. There are two kinds of teachers. There are those whose attitude is that they are standing above their scholars and telling them what they should and must accept. And there are those who, in effect, say, "Come now, let's learn about this together." Paul was the greatest thinker the Early Church ever produced, and yet, when he thought of the people to whom he longed to preach, he thought of himself not only as giving to them but also as receiving from them. It takes humility to teach as it takes humility to learn.

(iv) Rom. 8:14 has in Greek a double meaning that is almost untranslatable. The Revised Standard Version has it, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians." Paul was thinking of two things when he wrote that. He was under obligation because of all the kindness that he had received, and he was under obligation to preach to them. This highly compressed sentence means, "Because of all that I have received from them and because of all it is my duty to give to them, I am under an obligation to all sorts of men."

It may seem strange that Paul speaks of Greeks when he is writing to Romans. At this time the word Greek had lost its racial sense altogether. It did not mean a native of the country of Greece. The conquests of Alexander the Great had taken the Greek language and Greek thought all over the world. And a Greek was no longer only one who was a Greek by race and birth; he was one who knew the culture and the mind of Greece. A barbarian is literally a man who says bar-bar, that is to say a man who speaks an ugly and an unharmonious tongue in contrast with the man who speaks the beautiful, flexible language of Greek. To be a Greek was to be a man of a certain mind and spirit and culture. One of the Greeks said of his own people, "The barbarians may stumble on the truth, but it takes a Greek to understand."

What Paul meant was that his message, his friendship, his obligation was to wise and simple, cultured and uncultured, lettered and unlettered. He had a message for the world, and it was his ambition some day to deliver that message in Rome too.

GOOD NEWS OF WHICH TO BE PROUD

Rom. 1:16-17

I am proud of the good news, for it is the power of God which produces salvation for every one who believes, to the Jew first and to the Greek. The way to a right relationship with God is revealed in it when man's faith responds to God's fidelity, just as it stands written, "It is the man who is in a right relationship with God as a result of his faith who will live."

When we come to these two verses, the preliminaries are over and the trumpet call of Paul's gospel sounds out. Many of the great piano concertos begin with a crashing chord and then state the theme which they are going to develop. The reason is that they were often first performed at private gatherings in great houses. When the pianist first seated himself at the piano, there was still a buzz of conversation. He played the crashing chord to attract the attention of the company, and then, when attention was obtained, the theme was stated. Up to these two verses, Paul has been making contact with the people to whom he was writing; he has been attracting their attention. Now the introduction is over, and the theme is stated.

There are only two verses here, but they contain so much of the quintessence of Paul's gospel that we must spend some considerable time on them.

Paul began by saying that he was proud of the gospel which it was his privilege to preach. It is amazing to think of the background of that statement. Paul had been imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Beroea, laughed at in Athens and in Corinth his message was foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling-block to the Jews. Out of that background he declared that he was proud of the gospel. There was something in the gospel which made Paul triumphantly victorious over all that men could do to him.

In this passage we meet three great Pauline watchwords, the three foundation pillars of his thought and belief.

(i) There is the conception of salvation (*soteria*). At this time in history salvation was the one thing for which men were searching. There had been a time when Greek philosophy was speculative. Four and five hundred years before this men had spent their time discussing the problem--what is the one basic element of which the world is composed? Philosophy had been speculative philosophy and it had been natural philosophy. But, bit by bit, as the centuries passed, life fell in. The old landmarks were destroyed. Tyrants and conquerors and perils surrounded men; degeneracy and weakness haunted them; and philosophy changed its emphasis. It became, not speculative, but practical. It ceased to be natural philosophy, and became moral philosophy. Its one aim was to build "a ring-wall of defence against the advancing chaos of the world."

Epictetus called his lecture room the hospital for the sick soul. "Epicurus called his teaching the medicine of salvation." Seneca, who was contemporary with Paul, said that all men were looking, *ad salutem*, towards salvation. What we needed, he said, was "a hand let down to lift us up." Men, he said, were overwhelmingly conscious of "their weakness and their inefficiency in necessary things." He himself, he said, was *homo non tolerabilis*, a man not to be tolerated. Men loved their vices, he said with a sort of despair, and hated them at the same time. In that desperate world, Epictetus said, men were seeking a peace "not of Caesar's proclamation, but of God's."

There can seldom have been a time in history when men were more universally seeking for salvation. It was precisely that salvation, that power, that escape, that Christianity came to offer men.

Let us see just what this Christian soteria, this Christian salvation was.

(a) It was salvation from physical illness. (Matt. 9:21; Lk. 8:36.) It was not a completely other--worldly thing. It aimed at rescuing a man in body and in soul.

(b) It was salvation from danger. (Matt. 8:25; Matt. 14:30.) It was not that it gave a man a life free from perils and dangers, but it gave him a security of soul no matter what was happening. As Rupert Brooke wrote in the days of the First World War in his poem Safety:

"Safe shall be my going, Secretly armed against all death's endeavour; Safe though all safety's lost; safe where men fall; And if these poor limbs die, safest of all."

And as Browning had it in Paracelsus:

"If I stoop, Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud, It is but for a time; I press God's lamp Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late, Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day."

The Christian salvation makes a man safe in a way that is independent of any outward circumstance.

(c) It was salvation from life's infection. It is from a crooked and perverse generation that a man is saved (Acts 2:40). The man who has this Christian salvation has a kind of divine antiseptic which keeps him from infection by the evil of the world.

(d) It was salvation from lostness (Matt. 18:11; Lk. 19:10). It was to seek and to save the lost that Jesus came. The unsaved man is the man who is on the wrong road, a road that leads to death. The saved man is the man who has been put on the right way.

(e) It was salvation from sin (Matt. 1:21). Men are like slaves in bondage to a master from whom they cannot escape. The Christian salvation liberates them from the tyranny of sin.

(f) It was salvation from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9). We shall have occasion in the next passage to discuss the meaning of this phrase. It is sufficient to note at the moment that there is in this world an inexorable moral law and in the Christian faith an inevitable element of judgment. Without the salvation which Jesus Christ brings a man could only stand condemned.

(g) It was a salvation which is eschatological. That is to say it is a salvation which find its full meaning and blessedness in the final triumph of Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 1:5).

The Christian faith came to a desperate world offering a salvation which would keep a man safe in time and in eternity.

(ii) There is the conception of faith. In the thought of Paul this is a rich word.

(a) At its simplest it means loyalty. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he wished to know about their faith. That is, he wished to know how their loyalty was standing the test. In 2Th.1:4 faith and steadfastness are combined. Faith is the enduring fidelity which marks the real soldier of Jesus Christ.

(b) Faith means belief. It means the conviction that something is true. In 1 Cor. 15:17 Paul tells the Corinthians that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then their faith is vain, all that they have believed is wrecked. Faith is the assent that the Christian message is true.

(c) Faith sometimes means the Christian Religion (The Faith). In 2 Cor. 13:5 Paul tells his opponents to examine themselves to see if they are holding to their faith, that is, to see if they are still within the Christian Religion.

(d) Faith is sometimes practically equivalent to indestructible hope. "We walk," writes Paul, "by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

(e) But, in its most characteristic Pauline use, faith means total acceptance and absolute trust. It means "betting your life that there is a God." It means being utterly sure that what Jesus said is true, and staking all time and eternity on that assurance. "I believe in God," said Stevenson, "and if I woke up in hell I would still believe in him."

Faith begins with receptivity. It begins when a man is at least willing to listen to the message of the truth. It goes on to mental assent. A man first hears and then agrees that this is true. But mental assent need not issue in action. Many a man knows very well that something is true, but does not change his actions to meet that knowledge. The final stage is when this mental assent becomes total surrender. In full-fledged faith, a man hears the Christian message, agrees that it is true, and then casts himself upon it in a life of total yieldedness.

(iii) There is the conception of justification. Now there are no more difficult words to understand than justification, justify, justice and just, in all the New Testament. We shall have much occasion in this letter to meet them. At this point we can only lay down the broad lines on which all Paul's thought proceeds.

The Greek verb that Paul uses for "to justify" is *dikaion*, of which the first person singular of the present indicative--I justify--is *dikaioo*. We must be quite clear that the word justify, used in this sense, has a different meaning from its ordinary English meaning. If we justify ourselves, we produce reasons to prove that we were right; if someone justifies us, he produces reasons to prove that we acted in the right way. But all verbs in Greek which end in "oo" do not mean to prove or to make a person or thing to be something; they always mean to treat, or account or reckon a person as something. If God justifies a sinner, it does not mean that he finds reasons to prove that he was right--far from it. It does not even mean, at this point, that he makes the sinner a good man. It means that God treats the sinner as if he had not been a sinner at all. Instead of treating him as a criminal to be obliterated, God treats him as a child to be loved. That is what justification means. It means that God reckons us not as his enemies but as his friends, not as bad men deserve, but as good men deserve, not as law-breakers to be punished, but as men and women to be loved. That is the very essence of the gospel.

That means that to be justified is to enter into a new relationship with God, a relationship of love and confidence and friendship, instead of one of distance and enmity and fear. We no longer go to a God radiating just but terrible punishment. We go to a God radiating forgiving and redeeming love. Justification (*dikaiosis*) is the right relationship between God and man. The man who is just (*dikaios*) is the man who is in this right relationship, and--here is the supreme point--he is in it not because of anything that he has done, but because of what God has done. He is in this right relationship not because he has meticulously performed the works of the law, but because in utter faith he has cast himself on the amazing mercy and love of God.

In the King James Version we have the famous and highly compressed phrase, The just shall live by faith. Now we can see that in Paul's mind this phrase meant--It is the man who is in a right relationship with God, not because of the works of his hands, but because of his utter faith in what the love of God has done, who really knows what life is like in time and in eternity. And to Paul the whole work of Jesus was that he had enabled men to enter into this new and precious relationship with God. Fear was gone and love had come. The God whom men had thought an enemy had become a friend.

Lesson 3 Readings

THE WRATH OF GOD

Rom. 1:18-23

For the wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven, directed against all impiety and wickedness of men, who, in their wickedness, wilfully suppress the truth that is struggling in their hearts, for, that which can be known about God is clear within them, for God has made it clear to them, because, from the creation of the world, it has always been possible to understand the invisible things by the created things--I mean his invisible power and divinity--and things have been so ordered in order to leave them without defence, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify God and they did not give him thanks, but they have involved themselves in futile speculations and their senseless mind was darkened. They alleged themselves to be wise, but they have become fools, and they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the image of the likeness of mortal man, and of winged creatures, and of four-footed animals, and of creeping reptiles.

In the previous passage Paul was thinking about the relationship with God into which a man can enter through the faith which is utter yieldedness and trust. In contrast with that he sets the wrath of God which a man must incur, if he is deliberately blind to God and worships his own thoughts and idols instead of him.

This is difficult and must give us seriously to think, for here we meet the conception of the wrath of God, an alarming and a terrifying phrase. What is its meaning? What was in Paul's mind when he used it?

In the early parts of the Old Testament the wrath of God is specially connected with the idea of the covenant people. The people of Israel were in a special relationship with God. He had chosen them and offered them this special relationship, which would obtain so long as they kept his law (Exo. 24:3-8). That meant two things.

(a) It meant that within the nation any breach of the law provoked the wrath of God for it broke the relationship. Num. 16 tells of the rebelliousness of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and at the end of it Moses bade Aaron make special atonement for the sin of the people "for wrath has gone forth from the Lord" (Num. 16:46). When the Israelites were led away into Baal worship, "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel" (Num. 25:3).

(b) Further, because Israel stood in a unique relationship to God, any other nation which treated her with cruelty and injustice incurred the wrath of God. The Babylonians had ill-treated Israel, and because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited (Jer. 50:13).

In the prophets, the idea of the wrath of God occurs, but the emphasis has changed. Jewish religious thought from the prophets onwards was dominated by the idea of the two ages.

There was this age which was altogether bad, and there was the golden age which was altogether good, the present age and the age to come. These two ages were separated by the Day of the Lord. That was to be a day of terrible retribution and judgment, when the world would be shattered, the sinner destroyed and the universe remade before God's Kingdom came. It was then that the wrath of the Lord would go into terrible action. "Behold the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation" (Isa. 13:9). "Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 9:19). Eze. 7:19 speaks of "the day of the wrath of the Lord." God will pour out upon the nations "his indignation and all the heat of his anger" (Zeph. 3:8).

But the prophets did not regard the wrath of God as being postponed until that terrible day of judgment. They saw it continuously in action. When Israel strayed away from God, when she was rebellious and unfaithful, then the wrath of God operated against her and involved her in ruin, disaster, captivity and defeat.

To the prophets the wrath of God was continually operating, and would reach its peak of terror and destruction on the coming Day of the Lord.

A modern scholar has put it this way. Because he is God, because he is characteristically holy, God cannot tolerate sin, and the wrath of God is his "annihilating reaction" against sin.

That is hard for us to grasp and to accept. It is in fact the kind of religion that we associate with the Old Testament rather than with the New. Even Luther found it hard. He spoke of God's love as God's own work, and he spoke of his wrath as God's strange work. It is for the Christian mind a baffling thing.

Let us try to see how Paul understood this conception. Dr C. H. Dodd writes very wisely and profoundly on this matter. Paul speaks frequently of this idea of wrath. But the strange thing is that although he speaks of the wrath of God, he never speaks of God being angry. He speaks of God's love, and he speaks of God loving. He speaks of God's grace, and of God graciously giving. He speaks of God's fidelity, and of God being faithful to his people. But, very strangely, although he speaks of the wrath of God, he never speaks about God being angry. So then there is some difference in the connection with God of love and wrath.

Further, Paul speaks of the wrath of God only three times. He does so here, and in Eph. 5:6 and Col. 3:6 where, in both passages, he speaks of the wrath of God coming upon the children of disobedience. But quite frequently Paul speaks about the wrath, without saying it is the wrath of God, as if it ought to be spelled with capital letters--The Wrath--and was a kind of impersonal force at work in the world. In Rom. 3:5 the literal translation is, "God who brings on men The Wrath." In Rom. 5:9 he speaks about being saved from the wrath. In Rom. 12:19 he advises men not to take vengeance but to leave evil-doers to the wrath. In Rom. 13:5 he speaks about the wrath as being a powerful motive to keep men obedient. In Rom. 4:15 he says that the law produces wrath. And in 1Th. 1:10 he says that Jesus delivered us from The Wrath to come. Now there is something very strange here. Paul speaks about the wrath, and yet from that very wrath Jesus saves men.

Let us go back to the prophets. Very often their message amounted to this, "If you are not obedient to God, the wrath of God will involve you in ruin and disaster." Ezekiel put this in another vivid way--"The soul that sins shall die" (Eze. 18:4). If we were to put this into modern language we would say, "There is a moral order in this world, and the man who transgresses it soon or late is bound to suffer." That is exactly what J. A. Froude the great historian said: "One lesson, and one lesson only, history may be said to repeat with distinctness, that the world is butt somehow on moral foundations, that, in the long run, it is well with the good, and, in the long run, it will be ill with the wicked."

The whole message of the Hebrew prophets was that there is a moral order in this world. The conclusion is clear--that moral order is the wrath of God at work. God made this world in such a way that we break his laws at our peril. Now if we were left solely at the mercy of that inexorable moral order, there could be nothing for us but death and destruction. The world is made in such a way that the soul that sins must die--if the moral order is to act alone. But into this dilemma of man there comes the love of God, and that love of God, by an act of unbelievable free grace, lifts man out of the consequences of sin and saves him from the wrath he should have incurred.

Paul goes on to insist that men cannot plead ignorance of God. They could have seen what he is like from his world. It is always possible to tell something of a man from his handiwork; and it is possible to tell something about God from the world he made. The Old Testament writers knew that. Jb. 38-41, is based on that very idea. Paul knew it. It is from the world that he starts when he is speaking to the pagans at Lystra (Acts 14:17). Tertullian, the great early Christian Father, has much about this conviction that God can be seen in his world. "It was not the pen of Moses that initiated the knowledge of the Creator. The vast majority of mankind, though they had never heard the name of Moses--to say nothing of his book--know the God of Moses none the less." "Nature," he said, "is the teacher; the soul is the pupil." "One flower of the hedgerow by itself, I think--I do not say a flower of the meadows; one shell of any sea you like--I do not say a pearl from the Red Sea; one feather of a moor fowl--to say nothing of a peacock--will they speak to you of a mean Creator?" "If I offer you a rose, you will not scorn its Creator."

In the world we can see God. It is Paul's argument--and it is completely valid--that if we look at the world we see that suffering follows sin. Break the laws of agriculture--your harvest fails. Break the laws of architecture--your building collapses. Break the laws of health--your body suffers. Paul was saying "Look at the world! See how it is constructed! From a world like that you know what God is like." The sinner is left without excuse.

Paul goes on another step. What did the sinner do? Instead of looking out to God, he looked into himself. He involved himself in vain speculations and thought he was wise, while all the time he was a fool. Why? He was a fool because he made his ideas, his opinions, his speculations the standard and the law of life, instead of the will of God. The sinner's folly consisted in making "man the master of things." He found his standards in his own opinions and not in the laws of God. He lived in a self-centred instead of a God-centred universe. Instead of walking looking out to God he walked looking into himself, and, like any man who does not look where he is going, he fell.

The result of this was idolatry. The glory of God was exchanged for images of human and animal forms. The root sin of idolatry is that it is selfish. A man makes an idol. He brings it offerings and addresses prayers to it. Why? So that his own schemes and dreams may be furthered. His worship is for his own sake and not for God's.

In this passage we are face to face with the fact that the essence of sin is to put self in the place of God.

MEN WITH WHOM GOD CAN DO NOTHING

Rom. 1:24-25

So then God abandoned them to uncleanness in their hearts' passionate desires for pleasure, desires which made them dishonor their bodies among themselves, for they are men who have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, and who worship and serve the creation more than they do the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The word translated desires (epithumia) is the key to this passage. Aristotle defined epithumia as a reaching out after pleasure. The Stoics defined it as a reaching after pleasure which defies all reason. Clement of Alexandria called it an unreasonable reaching for that which will gratify itself. Epithumia is the passionate desire for forbidden pleasure. It is the desire which makes men do nameless and shameless things. It is the way of life of a man who has become so completely immersed in the world that he has ceased to be aware of God at all.

It is a terrible thing to talk of God abandoning anyone. And yet there are two reasons for that.

(i) God gave man free-will, and he respects that free-will. In the last analysis not even he can interfere with it. In Eph.4:19 Paul speaks of men who have abandoned themselves to lasciviousness; they have surrendered their whole will to it. Hosea (Hos.4:17) has the terrible sentence: "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." Before man there stands an open choice; and it has to be so. Without choice there can be no goodness and without choice there can be no love. A coerced goodness is not real goodness; and a coerced love is not love at all. If men deliberately choose to turn their backs on God after he has sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world, not even he can do anything about it.

When Paul speaks of God abandoning men to uncleanness, the word abandon has no angry irritation in it. Indeed, its main note is not even condemnation and judgment, but wistful, sorrowful regret, as of a lover who has done all that he can and can do no more. It describes exactly the feeling of the father when he saw his son turn his back on his home and go out to the far country.

(ii) And yet in this word abandon there is more than that--there is judgment. It is one of the grim facts of life that the more a man sins the easier it is to sin. He may begin with a kind of shuddering awareness of what he is doing, and end by sinning without a second thought. It

is not that God is punishing him; he is bringing punishment upon himself and steadily making himself the slave of sin. The Jews knew this, and they had certain great sayings upon this idea. "Every fulfilment of duty is rewarded by another; and every transgression is punished by another." "Whosoever strives to keep himself pure receives the power to do so; and whosoever is impure, to him is the door of vice thrown open." "He who erects a fence around himself is fenced, and he who gives himself over is given over."

The most terrible thing about sin is just this power to beget sin. It is the awful responsibility of free-will that it can be used in such a way that in the end it is obliterated and a man becomes the slave of sin, self-abandoned to the wrong way. And sin is always a lie, because the sinner thinks that it will make him happy, whereas in the end it ruins life, both for himself and for others, in this world and in the world to come.

AN AGE OF SHAME

Rom. 1:26-27

Because of this God abandoned them to dishonorable passions, for their women exchanged the natural relationship, for the relationship which is against nature; and so did the men, for they gave up the natural relationship with women, and were inflamed with their desire for each other, and men were guilty of shameful conduct with men. So within themselves they received their due and necessary rewards for their error.

Rom. 1:26-32 might seem the work of some almost hysterical moralist who was exaggerating the contemporary situation and painting it in colours of rhetorical hyperbole. It describes a situation of degeneracy of morals almost without parallel in human history. But Paul said nothing that the Greek and Roman writers of the age did not themselves say.

(i) It was an age when things seemed, as it were, out of control. Virgil wrote: "Right and wrong are confounded; so many wars the world over, so many forms of wrong; no worthy honour is left to the plough; the husbandmen are marched away and the fields grow dirty; the hook has its curve straightened into the sword-blade. In the East, Euphrates is stirring up the war, in the West, Germany; nay, close-neighbouring cities break their mutual league and draw the sword, and the war god's unnatural fury rages over the whole world; even as when in the circus the chariots burst from their floodgates, they dash into the course, and, pulling desperately at the reins, the driver lets the horses drive him, and the car is deaf to the curb."

It was a world where violence had run amok. When Tacitus came to write the history of this period, he wrote: "I am entering upon the history of a period, rich in disasters, gloomy with wars, rent with seditions, savage in its very hours of peace.

All was one delirium of hate and terror; slaves were bribed to betray their masters, freedmen their patrons. He who had no foe was destroyed by his friend." Suetonius, writing of the reign of Tiberius, said: "No day passed but someone was executed." It was an age of

sheer, utter terror. "Rome," said Livy, the historian, "could neither bear its ills nor the remedies that might have cured them." Propertius, the poet, wrote: "I see Rome, proud Rome, perishing, the victim of her own prosperity." It was an age of moral suicide. Juvenal, the satirist, wrote: "The earth no longer brings forth any but bad men and cowards. Hence God, whoever he is, looks down, laughs at them and hates them."

To the thinking man it was an age when things seemed out of control, and when, in the background, a man could hear the mocking laughter of the gods. As Seneca said, it was an age "stricken with the agitation of a soul no longer master of itself."

(ii) It was an age of unparalleled luxury. In the public baths of Rome the hot and cold water ran from silver taps. Caligula had even sprinkled the floor of the circus arena with gold dust instead of sawdust. Juvenal said bitterly: "A luxury more ruthless than war broods over Rome. No guilt or deed of lust is wanting since Roman poverty disappeared." "Money, the nurse of debauchery and enervating riches sapped the sinews of the age with foul luxury." Seneca spoke of "money, the ruin of the true honour of things," and said, "we ask not what a thing truly is but what it costs." It was an age so weary of ordinary things that it was avid for new sensations. Lucretius speaks of "that bitterness which flows from the very fountain of pleasure." Crime became the only antidote to boredom, until, as Tacitus said, "the greater the infamy, the wilder the delight."

(iii) It was an age of unparalleled immorality. There had not been one single case of divorce in the first 520 years of the history of the Roman republic. The first Roman recorded as having divorced his wife was Spurius Carvilius Ruga in 234 B.C. But now, as Seneca said, "women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married." Roman high-born matrons dated the years by the names of their husbands, and not by the names of the consuls. Juvenal could not believe that it was possible to have the rare good fortune to find a matron with unsullied chastity. Clement of Alexandria speaks of the typical Roman society lady as "girt like Venus with a golden girdle of vice." Juvenal writes: "Is one husband enough for Iberina? Sooner will you prevail upon her to be content with one eye." He cites the case of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. He cites the incredible case of Agrippina, the empress herself, the wife of Claudius, who at night used to leave the royal palace and go down to serve in a brothel for the sake of sheer lust. "They show a dauntless spirit in those things they basely dare." There is nothing that Paul said about the heathen world that the heathen moralists had not themselves already said. And vice did not stop with the crude and natural vices. Society from top to bottom was riddled with unnatural vice. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman Emperors were homosexuals.

So far from exaggerating the picture Paul drew it with restraint--and it was there that he was eager to preach the gospel, and it was there that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. The world needed the power that would work salvation, and Paul knew that nowhere else than in Christ did that power exist.

THE LIFE WHICH HAS LEFT GOD OUT OF THE RECKONING

Rom. 1:28-32

Just as they have given themselves over to a kind of knowledge that rejects the idea of God, so God has given them over to the kind of mind that all reject. The result is that they do things which it is not fitting for any man to do. They are replete with all evil, villainy, the lust to get, viciousness. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, the spirit which puts the worst construction on everything. They are whisperers, slanderers, haters of God. They are insolent men, arrogant, braggarts, inventors of evil things, disobedient to their parents, senseless breakers of agreements, without natural affections, pitiless. They are the kind of men who are well aware that those who do such things deserve death, and yet they not only do them themselves, but also heartily approve of those who do them.

There is hardly any passage which so clearly shows what happens to a man when he leaves God out of the reckoning. It is not so much that God sends a judgment on a man, as that a man brings a judgment on himself when he gives no place to God in his scheme of things. When a man banishes God from his life he becomes a certain kind of man, and in this passage is one of the most terrible descriptions in literature of the kind of man he becomes. Let us look at the catalogue of dreadful things which enter into the godless life.

Such men do things which are not fitting for any man to do. The Stoics had a phrase. They talked of *ta kathekonta*, by which they meant the things it befits a man to do. Certain things are essentially and inherently part of manhood, and certain things are not. As Shakespeare has it in *Macbeth*:

"I dare do all that may become a man; Who dares do more is none."

The man who banishes God not only loses godliness; he loses manhood too.

Then comes the long list of terrible things. Let us take them one by one.

Evil (*adikia*). *Adikia* is the precise opposite of *diaiosune*, which means justice; and the Greeks defined justice as giving to God and to men their due. The evil man is the man who robs both man and God of their rights. He has so erected an altar to himself in the centre of things that he worships himself to the exclusion of God and man.

Villainy (*poneria*). In Greek this word means more than badness. There is a kind of badness which, in the main, hurts only the person concerned. It is not essentially an outgoing badness. When it hurts others, as all badness must, the hurt is not deliberate. It may be thoughtlessly cruel, but it is not callously cruel. But the Greeks defined *poneria* as the desire of doing harm. It is the active, deliberate will to corrupt and to inflict injury. When the Greeks described a woman as *poneria* they meant that she deliberately seduced the innocent from their innocence. In Greek one of the commonest titles of Satan is *ho poneros*, the evil one, the one who deliberately attacks and aims to destroy the goodness of men.

Poneros describes the man who is not only bad but wants to make everyone as bad as himself. Poneria is destructive badness.

The lust to get (pleonexia). The Greek word is built up of two words which mean to have more. The Greeks themselves defined pleonexia as the accursed love of having. It is an aggressive vice. It has been described as the spirit which will pursue its own interests with complete disregard for the rights of others, and even for the considerations of common humanity. Its keynote is rapacity. Theodoret, the Christian writer, describes it as the spirit that aims at more, the spirit which grasps at things which it has no right to take. It may operate in every sphere of life. If it operates in the material sphere, it means grasping at money and goods, regardless of honour and honesty. If it operates in the ethical sphere, it means the ambition which tramples on others to gain something which is not properly meant for it. If it operates in the moral sphere, it means the unbridled lust which takes its pleasure where it has no right to take. Pleonexia is the desire which knows no law.

Viciousness (kakia). Kakia is the most general Greek word for badness. It describes the case of a man who is destitute of every quality which would make him good. For instance, a kakos krites is a judge destitute of the legal knowledge and the moral sense and uprightness of character which are necessary to make a good judge. It is described by Theodoret as "the turn of the soul to the worse." The word he uses for turn is "rope" which means the turn of the balance. A man who is kakos is a man the swing of whose life is towards the worse. Kakia has been described as the essential viciousness which includes all vice and as the forerunner of all other sins. It is the degeneracy out of which all sins grow and in which all sins flourish.

Envy (phthonos). There is a good and a bad envy. There is the envy which reveals to a man his own weakness and inadequacy, and which makes him eager to copy some great example. And there is the envy which is essentially a grudging thing. It looks at a fine person, and is not so much moved to aspire to that fineness, as to resent it. It is the most warped and twisted of human emotions.

Murder (phonos). It has always to be remembered that Jesus immeasurably widened the scope of this word. He insisted that not only the deed of violence but the spirit of anger and hatred must be eliminated. He insisted that it is not enough only to keep from angry and savage action. It is enough only when even the desire and the anger are banished from the heart. We may never have struck a man in our lives, but who can say he never wanted to strike anyone? As Aquinas said long ago, "Man regardeth the deed, but God seeth the intention."

Strife (eris). Its meaning is the contention which is born of envy, ambition, the desire for prestige, and place and prominence. It comes from the heart in which there is jealousy. If a man is cleansed of jealousy, he has gone far to being cleansed of all that arouses contention and strife. It is a God-given gift to be able to take as much pleasure in the successes of others as in one's own.

Deceit (dolos). We best get the meaning of this from the corresponding verb (doloun). Doloun has two characteristic usages. It is used of debasing precious metals and of adulterating wines. Dolos is deceit; it describes the quality of the man who has a tortuous and a twisted mind, who cannot act in a straightforward way, who stoops to devious and underhand methods to get his own way, who never does anything except with some kind of ulterior motive. It describes the crafty cunning of the plotting intriguer who is found in every community and every society.

The spirit which puts the worst construction on everything (kakoetheia). Kakoetheia means literally evil-naturedness. At its widest it means malignity. Aristotle defined it in a narrower sense which it has always retained. He said it was "the spirit which always supposes the worst about other people." Pliny called it "malignity of interpretation." Jeremy Taylor said that it is "a baseness of nature by which we take things by the wrong handle, and expound things always in the worst sense." It may well be that this is the commonest of all sins. If there are two possible constructions to be put upon the action of any man, human nature will choose the worse. It is terrifying to think how many reputations have been murdered in gossip over the teacups, with people maliciously putting a wrong interpretation upon a completely innocent action. When we are tempted so to do, we ought to remember that God hears and remembers every word we speak.

Whisperers and slanderers (Psithuristes, and katalalos). These two words describe people with slanderous tongues; but there is a difference between them. Katalalos, slanderer, describes the man who trumpets his slanders abroad; he quite openly makes his accusations and tells his tales--Psithuristes describes the man who whispers his malicious stories in the listener's ear, who takes a man apart into a corner and whispers a character-destroying story. Both are bad, but the whisperer is the worse. A man can at least defend himself against an open slander, but he is helpless against the secret whisperer who delights in destroying reputations.

Haters of God (theostugeis). This describes the man who hates God because he knows that he is defying him. God is the barrier between him and his pleasures; he is the chain which keeps him from doing exactly as he likes. He would gladly eliminate God if he could, for to him a godless world would be one where he would have, not liberty, but licence.

Insolent men (hubristes). Hubris was to the Greek the vice which supremely courted destruction at the hand of the gods. It has two main lines of thought in it. (i) It describes the spirit of the man who is so proud that he defies God. It is the insolent pride that goes before a fall. It is the forgetting that man is a creature. It is the spirit of the man who is so confident in his wealth, his power and his strength that he thinks that he can live life alone. (ii) It describes the man who is wantonly and sadistically cruel and insulting. Aristotle describes it as the spirit which harms and grieves someone else, not for the sake of revenge and not for any advantage that may be gained from it, but simply for the sheer pleasure of hurting. There are people who get pleasure from seeing someone wince at a cruel saying. There are people who take a devilish delight in inflicting mental and physical pain on others. That is hubris; it is the sadism which finds delight in hurting others simply for the sake of hurting them.

Arrogant men (huperephanos). This is the word which is three times used in scripture when it is said that God resists the proud. (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 3:34.) Theophylact called it "the summit of all sins." Theophrastus was a Greek writer who wrote a series of famous character sketches, and he defined huperephania as "a certain contempt for everyone except oneself." He picks out the things in everyday life which are signs of this arrogance. The arrogant man, when he is asked to accept some office, refuses on the ground that he has not time to spare from his own business; he never looks at people on the street unless it pleases him to do so; he invites a man to a meal and then does not appear himself, but sends his servant to attend to his guest. His whole life is surrounded with an atmosphere of contempt and he delights to make others feel small.

Braggarts (alazon). Alazon is a word with an interesting history. It literally means one who wanders about. It then became the stock word for wandering quacks who boast of cures that they have worked, and for cheapjacks who boast that their wares have an excellence which they are far from possessing. The Greeks defined alazoneia as the spirit which pretends to have what it has not. Xenophon said that the name belongs to those who pretend to be richer and braver than they are, and who promise to do what they are really unable to do in order to make some profit or gain. Again Theophrastus has a character study of such a man--the pretentious man, the snob. He is the kind of man who boasts of trade deals which exist only in his imagination, of connections with influential people which do not exist at all, of gifts to charities and public services which he never gave or rendered. He says about the house he lives in that it is really too small for him, and that he must buy a bigger one. The braggart is out to impress others--and the world is still full of his like.

Inventors of evil (epheuretes kakon). The phrase describes the man who, so to speak, is not content with the usual, ordinary ways of sinning, but who seeks out new and recondite vices because he has grown blasé and seeks a new thrill in some new sin.

Disobedient to their parents (goneusin apeitheis). Both Jews and Romans set obedience to parents very high in the scale of virtues. It was one of the Ten Commandments that parents should be honoured. In the early days of the Roman Republic, the patria potestas, the father's power, was so absolute that he had the power of life and death over his family. The reason for including this sin here is that, once the bonds of the family are loosened, wholesale degeneracy must necessarily follow.

Senseless (asunetos). This word describes the man who is a fool, who cannot learn the lesson of experience, who will not use the mind and brain that God has given to him.

Breakers of agreements (asunthetos). This word would come with particular force to a Roman audience. In the great days of Rome, Roman honesty was a wonderful thing. A man's word was as good as his bond. That was in fact one of the great differences between the Roman and the Greek. The Greek was a born pilferer. The Greeks used to say that if a governor or official was entrusted with one talent--240 British pounds--even if there were ten clerks and accountants to check up on him, he was certain to succeed in embezzling some of it; while the Roman, whether as a magistrate in office or a general on a campaign,

could deal with thousands of talents on his bare word alone, and never a penny went astray. By using this word, Paul was recalling the Romans not only to the Christian ethic, but to their own standards of honour in their greatest days.

Without natural affections (astorgos). Storge was the special Greek word for family love. It was quite true that this was an age in which family love was dying. Never was the life of the child so precarious as at this time. Children were considered a misfortune. When a child was born, it was taken and laid at the father's feet. If the father lifted it up that meant that he acknowledged it. If he turned away and left it, the child was literally thrown out. There was never a night when there were not thirty or forty abandoned children left in the Roman forum. Even Seneca, great soul as he was, could write: "We kill a mad dog; we slaughter a fierce ox; we plunge the knife into sickly cattle lest they taint the herd; children who are born weakly and deformed we drown." The natural bonds of human affection had been destroyed.

Pitiless (aneleemon). There never was a time when human life was so cheap. A slave could be killed or tortured by his master, for he was only a thing and the law gave his master unlimited power over him. In a wealthy household a slave was bringing in a tray of crystal glasses. He stumbled and a glass fell and broke. There and then his master had him flung into the fish pond in the middle of the courtyard where the savage lampreys devoured his living flesh. It was an age pitiless in its very pleasures, for it was the great age of the gladiatorial games where people found their delight in seeing men kill each other. It was an age when the quality of mercy was gone.

Paul says one last thing about these people who have banished God from life. It usually happens that, even if a man is a sinner, he knows it, and, even if he allows something in himself, he knows that it is to be condemned in others. But in those days men had reached such a level that they sinned themselves and encouraged others to do so. George Bernard Shaw once said, "No nation has ever survived the loss of its gods." Here Paul has given us a terrible picture of what happens when men deliberately banish God from the reckoning, and, in due time, Rome perished. Disaster and degeneracy went hand in hand.

Lesson 4 Readings

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PRIVILEGE

Rom. 2:1-11

So, then, O man, everyone of you who judges others, you yourself have no defence. While you judge others, you condemn yourself, for you who set yourself up as a judge do exactly the same things. We know that God's judgment is directed against all who do such things, and that it is based on reality. Are you counting on this, O man, you who set yourself up as a judge upon people who do such things and who do them yourself--that you will escape the condemnation of God? Or, are you treating with contempt the wealth of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not realizing that

God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? In your obtuseness, and in your impenitent heart, you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath, the day when there will be revealed the righteous judgment of God, who will settle accounts with each man according to his deeds. To those who sought glory and honor and immortality in steadfast good work, he will assign eternal life. To those who were dominated by ambition, who were disobedient to truth and obedient to evil, there will be wrath and anger, tribulation and affliction. These things will come upon every soul of man who does the bad thing, upon the soul of the Jew first and then of the Greek. But glory and honor and peace will come to everyone who does the good thing, to the Jew first and then to the Greek, for there is no favoritism with God.

In this passage Paul is directly addressing the Jews. The connection of thought is this. In the foregoing passage Paul had painted a grim and terrible picture of the heathen world, a world which was under the condemnation of God. With every word of that condemnation the Jew thoroughly agreed. But he never for a moment dreamed that he was under a like condemnation. He thought that he occupied a privileged position. God might be the judge of the heathen, but he was the special protector of the Jews. Here Paul is pointing out forcibly to the Jew that he is just as much a sinner as the Gentile is and that when he is condemning the Gentile he is condemning himself. He will be judged, not on his racial heritage, but by the kind of life that he lives.

The Jews always considered themselves in a specially privileged position with God. "God," they said, "loves Israel alone of all the nations of the earth." "God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and the Jews with another." "All Israelites will have part in the world to come." "Abraham sits beside the gates of hell and does not permit any wicked Israelite to go through." When Justin Martyr was arguing with the Jew about the position of the Jews in the Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew said, "They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal Kingdom." The writer of the Book of Wisdom comparing God's attitude to Jews and Gentiles said: "These as a father, admonishing them, thou didst prove; but those as a stern king, condemning them, thou didst search out" (Wis.11:9). "While therefore thou dost chasten us, thou scourgest our enemies a thousand times more" (Wis.12:22). The Jew believed that everyone was destined for judgment except himself. It would not be any special goodness which kept him immune from the wrath of God, but simply the fact that he was a Jew.

To meet this situation Paul reminded the Jews of four things.

(i) He told them bluntly that they were trading on the mercy of God. In Rom. 2:4 he uses three great words. He asks them: "Are you treating with contempt the wealth of his kindness, and forbearance and patience?" Let us look at these three great words.

(a) Kindness (chrestotes). Of this Trench says: "It is a beautiful word, as it is the expression of a beautiful idea." There are two words for good in Greek; there is agathos and there is chrestos. The difference between them is this. The goodness of a man who is agathos may well issue in rebuke and discipline and punishment; but the goodness of a man who is

chrestos is always essentially kind. Jesus was agathos when he drove the moneychangers and the sellers of doves from the Temple in the white heat of his anger. He was chrestos when he treated with loving gentleness the sinning woman who anointed his feet and the woman taken in adultery. So Paul says, in effect, "You Jews are simply trying to take advantage of the great kindness of God."

(b) Forbearance (anoche). Anoché is the word for a truce. True, it means a cessation of hostility, but it is a cessation that has a limit. Paul, in effect, is saying to the Jews, "You think that you are safe because God's judgment has not yet descended upon you. But what God is giving you is not *carte blanche* to sin; he is giving you the opportunity to repent and to amend your ways." A man cannot sin forever with impunity.

(c) Patience (makrothumia). Makrothumia is characteristically a word which expresses patience with people. Chrysostom defined it as the characteristic of the man who has it in his power to avenge himself and deliberately does not use it. Paul is, in effect, saying to the Jews: "Do not think that the fact that God does not punish you is a sign that he cannot punish you. The fact that his punishment does not immediately follow sin is not a proof of his powerlessness; it is a proof of his patience. You owe your lives to the patience of God."

One great commentator has said that almost everyone has "a vague and undefined hope of impunity," a kind of feeling that "this cannot happen to me." The Jews went further than that; "they openly claimed exemption from the judgment of God." They traded on his mercy, and there are many who to this day seek to do the same.

(ii) Paul told the Jews that they were taking the mercy of God as an invitation to sin rather than as an incentive to repentance. It was Heine who made the famous, cynical statement. He was obviously not worrying about the world to come. He was asked why he was so confident, and his answer was, "God will forgive." He was asked why he was so sure of that, and his reply was, "C'est son metier" "It is his trade." Let us think of it in human terms. There are two attitudes to human forgiveness. Suppose a young person does something which is a shame, a sorrow and a heartbreak to his parents, and suppose that in love he is freely forgiven, and the thing is never held against him. He can do one of two things. He can either go and do the same thing again, trading on the fact that he will be forgiven once more; or he can be so moved to wondering gratitude by the free forgiveness that he has received, that he spends his whole life in trying to be worthy of it. It is one of the most shameful things in the world to use love's forgiveness as an excuse to go on sinning. That is what the Jews were doing. That is what so many people still do. The mercy and love of God are not meant to make us feel that we can sin and get away with it; they are meant so to break our hearts that we will seek never to sin again.

(iii) Paul insists that in God's economy there is no most favoured nation clause. There may be nations which are picked out for a special task and for a special responsibility, but none which is picked out for special privilege and special consideration. It may be true, as Milton said, that "When God has some great work he gives it to his Englishmen," but it is a great work that is in question, not a great privilege. The whole of Jewish religion was based on the conviction that the Jews held a special position of privilege and favour in the eyes of

God. We may feel that that is a position which nowadays we are far past. But is it? Is there no such thing nowadays as a colour bar? Is there no such thing as a conscious feeling of superiority to what Kipling called "lesser breeds without the law"? This is not to say that all nations are the same in talent. But it is to say that those nations who have advanced further ought not to look with contempt on the others, but are, rather, under the responsibility to help them move forward.

(iv) Of all passages of Paul this deserves to be studied most carefully in order to arrive at a correct idea of Paulinism. It is often argued that his position was that all that matters is faith. A religion which stresses the importance of works is often contemptuously waved aside as being quite out of touch with the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth. "God," said Paul, "will settle with each man according to his deeds." To Paul a faith which did not issue in deeds was a travesty of faith; in fact it was not faith at all. He would have said that the only way in which you can see a man's faith at all is by his deeds. One of the most dangerous of all religious tendencies is to talk as if faith and works were entirely different and separate things. There can be no such thing as faith which does not issue in works, nor can there be works which are not the product of faith. Works and faith are inextricably bound up together. How, in the last analysis, can God judge a man other than by his deeds? We cannot comfortably say, "I have faith," and leave it at that. Our faith must issue in deeds, for it is by our deeds we are accepted or condemned.

THE UNWRITTEN LAW

Rom. 2:12-16

As many as sinned without the law shall also perish without the law; and as many as sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; for it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in the sight of God, but it is the doers of the law who will be accounted righteous, in that day when God judges the hidden things of men according to my gospel through Jesus Christ. For whenever the Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do by nature the deeds of the law, they, although they do not possess the law, are a law to themselves. They show the work of the law written on their hearts, while their consciences bear them witness, and while their thoughts within accuse or excuse them.

In the translation we have slightly changed the order of the verses. In the sense of the passage Rom. 2:16 follows Rom. 2:13, and Rom. 2:14-15 are a long parenthesis. It is to be remembered that Paul was not writing this letter sitting at a desk and thinking out every word and every construction. He was striding up and down the room dictating it to his secretary, Tertius (Rom. 16:22), who struggled to get it down. That explains the long parenthesis, but it is easier to get the correct meaning in English if we go straight from Rom. 2:13 to Rom. 2:16, and add Rom. 2:14-15 afterwards.

In this passage Paul turns to the Gentiles. He has dealt with the Jews and with their claims to special privilege. But one advantage the Jew did have, and that was the Law. A Gentile might well retaliate by saying, "It is only right that God should condemn the Jews, who had

the Law and who ought to have known better; but we will surely escape judgment because we had no opportunity to know the Law and did not know any better." In answer Paul lays down two great principles.

(i) A man will be judged by what he had the opportunity to know. If he knew the Law, he will be judged as one who knew the Law. If he did not know the Law, he will be judged as one who did not know the Law. God is fair. And here is the answer to those who ask what is to happen to the people who lived in the world before Jesus came and who had no opportunity to hear the Christian message. A man will be judged by his fidelity to the highest that it was possible for him to know.

(ii) Paul goes on to say that even those who did not know the written Law had an unwritten law within their hearts. We would call it the instinctive knowledge of right and wrong. The Stoics said that in the universe there were certain laws operative which a man broke at his peril--the laws of health, the moral laws which govern life and living. The Stoics called these laws phusis, which means nature, and urged men to live kata phusin, according to nature. It is Paul's argument that in the very nature of man there is an instinctive knowledge of what he ought to do. The Greeks would have agreed with that. Aristotle said: "The cultivated and free-minded man will so behave as being a law to himself" Plutarch asks: "Who shall govern the governor?" And he answers: "Law, the king of all mortals and immortals, as Pindar calls it, which is not written on papyrus rolls or wooden tablets, but is his own reason within the soul, which perpetually dwells with him and guards him and never leaves his soul bereft of leadership."

Paul saw the world divided into two classes of people. He saw the Jews with their Law given to them direct from God and written down so that all could read it. He saw the other nations, without this written law, but nonetheless with a God-implanted knowledge of right and wrong within their hearts. Neither could claim exemption from the judgment of God. The Jew could not claim exemption on the ground that he had a special place in God's plan. The Gentile could not claim exemption on the ground that he had never received the written Law. The Jew would be judged as one who had known the Law; the Gentile as one who had a God-given conscience. God will judge a man according to what he knows and has the chance to know.

THE REAL JEW

Rom. 2:17-29

If you are called by the name of Jew, if you take your rest in the Law, if you boast in God and know his will, if you give your approval to the excellent things, if you are instructed in the Law, if you believe yourself to be a leader of the blind, a light in darkness, and educator of the foolish, a teacher of the simple, if you believe yourself to have the very shape of knowledge and of truth in the Law--do you, then, who instruct another, not instruct yourself? Do you, who proclaim to others that stealing is forbidden, steal yourself? Do you, who forbid others to commit adultery, commit adultery yourself? Do you, who shudder at idols, rob temples? Do you, who boast in

the Law, dishonor others by transgressing the Law? As it stands written, "Because of your conduct, God's name is ill-spoken of among the Gentiles." Circumcision is indeed an advantage if you do the Law. But if you are a transgressor of the Law your circumcision has become the equivalent of uncircumcision. For if uncircumcision observes the moral requirements of the Law, shall not uncircumcision be reckoned as the equivalent of circumcision, and will natural uncircumcision which keeps the Law, not become the judge of you who are a transgressor of the Law, although you have the letter and the circumcision? For he is not a real Jew who is externally a Jew; nor is the real circumcision the external circumcision in the flesh; but he is a real Jew who is a Jew in inward things; and real circumcision is the circumcision of the heart, in spirit, and not in letter. The praise of such a man comes not from men but from God.

To a Jew a passage like this must have come as a shattering experience. He was certain that God regarded him with special favour, simply and solely because of his national descent from Abraham and because he bore the badge of circumcision in his flesh. But Paul introduces an idea to which he will return again and again. Jewishness, he insists, is not a matter of race at all; it has nothing to do with circumcision. It is a matter of conduct. If that is so, many a so-called Jew who is a pure descendant of Abraham and who bears the mark of circumcision in his body, is no Jew at all; and equally many a Gentile who never heard of Abraham and who would never dream of being circumcised, is a Jew in the real sense of the term. To a Jew this would sound the wildest heresy and leave him angry and aghast.

Rom. 2:29 contains a pun which is completely untranslatable. "The praise of such a man comes not from men but from God." The Greek word for praise is *epainos*. When we turn back to the Old Testament (Gen. 29:35; Gen. 49:8), we find that the original and traditional meaning of the word Judah is praise (*epainos*). Therefore this phrase means two things. (a) It means the praise of such a man comes not from men but from God. (b) It means the Jewishness of such a man comes not from men but from God. The sense of the passage is that God's promises are not to people of a certain race and to people who bear a certain mark on their bodies. They are to people who live a certain kind of life irrespective of their race. To be a real Jew is not a matter of pedigree but of character; and often the man who is not racially a Jew may be a better Jew than the man who is.

In this passage Paul says that there are Jews whose conduct makes the name of God ill-spoken of among the Gentiles. It is a simple fact of history that the Jews were, and often still are, the most unpopular people in the world. Let us see just how the Gentiles did regard the Jews in New Testament times.

They regarded Judaism as a "barbarous superstition" and the Jews as "the most disgusting of races," and as "a most contemptible company of slaves." The origins of Jewish religion were twisted with a malicious ignorance. It was said that Jews had originally been a company of lepers who had been sent by the king of Egypt to work in the sand quarries; and that Moses had rallied this band of leprous slaves and led them through the desert to Palestine. It was said that they worshipped an ass' head, because in the wilderness a herd of wild asses had led them to water when they were perishing with thirst. It was said that

they abstained from swine's flesh because the pig is specially liable to a skin disease called the itch, and it was that skin disease that the Jews had suffered from in Egypt.

Certain of the Jewish customs were mocked at by the Gentiles. Their abstinence from swine's flesh provided many a jest. Plutarch thought that the reason for it might well be that the Jews worshipped the pig as a god. Juvenal declares that Jewish clemency has accorded to the pig the privilege of living to a good old age, and that swine's flesh is more valuable to them than the flesh of man. The custom of observing the Sabbath was regarded as pure laziness.

Certain things which the Jews enjoyed infuriated the Gentiles. It was the odd fact that, unpopular as they were, the Jews had nonetheless received extraordinary privileges from the Roman government.

(a) They were allowed to transmit the temple tax every year to Jerusalem. This became so serious in Asia about the year 60 B.C. that the export of currency was forbidden and, according to the historians, no less than twenty tons of contraband gold was seized which the Jews had been about to despatch to Jerusalem.

(b) They were allowed, at least to some extent, to have their own courts and live according to their own laws. There is a decree issued by a governor called Lucius Antonius in Asia about the year 50 B.C. in which he wrote: "Our Jewish citizens came to me and informed me that they had their own private gathering, carried out according to their ancestral laws, and their own private place, where they settle their own affairs and deal with cases between each other. When they asked that this custom should be continued, I gave judgment that they should be allowed to retain this privilege." The Gentiles detested the spectacle of a race of people living as a kind of separate and specially privileged group.

(c) The Roman government respected the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. It was laid down that the Jew could not be called to give evidence in a law court on the Sabbath. It was laid down that if special doles were being distributed to the populace and the distribution fell on the Sabbath, the Jews could claim their share on the following day. And--a specially sore point with the Gentiles--the Jews enjoyed *astrateia*, that is, exemption from conscription to the Roman army. This exemption was directly due to the fact that the Jewish strict observance of the Sabbath obviously made it impossible for him to carry out military duties on the Sabbath. It can easily be imagined with what resentment the rest of the world would look on this special exemption from a burdensome duty.

There were two special things of which the Jews were accused.

(a) They were accused of atheism (*atheotes*). The ancient world had great difficulty in conceiving of the possibility of a religion without any visible images of worship. Pliny called them, "a race distinguished by their contempt for all deities." Tacitus said, "The Jews conceive of their deity as one, by the mind alone.... Hence no images are erected in their cities or even in their temples. This reverence is not paid to kings, nor this honour to the Caesars." Juvenal said, "They venerate nothing but the clouds and the deity of the sky." But

the truth is that what really moved the Gentile to such dislike, was not so much the imageless worship of the Jews, as the cold contempt in which they held all other religions. No man whose main attitude to his fellows is contempt can ever be a missionary. This contempt for others was one of the things which Paul was thinking of when he said that the Jews brought the name of God into disrepute.

(b) They were accused of hatred of their fellow-men (misanthropia) and complete unsociability (amixia). Tacitus said of them: "Among themselves their honesty is inflexible, their compassion quick to move, but to all other persons they show the hatred of antagonism." In Alexandria the story was that the Jews had taken an oath never to show kindness to a Gentile, and that they even offered a Greek in sacrifice to their God every year. Tacitus said that the first thing Gentiles converted to Judaism were taught to do was "to despise the gods, to repudiate their nationality, and to disparage parents, children and brothers." Juvenal declared that if a Jew was asked the way to any place, he refused to give any information except to another Jew, and that if anyone was looking for a well from which to drink, he would not lead him to it unless he was circumcised. Here we have the same thing again. The basic Jewish attitude to other men was contempt and this must ever invite hatred in answer.

It was all too true that the Jews did bring the name of God into disrepute, because they shut themselves into a rigid little community from which all others were shut out and because they showed to the heathen an attitude of contempt for their worship and complete lack of charity for their needs. Real religion is a thing of the open heart and the open door; Judaism was a thing of the shut heart and the shut door.

GOD'S FIDELITY AND MAN'S INFIDELITY

Rom. 3:1-8

What, then, is the something plus which belongs to a Jew? Or what special advantage belongs to those who have been circumcised? Much in every way. In the first place, there is this advantage--that the Jews have been entrusted with the oracles of God. Yes, you say, but what if some of them were unfaithful to them? Surely you are not going to argue that their infidelity invalidates the fidelity of God? God forbid! Let God be shown to be true, though every man be shown to be a liar, as it stands written: "In order that you may be seen to be in the right in your arguments, and that you may win your case when you enter into judgment." But, you say, if our unrighteousness merely provides proof of God's righteousness, what are we to say? Surely you are not going to try to argue that God is unrighteous to unleash the Wrath upon you? (I am using human arguments:) God forbid! For, if that were so, how shall God judge the world? But, you say, if the fact that I am false merely provides a further opportunity to demonstrate the fact that God is true, to his greater glory, why should I still be condemned as a sinner? Are you going to argue--just as some slanderously allege that we suggest--that we should do evil that good may come of it? Anyone can see that statements like that merit nothing but condemnation.

Here Paul is arguing in the closest and the most difficult way. It will make it easier to understand if we remember that he is carrying on an argument with an imaginary objector. The argument stated in full would run something like this.

The objector: The result of all that you have been saying is that there is no difference between Gentile and Jew and that they are in exactly the same position. Do you really mean that?

Paul: By no means.

The objector: What, then, is the difference?

Paul: For one thing, the Jew possesses what the Gentile never so directly possessed--the commandments of God.

The objector: Granted! But what if some of the Jews disobeyed these commandments and were unfaithful to God and came under his condemnation? You have just said that God gave the Jews a special position and a special promise. Now you go on to say that at least some of them are under the condemnation of God. Does that mean that God has broken his promise and shown himself to be unjust and unreliable?

Paul: Far from it! What it does show is that there is no favouritism with God and that he punishes sin wherever he sees it. The very fact that he condemns the unfaithful Jews is the best possible proof of his absolute justice. He might have been expected to overlook the sins of this special people of his but he does not.

The objector: Very well then! All you have done is to succeed in showing that my disobedience has given God an opportunity to demonstrate his righteousness. My infidelity has given God a marvellous opportunity to demonstrate his fidelity. My sin is, therefore, an excellent thing! It has given God a chance to show how good he is! I may have done evil, but good has come of it! You can't surely condemn a man for giving God a chance to show his justice!

Paul: An argument like that is beneath contempt! You have only to state it to see how intolerable it is!

When we disentangle this passage in this way, we see that there are in it certain basic thoughts of Paul in regard to the Jews.

(i) To the end of the day he believed the Jews to be in a special position in regard to God. That, in fact, is what they believed themselves. The difference was that Paul believed that their special position was one of special responsibility; the Jew believed it to be one of special privilege. What did Paul say that the Jew had been specially entrusted with? The oracles of God. What does he mean by that? The word he uses is *logia*, the regular word in the Greek Old Testament for a special statement or pronouncement of God. Here it means The Ten Commandments. God entrusted the Jews with commandments, not privileges. He

said to them, "You are a special people; therefore you must live a special life." He did not say, "You are a special people; therefore you can do what you like." He did say, "You are a special people; therefore you must do what I like." When Lord Dunsany came in safety through the 1914-18 war he tells us that he said to himself, "In some strange way I am still alive. I wonder what God means me to do with a life so specially spared?" That thought never struck the Jews. They never could grasp the fact that God's special choice was for special duty.

(ii) All through his writings there are three basic facts in Paul's mind about the Jews. They occur in embryo here; and they are in fact the three thoughts that it takes this whole letter to work out. We must note that he does not place all the Jews under the one condemnation. He puts it in this way: "What if some of them were unfaithful?"

(a) He was quite sure that God was justified in condemning the Jews. They had their special place and their special promises; and that very fact made their condemnation all the greater. Responsibility is always the obverse of privilege. The more opportunity a man has to do right, the greater his condemnation if he does wrong.

(b) But not all of them were unfaithful. Paul never forgot the faithful remnant; and he was quite sure that that faithful remnant--however small it was in numbers--was the true Jewish race. The others had lost their privileges and were under condemnation. They were no longer Jews at all. The remnant was the real nation.

(c) Paul was always sure that God's rejection of Israel was not final. Because of this rejection, a door was opened to the Gentiles; and, in the end, the Gentiles would bring the Jews back within the fold, and Gentile and Jew would be one in Christ. The tragedy of the Jew was that the great task of world evangelization that he might have had, and was designed to have, was refused by him. It was therefore given to the Gentiles, and God's plan was, as it were, reversed, and it was not, as it should have been, the Jew who evangelized the Gentile, but the Gentile who evangelized the Jew--a process which is still going on.

Further, this passage contains two great universal human truths.

(i) The root of all sin is disobedience. The root of the Jew's sin was disobedience to the known law of God. As Milton wrote, it was "man's first disobedience" which was responsible for paradise lost. When pride sets tip the will of man against the will of God, there is sin. If there were no disobedience, there would be no sin.

(ii) Once a man has sinned, he displays an amazing ingenuity in justifying his sin. Here we come across an argument that reappears again and again in religious thought, the argument that sin gives God a chance to show at once his justice and his mercy and is therefore a good thing. It is a twisted argument. One might as well argue--it would, in fact, be the same argument--that it is a good thing to break a person's heart, because it gives him a chance to show how much he loves you. When a man sins, the need is not for ingenuity to justify his sin, but for humility to confess it in penitence and in shame.

THE CHRISTLESS WORLD

Rom. 3:9-18

What then? Are we Jews out ahead? By no means. For we have already charged all Jews and Greeks with being under the power of sin, as it stands written: "There is none righteous, no not one. There is no man of understanding. There is none who seeks the Lord. All have swerved out of the way, and all together have gone bad. There is none whose acts are good, not one single one. Their throat is an open tomb. They practise fraud with their tongues. The poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouths are laden with curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and wretchedness are in their ways, and they have not known the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

In the last passage Paul had insisted that, in spite of everything, the Jew had a special position in the economy of God. Not unnaturally the Jewish objector then asks if that means that the Jews are out ahead of other peoples. Paul's answer is that Jew and Gentile alike, so long as they are without Christ, are under the dominion of sin. The Greek phrase that he uses for under sin is very suggestive, *hupo hamartian*. In this sense *hupo* means in the power of, under the authority of. In Matt.8:9 the centurion says: "I have soldiers *hupo emautou*, under me." That is, I have soldiers under my command. A schoolboy is *hupo paidagoga*, under the direction of the slave who is in control of him. A slave is *hupo zugou*, under the yoke of his master. In the Christless state a man is under the control of sin, and helpless to escape from it.

There is one other interesting word in this passage. It is the word in Rom. 3:12 which we have translated. "They have gone bad." The word is *achreioo*, which literally means to render useless. One of its uses is of milk that has gone sour. Human nature without Christ is a soured and useless thing.

We see Paul doing here what Jewish Rabbis customarily did. In Rom. 3:10-18 he has strung together a collection of Old Testament texts. He is not quoting accurately, because he is quoting from memory, but he includes quotations from Ps. 14:1-3; Ps. 5:9; Ps. 140:3; Ps. 10:7; Isa. 59:7-8; Ps. 36:1. It was a very common method of Rabbinic preaching to string texts together like this. It was called *charaz* (see *charuwz*), which literally means stringing pearls.

It is a terrible description of human nature in its Christless state. Vaughan has pointed out that these Old Testament quotations describe three things. (i) A character whose characteristics are ignorance, indifference, crookedness and unprofitableness. (ii) A tongue whose notes are destructive, deceitful, malignant. (iii) A conduct whose marks are oppression, injuriousness, implacability. These things are the result of disregard of God.

No one saw so clearly the evil of human nature as Paul did; but it must always be noted that the evil of human nature was to him, not a call to hopelessness, but a challenge to hope. When we say that Paul believed in original sin and the depravity of human nature, we must

never take that to mean that he despaired of human nature or looked on it with cynical contempt. Once, when William Jay of Bath was an old man, he said: "My memory is failing, but there are two things that I never forget--that I am a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior."

Paul never underrated the sin of man and he never underrated the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Once, when he was a young man, William Roby, the great Lancashire Independent, was preaching at Malvern. His lack of success drove him to despair, and he wished to leave the work. Then came a seasonable reproof from a certain Mr Moody, who asked him, "Are they, then, too bad to be saved?" The challenge sent William Roby back to his work. Paul believed men without Christ to be bad, but he never believed them too bad to be saved. He was confident that what Christ had done for him Christ could do for any man.

Lesson 4 Readings

THE ONLY WAY TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD

Rom. 3:19-26

We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are within the law, and the function of the law is that every mouth should be silenced and that the whole world should be known to be liable to the judgment of God, because no one will ever get into a right relationship with God by doing the works which the law lays down. What does come through the law is a full awareness of sin. But now a way to a right relationship to God lies open before us quite apart from the law, and it is a way attested by the law and the prophets. For a right relationship to God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God, but they are put into a right relationship with God, freely, by his grace, through the deliverance which is wrought by Jesus Christ. God put him forward as one who can win for us forgiveness of our sins through faith in his blood. He did so in order to demonstrate his righteousness because, in the forbearance of God, there had been a passing over of the sins which happened in previous times; and he did so to demonstrate his righteousness in this present age, so that he himself should be just and that he should accept as just the man who believes in Jesus.

Here again is a passage which is not easy to understand, but which is full of riches when its true meaning is grasped. Let us see if we can penetrate to the basic truth behind it.

The supreme problem of life is, How can a man get into a right relationship with God? How can he feel at peace with God? How can he escape the feeling of estrangement and fear in the presence of God? The religion of Judaism answered: "A man can attain to a right relationship with God by keeping meticulously all that the law lays down." But to say that is

simply to say that there is no possibility of any man ever attaining to a right relationship with God, for no man ever can keep every commandment of the law.

"Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill thy law's demands."

What then is the use of the law? It is that it makes a man aware of sin. It is only when a man knows the law and tries to satisfy it that he realizes he can never satisfy it. The law is designed to show a man his own weakness and his own sinfulness. Is a man then shut out from God? Far from it, because the way to God is not the way of law, but the way of grace; not the way of works, but the way of faith.

To show what he means Paul uses three metaphors.

(i) He uses a metaphor from the law courts which we call justification. This metaphor thinks of man on trial before God. The Greek word which is translated to justify is *diakioun*. All Greek verbs which end in "-oun" mean, not to make someone something, but to treat, to reckon, to account him as something. If an innocent man appears before a judge then to treat him as innocent is to acquit him. But the point about a man's relationship to God is that he is utterly guilty, and yet God, in his amazing mercy, treats him, reckons him, accounts him as if he were innocent. That is what justification means.

When Paul says that "God justifies the ungodly," he means that God treats the ungodly as if he had been a good man. That is what shocked the Jews to the core of their being. To them to treat the bad man as if he was good was the sign of a wicked judge. "He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). "I will not acquit the wicked" (Exo. 23:7). But Paul says that is precisely what God does.

How can I know that God is like that? I know because Jesus said so. He came to tell us that God loves us, bad as we are. He came to tell us that, although we are sinners, we are still dear to God. When we discover that and believe it, it changes our whole relationship to God. We are conscious of our sin, but we are no longer in terror and no longer estranged. Penitent and brokenhearted we come to God, like a sorry child coming to his mother, and we know that the God we come to is love.

That is what justification by faith in Jesus Christ means. It means that we are in a right relationship with God because we believe with all our hearts that what Jesus told us about God is true. We are no longer terrorized strangers from an angry God. We are children, erring children, trusting in their Father's love for forgiveness. And we could never have found that right relationship with God, if Jesus had not come to live and to die to tell us how wonderfully he loves us.

(ii) Paul uses a metaphor from sacrifice. He says of Jesus that God put him forward as one who can win forgiveness for our sins.

The Greek word that Paul uses to describe Jesus is *hilasterion*. This comes from a verb which means to propitiate. It is a verb which has to do with sacrifice. Under the old system,

when a man broke the law, he brought to God a sacrifice. His aim was that the sacrifice should turn aside the punishment that should fall upon him. To put it in another way--a man sinned; that sin put him at once in a wrong relationship with God; to get back into the right relationship he offered his sacrifice.

But it was human experience that an animal sacrifice failed entirely to do that. "Thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased" (Ps. 51:16). "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. 6:6-7.) Instinctively men felt that, once they had sinned, the paraphernalia of earthly sacrifice could not put matters right.

So Paul says, "Jesus Christ, by his life of obedience and his death of love, made the one sacrifice to God which really and truly atones for sin." He insists that what happened on the Cross opens the door back to a right relationship with God, a door which every other sacrifice is powerless to open.

(iii) Paul uses a metaphor from slavery. He speaks of the deliverance wrought through Jesus Christ. The word is *apolutrosis*. It means a ransoming, a redeeming, a liberating. It means that man was in the power of sin, and that Jesus Christ alone could free him from it.

Finally, Paul says of God that he did all this because he is just, and accepts as just all who believe in Jesus. Paul never said a more startling thing than this. Bengel called it "the supreme paradox of the gospel." Think what it means. It means that God is just and accepts the sinner as a just man. The natural thing to say would be, "God is just, and, therefore, condemns the sinner as a criminal." But here we have the great paradox--God is just, and somehow, in that incredible, miraculous grace that Jesus came to bring to men, he accepts the sinner, not as a criminal, but as a son whom he still loves.

What is the essence of all this? Where is the difference between it and the old way of the law? The basic difference is this--the way of obedience to the law is concerned with what a man can do for himself; the way of grace is concerned with what God can do, and has done, for him. Paul is insisting that nothing we can ever do can win for us the forgiveness of God; only what God has done for us can win that; therefore the way to a right relationship with God lies, not in a frenzied, desperate, doomed attempt to win acquittal by our performance; it lies in the humble, penitent acceptance of the love and the grace which God offers us in Jesus Christ.

THE END OF THE WAY OF HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

Rom. 3:27-31

Where, then, is there any ground for boasting? It is completely shut out. Through what kind of law? Through the law of works? No, but through the law of faith. So,

then, we reckon that a man enters into a right relationship with God by faith quite apart from works of the law. Or, is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles? Yes, he is the God of the Gentiles too. If, indeed, God is one, he is the God who will bring those who are of the circumcision into a right relationship with himself by faith, and those who never knew the circumcision through faith. Do we then through faith completely cancel out all law? God forbid! Rather, we confirm the law.

Paul deals with three points here.

(i) If the way to God is the way of faith and of acceptance, then all boasting in human achievement is gone. There was a certain kind of Judaism which kept a kind of profit and loss account with God. In the end a man often came to a frame of mind in which he rather held that God was in his debt. Paul's position was that every man is a sinner and God's debtor, that no man could ever put himself back into a right relationship with God through his own efforts and that grounds for self-satisfaction and boasting in one's own achievement no longer exist.

(ii) But, a Jew might answer, that might be well enough for a Gentile who never knew the law, but what about Jews who do know it? Paul's answer was to turn them to the sentence which is the basis of the Jewish creed, the sentence with which every synagogue service always began and still begins. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God" (Deut.6:4). There is not one God for the Gentiles and another for the Jews. God is one. The way to him is the same for Gentile and Jew. It is not the way of human achievement; it is the way of trusting and accepting faith.

(iii) But, says the Jew, does this mean an end of all law? We might have expected Paul to say, "Yes." In point of fact he says, "No." He says that, in fact, it strengthens the law. He means this. Up to this time the Jew had tried to be a good man and keep the commandments because he was afraid of God, and was terrified of the punishment that breaches of the law would bring. That day has for ever gone. But what has taken its place is the love of God. Now a man must try to be good and keep God's law, not because he fears God's punishment, but because he feels that he must strive to deserve that amazing love. He strives for goodness, not because he is afraid of God, but because he loves him. He knows now that sin is not so much breaking God's law as it is breaking God's heart, and, therefore, it is doubly terrible.

Take a human analogy. Many a man is tempted to do a wrong thing, and does not do it. It is not so much that he fears the law. He would not greatly care if he were fined, or even imprisoned. What keeps him right is the simple fact that he could not meet the sorrow that would be seen in the eyes of the one who loves him if he made shipwreck of his life. It is not the law of fear but the law of love which keeps him right. It must be that way with us and God. We are rid forever of the terror of God, but that is no reason for doing as we like. We can never again do as we like for we are now for ever constrained to goodness by the law of love; and that law is far stronger than ever the law of fear can be.

THE FAITH WHICH TAKES GOD AT HIS WORD

Rom. 4:1-8

What, then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather from whom we take our human descent, found? If Abraham entered into a right relationship with God by means of work, he has some ground for boasting--but not in regard to God. For what does scripture say? "Abraham trusted in God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." The man who works does not receive his pay as a favour; he receives it as a debt due to him. But, as for the man who does not depend on work, but who trusts in the God who treats the ungodly as he would treat a good man, his faith is accounted as righteousness. Just so, David speaks of the counting happy of the man to whom God accounts righteousness apart from works--"Happy they whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered! Happy the man to whom God does not account sin!"

Paul moves on to speak of Abraham for three reasons.

(i) The Jews regarded Abraham as the great founder of the race and the pattern of all that a man should be. Very naturally they ask, "If all that you say is true, what was the special thing that was given to Abraham when God picked him out to be the ancestor of his special people? What makes him different from other people?" That is the question which Paul is going on to answer.

(ii) Paul has just been seeking to prove that what makes a man right with God is not the performance of the works that the law lays down, but the simple trust of complete yieldedness which takes God at his word and believes that he still loves us even when we have done nothing to deserve that love. The immediate reaction of the Jews was, "This is something entirely new and a contradiction of all that we have been taught to believe. This doctrine is completely incredible." Paul's answer is, "So far from being new, this doctrine is as old as the Jewish faith. So far from being an heretical novelty, it is the very basis of Jewish religion." That is what he is going on to prove.

(iii) Paul begins to speak about Abraham because he was a wise teacher who knew the human mind and the way it works. He has been talking about faith. Now faith is an abstract idea. The ordinary human mind finds abstract ideas very hard to grasp. The wise teacher knows that every idea must become a person, for the only way in which an ordinary person can grasp an abstract idea is to see it in action, embodied in a person. So Paul, in effect, says, "I have been talking about faith. If you want to see what faith is, look at Abraham."

When Paul began to speak about Abraham, he was on ground that every Jew knew and understood. In their thoughts Abraham held a unique position. He was the founder of the nation. He was the man to whom God had first spoken. He was the man who had in a unique way had been chosen by God and who had heard and obeyed him. The Rabbis had their own discussions about Abraham. To Paul the essence of his greatness was this. God had come to Abraham and bidden him leave home and friends and kindred and livelihood,

and had said to him, "If you make this great venture of faith, you will become the father of a great nation." Thereupon Abraham had taken God at his word. He had not argued; he had not hesitated; he went out not knowing where he was to go (Heb.11:8). It was not the fact that Abraham had meticulously performed the demands of the law that put him into his special relationship with God, it was his complete trust in God and his complete willingness to abandon his life to him. That for Paul was faith, and it was Abraham's faith which made God regard him as a good man.

Some few, some very few, of the more advanced Rabbis believed that. There was a rabbinic commentary which said, "Abraham, our father, inherited this world and the world to come solely by the merit of faith whereby he believed in the Lord; for it is said, `And he believed in the Lord, and he accounted it to him for righteousness.'"

But the great majority of the Rabbis turned the Abraham story to suit their own beliefs. They held that because he was the only righteous man of his generation, therefore he was chosen to be the ancestor of God's special people. The immediate answer is, "But how could Abraham keep the law when he lived hundreds of years before it was given?" The Rabbis advanced the odd theory that he kept it by intuition or anticipation. "At that time," says the Apocalypse of Baruch (Bar.57:2), "the unwritten law was named among them, and the works of the commandment were then fulfilled." "He kept the law of the Most High," says Ecclesiasticus (Sir. 44:20-21), "and was taken into covenant with God.... Therefore God assured him by an oath that the nations should be blessed in his seed." The Rabbis were so in love with their theory of works that they insisted that it was because of his works that Abraham was chosen, although it meant that they had to argue that he knew the law by anticipation, since it had not yet come.

Here, again, we have the root cleavage between Jewish legalism and Christian faith. The basic thought of the Jews was that a man must earn God's favour. The basic thought of Christianity is that all a man can do is to take God at his word and stake everything on the faith that his promises are true. Paul's argument was--and he was unanswerably right--that Abraham entered into a right relationship with God, not because he did all kinds of legal works, but because he cast himself, just as he was, on God's promise.

"If our love were but more simple, We should take him at his word; And our lives would be all sunshine, In the sweetness of our Lord."

It is the supreme discovery of the Christian life that we do not need to torture ourselves with a losing battle to earn God's love but rather need to accept in perfect trust the love which God offers to us. True, after that, any man of honour is under the life-long obligation to show himself worthy of that love. But he is no longer a criminal seeking to obey an impossible law; he is a lover offering his all to one who loved him when he did not deserve it.

Sir James Barrie once told a story about Robert Louis Stevenson. "When Stevenson went to Samoa he built a small hut, and afterwards went into a large house. The first night he went into the large house he was feeling very tired and sorrowful that he had not had the

forethought to ask his servant to bring him coffee and, cigarettes. Just as he was thinking that, the door opened, and the native boy came in with a tray carrying cigarettes and coffee. And Mr Stevenson said to him, in the native language, 'Great is your forethought'; and the boy corrected him, and said, 'Great is the love.'" The service was rendered, not because of the coercion of servitude, but because of the compulsion of love. That also is the motive of Christian goodness.

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

Rom. 4:9-12

Did, then, this pronouncing of blessedness come to Abraham when he was circumcised? Or when he was uncircumcised? We are just saying, "His faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness." Under what circumstances was it then accounted? Was it while he was circumcised? Or was it while he was uncircumcised? It was not while he was circumcised, but while he was uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of that relationship to God whose source was faith while he was still uncircumcised. This happened that he might be the father of all who believe while they are uncircumcised, so that the accounting of righteousness may come to them too; and that he might also be the father of those who are circumcised, and by that I mean, not those who are circumcised only, but who walk in the steps of that faith which our father Abraham showed when he was still uncircumcised.

To understand this passage we must understand the importance that the Jew attached to circumcision. To the Jew a man who was not circumcised was quite literally not a Jew, no matter what his parentage was. The Jewish circumcision prayer runs: "Blessed is he who sanctified his beloved from the womb, and put his ordinance upon his flesh, and sealed his offspring with the sign of the holy covenant." The rabbinic ordinance lays it down: "Ye shall not eat of the Passover unless the seal of Abraham be in your flesh." If a Gentile accepted the Jewish faith, he could not enter fully into it without three things--baptism, sacrifice and circumcision.

The Jewish objector, whom Paul is answering all the time, is still fighting a rear-guard action. "Suppose I admit," he says, "all that you say about Abraham and about the fact that it was his complete trust that gained him an entry into a right relationship with God, you will still have to agree that he was circumcised." Paul has an unanswerable argument. The story of Abraham's call, and of God's blessing on him, is in Gen. 15:6; the story of Abraham's circumcision is in Gen. 17:10ff. He was not, in fact, circumcised until fourteen years after he had answered God's call and entered into the unique relationship with God. Circumcision was not the gateway to his right relationship with God; it was only the sign and the seal that he had already entered into it. His being accounted righteous had nothing to do with circumcision and everything to do with his act of faith. From this unanswerable fact Paul makes two great deductions.

(i) Abraham is not the father of those who have been circumcised; he is the father of those who make the same act of faith in God as he did. He is the father of every man in every age who takes God at his word as he did. This means that the real Jew is the man who trusts God as Abraham did, no matter what his race is. All the great promises of God are made not to the Jewish nation, but to the man who is Abraham's descendant because he trusts God as he did. Jew has ceased to be a word which describes a nationality and has come to describe a way of life and a reaction to God. The descendants of Abraham are not the members of any particular nation, but those in every nation who belong to the family of God.

(ii) The converse is also true. A man may be a Jew of pure lineage and may be circumcised; and yet in the real sense may be no descendant of Abraham. He has no right to call Abraham his father or to claim the promises of God, unless he makes that venture of faith that Abraham made.

In one short paragraph Paul has shattered all Jewish thought. The Jew always believed that just because he was a Jew he automatically enjoyed the privilege of God's blessings and immunity from his punishment. The proof that he was a Jew was circumcision. So literally did some of the Rabbis take this that they actually said that, if a Jew was so bad that he had to be condemned by God, there was an angel whose task it was to make him uncircumcised again before he entered into punishment.

Paul has laid down the great principle that the way to God is not through membership of any nation, not through any ordinance which makes a mark upon a man's body; but by the faith which takes God at his word and makes everything dependent, not on man's achievement, but solely upon God's grace.

ALL IS OF GRACE

Rom. 4:13-17

It was not through law that there came to Abraham or to his seed the promise that he would inherit the earth, but it came through that right relationship with God which has its origin in faith. If they who are vassals of the law are heirs, then faith is drained of its meaning, and the promise is rendered inoperative; for the law produces wrath, but where law does not exist, neither can transgression exist. So, then, the whole process depends on faith, in order that it may be a matter of grace, so that the promise should be guaranteed to all Abraham's descendants, not only to those who belong to the tradition of the law, but also to those who are of Abraham's family in virtue of faith. Abraham who is the father of us all--as it stands written, "I have appointed you a father of many nations"--in the sight of that God in whom he believed, that God who calls the dead into life, and who calls into being even things which do not exist.

To Abraham God made a very great and wonderful promise. He promised that he would become a great nation, and that in him all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen.12:2-3). In truth, the earth would be given to him as his inheritance. Now that promise came to

Abraham because of the faith that he showed towards God. It did not come because he piled up merit by doing works of the law. It was the outgoing of God's generous grace in answer to Abraham's absolute faith. The promise, as Paul saw it, was dependent on two things and two things only--the free grace of God and the perfect faith of Abraham.

The Jews were still asking, "How can a man enter into the right relationship with God so that he too may inherit this great promise?" Their answer was, "He must do so by acquiring merit in the sight of God through doing works which the law prescribes." That is to say, he must do it by his own efforts. Paul saw with absolute clearness that this Jewish attitude had completely destroyed the promise. It had done so for this reason--no man can fully keep the law; therefore, if the promise depends on keeping the law, it can never be fulfilled.

Paul saw things in terms of black and white. He saw two mutually exclusive ways of trying to get into a right relationship with God. On the one hand there was dependence on human effort; on the other, dependence on divine grace. On the one hand there was the constant losing battle to obey an impossible law; on the other, there was the faith which simply takes God at his word.

On each side there were three things.

(i) On the one side there is God's promise. There are two Greek words which mean promise. *Hupochesis* means a promise which is entered into upon conditions. "I promise to do this if you promise to do that." *Epaggelia* means a promise made out of the goodness of someone's heart quite unconditionally. It is *epaggelia* that Paul uses of the promise of God. It is as if he is saying, "God is like a human father; he promises to love his children no matter what they do." True, he will love some of us with a love that makes him glad, and he will love some of us with a love that makes him sad; but in either case it is a love which will never let us go. It is dependent not on our merit but only on God's own generous heart.

(ii) There is faith. Faith is the certainty that God is indeed like that. It is staking everything on his love.

(iii) There is grace. A gift of grace is always something which is unearned and undeserved. The truth is that man can never earn the love of God. He must always find his glory, not in what he can do for God, but in what God has done for him.

(i) On the other side there is law. The trouble about law has always been that it can diagnose the malady but cannot effect a cure. Law shows a man where he goes wrong, but does not help him to avoid going wrong. There is in fact, as Paul will later stress, a kind of terrible paradox in law. It is human nature that when a thing is forbidden it has a tendency to become desirable. "Stolen fruits are sweetest." Law, therefore, can actually move a man to desire the very thing which it forbids. The essential complement of law is judgment, and, so long as a man lives in a religion whose dominant thought is law, he cannot see himself as anything other than a condemned criminal at the bar of God's justice.

(ii) There is transgression. Whenever law is introduced, transgression follows. No one can break a law which does not exist; and no one can be condemned for breaking a law of whose existence he was ignorant. If we introduce law and stop there, if we make religion solely a matter of obeying law, life consists of one long series of transgressions waiting to be punished.

(iii) There is wrath. Think of law, think of transgression, and inevitably the next thought is wrath. Think of God in terms of law and you cannot do other than think of him in terms of outraged justice. Think of man in terms of law and you cannot do other than think of him as destined for the condemnation of God.

So Paul sets before the Romans two ways. The one is a way in which a man seeks a right relationship with God through his own efforts. It is doomed to failure. The other is a way in which a man enters by faith into a relationship with God, which by God's grace already exists for him to come into in trust.

BELIEVING IN THE GOD WHO MAKES THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE

Rom. 4:18-25

In hope Abraham believed beyond hope that he would become the father of many nations, as the saying had it, "So will be your seed.?" He did not weaken in his faith, although he was well aware that by this time his body had lost its vitality (for he was a hundred years old), and that the womb of Sarah was without life. He did not in unfaith waver at the promise of God, but he was revitalized by his faith, and he gave glory to God, and he was firmly convinced that he who had made the promise was also able to perform it. So this faith was accounted to him as righteousness. It was not only for his sake this "it was accounted to him for righteousness" was written. It was written also for our sakes; for it will be so reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead, who was delivered up for our sin and raised to bring us into a right relationship with God.

The last passage ended by saying that Abraham believed in the God who calls the dead into life and who brings into being even things which have no existence at all. This passage turns Paul's thoughts to another outstanding example of Abraham's willingness to take God at his word. The promise that all families of the earth would be blessed in his descendants was given to Abraham when he was an old man. His wife, Sarah, had always been childless; and now, when he was one hundred years old and she was ninety (Gen.17:17), there came the promise that a son would be born to them. It seemed, on the face of it, beyond all belief and beyond all hope of fulfilment, for he was long past the age of begetting and she long past the age of bearing a son. Yet, once again, Abraham took God at his word and once again it was this faith that was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

It was this willingness to take God at his word which put Abraham into a right relationship with him. Now the Jewish Rabbis had a saying to which Paul here refers. They said, "What is written of Abraham is written also of his children." They meant that any promise that

God made to Abraham extends to his children also. Therefore, if Abraham's willingness to take God at his word brought him into a right relationship with God, so it will be with us. It is not works of the law, it is this trusting faith which establishes the relationship between God and a man which ought to exist.

The essence of Abraham's faith in this case was that he believed that God could make the impossible possible. So long as we believe that everything depends on our efforts, we are bound to be pessimists, for experience has taught the grim lesson that our own efforts can achieve very little. When we realize that it is not our effort but God's grace and power which matter, then we become optimists, because we are bound to believe that with God nothing is impossible.

It is told that once Saint Theresa set out to build a convent with a sum the equivalent of twelve pence as her complete resources. Someone said to her, "Not even Saint Theresa can accomplish much with twelve pence." "True," she answered, "but Saint Theresa and twelve pence and God can do anything." A man may well hesitate to attempt a great task by himself; there is nothing which he need hesitate to attempt with God. Ann Hunter Small, the great missionary teacher, tells how her father, himself a missionary, used to say: "Oh! the wickedness as well as the stupidity of the croakers!" And she herself had a favourite saying: "A church which is alive dares to do anything." That daring only becomes possible to a man and to a church who take God at his word.

Lesson 6 Readings

AT HOME WITH GOD

Rom. 5:1-5

Since, then, we have been put into a right relationship with God in consequence of faith, let us enjoy peace with him through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, by faith, we are in possession of an introduction to this grace in which we stand; and let us glory in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but let us find a cause of glorying in our troubles; for we know that trouble produces fortitude, and fortitude produces character; and character produces hope; and hope does not prove an illusion, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us.

Here is one of Paul's great lyrical passages in which he almost sings the intimate joy of his confidence in God. Trusting faith has done what the labour to produce the works of the law could never do; it has given a man peace with God. Before Jesus came, no man could ever be really close to God.

Some, indeed, have seen him, not as the supreme good, but as the supreme evil. Swinburne wrote:

"His hidden face and iron feet, Hath not man known and felt them in their way Threaten and trample all things every day? Hath he not sent us hunger? Who hath cursed Spirit and flesh with longing? Filled with thirst Their lips that cried to him?"

Some have seen him as the complete stranger, the utterly untouchable. In one of H. G. Wells' books there is the story of a man of affairs whose mind was so tensed and strained that he was in serious danger of a complete nervous and mental breakdown. His doctor told him that the only thing that could save him was to find the peace that fellowship with God can give. "What!" he said, "to think of that, up there, having fellowship with me! I would as soon think of cooling my throat with the milky way or shaking hands with the stars!" God, to him, was the completely unfindable. Rosita Forbes, the traveller, tells of finding shelter one night in a Chinese village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated men.

It is only when we realize that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that there comes into life that intimacy with him, that new relationship, which Paul calls justification.

Through Jesus, says Paul, we have an introduction to this grace in which we stand. The word he uses for introduction is *prosagoge*. It is a word with two great pictures in it.

(i) It is the regular word for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty; and it is the regular word for the approach of the worshipper to God. It is as if Paul was saying, "Jesus ushers us into the very presence of God. He opens the door for us to the presence of the King of Kings; and when that door is opened what we find is grace; not condemnation, not judgment, not vengeance, but the sheer, undeserved, incredible kindness of God."

(ii) But *prosagoge* has another picture in it. In late Greek it is the word for the place where ships come in, a harbour or a haven. If we take it that way, it means that so long as we tried to depend on our own efforts we were tempest-tossed, like mariners striving with a sea which threatened to overwhelm them completely, but now that we have heard the word of Christ, we have reached at last the haven of God's grace, and we know the calm of depending, not on what we can do for ourselves, but on what God has done for us.

Because of Jesus we have entry to the presence of the King of Kings and entry to the haven of God's grace.

No sooner has Paul said this than the other side of the matter strikes him. All this is true, and it is glory; but the fact remains that in this life the Christians are up against it. It is hard to be a Christian in Rome. Remembering that, Paul produces a great climax. "Trouble," he said, "produces fortitude." The word he uses for trouble is *thlipis*, which literally means pressure. All kinds of things may press in upon the Christian--want and straitened circumstances, sorrow, persecution, unpopularity and loneliness. All that pressure, says Paul, produces fortitude. The word he uses for fortitude is *hupomone* which means more

than endurance. It means the spirit which can overcome the world; it means the spirit which does not passively endure but which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of life.

When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said: "I will take life by the throat." That is hupomone. When Scott was involved in ruin because of the bankruptcy of his publishers, he said: "No man will say 'Poor fellow!' to me; my own right hand will pay the debt." That is hupomone. Someone once said to a gallant soul who was undergoing a great sorrow: "Sorrow fairly colours life, doesn't it?" Back came the reply: "Yes! And I propose to choose the colour!" That is hupomone. When Henley was lying in Edinburgh Infirmary with one leg amputated, and the prospect that the other must follow, he wrote *Invictus*.

"Out of the night that covers me, Black as the Pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be For my unconquerable soul."

That is hupomone. Hupomone is not the spirit which lies down and lets the floods go over it; it is the spirit which meets things breastforward and overcomes them.

"Fortitude," Paul goes on, "produces character." The word he uses for character is *dokime*. *Dokime* is used of metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. It is used of coinage as we use the word sterling. When affliction is met with fortitude, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer God.

"Character," Paul goes on, "produces hope." Two men can meet the same situation. It can drive one of them to despair, and it can spur the other to triumphant action. To the one it can be the end of hope, to the other it can be a challenge to greatness. "I do not like crises," said Lord Reith, "but I do like the opportunities they provide." The difference corresponds to the difference between the men. If a man has let himself become weak and flabby, if he has allowed circumstances to beat him, if he has allowed himself to whine and grovel under affliction, he has made himself such that when the challenge of the crisis comes he cannot do other than despair. If, on the other hand, a man has insisted on meeting life with head up, if he has always faced and, by facing, conquered things, then when the challenge comes, he meets it with eyes aflame with hope. The character which has endured the test always emerges in hope.

Then Paul makes one last great statement: "The Christian hope never proves an illusion for it is founded on the love of God." Omar Khayyam wrote wistfully of human hopes:

"The Worldly Hope men set their hearts upon Turns Ashes--or it prospers; and anon, Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face Lighting a little Hour or two--is gone."

When a man's hope is in God, it cannot turn to dust and ashes. When a man's hope is in God, it cannot be disappointed. When a man's hope is in the love of God, it can never be an illusion, for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power.

THE FINAL PROOF OF LOVE

Rom. 5:6-11

While we were still helpless, in God's good time, Christ died for the ungodly. A man will hardly die for a just man. It may be that a man would even dare to die for the good cause. But God proves his love to us by the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since we have been brought into a right relationship with God at the price of his life's blood, much more through him we shall be saved from the Wrath. For if while we were still at enmity with God, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, now that we have been reconciled, we shall go on being saved by his life. Not only that, but we glory in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received this reconciliation.

The fact that Jesus Christ died for us is the final proof of God's love. It would be difficult enough to get a man to die for a just man; it might be possible for a man to be persuaded to die for some great and good principle; a man might have the greater love that would make him lay down his life for his friend. But the wonder of Jesus Christ is that he died for us when we are sinners and in a state of hostility to God. Love can go no further than that.

Rita Snowdon relates an incident from the life of T. E. Lawrence. In 1915 he was journeying across the desert with some Arabs. Things were desperate. Food was almost done, and water was at its last drop. Their hoods were over their heads to shelter them from the wind which was like a flame and full of the stinging sand of the sandstorm. Suddenly someone said, "Where is Jasmin?" Another said, "Who is Jasmin?" A third answered, "That yellow-faced man from Meen. He killed a Turkish tax-collector and fled to the desert." The first said, "Look, Jasmin's camel has no rider. His rifle is strapped to the saddle, but Jasmin is not there." A second said, "Someone has shot him on the march." A third said, "He is not strong in the head, perhaps he is lost in a mirage; he is not strong in the body, perhaps he has fainted and fallen off his camel." Then the first said, "What does it matter? Jasmin was not worth ten pence." And the Arabs hunched themselves up on their camels and rode on. But Lawrence turned and rode back the way he had come. Alone, in the blazing heat, at the risk of his life, he went back. After an hour and a half's ride he saw something against the sand. It was Jasmin, blind and mad with heat and thirst, being murdered by the desert. Lawrence lifted him up on his camel, gave him some of the last drops of precious water, slowly plodded back to his company. When he came up to them, the Arabs looked in amazement. "Here is Jasmin," they said, "Jasmin, not worth ten pence, saved at his own risk by Lawrence, our lord." That is a parable. It was not good men Christ died to save but sinners; not God's friends but men at enmity with him.

Then Paul goes on a step. Through Jesus our status with God was changed. Sinners though we were, we were put into a right relationship with God. But that is not enough. Not only our status must be changed but our state. The saved sinner cannot go on being a sinner; he must become good. Christ's death changed our status; his risen life changes our state. He is not dead but alive; he is with us always to help us and guide us, to fill us with his strength so as to overcome temptation, to clothe our lives with something of his radiance. Jesus

begins by putting sinners into a right relationship with God even when they are still sinners; he goes on, by his grace, to enable them to quit their sin and become good men. There are technical names for these things. The change of our status is justification; that is where the whole saving process begins. The change of our state is sanctification; that is where the saving process goes on, and never ends, until we see him face to face and are like him.

There is one thing to note here of quite extraordinary importance. Paul is quite clear that the whole saving process, the coming of Christ and the death of Christ, is the proof of God's love. Sometimes the thing is stated as if on the one side there was a gentle and loving Christ, and on the other an angry and vengeful God; and as if Christ had done something which changed God's attitude to men. Nothing could be further from the truth. The whole matter springs from the love of God. Jesus did not come to change God's attitude to men; he came to show what it is and always was. He came to prove unanswerably that God is love.

RUIN AND RESCUE

Rom. 5:12-21

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and, through sin, death entered into the world, and so death spread to all men, in that they had sinned; for up to the coming of the law sin was in the world, but sin was not debited against men because the law did not yet exist; but death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses even over those who had not sinned in the way that Adam had, Adam, who was the symbol of the one who was to come. But the gift of free grace was not like the trespass. For if the many died in consequence of the sin of the one, much more the grace of God and his free gift in the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abounded to many. The free gift is not like the effect of the one man who sinned. The sentence which followed the one sin was a sentence of condemnation; but the free gift which followed the many trespasses was a sentence of acquittal. For if, because of the trespass of one, death reigned because of one, much more they who receive the superabundance of grace and of that free gift which establishes a right relationship between man and God, shall reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. So, then, as by one sin it came to all men to fall under sentence, so by one supreme act of righteousness it came to men to enter into that relationship with God which gives them life. Just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted sinners, so, through the obedience of one man, the many were constituted righteous. But the law slipped in that trespass might abound; but where sin abounded grace superabounded, so that just as sin reigned in death, grace might reign by putting men into a right relationship with God that they might enter into eternal life because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done.

No passage of the New Testament has had such an influence on theology as this; and no passage is more difficult for a modern mind to understand. It is difficult because Paul expresses himself in a difficult way. We can see, for instance, that the first sentence never ends, but breaks off in mid-air, while Paul pursues another idea down a sideline. Still more,

it is thinking and speaking in terms which were familiar to Jews and perfectly understandable to them, but which are unfamiliar to us.

If we were to put the thought of this passage into one sentence, which, indeed, was the sentence which Paul set out to write at the very beginning, and which got sidetracked, it would be this: "By the sin of Adam all men became sinners and were alienated from God; by the righteousness of Jesus Christ all men became righteous and are restored to a right relationship with God." Paul, in fact, said this very much more clearly in 1 Cor. 15:21: "As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

There are two basic Jewish ideas in the light of which this passage must be read.

(i) There is the idea of solidarity. The Jew never really thought of himself as an individual but always thought as part of a clan, a family, or a nation apart from which he had no real existence. To this day it is said that if an Australian aboriginal is asked his name, he gives the name of his tribe or clan. He does not think of himself as a person, but as a member of a society. One of the clearest instances of this kind of thing in recognizable action is the blood feud amongst primitive people. Suppose a man from one tribe murders a man from another tribe. It becomes the duty of the first tribe to take vengeance on the second; it is the tribe that has been hurt, and the tribe which takes vengeance.

In the Old Testament there is one vivid instance of this. It is the case of Achan as related in Josh. 7. At the siege of Jericho, Achan kept to himself certain spoils in direct defiance of the commandment of God that all should be destroyed. The next item in the campaign was the siege of Ai, which should have fallen without trouble. The assaults against it, however, failed disastrously. Why? Because Achan had sinned, and, as a result, the whole nation was branded as sinner and punished by God. Achan's sin was not one man's sin but the nation's. The nation was not a collection of individuals; it was a solid mass. What the individual did, the nation did. When Achan's sin was admitted, it was not he alone who was executed but his whole family. Again, Achan was not a solitary, self-responsible individual; he was one of a solid mass of people from whom he could not be separated.

That is how Paul sees Adam. Adam was not an individual. He was one of mankind, and because he was one of mankind, his sin was the sin of all men.

Paul says that all men sinned in Adam. If we are ever to understand Paul's thought here, we must be quite sure what he means, and we must be equally sure that he was serious. All through the history of Christian thinking there have been efforts to interpret in different ways this conception of the connection between Adam's sin and that of mankind.

(a) The passage has been taken to mean that "each man is his own Adam." This really means that, just as Adam sinned, all men have sinned, but that there is no real connection between the sin of Adam and the sin of mankind, other than that it could be said that Adam's sin is typical of the sin of all mankind.

(b) There is what has been called the legal interpretation. This would hold that Adam was the representative of mankind and the human race shares in the deed of its representative. But a representative must be chosen by the people he represents; and in no sense can we say that of Adam.

(c) There is the interpretation that what we inherit from Adam is the tendency to sin. That is true enough, but that is not what Paul meant. It would not, in fact, suit his argument at all.

(d) The passage ought to be given what is called the realistic interpretation, namely that, because of the solidarity of the human race, all mankind actually sinned in Adam. This idea was not strange to a Jew; it was the actual belief of the Jewish thinkers. The writer of 2 Esdras is quite clear about it. "A grain of evil was sown in the heart of Adam from the beginning and how much wickedness has it brought forth unto this time; and how much shall it yet bring forth till the time of the threshing come" (2 Esdr. 4:30). "For the first Adam, bearing a wicked heart, transgressed and was overcome; and not only he but all they also who are born of him" (2 Esdr. 3:21).

(ii) The second basic idea is intimately connected with this in Paul's argument. Death is the direct consequence of sin. It was the Jewish belief that, if Adam had not sinned, man would have been immortal. Sirach (Sir. 2:23) writes, "A woman was the beginning of sin and through her all die." The Book of Wisdom has it, "God created man for immortality and made him the image of his own proper nature; but by the envy of the devil death entered into the world." In Jewish thought, sin and death are integrally connected. This is what Paul is getting at in the involved and difficult line of thought in Rom. 5:12-14. We may trace his thought there in a series of ideas.

(a) Adam sinned because he broke a direct commandment of God not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree--and because he sinned, he died, although he was meant to be immortal.

(b) The law did not come until the time of Moses. Now, if there is no law, there can be no breach of the law; that is to say, there can be no sin. Therefore, the men who lived between Adam and Moses did in fact commit sinful actions, but they could not be counted sinners, for the law did not yet exist.

(c) In spite of the fact that sin could not be reckoned to them, they still died. Death reigned over them, although they could not be accused of breaking a non-existent law.

(d) Why, then, did they die? It was because they had sinned in Adam. Their involvement in his sin caused their deaths, although there was no law for them to break. That, in fact, is Paul's proof that all men did sin in Adam.

So, then, we have extracted the essence of one side of Paul's thought. Because of this idea of the complete solidarity of mankind, all men literally sinned in Adam; and because it is the consequence of sin, death reigned over all men.

But this very same conception, which can be used to produce so desperate a view of the human situation, can be used in reverse to fill it with a blaze of glory. Into this situation comes Jesus. To God Jesus offered perfect goodness. And, just as all men were involved in Adam's sin, all men are involved in Jesus' perfect goodness; and, just as Adam's sin was the cause of death, so Jesus' perfect goodness conquers death and gives men life eternal. Paul's triumphant argument is that, as mankind was solid with Adam and was therefore condemned to death, so mankind is solid with Christ and is therefore acquitted to life. Even although the law has come and made sin much more terrible, the grace of Christ overcomes the condemnation which the law must bring.

That is Paul's argument, and on Jewish grounds it is unassailable. But it has one great flaw, as it has one great truth.

(i) The flaw is this. Suppose we assume the literal truth of the Adam story, our connection with Adam is purely physical. We have no choice whatever in the matter, any more than a child chooses his father. On the other hand our connection with Christ is voluntary. Union with Christ is something a man can accept or reject. The connection is in reality quite different. That is a serious flaw in Paul's argument.

(ii) The great virtue is this. Paul conserves the truth that mankind was involved in a situation from which there was no escape; sin had man in its power and there was no hope. Into this situation came Jesus Christ, and he brought with him something that broke the old deadlock. By what he did, by what he is, by what he gives, he enabled man to escape from a situation in which he was hopelessly dominated by sin. Whatever else we may say about Paul's argument, it is completely true that man was ruined by sin and rescued by Christ.

DYING TO LIVE

Rom. 6:1-11

What, then, shall we infer? Are we to persist in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who have died to sin still live in it? Can you be unaware that all who have been baptized into Jesus Christ have been baptized into his death? We have therefore been buried with him through baptism until we died, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, so we, too, may live in newness of life. For, if we have become united to him in the likeness of his death, so also shall we be united to him in the likeness of his resurrection. For this we know, that our old self has been crucified with him, that our sinful body might be rendered inoperative, in order that we should no longer be slaves to sin. For a man who has died stands acquitted from sin. But, if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, for we know that, after Christ was raised from the dead, he dies no more. Death has no more lordship over him. He who died, died once and for all to sin; and he who lives, lives to God. So you, too, must reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

As he has so often done in this letter, Paul is once again carrying on an argument against a kind of imaginary opponent. The argument springs from the great saying at the end of the last chapter: "Where sin abounded, grace superabounded." It runs something like this.

The Objector: You have just said that God's grace is great enough to find forgiveness for every sin.

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: You are, in fact, saying that God's grace is the most wonderful thing in all this world.

Paul: That is so.

The Objector: Well, if that is so, let us go on sinning. The more we sin, the more grace will abound. Sin does not matter, for God will forgive anyway. In fact we can go further than that and say that sin is an excellent thing, because it gives the grace of God a chance to operate. The conclusion of your argument is that sin produces grace; therefore sin is bound to be a good thing if it produces the greatest thing in the world.

Paul's first reaction is to recoil from that argument in sheer horror. "Do you suggest," he demands, "that we should go on sinning in order to give grace more chance to operate? God forbid that we should pursue so incredible a course as that."

Then, having recoiled like that, he goes on to something else.

"Have you never thought," he demands, "what happened to you when you were baptized?" Now, when we try to understand what Paul goes on to say, we must remember that baptism in his time was different from what it commonly is today.

(a) It was adult baptism. That is not to say that the New Testament is opposed to infant baptism, but infant baptism is the result of the Christian family, and the Christian family could hardly be said to have come into being as early as the time of Paul. A man came to Christ as an individual in the early Church, often leaving his family behind.

(b) Baptism in the early Church was intimately connected with confession of faith. A man was baptized when he entered the Church; and he was entering the Church direct from paganism. In baptism a man came to a decision which cut his life in two, a decision which often meant that he had to tear himself up by the roots, a decision which was so definite that it often meant nothing less than beginning life all over again.

(c) Commonly baptism was by total immersion and that practice lent itself to a symbolism to which sprinkling does not so readily lend itself. When a man descended into the water and the water closed over his head, it was like being buried. When he emerged from the water, it was like rising from the grave. Baptism was symbolically like dying and rising

again. The man died to one kind of life and rose to another; he died to the old life of sin and rose to the new life of grace.

Again, if we are fully to understand this, we must remember that Paul was using language and pictures that almost anyone of his day and generation would understand, It may seem strange to us, but it was not at all strange to his contemporaries.

The Jews would understand it. When a man entered the Jewish religion from heathenism, it involved three things--sacrifice, circumcision and baptism. The Gentile entered the Jewish faith by baptism. The ritual was as follows. The person to be baptized cut his nails and hair; he undressed completely; the baptismal bath must contain at least forty seahs, that is two hogsheads, of water; every part of his body must be touched by the water. As he was in the water, he made confession of his faith before three fathers of baptism and certain exhortations and benedictions were addressed to him. The effect of this baptism was held to be complete regeneration; he was called a little child just born, the child of one day. All his sins were remitted because God could not punish sins committed before he was born. The completeness of the change was seen in the fact that certain Rabbis held that a man's child born after baptism was his first-born, even if he had older children. Theoretically it was held--although the belief was never put into practice--that a man was so completely new that he might marry his own sister or his own mother. He was not only a changed man, he was a different man. Any Jew would fully understand Paul's words about the necessity of a baptized man being completely new.

The Greek would understand. At this time the only real Greek religion was found in the mystery religions. They were wonderful things. They offered men release from the cares and sorrows and fears of this earth; and the release was by union with some god. All the mysteries were passion plays. They were based on the story of some god who suffered and died and rose again. The story was played out as a drama. Before a man could see the drama he had to be initiated. He had to undergo a long course of instruction on the inner meaning of the drama. He had to undergo a course of ascetic discipline. He was carefully prepared. The drama was played out with all the resources of music and lighting, and incense and mystery. As it was played out, the man underwent an emotional experience of identification with the god. Before he entered on this he was initiated. Initiation was always regarded as a death followed by a new birth, by which the man was renatus in aeternum, reborn for eternity. One who went through the initiation tells us that he underwent "a voluntary death." We know that in one of the mysteries the man to be initiated was called moriturus, the one who is to die, and that he was buried up to the head in a trench. When he had been initiated, he was addressed as a little child and fed with milk, as one newly born. In another of the mysteries the person to be initiated prayed: "Enter thou into my spirit, my thought, my whole life; for thou art I and I am thou." Any Greek who had been through this would have no difficulty in understanding what Paul meant by dying and rising again in baptism, and, in so doing, becoming one with Christ.

We are not for one moment saying that Paul borrowed either his ideas or his words from such Jewish or pagan practices; what we do say is that he was using words and pictures that both Jew and Gentile would recognize and understand.

In this passage lie three great permanent truths.

(i) It is a terrible thing to seek to trade on the mercy of God and to make it an excuse for sinning. Think of it in human terms. How despicable it would be for a son to consider himself free to sin, because he knew that his father would forgive. That would be taking advantage of love to break love's heart.

(ii) The man who enters upon the Christian way is committed to a different kind of life. He has died to one kind of life and been born to another. In modern times we may have tended to stress the fact that acceptance of the Christian way need not make so very much difference in a man's life. Paul would have said that it ought to make all the difference in the world.

(iii) But there is more than a mere ethical change in a man's life when he accepts Christ. There is a real identification with Christ. It is, in fact, the simple truth that the ethical change is not possible without that union. A man is in Christ. A great scholar has suggested this analogy for that phrase. We cannot live our physical life unless we are in the air and the air is in us; unless we are in Christ, and Christ is in us, we cannot live the life of God.

THE PRACTICE OF THE FAITH

Rom. 6:12-14

Let not sin reign in your mortal body to make you obey the body's desires. Do not go on yielding your members to sin as weapons of evil; but yield yourselves once and for all to God, as those who were dead and are now alive, and yield your members to God as weapons of righteousness. For sin will not lord it over you. You are not under law but under grace.

There is no more typical transition in Paul than that between this passage and the preceding one. The passage which went before was the writing of a mystic. It spoke of the mystical union between the Christian and Christ which came in baptism. It spoke of the way in which a Christian should live so close to Christ that all his life can be said to be lived in him. And now, after the mystical experience, comes the practical demand. Christianity is not an emotional experience; it is a way of life. The Christian is not meant to luxuriate in an experience however wonderful; he is meant to go out and live a certain kind of life in the teeth of the world's attacks and problems. It is common in the world of religious life to sit in church and feel a wave of feeling sweep over us. It is a not uncommon experience, when we sit alone, to feel Christ very near. But the Christianity which has stopped there, has stopped half-way. That emotion must be translated into action. Christianity can never be only an experience of the inner being; it must be a life in the marketplace.

When a man goes out into the world, he is confronted with an awesome situation. As Paul thinks of it, both God and sin are looking for weapons to use. God cannot work without men. If he wants a word spoken, he has to get a man to speak it. If he wants a deed done, he has to get a man to do it. If he wants a person encouraged, he has to get a man to do the

lifting up. It is the same with sin; every man has to be given the push into it. Sin is looking for men who will by their words or example seduce others into sinning. It is as if Paul was saying: "In this world there is an eternal battle between sin and God; choose your side." We are faced with the tremendous alternative of making ourselves weapons in the hand of God or weapons in the hand of sin.

A man may well say: "Such a choice is too much for me. I am bound to fail." Paul's answer is: "Don't be discouraged and don't be despairing; sin will not lord it over you." Why? Because we are no longer under law but under grace. Why should that make all the difference? Because we are no longer trying to satisfy the demands of law but are trying to be worthy of the gifts of love. We are no longer regarding God as the stern judge; we are regarding him as the lover of the souls of men. There is no inspiration in all the world like love. Who ever went out from the presence of his loved one without the burning desire to be a better person? The Christian life is no longer a burden to be borne; it is a privilege to be lived up to. As Denney put it: "It is not restraint but inspiration which liberates from sin; not Mount Sinai but Mount Calvary which makes saints." Many a man has been saved from sin, not because of the regulations of the law, but because he could not bear to hurt or grieve or disappoint someone whom he loved and someone who, he knew, loved him. At best, the law restrains a man through fear; but love redeems him by inspiring him to be better than his best. The inspiration of the Christian comes, not from the fear of what God will do to him, but from the inspiration of what God has done for him.

Lesson 7 Readings

THE EXCLUSIVE POSSESSION

Rom. 6:15-23

What then? Are we to go on sinning because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid! Are you not aware that if you yield yourselves to anyone as slaves, in order to obey them, you are the slaves of the person whom you have chosen to obey--in this case, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness. But, thank God, you, who used to be slaves of sin, have come to a spontaneous decision to obey the pattern of teaching to which you were committed, and, since you have been liberated from sin, you have become the slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms, because unaided human nature cannot understand any others. Just as you yielded your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness which issues in still more lawlessness, so now you have yielded your members as slaves to righteousness and have started on the road that leads to holiness. When you were slaves of sin, you were free as regards righteousness; but then what fruit did you have? All you had was things of which you are now heartily ashamed, for the end of these things is death. But now, since you have been liberated from sin, and since you have become the slaves of God, the fruit you enjoy is designed to lead you on the road to holiness and its end is eternal life. For sin's pay is death, but God's free gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

To a certain type of mind the doctrine of free grace is always a temptation to say, "If forgiveness is as easy and as inevitable as all that, if God's one desire is to forgive men and if his grace is wide enough to cover every spot and stain, why worry about sin? Why not do as we like? It will be all the same in the end."

Paul counters this argument by using a vivid picture. He says: "Once you gave yourselves to sin as its slave; when you did that, righteousness had no claim over you. But now you have given yourselves to God as the slave of righteousness; and so sin has no claim over you."

To understand this, we must understand the status of the slave. When we think of a servant, in our sense of the word, we think of a man who gives a certain agreed part of his time to his master and who receives a certain agreed wage for doing so. Within that agreed time he is at the disposal and in the command of his master. But, when that time ends, he is free to do as he likes. During his working hours he belongs to his master, but in his free time he belongs to himself. But, in Paul's time, the status of the slave was quite different. Literally he had no time which belonged to himself; every single moment belonged to his master. He was his master's absolutely exclusive possession. That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He says: "At one time you were the slave of sin. Sin had exclusive possession of you. At that time you could not talk of anything else but sinning. But now you have taken God as your master and he has exclusive possession of you. Now you cannot even talk about sinning; you must talk about nothing but holiness."

Paul actually apologizes for using this picture. He says: "I am only using a human analogy so that your human minds can understand it." He apologized because he did not like to compare the Christian life to any kind of slavery. But the one thing that this picture does show is that the Christian can have no master but God. He cannot give a part of his life to God, and another part to the world. With God it is all-or nothing. So long as man keeps some part of his life without God, he is not really a Christian. A Christian is a man who has given complete control of his life to Christ, holding nothing back. No man who has done that can ever think of using grace as an excuse for sin.

But Paul has something more to say, "You took a spontaneous decision to obey the pattern of the teaching to which you were committed." In other words, he is saying, "You knew what you were doing, and you did it of your own free will." This is interesting. Remember that this passage has arisen from a discussion of baptism. This therefore means that baptism was, instructed baptism. Now we have already seen that baptism in the early Church was adult baptism and confession of faith. It is, then, quite clear that no man was ever allowed into the Christian Church on a moment of emotion. He was instructed; he had to know what he was doing; he was shown what Christ offered and demanded. Then, and then only, could he take the decision to come in.

When a man wishes to become a member of the great Benedictine order of monks he is accepted for a year on probation. During all that time the clothes which he wore in the world hang in his cell. At any time he can put off his monk's habit, put on his worldly clothes, and walk out, and no one will think any the worse of him. Only at the end of the

year are his clothes finally taken away. It is with open eyes and a full appreciation of what he is doing that he must enter the order.

It is so with Christianity. Jesus does not want followers who have not stopped to count the cost. He does not want a man to express an impermanent loyalty on the crest of a wave of emotion. The Church has a duty to present the faith in all the riches of its offer and the heights of its demands to those who wish to become its members.

Paul draws a distinction between the old life and the new. The old life was characterized by uncleanness and lawlessness. The pagan world was an unclean world; it did not know the meaning of chastity. Justin Martyr has a terrible jibe when talking about the exposure of infants. In Rome unwanted children, especially girls, were literally, thrown away. Every night numbers of them were left lying in the forum. Some of them were collected by dreadful characters who ran brothels, and brought up to be prostitutes to stock the brothels. So Justin turns on his heathen opponents and tells them that, in their immorality, they had every chance of going into a city brothel. and. all unknown, having intercourse with their own child.

The pagan world was lawless in the sense that men's lusts were their only flaws; and that lawlessness produced more lawlessness. That, indeed. is the law of sin. Sin begets sin. The first time we do a wrong thing, you may do it with hesitation and a tremor and a shudder. The second time we do it, it is easier; and if we go on doing it, it becomes effortless; sin loses its terror. The first time we allow ourselves some indulgence, we may be satisfied with very little of it; but the time comes when we need more and more of it to produce the same thrill. Sin leads on to sin; lawlessness produces lawlessness. To start on the path of sin is to go on to more and more.

The new life is different; it is life which is righteous. Now the Greeks defined righteousness as giving to man and to God their due. The Christian life is one which gives God his proper place and which respects the rights of human personality. The Christian will never disobey God nor ever use a human being to gratify his desire for pleasure. That life leads to what the Revised Standard Version calls sanctification. The word in Greek is *hagiasmos*. All Greek nouns which end in *-asmos* describe, not a completed state, but a process. Sanctification is the road to holiness. When a man gives his life to Christ, he does not then become a perfect man; the struggle is by no means over. But Christianity has always regarded the direction in which a man is facing as more important than the particular stage he has reached. Once he is Christ's he has started on the process of sanctification, the road to holiness.

"Leaving every day behind Something which might hinder; Running swifter every day; Growing purer, kinder."

Robert Louis Stevenson said: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." What is true is that it is a great thing to set out to a great goal, even if we never get the whole way.

Paul finishes with a great saying that contains a double metaphor. "Sin's pay is death," he says, "but God's free gift is eternal life." Paul uses two military words. For pay he uses *opsonia*. *Opsonia* was the soldier's pay, something that he earned with the risk of his body and the sweat of his brow, something that was due to him and could not be taken from him. For gift he uses *charisma*. The *charisma* or, in Latin, the *donativum*, was a totally unearned gift which the army sometimes received. On special occasions, for instance on his birthday, or on his accession to the throne, or the anniversary of it, an emperor handed out a free gift of money to the army. It had not been earned; it was a gift of the emperor's kindness and grace. So Paul says: "If we got the pay we had earned it would be death; but out of his grace God has given us life."

THE NEW ALLEGIANCE

Rom. 7:1-6

You are bound to know, brothers--for I speak to men who know what law means--that the law has authority over a man only for the duration of his life. Thus, a married woman remains bound by law to her husband as long as he is alive; but, if her husband dies, she is completely discharged from the law concerning her husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she marries another man while her husband is still alive; but, if her husband dies, she is free from the law, and she is no longer an adulteress if she marries another man. Just so, my brothers, you have died to the law, through the body of Jesus Christ (for you shared in his death by baptism) in order that you should enter into union with another, I mean, with him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit to God. In the days of our unaided human nature, the passions of our sins, which were set in motion by the law, worked in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are completely discharged from the law, because we have died to that by which we were held captive, so that we serve, not under the old written law, but in the new life of the spirit.

Seldom did Paul write so difficult and so complicated a passage as this. C. H. Dodd has said that when we are studying it we should try to forget what Paul says and to find out what he means.

The basic thought of the passage is founded on the legal maxim that death cancels all contracts. Paul begins with an illustration of this truth and wishes to use this picture as a symbol of what happens to the Christian. So long as a woman's husband is alive, she cannot marry another without becoming an adulteress. But if her husband dies, the contract is, so to speak, cancelled, and she is free to marry anyone she likes.

In view of that, Paul could have said that we were married to sin; that sin was slain by Christ; and that, therefore, we are now free to be married to God. That is undoubtedly what he set out to say. But into this picture came the law. Paul could still have put the thing quite simply. He could have said that we were married to the law; that the law was killed by the

work of Christ; and that now we are free to be married to God. But, quite suddenly, he puts it the other way, and, in his suddenly changed picture, it is we who die to the law.

How can that be? By baptism we share in the death of Christ. That means that, having died, we are discharged from all obligations to the law and become free to marry again. This time we marry, not the law, but Christ. When that happens, Christian obedience becomes, not an externally imposed obedience to some written code of laws, but an inner allegiance of the spirit to Jesus Christ.

Paul is drawing a contrast between the two states of man--without Christ and with him. Before we knew Christ we tried to rule life by obedience to the written code of the law. That was when we were in the flesh. By the flesh Paul does not mean simply the body, because a man retains a physical body to the end of the day. In man there is something which answers to the seduction of sin; and it is that part of man which provides a bridgehead for sin that Paul calls the flesh.

The flesh is human nature apart from and unaided by God. Paul says that, when our human nature was unaided by God, the law actually moved our passions to sin. What does he mean by that? More than once he has the thought that the law actually produces sin, because the very fact that a thing is forbidden lends it a certain attraction. When we had nothing but the law, we were at the mercy of sin.

Then Paul turns to the state of a man with Christ. When a man rules his life by union with Christ he rules it not by obedience to a written code of law which may actually awaken the desire to sin but by an allegiance to Jesus Christ within his spirit and his heart. Not law, but love, is the motive of his life; and the inspiration of love can make him able to do what the restraint of law was powerless to help him do.

THE EXCEEDING SINFULNESS OF SIN

Rom. 7:7-13

What then are we to infer? That the law is sin? God forbid! So far from that, I would never have known what sin meant except through the law. I would never have known desire if the law had not said, "You must not covet." For, when sin had, through the commandment, obtained a foothold, it produced every kind of desire in me; for, without law, sin is lifeless. Once I lived without the law; but, when the commandment came, sin sprang to life, and in that moment I knew that I had incurred the penalty of death. The commandment that was meant for life--I discovered that that very commandment was in me for death. For, when sin obtained a foothold through the commandment, it seduced me, and, through it, killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, just and good. Did then that which was good become death to me? God forbid! But the reason was that sin might be revealed as sin by producing death in me, through the very thing which was in itself good, so that, through the commandment, sin might become surpassingly sinful.

Here begins one of the greatest of all passages in the New Testament; and one of the most moving; because here Paul is giving us his own spiritual autobiography and laying bare his very heart and soul.

Paul deals with the torturing paradox of the law. In itself it is a fine and a splendid thing. It is holy. That is to say it is the very voice of God. The root meaning of the word holy (hagios, GSN0040) is different. It describes something which comes from a sphere other than this world. The law is divine and has in it the very voice of God. It is just. We have seen that the root Greek idea of justice is that it consists in giving to man, and to God, their due. Therefore the law is that which settles all relationships, human and divine. If a man perfectly kept the law, he would be in a perfect relationship both with God and with his fellow men. The law is good. That is to say, it is designed for nothing other than our highest welfare. It is meant to make a man good.

All that is true. And yet the fact remains that this same law is the very thing through which sin gains entry into a man. How does that happen? There are two ways in which the law may be said to be, in one sense, the source of sin.

(i) It defines sin. Sin without the law, as Paul said, has no existence. Until a thing is defined as sin by the law, a man cannot know that it is sin. We might find a kind of remote analogy in any game, say tennis. A man might allow the ball to bounce more than once before he returned it over the net; so long as there were no rules he could not be accused of any fault. But then the rules are made, and it is laid down that the ball must be struck over the net after only one bounce and that to allow it to bounce twice is a fault. The rules define what a fault is, and that which was allowable before they were made, now becomes a fault. So the law defines sin.

We may take a better analogy. What is pardonable in a child, or in an uncivilized man from a savage country, may not be allowable in a mature person from a civilized land. The mature, civilized person is aware of laws of conduct which the child and the savage do not know; therefore, what is pardonable in them is fault in him.

The law creates sin in the sense that it defines it. It may for long enough be legal to drive a motor car in either direction along a street; then that street is declared one-way; after that a new breach of the law exists--that of driving in a forbidden direction. The new regulation actually creates a new fault. The law, by making men aware of what it is, creates sin.

(ii) But there is a much more serious sense in which the law produces sin. One of the strange facts of life is the fascination of the forbidden thing. The Jewish rabbis and thinkers saw that human tendency at work in the Garden of Eden. Adam at first lived in innocence; a commandment was given him not to touch the forbidden tree, and given only his good; but the serpent came and subtly turned that prohibition into a temptation. The fact that the tree was forbidden made it desirable; so Adam was seduced into sin by the forbidden fruit; and death was the result.

Philo allegorized the whole story. The serpent was pleasure; Eve stood for the senses; pleasure, as it always does, wanted the forbidden thing and attacked through the senses. Adam was the reason; and, through the attack of the forbidden thing on the senses, reason was led astray, and death came.

In his Confessions there is a famous passage in which Augustine tells of the fascination of the forbidden thing.

"There was a pear tree near our vineyard, laden with fruit. One stormy night we rascally youths set out to rob it and carry our spoils away. We took off a huge load of pears--not to feast upon ourselves, but to throw them to the pigs, though we ate just enough to have the pleasure of forbidden fruit. They were nice pears, but it was not the pears that my wretched soul coveted, for I had plenty better at home. I picked them simply in order to become a thief. The only feast I got was a feast of iniquity, and that I enjoyed to the full. What was it that I loved in that theft? Was it the pleasure of acting against the law, in order that I, a prisoner under rules, might have a maimed counterfeit of freedom by doing what was forbidden, with a dim similitude of impotence? ... The desire to steal was awakened simply by the prohibition of stealing."

Set a thing in the category of forbidden things or put a place out of bounds, and immediately they become fascinating. In that sense the law produces sin.

Paul has one revealing word which he uses of sin. "Sin," he says, "seduced me." There is always deception in sin. Vaughan says that sin's delusion works in three directions. (i) We are deluded regarding the satisfaction to be found in sin. No man ever took a forbidden thing without thinking that it would make him happy, and no man ever found that it did. (ii) We are deluded regarding the excuse that can be made for it. Every man thinks that he can put up a defence for doing the wrong thing; but no man's defence ever sounded anything else but futile when it was made in the presence of God. (iii) We are deluded regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it. No man sins without the hope that he can get away with it. But it is true that, soon or late, our sin will find us out.

Is, then, the law a bad thing because it actually produces sin? Paul is certain that there is wisdom in the whole sequence. (i) First he is convinced that, whatever the consequence, sin had to be defined as sin. (ii) The process shows the terrible nature of sin, because sin took a thing--the law--which was holy and just as good, and twisted it into something which served the ends of evil. The awfulness of sin is shown by the fact that it could take a fine thing and make it a weapon of evil. That is what sin does. It can take the loveliness of love and turn it into lust. It can take the honourable desire for independence and turn it into the obsession for money and for power. It can take the beauty of friendship and use it as a seduction to the wrong things. That is what Carlyle called "the infinite damnability of sin." The very fact that it took the law and made it a bridgehead to sin shows the supreme sinfulness of sin. The whole terrible process is not accidental; it is all designed to show us how awful a thing sin is, because it can take the loveliest things and defile them with a polluting touch.

THE HUMAN SITUATION

Rom. 7:14-25

We are aware that the law is spiritual; but I am a creature of flesh and blood under the power of sin. I cannot understand what I do. What I want to do, that I do not do; but what I hate, that I do. If what I do not want to do I in point of fact do, then I acquiesce in the law, and I agree that it is fair. As it is, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin which resides in me--I mean in my human nature. To will the fair thing is within my range, but not to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do; but the evil that I do not want to do, that is the very thing I do. And if I do that very thing that I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but the sin which resides in me. My experience of the law, then, is that I wish to do the fine thing and that the evil thing is the only thing that is within my ability. As far as my inner self is concerned, I fully agree with the law of God; but I see another law in my members, continually carrying on a campaign against the law of my mind, and making me a captive by the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this fatal body? God will! Thanks be to him through Jesus Christ our Lord. Therefore with my mind I serve the law of God, but with my human nature the law of sin.

Paul is baring his very soul; and he is telling us of an experience which is of the very essence of the human situation. He knew what was right and wanted to do it; and yet, somehow, he never could. He knew what was wrong and the last thing he wanted was to do it; and yet, somehow, he did. He felt himself to be a split personality. It was as if two men were inside the one skin, pulling in different directions. He was haunted by this feeling of frustration, his ability to see what was good and his inability to do it; his ability to recognize what was wrong and his inability to refrain from doing it.

Paul's contemporaries well knew this feeling, as, indeed, we know it ourselves. Seneca talked of "our helplessness in necessary things." He talked about how men hate their sins and love them at the same time. Ovid, the Roman poet, had penned the famous tag: "I see the better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse."

No one knew this problem better than the Jews. They had solved it by saying that in every man there were two natures, called the Yetser hatob and the Yetser hara. It was the Jewish conviction that God had made men like that with a good impulse and an evil impulse inside them.

There were Rabbis who believed that that evil impulse was in the very embryo in the womb, there before a man was even born. It was "a malevolent second personality." It was "man's implacable enemy." It was there waiting, if need be for a lifetime, for a chance to ruin man. But the Jew was equally clear, in theory, that no man need ever succumb to that evil impulse. It was all a matter of choice.

Ben Sirach wrote:

"God himself created man from the beginning. And he left him in the hand of his own counsel. If thou so desirest thou shalt keep the commandments, And to perform faithfulness is of thine own good pleasure. He hath set fire and water before thee, Stretch forth thy hand unto whichever thou wilt. Before man is life and death, And whichever he liketh shall be given unto him.... He hath commanded no man to do wickedly, Neither have he given any man licence to sin." (Sir. 15:11-20).

There were certain things which would keep a man from falling to the evil impulse. There was the law. They thought of God as saying:

"I created for you the evil impulse; I created for you the law as an antiseptic."

"If you occupy yourself with the law you will not fall into the power of the evil impulse..."

There was the will and the mind.

"When God created man, he implanted in him his affections and his dispositions; and then, over all, he enthroned the sacred, ruling mind."

When the evil impulse attacked, the Jew held that wisdom and reason could defeat it; to be occupied with the study of the word of the Lord was safety; the law was a prophylactic; at such a time the good impulse could be called up in defence.

Paul knew all that; and knew, too, that, while it was all theoretically true, in practice it was not true. There were things in man's human nature--that is what Paul meant by this fatal body--which answered to the seduction of sin. It is part of the human situation that we know the right and yet do the wrong, that we are never as good as we know we ought to be. At one and the same time we are haunted by goodness and haunted by sin.

From one point of view this passage might be called a demonstration of inadequacies.

(i) It demonstrates the inadequacy of human knowledge. If to know the right thing was to do it, life would be easy. But knowledge by itself does not make a man good. It is the same in every walk of life. We may know exactly how golf should be played but that is very far from being able to play it; we may know how poetry ought to be written but that is very far from being able to write it. We may know how we ought to behave in any given situation but that is very far from being able so to behave. That is the difference between religion and morality. Morality is knowledge of a code; religion is knowledge of a person; and it is only when we know Christ that we are able to do what we know we ought.

(ii) It demonstrates the inadequacy of human resolution. To resolve to do a thing is very far from doing it. There is in human nature an essential weakness of the will. The will comes up against the problems, the difficulties, the opposition--and it fails. Once Peter took a great resolution. "Even if I must die with you," he said, "I will not deny you" (Matt.26:35); and yet

he failed badly when it came to the point. The human will unstrengthened by Christ is bound to crack.

(iii) It demonstrates the limitations of diagnosis. Paul knew quite clearly what was wrong; but he was unable to put it right. He was like a doctor who could accurately diagnose a disease but was powerless to prescribe a cure. Jesus is the one person who not only knows what is wrong, but who can also put the wrong to rights. It is not criticism he offers but help.

THE LIBERATION OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

Rom. 8:1-4

There is, therefore, now no condemnation against those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law which comes from the Spirit and leads to life has in Christ Jesus set me free from the law which begets sin and leads to death. As for the impotency of the law, that weakness of the law which resulted from the effects of our sinful human nature-- God sent his own Son as a sin offering with that very same human nature which in us had sinned; and thereby, while he existed in the same human nature as we have, he condemned sin, so that as a result the righteous demand of the law might be fulfilled in us, who live our lives not after the principle of sinful human nature, but after the principle of the Spirit.

This is a very difficult passage because it is so highly compressed, and because, all through it, Paul is making allusions to things which he has already said.

Two words keep occurring again and again in this chapter, flesh (sarx) and spirit (pneuma). We will not understand the passage at all unless we understand the way in which Paul is using these words.

(i) Sarx literally means flesh. The most cursory reading of Paul's letters will show how often he uses the word, and how he uses it in a sense that is all his own. Broadly speaking, he uses it in three different ways.

(a) He uses it quite literally. He speaks of physical circumcision, literally "in the flesh" (Rom. 2:28). (b) Over and over again he uses the phrase kata sarka, literally according to the flesh, which most often means looking at things from the human point of view. For instance, he says that Abraham is our forefather kata sarka, from the human point of view. He says that Jesus is the son of David kata sarka (Rom. 1:3), that is to say, on the human side of his descent. He speaks of the Jews being his kinsmen kata sarka (Rom. 9:3), that is to say, speaking of human relationships. When Paul uses the phrase kata sarka, it always implies that he is looking at things from the human point of view.

(c) But he has a use of this word sarx which is all his own. When he is talking of the Christians, he talks of the days when we were in the flesh (en sarki) (Rom. 7:5). He speaks of those who walk according to the flesh in contradistinction to those who live the Christian

life (Rom. 8:4-5). He says that those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:8). He says that the mind of the flesh is death, and that it is hostile to God (Rom. 8:6,8). He talks about living according to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). He says to his Christian friends, "You are not in the flesh" (Rom. 8:9).

It is quite clear, especially from the last instance, that Paul is not using flesh simply in the sense of the body, as we say flesh and blood. How, then, is he using it? He really means human nature in all its weakness and he means human in its vulnerability to sin. He means that part of man which gives sin its bridgehead. He means sinful human nature, apart from Christ, everything that attaches a man to the world instead of to God. To live according to the flesh is to live a life dominated by the dictates and desires of sinful human nature instead of a life dominated by the dictates and the love of God. The flesh is the lower side of man's nature.

It is to be carefully noted that when Paul thinks of the kind of life that a man dominated by the *sarx* lives he is not by any means thinking exclusively of sexual and bodily sins. When he gives a list of the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21, he includes the bodily and the sexual sins; but he also includes idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, heresies, envy, murder. The flesh to him was not a physical thing but spiritual. It was human nature in all its sin and weakness; it was all that man is without God and without Christ.

(ii) There is the word Spirit; in Rom. 8 it occurs no fewer than twenty times. This word has a very definite Old Testament background. In Hebrew it is *ruach*, and it has two basic thoughts. (a) It is not only the word for Spirit; it is also the word for wind. It has always the idea of power about it, power as of a mighty rushing wind. (b) In the Old Testament, it always has the idea of something that is more than human. Spirit, to Paul, represented a power which was divine.

So Paul says in this passage that there was a time when the Christian was at the mercy of his own sinful human nature. In that state the law simply became something that moved him to sin and he went from bad to worse, a defeated and frustrated man. But, when he became a Christian, into his life there came the surging power of the Spirit of God, and, as a result, he entered into victorious living.

In the second part of the passage Paul speaks of the effect of the work of Jesus on us. It is complicated and difficult, but what Paul is getting at is this. Let us remember that he began all this by saying that every man sinned in Adam. We saw how the Jewish conception of solidarity made it possible for him to argue that, quite literally, all men were involved in Adam's sin and in its consequence--death. But there is another side to this picture. Into this world came Jesus; with a completely human nature; and he brought to God a life of perfect obedience, of perfect fulfilment of God's law. Now, because Jesus was fully a man, just as we were one with Adam, we are now one with him; and, just as we were involved in Adam's sin, we are now involved in Jesus' perfection. In him mankind brought to God the perfect obedience, just as in Adam mankind brought to God the fatal disobedience. Men are saved because they were once involved in Adam's sin but are now involved in Jesus' goodness. That is Paul's argument, and, to him and to those who heard it, it was completely

convincing, however hard it is for us to grasp it. Because of what Jesus did, there opens out to the Christian a life no longer dominated by the flesh but by that Spirit of God, which fills a man with a power not his own. The penalty of the past is removed and strength for his future is assured.

Lesson 8 Readings

THE TWO PRINCIPLES OF LIFE

Rom. 8:5-11

Those who live according to the dictates of sinful human nature are absorbed in worldly human things. Those who live according to the dictates of the Spirit are absorbed in the things of the Spirit. To be absorbed in worldly human things is death; but to be absorbed in the things of the Spirit is life and peace, because absorption in the things which fascinate our sinful human nature is hostility to God, for it does not obey the law of God, nor, indeed, can it do so. Those whose life is a purely worldly thing cannot please God; but you are not dominated by the pursuits which fascinate our sinful human nature; you are dominated by the Spirit, if so it be that the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not possess the Spirit of Christ he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, even if because of sin your body is mortal, your Spirit has life through righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you he will make even your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit indwelling in you.

Paul is drawing a contrast between two kinds of life.

(i) There is the life which is dominated by sinful human nature; whose focus and centre is self; whose only law is its own desires; which takes what it likes where it likes. In different people that life will be differently described. It may be passion-controlled, or lust-controlled, or pride-controlled, or ambition-controlled. Its characteristic is its absorption in the things that human nature without Christ sets its heart upon.

(ii) There is the life that is dominated by the Spirit of God. As a man lives in the air, he lives in Christ, never separated from him. As he breathes in the air and the air fills him, so Christ fills him. He has no mind of his own; Christ is his mind. He has no desires of his own; the will of Christ is his only law. He is Spirit-controlled, Christ-controlled, God-focused.

These two lives are going in diametrically opposite directions. The life that is dominated by the desires and activities of sinful human nature is on the way to death. In the most literal sense, there is no future in it--because it is getting further and further away from God. To allow the things of the world completely to dominate life is self extinction; it is spiritual suicide. By living it, a man is making himself totally unfit ever to stand in the presence of God. He is hostile to him, resentful of his law and his control. God is not his friend but his enemy, and no man ever won the last battle against him.

The Spirit-controlled life, the Christ-centred life, the God-focused life is daily coming nearer heaven even when it is still on earth. It is a life which is such a steady progress to God that the final transition of death is only a natural and inevitable stage on the way. It is like Enoch who walked with God and God took him. As the child said: "Enoch was a man who went walks with God--and one day he didn't come back."

No sooner has Paul said this than an inevitable objection strikes him. Someone may object: "You say that the Spirit-controlled man is on the way to life; but in point of fact every man must die. Just what do you mean?" Paul's answer is this. All men die because they are involved in the human situation. Sin came into this world and with sin came death, the consequence of sin. Inevitably, therefore, all men die; but the man who is Spirit-controlled and whose heart is Christ-occupied, dies only to rise again. Paul's basic thought is that the Christian is indissolubly one with Christ. Now Christ died and rose again; and the man who is one with Christ is one with death's conqueror and shares in that victory. The Spirit controlled, Christ-possessed man is on the way to life; death is but an inevitable interlude that has to be passed through on the way.

ENTRY INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD

Rom. 8:12-17

So then, brothers, a duty is laid upon us--and that duty is not to our own sinful human nature, to live according to the principles of that same nature; for, if you live according to the principles of sinful human nature, you are on the way to death; but if by the spirit you kill the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are guided by the Spirit of God, these, and only these, are the children of God. For you did not receive a state whose dominating condition is slavery so that you might relapse into fear; but you received a state whose dominating characteristic is adoption, in which we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. If we are children then we are also heirs; and if we are the heirs of God then we are joint-heirs with Christ. If we suffer with him we shall also be glorified with him.

Paul is introducing us to another of the great metaphors in which he describes the new relationship of the Christian to God. He speaks of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. It is only when we understand how serious and complicated a step Roman adoption was that we really understand the depth of meaning in this passage.

Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Roman patria potestas. This was the father's power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days was actually the power of life and death. In regard to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the patria potestas, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one patria potestas to another.

There were two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio*, and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the *patria potestas* was held to be broken. There followed a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to the praetor, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his *patria potestas*. When all this was completed, the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and an impressive step.

But it is the consequences of adoption which are most significant for the picture that is in Paul's mind. There were four main ones. (i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father. (ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them. (iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do. (iv) In the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father. Roman history provides an outstanding case of how completely this was held to be true. The Emperor Claudius adopted Nero in order that he might succeed him on the throne; they were not in any sense blood relations. Claudius already had a daughter, Octavia. To cement the alliance Nero wished to marry her. Nero and Octavia were in no sense blood relations; yet, in the eyes of the law, they were brother and sister; and before they could marry, the Roman senate had to pass special legislation.

That is what Paul is thinking of. He uses still another picture from Roman adoption. He says that God's spirit witnesses with our spirit that we really are his children. The adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. Now, suppose the adopting father died and there was some dispute about the right of the adopted son to inherit, one or more of the seven witnesses stepped forward and swore that the adoption was genuine. Thus the right of the adopted person was guaranteed and he entered into his inheritance. So, Paul is saying, it is the Holy Spirit himself who is the witness to our adoption into the family of God.

We see then that every step of Roman adoption was meaningful in the mind of Paul when he transferred the picture to our adoption into the family of God. Once we were in the absolute control of our own sinful human nature; but God, in his mercy, has brought us into his absolute possession. The old life has no more rights over us; God has an absolute right. The past is cancelled and its debts are wiped out; we begin a new life with God and become heirs of all his riches. If that is so, we become joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, God's own Son. That which Christ inherits, we also inherit. If Christ had to suffer, we also inherit that suffering; but if Christ was raised to life and glory, we also inherit that life and glory.

It was Paul's picture that when a man became a Christian he entered into the very family of God. He did nothing to deserve it; God, the great Father, in his amazing love and mercy, has taken the lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinner and adopted him into his own family, so that the debts are cancelled and the glory inherited.

THE GLORIOUS HOPE

Rom. 8:18-25

For I am convinced that the sufferings of this present age cannot be compared with the glory which is destined to be disclosed to us. The created world awaits with eager expectation the day when those who are the sons of God will be displayed in all their glory. For the created world has been subjected to chaos, not because of its own choice, but through him who passed the sentence of such subjugation upon it, and yet it still has the hope that the created world also will be liberated from this slavery to decay and will be brought to the freedom of the glory of the children of God; for we know that the whole creation unites together in groans and agonies. Not only does the created world do so, but so do we, even though we have received the first-fruits of the spirit as a foretaste of the coming glory, yes, we too groan within ourselves earnestly awaiting the full realization of our adoption into the family of God. I mean the redemption of our body. For it is by hope that we are saved; but a hope which is already visible is not a hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then in patience we eagerly wait for it.

Paul has just been speaking of the glory of adoption into the family of God; and then he comes back to the troubled state of this present world. He draws a great picture. He speaks with a poet's vision. He sees all nature waiting for the glory that shall be. At the moment creation is in bondage to decay.

"Change and decay in all around I see."

The world is one where beauty fades and loveliness decays; it is a dying world; but it is waiting for its liberation from all this and the coming of the state of glory.

When Paul was painting this picture, he was working with ideas that any Jew would recognize and understand. He talks of this present age and of the glory that will be disclosed. Jewish thought divided time into two sections--this present age and the age to come. This present age was wholly bad, subject to sin, and death and decay. Some day there would come The Day of the Lord. That would be a day of judgment when the world would be shaken to its foundations; but out of it there would come a new world.

The renovation of the world was one of the great Jewish thoughts. The Old Testament speaks of it without elaboration and without detail. "Behold I create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17). But in the days between the Testaments, when the Jews were oppressed and enslaved and persecuted, they dreamed their dreams of that new earth and that renovated world.

"The vine shall yield its fruit ten thousand fold, and on each vine there shall be a thousand branches; and each branch shall produce a thousand clusters; and each cluster produce a thousand grapes; and each grape a cor of wine. And those who have hungered shall rejoice; moreover, also, they shall behold marvels every day. For winds shall go forth from before

me to bring every morning the fragrance of aromatic fruits, and at the close of the day clouds distilling the dews of health" (Bar. 29:5).

"And earth, and all the trees, and the innumerable flocks of sheep shall give their true fruit to mankind, of wine and of sweet honey and of white milk and corn, which to men is the most excellent gift of all" (Sibylline Oracles 3: 620-633).

"Earth, the universal mother, shall give to mortals her best fruit in countless store of corn, wine and oil. Yea, from heaven shall come a sweet draught of luscious honey. The trees shall yield their proper fruits, and rich flocks, and kine, and lambs of sheep and kids of goats. He will cause sweet fountains of white milk to burst forth. And the cities shall be full of good things, and the fields rich; neither shall there be any sword throughout the land or battle-din; nor shall the earth be convulsed any more with deep-drawn groans. No war shall be any more, nor shall there be any more drought throughout the land, no famine, or hail to work havoc on the crops" (Sibylline Oracles 3: 744-756).

The dream of the renovated world was dear to the Jews. Paul knew that, and here he, as it were, endows creation with consciousness. He thinks of nature longing for the day when sin's dominion would be broken, death and decay would be gone, and God's glory would come. With a touch of imaginative insight, he says that the state of nature was even worse than the state of men. Man had sinned deliberately; but it was involuntarily that nature was subjected. Unwittingly she was involved in the consequences of the sin of man. "Cursed is the ground because of you," God said to Adam after his sin (Gen. 3:17). So here, with a poet's eye, Paul sees nature waiting for liberation from the death and decay that man's sin had brought into the world.

If that is true of nature, it is still truer of man. So Paul goes on to think of human longing. In the experience of the Holy Spirit men had a foretaste, a first instalment, of the glory that shall be; now they long with all their hearts for the full realization of what adoption into the family of God means. That final adoption will be the redemption of their bodies. In the state of glory Paul did not think of man as a disembodied spirit. Man in this world is a body and a spirit; and in the world of glory the total man will be saved. But his body will no longer be the victim of decay and the instrument of sin; it will be a spiritual body fit for the life of a spiritual man.

Then comes a great saying. "We are saved by hope." The blazing truth that lit life for Paul was that the human situation is not hopeless. Paul was no pessimist. H. G. Wells once said: "Man, who began in a cave behind a windbreak, will end in the disease soaked ruins of a slum." Not so Paul. He saw man's sin and the state of the world; but he also saw God's redeeming power; and the end of it all for him was hope. Because of that, to Paul life was not a despairing waiting for an inevitable end in a world encompassed by sin and death and decay; life was an eager anticipation of a liberation, a renovation and a recreation wrought by the glory and the power of God.

In Rom. 8:19 he uses a wonderful word for eager expectation. It is *apokaradokia* (GSN0603) and it describes the attitude of a man who scans the horizon with head thrust

forward, eagerly searching the distance for the first signs of the dawn break of glory. To Paul life was not a weary, defeated waiting; it was a throbbing, vivid expectation. The Christian is involved in the human situation. Within he must battle with his own evil human nature; without he must live in a world of death and decay. Nonetheless, the Christian does not live only in the world; he also lives in Christ. He does not see only the world; he looks beyond it to God. He does not see only the consequences of man's sin; he sees the power of God's mercy and love. Therefore, the keynote of the Christian life is always hope and never despair. The Christian waits, not for death, but for life.

ALL IS OF GOD

Rom. 8:26-30

Even so, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know what we should pray, if we are to pray as we ought. But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings which baffle speech to utter; but he who searches the hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because it is by God's will that he intercedes for those whose lives are consecrated to God. We know that God intermingles all things for good for those who love him, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he knew long ago he long ago designed to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers. Those whom he long ago designed for this purpose, he also called; and those whom he called he put into a right relationship with himself; and those whom he put into a right relationship with himself he also glorified.

Rom. 8:26-27 form one of the most important passages on prayer in the whole New Testament. Paul is saying that, because of our weakness, we do not know what to pray for, but the prayers we ought to offer are offered for us by the Holy Spirit. C. H. Dodd defines prayer in this way--"Prayer is the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us."

There are two very obvious reasons why we cannot pray as we ought. First, we cannot pray aright because we cannot foresee the future. We cannot see a year or even an hour ahead; and we may well pray, therefore, to be saved from things which are for our good and we may well pray for things which would be to our ultimate harm. Second, we cannot pray aright because in any given situation we do not know what is best for us. We are often in the position of a child who wants something which would be bound only to hurt him; and God is often in the position of a parent who has to refuse his child's request or compel him to do something he does not want to do, because he knows what is to the child's good far better than the child himself.

Even the Greeks knew that. Pythagoras forbade his disciples to pray for themselves, because, he said, they could never in their ignorance know what was expedient for them. Xenophon tells us that Socrates taught his disciples simply to pray for good things, and not to attempt to specify them, but to leave God to decide what the good things were. C. H. Dodd puts it in this way. We cannot know our own real need; we cannot with our finite

minds grasp God's plan; in the last analysis all that we can bring to God is an inarticulate sigh which the Spirit will translate to God for us.

As Paul saw it, prayer, like everything else, is of God. He knew that by no possible human effort can a man justify himself; and he also knew that by no possible effort of the human intelligence can a man know for what to pray. In the last analysis the perfect prayer is simply, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. Not my will, but Thine be done."

But Paul goes on from there. He says that those who love God, and who are called according to his purpose, know well that God is intermingling all things for good to them. It is the experience of life for the Christian that all things do work together for good. We do not need to be very old to look back and see that things we thought were disasters worked out to our good; things that we thought were disappointments worked out to greater blessings.

But we have to note that that experience comes only to those who love God. The Stoics had a great idea which may well have been in Paul's mind when he wrote this passage. One of their great conceptions was the *logos* of God, which was God's mind or the reason. The Stoic believed that this world was permeated with that *logos*. It was the *logos* which put sense into the world. It was the *logos* which kept the stars in their courses and the planets in their appointed tracks. It was the *logos* which controlled the ordered succession of night and day, and summer and winter and spring and autumn. The *logos* was the reason and the mind of God in the universe, making it an order and not a chaos.

The Stoic went further. He believed that the *logos* not only had an order for the universe, but also a plan and a purpose for the life of every individual man. To put it in another way, the Stoic believed that nothing could happen to a man which did not come from God and which was not part of God's plan for him. Epictetus writes: "Have courage to look up to God and to say, 'Deal with me as thou wilt from now on. I am as one with thee; I am thine; I flinch from nothing so long as thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where thou wilt; put on me what raiment thou wilt. Wouldst thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For this I will defend thee before men.'" The Stoic taught that the duty of every man was acceptance. If he accepted the things that God sent him, he knew peace. If he struggled against them, he was uselessly battering his head against the ineluctable purpose of God.

Paul has the very same thought. He says that all things work together for good, but only to them that love God. If a man loves and trusts and accepts God, if he is convinced that God is the all-wise and all-loving Father, then he can humbly accept all that he sends to him. A man may go to a physician, and be prescribed a course of treatment which at the time is unpleasant or even painful; but if he trusts the wisdom of the man of skill, he accepts the thing that is laid upon him. It is so with us if we love God. But if a man does not love and trust God, he may well resent what happens to him and may well fight against God's will. It is only to the man who loves and trusts that all things work together for good, for to him they come from a Father who in perfect wisdom, love and power is working ever for the best.

Paul goes further; he goes on to speak of the spiritual experience of every Christian. The King James Version rendering is famous. "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. 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." This is a passage which has been very seriously misused. If we are ever to understand it we must grasp the basic fact that Paul never meant it to be the expression of theology or philosophy; he meant it to be the almost lyrical expression of Christian experience. If we take it as philosophy and theology and apply the standards of cold logic to it, it must mean that God chose some and did not choose others. But that is not what it means.

Think of the Christian experience. The more a Christian thinks of his experience the more he becomes convinced that he had nothing to do with it and all is of God. Jesus Christ came into this world; he lived; he went to the Cross; he rose again. We did nothing to bring that about; that is God's work. We heard the story of this wondrous love. We did not make the story; we only received the story. Love woke within our hearts; the conviction of sin came, and with it came the experience of forgiveness and of salvation. We did not achieve that; all is of God. That is what Paul is thinking of here.

The Old Testament has an illuminating use of the word to know. "I knew you in the wilderness," said God to Hosea about the people of Israel (Hos. 13:5). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," said God to Amos (Am. 3:2). When the Bible speaks of God knowing a man, it means that he has a purpose and a plan and a task for that man. And when we look back upon our Christian experience, all we can say is, "I did not do this; I could never have done this; God did everything." And we know well that this does not take freewill away. God knew Israel, but the day came when Israel refused the destiny God meant her to have. God's unseen guiding is in our lives, but to the end of the day we can refuse it and take our own way.

It is the deep experience of the Christian that all is of God; that he did nothing and that God did everything. That is what Paul means here. He means that from the beginning of time God marked us out for salvation; that in due time his call came to us; but the pride of man's heart can wreck God's plan and the disobedience of man's will can refuse the call.

THE LOVE FROM WHICH NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US

Rom. 8:31-39

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? The very God who did not spare his own Son but who delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall impeach the elect of God? It is God who acquits. Who is he who condemns? It is Jesus Christ who died, nay rather, who was raised from the dead, and who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trial, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it stands written, "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are reckoned as sheep for the slaughter."

But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor the present age, nor the age to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is one of the most lyrical passages Paul ever wrote. In Rom. 8:32 there is a wonderful allusion which would stand out to any Jew who knew his Old Testament well. Paul says in effect: "God for us did not spare his own Son; surely that is the final guarantee that he loves us enough to supply all our needs." The words Paul uses of God are the very words God used of Abraham when Abraham proved his utter loyalty by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command. God said to Abraham: "You have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gen. 22:12). Paul seems to say: "Think of the greatest human example in the world of a man's loyalty to God; God's loyalty to you is like that." Just as Abraham was so loyal to God that he was prepared to sacrifice his dearest possession, God is so loyal to men that he is prepared to sacrifice his only Son for them. Surely we can trust a loyalty like that for anything.

It is difficult to know just how to take Rom. 8:33-35. There are two ways of taking them and both give excellent sense and precious truth.

(i) We can take them as two statements, followed by two questions which give the inferences to be made from these statements. (a) It is God who acquits men--that is the statement. If that be so who can possibly condemn men? If man is acquitted by God, then he is saved from every other condemnation. (b) Our belief is in a Christ who died and rose again and who is alive for evermore--that is the statement. If that be so, is there anything in this or any other world that can separate us from our Risen Lord?

If we take it that way two great truths are laid down. (a) God has acquitted us; therefore no one can condemn us. (b) Christ is risen; therefore nothing can ever separate us from him.

(ii) But there is another way to take it. God has acquitted us. Who then can condemn us? The answer is that the Judge of all men is Jesus Christ. He is the one who has the right to condemn--but so far from condemning, he is at God's right hand interceding for us, and therefore we are safe.

It may be that in Rom. 8:34 Paul is doing a very wonderful thing. He is saying four things about Jesus. (a) He died. (b) He rose again. (c) He is at the right hand of God. (d) He makes intercession for us there. Now the earliest creed of the Church, which is still the essence of all Christian creeds, ran like this: "He was crucified dead and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; and sitteth at the right hand of God; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Three items in Paul's statement and in the early creed are the same, that Jesus died, rose again, and is at the right hand of God. But the fourth is different. In the creed the fourth is that Jesus will come to be the judge of the quick and the dead. In Paul the fourth is that Jesus is at God's right hand to plead our case. It is as if Paul said: "You think of Jesus as the Judge who is there to condemn; and well he might for he has won the

right. But you are wrong; he is not there to be our prosecuting counsel but to be the advocate to plead our cause."

I think that the second way of taking this is right. With one tremendous leap of thought Paul has seen Christ, not as the Judge but as the lover of the souls of men.

Paul goes on with a poet's fervour and a lover's rapture to sing of how nothing can separate us from the love of God in our Risen Lord.

(i) No affliction, no hardship, no peril can separate us. (Rom. 8:35.) The disasters of the world do not separate a man from Christ; they bring him closer yet.

(ii) In Rom. 8:38-39 Paul makes a list of terrible things.

Neither life nor death can separate us from Christ. In life we live with Christ; in death we die with him; and because we die with him, we also rise with him. Death, so far from being a separation, is only a step into his nearer presence; not the end but "the gate on the skyline" leading to the presence of Jesus Christ.

The angelic powers cannot separate us from him. At this particular time the Jews had a highly developed belief in angels. Everything had its angel. There was an angel of the winds, of the clouds, of the snow and hail and hoarfrost. of the thunder and the lightning, of cold and heat, of the seasons. The Rabbis said that there was nothing in the world, not even a blade of grass, that had not got its angel. According to the Rabbis there were three ranks of angels. The first included thrones, cherubim and seraphim. The second included powers, lordships and mights. The third included angels and archangels and principalities. More than once Paul speaks of these angels (Eph. 1:21; Eph. 3:10; Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:10,15; 1 Cor. 15:24). Now the Rabbis--and Paul had once been a Rabbi--believed that they were grudgingly hostile to men. They believed that they had been angry when God created man. It was as if they did not want to share God with anyone and had grudged man his share in him. The Rabbis had a legend that when God appeared on Sinai to give Moses the law he was attended by his hosts of angels, and the angels grudged Israel the law, and assaulted Moses on his way up the mountain and would have stopped him had not God intervened. So Paul, thinking in terms of his own day, says, "Not even the grudging, jealous angels can separate us from the love of God, much as they would like to do so."

No age in time can separate us from Christ. Paul speaks of things present and things to come. We know that the Jews divided all time into this present age and the age to come. Paul is saying: "In this present world nothing can separate us from God in Christ; the day will come when this world will be shattered and the new age will dawn. It does not matter; even then, when this world has passed and the new world come, the bond is still the same."

No malign influences (powers) will separate us from Christ. Paul speaks about height and depth. These are astrological terms. The ancient world was haunted by the tyranny of the stars. They believed that a man was born under a certain star and thereby his destiny was settled. There are some who still believe that; but the ancient world was really haunted by

this supposed domination of a man's life by the influence of the stars. Height (hupsoma, GSN5313) was the time when a star was at its zenith and its influence was greatest; depth (bathos) was the time when a star was at its lowest, waiting to rise and to put its influence on some man. Paul says to these haunted men of his age: "The stars cannot hurt you. In their rising and their setting they are powerless to separate you from God's love."

No other world can separate us from God. The word that Paul uses for other (heteros) has really the meaning of different. He is saying: "Suppose that by some wild flight of imagination there emerged another and a different world, you would still be safe; you would still be enwrapped in the love of God."

Here is a vision to take away all loneliness and all fear. Paul is saying: "You can think of every terrifying thing that this or any other world can produce. Not one of them is able to separate the Christian from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, Lord of every terror and Master of every world." Of what then shall we be afraid?

Lesson 9 Readings

THE PROBLEM OF THE JEWS

In Rom. 9-11 Paul tries to deal with one of the most bewildering problems that the Church has to solve--the problem of the Jews. They were God's chosen people; they had had a unique place in God's purposes; and yet when God's Son had come into the world they had rejected him and crucified him. How is this tragic paradox to be explained? That is the problem with which Paul seeks to deal in these chapters. They are complicated and difficult, and, before we begin to study them in detail, it will be well to set out the broad lines of the solution which Paul presented.

One thing we must note before we begin to disentangle Paul's thought--the chapters were written not in anger but in heartbreak. He could never forget that he was a Jew and he would gladly have laid down his own life if, by so doing, he could have brought his brethren to Jesus Christ.

Paul never denies that the Jews were the chosen people. God adopted them as his own; he gave them the covenants and the service of the Temple and the law; he gave them the presence of his own glory; he gave them the patriarchs. Above all Jesus was a Jew. The special place of the Jews in God's economy of salvation Paul accepts as an axiom and as the starting-point of the whole problem.

The first point which he makes is this--it is true that the Jews as a nation rejected and crucified Jesus, but it is also true, that not all the Jews rejected him; some received him and believed in him, for all the early followers of Jesus were Jews. Paul then looks back on history and insists that racial descent from Abraham does not make a Jew. Over and over again in Jewish history there was in God's ways a process of selection--Paul calls it election--whereby some of those who were racial descendants of Abraham were chosen and some

rejected. In the case of Abraham, Isaac, the son born according to the promise of God, was chosen, but Ishmael, the son born of purely natural desire, was not. In the case of Isaac, his son Jacob was chosen, but Esau, Jacob's twin, was not. This selection had nothing to do with merit; it was the work entirely of God's electing wisdom and power.

Further, the real chosen people never lay in the whole nation; it always lay in the righteous remnant, the few who were true to God when all others denied him. It was so in the days of Elijah, when seven thousand remained faithful to God after the rest of the nation had gone after Baal. It was an essential part of the teaching of Isaiah, who said: "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved" (Isa. 10:22; Rom. 9:27). Paul's first point is that at no time were the whole people the chosen people. There was always selection, election, on the part of God.

Is it fair of God to elect some and to reject others? And, if some men are elected and others are rejected through no virtue or fault of their own, how can you blame them if they reject Christ, and how can you praise them if they accept him? Here Paul uses an argument at which the mind staggers, and from which we quite properly recoil. Bluntly, it is that God can do what he likes and that man has no right whatever to question his decisions, however inscrutable they may be. The clay cannot talk back to the potter. A craftsman may make two vessels, one for an honourable purpose and another for a menial purpose; the vessels have nothing whatever to do with it. That, said Paul, is what God has a right to do with men. He quotes the instance of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17) and says that he was brought on to the stage of history simply to be the instrument through which God's avenging power was demonstrated. In any event, the people of Israel had been forewarned of the election of the Gentiles and of their own rejection, for, did not the prophet Hosea write: "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people', and her who was not beloved I will call 'my beloved'" (Hos. 1:10; Rom. 9:25).

However, this rejection of Israel was not callous and haphazard. The door was shut to the Jews that it might be opened to the Gentiles. God hardened the hearts of the Jews and blinded their eyes with the ultimate purpose of opening a way for the Gentiles into the faith. Here is a strange and terrible argument. Stripped of all its non-essentials, it is that God can do what he likes with any man or nation. and that he deliberately darkened the minds and shut the eyes of the Jews in order that the Gentiles might come in.

What was the fundamental mistake of the Jews? This may seem a curious question to ask in view of what we have just said. But, paradoxically, Paul holds that though the rejection of the Jews was the work of God, it need never have happened. He cannot get rid of the eternal paradox--nor does he desire to--that at one and the same time all is of God and man has free-will. The fundamental mistake of the Jews was that they tried to get into a right relationship with God through their own efforts. They tried to earn salvation; whereas the Gentiles simply accepted the offer of God in perfect trust. The Jews should have known that the only way to God was the way of faith and that human achievement led nowhere. Did not Isaiah say: "No one who believes in him will be put to shame"? (Isa. 28:16; Rom. 10:11.) Did not Joel say: "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved"? (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13.) True, no man can have faith until he hears the offer of God; but to the Jews

that offer was made. They clung to the way of human achievement through obedience to the law; they staked everything on works, but they should have known that the way to God was the way of faith, for the prophets had told them so.

Once again it is to be stressed that all this was God's arrangement; and that it was so arranged to allow the Gentiles to come in. Paul therefore turns to the Gentiles. He orders them to have no pride. They are in the position of wild olive shoots which have been grafted into a garden olive tree. They did not achieve their own salvation any more than the Jews did; in point of fact they are dependent on the Jews; they are only engrafted branches; the root and the stem are still the chosen people. The fact of their own election and the fact of the rejection of the Jews are not to produce pride in Gentile hearts. If that happens, rejection can and will happen to them.

Is this the end? Far from it. It is God's purpose that the Jews will be moved to envy at the relationship of the Gentiles to him and that they will ask to be admitted to it themselves. Did not Moses say: "I make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry"? (Deut. 32:21; Rom. 10:19.) In the end the Gentiles will be the very instrument by which the Jews will be saved. "And so all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

So Paul comes to the end of the argument. We may summarily set out its steps.

(i) Israel is the chosen people.

(ii) To be a member of Israel means more than racial descent. There has always been election within the nation; and the best of the nation has always been the remnant who were faithful.

(iii) This selection by God is not unfair, for he has the right to do what he likes.

(iv) God did harden the hearts of the Jews, but only to open the door to the Gentiles.

(v) Israel's mistake was dependence on human achievement founded on the law; the necessary approach to God is that of the totally trusting heart.

(vi) The Gentiles must have no pride for they are only wild olives grafted into the true olive stock. They must remember that.

(vii) This is not the end; the Jews will be so moved to wondering envy at the privilege that the Gentiles have received that in the end they will be brought in by them.

(viii) So in the very end all, Jew and Gentile, will be saved.

The glory is in the end of Paul's argument. He began by saying that some were elected to reception and some to rejection. In the end he comes to say that it is God's will that all men should be saved.

THE TRAGIC FAILURE

Rom. 9:1-6

I tell you the truth as one who is united to Christ is bound to do. I do not lie. My conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit when I say that my grief is great and there is unceasing anguish in my heart. I could pray that I myself might be accursed so that I was completely separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen as far as human relationship goes. For my kinsmen are the Israelites, and theirs is the special sonship of God, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the worship of the Temple and the promises. To them the fathers belong. And from them, on his human side, came the Anointed One of God. Blessed for ever be the God who is over all! Amen.

Paul begins his attempt to explain the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ. He begins, not in anger, but in sorrow. Here is no tempest of anger and no outbreak of enraged condemnation; here is the poignant sorrow of the broken heart. Paul was like the God whom he loved and served--he hated the sin. but he loved the sinner. No man will ever even begin to try to save men unless he first loves them. Paul sees the Jews, not as people to be lashed with anger, but as people to be yearned over with longing love.

Willingly Paul would have laid down his life if he could have won the Jews for Christ. It may be that his thoughts were going back to one of the greatest episodes in Jewish history. When Moses went up the mountain to receive the law from the hands of God, the people who had been left below sinned by making the golden calf and worshipping it. God was wroth with them; and then Moses prayed the great prayer: "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Exo.32:32).

Paul says that for the sake of his brethren he would consent to be accursed if it would do any good. The word he uses is anathema and it is a terrible word. A thing which was anathema was under the ban; it was devoted to God for utter destruction. When a heathen city was taken, everything in it was devoted to utter destruction, for it was polluted (Deut. 3:6; Deut. 2:34; Josh. 6:17; Josh. 7:1-26). If a man tried to lure Israel away from the worship of the true God, he was pitilessly condemned to utter destruction (Deut. 13:8-11). The dearest thing in all Paul's life was the fact that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus; but, if it would do anything to save his brethren, he would even accept banishment from God.

Here again is the great truth that the man who would save the sinner must love him. When a son or a daughter has done something wrong and incurred punishment, many a father and a mother would gladly bear that punishment if only they could. As Myers makes Paul say in his poem Saint Paul:

"Then with a thrill the intolerable craving, Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call; O to save these, to perish for their saving-- Die for their life, be offered for them all."

That is what God felt; that is what Paul felt; and that is what we must feel.

Paul did not for a moment deny the place of the Jews in the economy of God. He enumerates their privileges.

(i) In a special sense they were children of God, specially chosen, specially adopted into the family of God. "You are the sons of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). "Is not he your father, who created you?" (Deut. 32:6). "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exo. 4:22). "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt called my son" (Hos. 11:1). The Bible is full of this idea of the special sonship of Israel and of Israel's refusal to accept it in the fullest sense.

Boreham somewhere tells how he was visiting in a friend's house when he was a boy. There was one room into which it was forbidden to go. One day he was opposite the room when the door opened and inside he saw a boy of his own age, but in a dreadful state of animal idiocy. He saw the boy's mother go to his side. She must have seen young Boreham in all his health and sanity and then looked at her own son; and the comparison must have pierced her heart. He saw her kneel by the idiot boy's bedside and heard her cry out in a kind of anguish: "I've fed you and clothed you and loved you--and you've never known me." That was what God might have said to Israel--only in this case it was worse, for Israel's rejection was deliberate and open-eyed. It is a terrible thing to break the heart of God.

(ii) Israel had the glory. The shekinah or kaboth occurs again and again in Israel's history. It was the divine splendour of light which descended when God was visiting his people (Exo.16:10; Exo.24:16-17; Exo.29:43; Exo.33:18-22). Israel had seen the glory of God and yet had rejected him. To us it has been given to see the glory of God's love and mercy in the face of Jesus Christ; it is a terrible thing if we then choose the ways of earth.

(iii) Israel had the covenants. A covenant is a relationship entered into between two people, a bargain for mutual profit, an engagement for mutual friendship. Again and again God had approached the people of Israel and entered into a special relationship with them. He did so with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob and upon Mount Sinai when he gave the law.

Irenaeus distinguishes four great occasions when God entered into agreement with men. The first was the covenant with Noah after the flood, and the sign was the rainbow in the heavens which stood for God's promise that the floods would not come again. The second was the covenant with Abraham and its sign was the sign of circumcision. The third was the covenant with the nation entered into on Mount Sinai and its basis was the law. The fourth is the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

It is an amazing thing to think of God approaching men and entering into a pledged relationship with them. It is the simple truth that God has never left men alone. He did not make one approach and then abandon them. He has made approach after approach; and he still makes approach after approach to the individual human soul. He stands at the door and knocks; and it is the awful responsibility of human will that man can refuse to open.

(iv) They had the law. Israel could never plead ignorance of God's will; God had told them what he desired them to do. If they sinned, they sinned in knowledge and not in ignorance, and the sin of knowledge is the sin against the light which is worst of all.

(v) They had the worship of the Temple. Worship is in essence the approach of the soul to God; and God in the Temple worship had given to the Jews a special road of approach to himself. If the door to God was shut, they had shut it on themselves.

(vi) They had the promises. Israel could never say that it did not know its destiny. God had told them of the task and the privilege which were in store for them in his purpose. They knew that they were destined for great things in the economy of God.

(vii) They had the fathers. They had a tradition and a history; and it is a poor man who can dare to be false to his traditions and to shame the heritage into which he has entered.

(viii) Then comes the culmination. From them there came the Anointed One of God. All else had been a preparation for this; and yet when he came they rejected him. The biggest grief a man can have is to give his child every chance of success, to sacrifice and save and toil to give him the opportunity, and then to find that the child, through his disobedience or rebelliousness or self-indulgence, has failed to grasp it. Therein lies tragedy, for therein is the waste of love's labour and the defeat of love's dream. The tragedy of Israel was that God had prepared her for the day of the coming of his Son--and all the preparation was frustrated. It was not that God's law had been broken; it was that God's love had been spurned. It is not the anger, but the broken heart of God, which lies behind Paul's words.

THE CHOICE OF GOD

Rom. 9:7-13

But it is not as though the word of God had been completely frustrated. For not all who belong to the race of Israel are really Israel; nor are all really children because they can claim physical descent from Abraham. On the contrary, it is written: "In Isaac will your descendants be called." That is to say, it is not the children who can claim merely physical descent who are really the children of God. No! It is the children of the promise who are reckoned as the true descendants of Abraham, for the word of the promise runs like this: "I will come at this time and Sarah will have a son." Not only this, but when Rebecca, too, was brought to bed with child by one, I mean Isaac, our father--and note that the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad, so that God's purpose in choice should stand, not in consequence of any deeds, but simply because he called them--it was said to her: "The elder will be the servant of the younger." As it stands written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

If the Jews have rejected and crucified Jesus, the Son of God, is that to say that God's purposes were frustrated and his plan defeated? Paul produces a strange argument to prove that it is not so. In point of fact not all the Jews did reject Jesus; some of them

accepted him, for, of course, all the early followers were Jews, as was Paul himself. Now, he says, if we go back through the history of Israel, we will see again and again a process of selection at work. Again and again we see that it was not all Jews who were within the design of God. Some were and some were not. The line of the nation through which God worked, and in which he carried out his plan, was not at any time composed of all those who could claim physical descent from Abraham. At the back of the whole plan there is not merely physical descent; there is the selection, the election of God.

To prove his case, Paul cites two instances from Jewish history and buttresses them with proof texts. Abraham had two sons. There was Ishmael, who was the son of the bondwoman Hagar, and there was Isaac, who was the son of his wife Sarah. Both were true blood descendants of Abraham. It was late in life when Sarah had a son, so late that it was, humanly speaking, an impossibility. As he grew up, there came a day when Ishmael mocked at Isaac. Sarah resented it, and demanded that Hagar and Ishmael should be ejected and that Isaac alone should inherit. Abraham was very unwilling to eject them, but God told him to do so, for it was in Isaac that his descendants would preserve his name (Gen. 21:12). Now Ishmael had been the son of natural human desire; but Isaac had been the son of God's promise (Gen. 18:10-14). It was to the child of the promise that the real descent was given. Here is the first proof that not all physical descendants of Abraham are to be ranked as the chosen ones. Within the nation, God's selection and election have gone on.

Paul proceeds to cite another instance. When Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, was with child, she was told by God that in her womb there were two children who would be the fathers of two nations; but that in the days to come the elder would serve and be subject to the younger (Gen. 25:23). So the twins Esau and Jacob were born. Esau was the elder twin, and yet the choice of God fell on Jacob, and it was through the line of Jacob that God's will was to be done. To clinch the argument Paul cites Mal. 1:2-3, where God is represented as saying to the prophet: "I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau."

Paul argues that there is more to Jewishness than descent from Abraham, that the chosen people were not simply the entire sum of all the physical descendants of Abraham, that within that family there was a process of election all through history. A Jew would thoroughly understand and accept the argument so far. The Arabs were the descendants of Ishmael who was a flesh and blood son of Abraham, but the Jews would never have dreamed of saying that the Arabs belonged to the chosen people. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau--that in fact is what Malachi means--and Esau was a true son of Isaac, even the twin brother of Jacob, but no Jew would ever have said that the Edomites had any share in the chosen people. From the Jewish point of view Paul has made his point; there was election within the family of Abraham's physical descendants.

He makes the further point that that selection had nothing to do with deeds and merit. The proof is that Jacob was chosen and Esau was rejected, before either of them was born. The choice was made while they were still in their mother's womb.

Our minds stagger at this argument. It presents us with the picture of a God who apparently quite arbitrarily chooses one and rejects the other. To us it is not a valid

argument, because it makes God responsible for an action which does not seem to be ethically justified. But the fact remains that it would strike home to a Jew. And even to us, at the heart of this argument one great truth remains. Everything is of God; behind everything is his action; even the things which seem arbitrary and haphazard go back to him. Nothing in this world moves with aimless feet.

THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD

Rom. 9:14-18

What shall we then say? Are you going to say that there is injustice with God? God forbid! For, he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whomsoever I will have mercy and I will have pity on whomsoever I will have pity." So then the whole matter depends not on man's will and not on man's effort, but entirely on the mercy of God. For scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this one thing I assigned you a part in the drama of history--that I might demonstrate my power by what happens to you, and that my name might be broadcast throughout all the world." So then he has mercy on whom he will, but he hardens whom he will.

Paul now begins to meet the very arguments and objections which rise in our own minds. He has stated that in all Israel's history the process of selection and election has gone on; he has stressed the fact that this election was based not on any merit of the person elected but on nothing else than the will of God himself. The objector asks: "Is that fair? Is it just of God to pursue a policy of quite arbitrary selection altogether?" Paul's answer is that God can do what he chooses to do. In the terrible days of the Roman Empire, when no man's life was safe and any one might die at the whim of an irresponsible and suspicious Emperor, Galba said, when he became Emperor, that now "he could do what he liked and do it to anyone." To be honest, that is what Paul is saying about God in this passage.

Again he cites two instances to prove his point and buttresses them with scripture quotations. The first is from Exo. 33:19. Moses is beseeching some real proof that God is really with the people of Israel. God's answer is that he will have mercy on those on whom he chooses to have mercy. His attitude of loving mercy to the nation depends on himself alone. The other instance is from Israel's battle for release from Egypt and the power of Pharaoh. When Moses first went to ask for that release, he warned Pharaoh that God had simply brought him on to the stage of history to demonstrate the divine power and to serve to all men as an example of what happens to the man who opposes it (Exo. 9-16).

Once again our mind staggers at this argument. It is, of course, not true to say that God can do anything. He cannot do anything which contradicts his own nature. He cannot be responsible for any act which is unjust and which, in fact, breaks his own laws. We find it hard, and even impossible, to conceive of a God who irresponsibly gives mercy to one and not to another, and who raises up a king to be a mere puppet or lay figure through which his own avenging power may be demonstrated. But the argument would be valid and convincing to a Jew, because again it, in essence, means that God is behind everything.

When we get to the foot of this argument, it does conserve one great truth. It is impossible to think of the relationship between God and man in terms of justice. Man has no claim on God whatever. The created has no claim on the Creator. Whenever justice enters into it, the answer is that from God man deserves nothing and can claim nothing. In God's dealings with men, the essential things are his will and his mercy.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

Rom. 9:19-29

But, then, you may ask, "If this is so how can God go on blaming men if they do not take his way? Who can withstand God's purpose?" Fellow! Who are you to be arguing with God? Surely the thing that is molded into shape cannot say to the man who molds it, "Why did you make me like this?" Has not the potter complete authority over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for an honourable use and another for a menial service? What if God, although it was his will to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, did nonetheless treat with long patience the objects of his wrath, although they were ripe and ready for destruction? Yes, and what if he did it because it is his will to make known the wealth of his glory to the objects of his mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory--I mean us whom he called not only from among the Jews but also from among the Gentiles? Just as he says in Hosea: "A people which was not mine I will call my people; and her who was not beloved I will call beloved." And as he says in that same place where it was said to them: "You are not my people; there they shall be called the sons of the living God." And Isaiah cries about Israel: "Even though the number of the sons of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved, for the Lord will carry out his sentence on earth completely and summarily." And even as Isaiah foretold: "Unless the Lord of Hosts had left us some descendants, we would have become as Sodom, and we would have been like Gomorrah."

In the previous passage Paul had been showing that all through the history of Israel there had been going on a process of election and selection by God. A very natural objection arises--if at the back of the whole process there is the selection and rejection of God, how can God possibly blame the men who have rejected him? Surely the fault is not theirs at all, but God's. Paul's answer is blunt almost to the point of crudity. He says that no man has any right to argue with God. When a potter makes a vessel, it cannot talk back to him; he has absolute power over it; out of the one lump of clay he can make one vessel for an honourable purpose and another for a menial purpose, and the clay has nothing to do with it and has no right whatever to protest. In point of fact Paul took this picture from Jeremiah (Jer. 18:1-6). There are two things to be said about it.

(i) It is a bad analogy. One great New Testament commentator has said that this is one of the very few passages which we wish Paul had not written. There is a difference between a human being and a lump of clay. A human being is a person and a lump of clay is a thing. Maybe you can do what you like with a thing, but you cannot do what you like with a person. Clay does not desire to answer back; does not desire to question; cannot think and

feel; cannot be bewildered and tortured. If someone has inexplicably suffered some tremendous sorrow, it will not help much to tell him that he has no right to complain, because God can do what he likes. That is the mark of a tyrant and not of a loving Father. It is the basic fact of the gospel that God does not treat men as a potter treats a lump of clay; he treats them as a loving father treats his child.

(ii) But when we have said that we must remember one thing--it was out of anguish of heart that Paul wrote this passage. He was faced with the bewildering fact that God's own people, his own kinsmen, had rejected and crucified God's own Son. It was not that Paul wished to say this; he was driven to say it. The only possible explanation he could see was that, for his own purposes, God had somehow blinded his people.

In any event, Paul does not leave the argument there. He goes on to say that this rejection by the Jews had happened in order that the door might be opened to the Gentiles. His argument is not good. It is one thing to say that God used an evil situation to bring good out of it; it is quite another thing to say that he created it to produce good in the end. Paul is saying that God deliberately darkened the minds and blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of the mass of the Jewish people in order that the way might open for the Gentiles to come in. We must remember that this is not the argument of a theologian sitting quietly in a study thinking things out; it is the argument of a man whose heart was in despair to find some reason for a completely incomprehensible situation. In the end the only answer Paul can find is that God did it.

Now Paul was arguing with Jews, and he knew that the only way he could buttress his argument was with quotations from their own scriptures. So he goes on to cite texts to prove that this rejection of the Jews and acceptance of the Gentiles had actually been foretold in the prophets. Hosea had said that God would make a people his people who were not his people (Hos.2:23). He said that a people who were not God's people would be called the sons of God (Hos.1:10). He showed how Isaiah had foreseen a situation when Israel would have been obliterated had not a remnant been left (Isa. 10:22-23; Isa. 37:32). It is his argument that Israel could have foreseen her doom had she only understood.

It is easy in this passage to criticize him, but the one thing that must be remembered is that Paul, in his despairing anguish for his own people, clung to the fact that somehow everything was God's work. For him there was nothing left to say but that.

Lesson 10 Readings

THE JEWISH MISTAKE

Rom. 9:30-33

What shall we then say? The Gentiles who were not looking for a right relationship with God received such a relationship, but it was a relationship which was the result of faith, while Israel which was looking for a law which would produce a right

relationship with God never succeeded in finding such a law. Why? Because they tried to get into a right relationship with God, not by trusting God, but by depending on their own human achievements. They stumbled over the stone which makes men stumble, even as it stands written: "I have set in Zion a stone which makes men stumble, and a rock which makes them trip. And he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

Here Paul draws a contrast between two ways of feeling towards God. There was the Jewish way. The aim of the Jew was to set himself right with God and he regarded a right relationship with God as something which could be earned. There is another way to put that which will show really what it means. Fundamentally, the Jewish idea was that a man, by strict obedience to the law, could pile up a credit balance. The result would be that God was in his debt and owed him salvation. But it was obviously a losing battle, because man's imperfection could never satisfy God's perfection; nothing that man could do could even begin to repay what God has done for him.

That is precisely what Paul found. As he said, the Jew spent his life searching for a law, obedience to which would put him right with God, and he never found it because there was no such law to be found. The Gentile had never engaged upon this search; but when he suddenly was confronted with the incredible love of God in Jesus Christ, he simply cast himself upon that love in total trust. It was as if the Gentile saw the Cross and said, "If God loves me like that I can trust him with my life and with my soul."

The Jew sought to put God in his debt; the Gentile was content to be in God's debt. The Jew believed he could win salvation by doing things for God; the Gentile was lost in amazement at what God had done for him. The Jew sought to find the way to God by works; the Gentile came by the way of trust.

"Not the labours of my hands Can fulfil thy law's demands; Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears for ever flow, All for sin could not atone: Thou must save, and thou alone."

Paul would have said "Amen" to that.

The stone is one of the characteristic references of the early Christian writers. In the Old Testament there is a series of rather mysterious references to the stone. In Isa. 8:14 it is said that God shall be for a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling to the houses of Israel. In Isa. 28:16 God says that he will lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation. In Dn. 2:34-35, Dn. 2:44-45, there is a reference to a mysterious stone. In Ps. 118:22 the Psalmist writes: "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner."

When the Christians began to search the Old Testament for forecasts of Christ they came across these references to this wonderful stone; and they identified Jesus with it. Their warrant was that the gospel story shows Jesus himself making that identification and taking the verse in Ps. 118:22 and applying it to himself (Matt. 21:42). The Christians thought of the stone which was the sure foundation, the stone which was the corner stone

binding the whole building together, the stone which had been rejected and had then become the chief of all the stones, as pictures of Christ himself.

The actual quotation which Paul uses here is a combination of Isa. 8:14 and Isa. 28:16. The Christians, including Paul, took it to mean this--God had intended his Son to be the foundation of every man's life, but when he came the Jews rejected him, and because they rejected him that gift of God which had been meant for their salvation became the reason for their condemnation. This picture of the stone fascinated the Christians. We get it again and again in the New Testament (Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:4-6).

The eternal truth behind this thought is this. Jesus was sent into this world to be the Saviour of men; but he is also the touch-stone by which all men are judged. If a man's heart goes out in love and submission to him, Jesus is for him salvation. If a man's heart is entirely unmoved or angrily rebellious, Jesus is for him condemnation. Jesus came into the world for our salvation, but by his attitude to him a man can either gain salvation or merit condemnation.

THE MISTAKEN ZEAL

Rom. 10:1-13

Brothers, the desire of my heart for the Jews and my prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I do say this for them--that they do have a zeal for God, but it is not a zeal which is based on a real knowledge. For they do not realize that a man can only achieve the status of righteousness by God's gift, and they seek to establish their own status, and so they have not submitted themselves to that power of God which alone can make them righteous in his sight. For Christ is the end of the whole system of law. for he came to bring everyone who believes and trusts into a right relationship with God. Moses writes that the man who works at the righteousness which comes from the law shall live by it. But the righteousness which stems from faith speaks like this--"Do not say in your heart, `Who shall go up into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or, `Who shall go down into the deep abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ again from among the dead)." But what does it say? "The word is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart." And that word is the message of faith which we proclaim. This word of faith is our message, that, if you acknowledge with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For belief with the heart is the way to a right relationship with God, and confession with the mouth is the way to salvation, For scripture says, "Every one who believes in him will not be put to shame," for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord over all, and he has ample resources for all who call upon him. For "every one who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Paul has been saying some hard things about the Jews. He has been telling them truths which were difficult for them to hear and bear. The whole passage Rom. 9-11 is a condemnation of the Jewish attitude to religion. Yet from beginning to end there is no anger

in it; there is nothing but wistful longing and heartfelt yearning. It is Paul's one desire that the Jews may be saved.

If ever we are to bring men to the Christian faith, our attitude must be the same. Great preachers have known this. "Don't scold," said one. "Always remember to keep your voice down," said another. A great present-day preacher called preaching "pleading with men." Jesus wept over Jerusalem. There is a preaching which blasts the sinner with tempestuously angry words; but always Paul speaks the truth in love.

Paul was entirely ready to admit that the Jews were zealous for God; but he also saw that their zeal was a misdirected thing. Jewish religion was based on meticulous obedience to the law. Now it is clear that that obedience could be given only by a man who was desperately in earnest about his religion. It was not an easy thing; it must often have been made extremely inconvenient; and it must often have made life very uncomfortable.

Take the Sabbath law. It was laid down exactly how far a man could walk on the Sabbath. It was laid down that he must lift no burden which weighed more than two dried figs. It was laid down that no food must be cooked on the Sabbath. It was laid down that, in the event of sickness, measures might be taken to keep the patient from becoming worse, but not to make him better. To this day there are strict orthodox Jews in this country who will not poke or mend a fire on the Sabbath or switch on a light. If a fire has to be poked a Gentile is employed to do it. If a Jew is wealthy enough he will sometimes instal a time switch to switch on the lights at dusk on Sabbath without his doing so himself.

This is not something to smile at, but to admire. The way of the law was not easy. No one would undertake it at all unless he was supremely in earnest. Zealous the Jews were and are. Paul had no difficulty in granting that, but the zeal was misdirected and misapplied.

In the Fourth Book of Maccabees there is an amazing incident. Eleazar the priest was brought before Antiochus Epiphanes whose aim was to stamp out Jewish religion. Antiochus ordered him to eat pork. The old man refused. "No, not if you pluck out my eyes, and consume my bowels in the fire. We, O Antiochus," he said, "who live under a divine law, consider no compulsion to be so forcible as obedience to our law." If he had to die, his fathers would receive him "holy and pure." He was ordered to be beaten. "His flesh was torn off by the whips, and he streamed down with blood, and his flanks were laid open by wounds." He fell and a soldier kicked him. In the end the soldiers so pitied him that they brought him dressed meat, which was not pork, and told him to eat it and say that he had eaten pork. He refused. He was in the end killed. "I am dying by fiery torments for thy law's sake," he prayed to God. "He resisted," says the writer, "even to the agonies of death, for the law's sake."

And what was all this about? It was about eating pork. It seems incredible that a man should die like that for a law like that. But the Jews did so die. Truly they had a zeal for the law. No man can say that they were not desperately in earnest about their service to God.

The whole Jewish approach was that by this kind of obedience to the law a man earned credit with God. Nothing shows better the Jewish attitude than the three classes into which they divided mankind. There were those who were good, whose balance was on the right side; there were those who were bad, whose balance was on the debit side; there were those who were in between, who, by doing one more good work, could become good. It was all a matter of law and achievement. To this Paul answers: "Christ is the end of the law." What he meant was: "Christ is the end of legalism." The relationship between God and man is no longer the relationship between a creditor and a debtor, between an earner and an assessor, between a judge and a man standing at the bar of judgment. Because of Jesus Christ, man is no longer faced with the task of satisfying God's justice; he need only accept his love. He has no longer to win God's favour; he need simply take the grace and love and mercy which he freely offers.

To make his point Paul uses two Old Testament quotations. First, he quotes Lev.18:5 where it says that, if a man meticulously obeys the commandments of the law, he will find life. That is true--but no one ever has. Then he quotes Deut. 30:12-13. Moses is saying that God's law is not inaccessible and impossible; it is there in a man's mouth and life and heart. Paul allegorizes that passage. It was not our effort which brought Christ into the world or raised him from the dead. It is not our effort which wins us goodness. The thing is done for us, and we have only to accept.

Rom. 10:9-10 are of prime importance. They give us the basis of the first Christian creed.

(i) A man must say Jesus Christ is Lord. The word for Lord is kurios. This is the key word of early Christianity. It has four stages of meaning. (a) It is the normal title of respect like the English sir, the French monsieur, the German herr. (b) It is the normal title of the Roman Emperors. (c) It is the normal title of the Greek gods, prefaced before the god's name. Kurios Serapis is Lord Serapis. (d) In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures it is the regular translation of the divine name, Jahveh or Jehovah. So, then, if a man called Jesus kurios he was ranking him with the Emperor and with God; he was giving him the supreme place in his life; he was pledging him implicit obedience and reverent worship. To call Jesus kurios was to count him unique. First, then, a man to be a Christian must have a sense of the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

(ii) A man must believe that Jesus is risen from the dead. The resurrection was an essential of Christian belief. The Christian must believe not only that Jesus lived, but also that he lives. He must not only know about Christ: he must know him. He is not studying an historical personage, however great; he is living with a real presence. He must know not only Christ the martyr: he must know Christ the victor, too.

(iii) But a man must not only believe in his heart; he must confess with his lips. Christianity is belief plus confession; it involves witness before men. Not only God, but also our fellow men, must know what side we are on.

A Jew would find it hard to believe that the way to God was not through the law; this way of trust and of acceptance was shatteringly and incredibly new to him. Further, he would have

real difficulty in believing that the way to God was open to everybody. The Gentiles did not seem to him to be in the same position as the Jews at all. So Paul concludes his argument by citing two Old Testament texts to prove his case. First, he cites Isa. 28:16: "Every one who believes in him will not be put to shame." There is nothing about law there; it is all based on faith. Second, he cites Joel 2:32: "All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered." There is no limitation there; the promise is to everyone; therefore, there is no difference between Jew and Greek.

In essence this passage is an appeal to the Jews to abandon the way of legalism and accept the way of grace. It is an appeal to them to see that their zeal is misplaced. It is an appeal to listen to the prophets who long ago declared that faith is the only way to God, and that that way is open to every man.

THE DESTRUCTION OF EXCUSES

Rom. 10:14-21

How are they to call on him on whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? How are they to hear without someone to proclaim the good news to them? How are they to proclaim the good news unless they are sent to do so? But this is the very thing that has happened, as it stands written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news of good things."

But all have not obeyed the good news. That is quite true, because Isaiah says: "Lord, who has believed what they heard from us?" So, then, faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word which comes from Christ and which tells of him. But, suppose I still say: "Can it be that they have not heard?" Indeed they have. "Their voice is gone out to all the earth, and their words to the boundaries of the inhabited world." Well, then, suppose I say: "Did Israel not understand?" First, Moses says: "I will make you jealous of a nation which is no nation. I will make you angry with a nation that has no understanding." Then Isaiah says, greatly daring: "I was found by those who did not seek me. I appeared plainly to those who did not enquire after me." And he says to Israel: "All the day I have stretched out my hands to a people who are disobedient and contrary."

It is agreed by all commentators that this is one of the most difficult and obscure passages in the letter to the Romans. It seems to us that what we have here is not so much a finished passage as summary notes. There is a kind of telegraphic quality about the writing. It may well be that what we have here is the notes of some address which Paul was in the habit of making to the Jews to convince them of their error.

Basically the scheme is this--in the previous passage Paul has been saying that the way to God is not that of works and of legalism, but of faith and trust. The objection is: But what if the Jews never heard of that? It is with that objection Paul deals; and, as he deals with it in its various forms, on each occasion he clinches his answer with a text from scripture.

Let us take the objections and the answering scripture texts one by one.

(i) The first objection is: "You cannot call on God unless you believe in him. You cannot believe in him unless you hear about him. You cannot hear about him unless there is someone to proclaim the good news. There can be no one to proclaim the good news unless God commissions someone to do so." Paul deals with that objection by quoting Isa. 52:7. There the prophet points out how welcome those are who bring the good news of good things. So Paul's first answer is: "You cannot say there was no messenger; Isaiah describes these very messengers; and Isaiah lived long ago."

(ii) The second objection is: "But, in point of fact, Israel did not obey the good news, even if your argument is true. What have you to say to that?" Paul's answer is: "Israel's disbelief was only to be expected, for, long ago, Isaiah was moved to say in despair: 'Lord, who has believed what we have heard?'" (Isa.53:1.) It is true that Israel did not accept the good news from God, and in their refusal they were simply running true to form; history was repeating itself.

(iii) The third objection is a restatement of the first: But, what if I insist that they never got the chance to hear? This time Paul quotes Ps. 19:4: "Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." His answer is: "You cannot say that Israel never got the chance to hear; for scripture plainly says that God's message has gone out to all the world."

(iv) The fourth objection is: "But what if Israel did not understand?" Apparently the meaning is: "What if the message was so difficult to grasp that even when Israel did hear it they were unable to grasp its significance?" Here is where the passage becomes really difficult. But Paul's answer is: "Israel may have failed to understand; but the Gentiles did not. They grasped the meaning of this offer all right, when it came to them unexpectedly and unsought." To prove this point Paul quotes two passages. One is from Deut.32:21 where God says that, because of Israel's disobedience and rebellion, he will transfer his favour to another people, and they will be forced to become jealous of a nation which has no nation. The second passage is from Isa.65:1 where God says that, in a strange way, he has been found by a people who were not looking for him at all.

Finally, Paul insists that, all through history, God has been stretching out hands of appeal to Israel, and Israel has always been disobedient and perverse.

A passage like this may seem strange to us and unconvincing; and it may seem that some at least of the texts Paul quotes have been wrenched out of their context and made to mean what they were never intended to mean. Nevertheless there is in this passage something of permanent value. Beneath it there runs the conviction that there are certain kinds of ignorance which are inexcusable.

(i) There is the ignorance which comes from neglect of knowledge. There is a legal maxim which says that genuine ignorance may be a defence, but neglect of knowledge never is. A man cannot be blamed for not knowing what he never had a chance to know; but he can be

blamed for neglecting to know that which was always open to him. For instance, if a man signs a contract without having read the conditions, he cannot complain if afterwards he finds out that the conditions are very different from what he thought they were. If we fail to equip ourselves for a task when every chance is given to us to equip ourselves adequately for it, we must stand condemned. A man is responsible for failing to know what he might have known.

(ii) There is the ignorance which comes from wilful blindness. Men have an infinite and fatal capacity for shutting their minds to what they do not wish to see, and stopping their ears to what they do not wish to hear. A man may be well aware that some habit, some indulgence, some way of life, some friendship, some association must have disastrous results; but he may simply refuse to look at the facts. To turn a blind eye may be in some few cases a virtue; in most cases it is folly.

(iii) There is the ignorance which is in essence a lie. The things about which we are in doubt are far fewer than we would like to think. There are in reality very few times when we can honestly say: "I never knew that things would turn out like this." God gave us conscience and the guidance of his Holy Spirit; and often we plead ignorance, when, if we were honest, we would have to admit that in our heart of hearts we knew the truth.

One thing remains to be said of this passage. In the argument so far as it has gone there is a paradox. All through this section Paul has been driving home the personal responsibility of the Jews. They ought to have known better: they had every chance to know better; but they rejected the appeal of God. Now he began the argument by saying that everything was of God and that men had no more to do with it than the clay had to do with the work of the potter. He has set two things side by side; everything is of God, and everything is of human choice. Paul makes no attempt to resolve this dilemma; and the fact is that there is no resolution of it. It is a dilemma of human experience. We know that God is behind everything; and yet, at the same time, we know that we have free will and can accept or reject God's offer. It is the paradox of the human situation that God is in control and yet the human will is free.

THE CALLOUS ON THE HEART

Rom. 11:1-12

So then, I ask, "Has God repudiated his people?" God forbid! I, too, am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not repudiated his people whom long ago he marked out for his purposes. Do you not know what scripture says in the passage about Elijah? You remember how he talked to God in complaint against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets; they have torn down your altars; and I alone am left and they are seeking my life." But what was the answer that came to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So, then, at this present time too, there is a remnant chosen by his grace. And if they were chosen by grace, their relationship to God is no longer dependent on works, for, if that were so, grace is no longer grace. What then? Israel

has not obtained that for which she is searching; but the chosen remnant has obtained it, while the rest have been made so dull and insensitive in heart that they cannot see. As it stands written: "God gave them a spirit of lethargy--eyes not to see, ears not to hear--down to this day." And David says: "Let their table become a snare, and a trap, and a thing to trip them up, and a retribution for them. and let their backs be bent for ever." So, I say, "Have they stumbled that their fall might be complete?" God forbid! So far from that, salvation has become a gift for the Gentiles because of their fall, so as to move them to jealousy of the Gentiles. If their fall has brought wealth to the world, if their failure has brought wealth to the Gentiles, how much more shall the whole world be enriched, when they come in, and the whole process of salvation is completed?

There was a question now to be asked which any Jew was bound to ask. Does all this mean that God has repudiated his people? That is a question that Paul's heart cannot bear. After all, he himself is a member of that people. So he falls back on an idea which runs through much of the Old Testament. In the days of Elijah, Elijah was in despair (1Kgs.19:10-18). He had come to the conclusion that he alone was left to be true to God. But God told him that, in fact, there were still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. So into Jewish thought came the idea of The Remnant.

The prophets began to see that there never was a time, and never would be, when the whole nation was true to God; nevertheless, always within the nation a remnant was left who had never forsaken their loyalty or compromised their faith. Prophet after prophet came to see this. Amos (Am. 9:8-10) thought of God sifting men as corn is in a sieve until only the good are left. Micah (Mic. 2:12; Mic. 5:3) had a vision of God gathering the remnant of Israel. Zephaniah (Zeph. 3:12-13) had the same idea. Jeremiah foresaw the remnant being gathered from all the countries throughout which they had been scattered (Jer. 23:3). Ezekiel, the individualist, was convinced that a man could not be saved by either a national or an inherited righteousness; the righteous would deliver their own souls by their righteousness (Eze. 14:14,20,22). Above all, this idea dominated the thought of Isaiah. He called his son Shear-Jashub, which means The Salvation of the Remnant. Again and again he returns to this idea of the faithful remnant who will be saved by God (Isa. 7:3; Isa. 8:2; Isa. 8:18; Isa. 9:12; Isa. 6:9-13).

There is a tremendous truth beginning to dawn here. As one great scholar put it: "No Church or nation is saved en masse." The idea of a Chosen People will not hold water for this basic reason. The relationship with God is an individual relationship. A man must give his own heart and surrender his own life to God. God does not call men in crowds; he has "His own secret stairway into every heart." A man is not saved because he is a member of a nation or of a family, or because he has inherited righteousness and salvation from his ancestors; he is saved because he has made a personal decision for God. It is not now the whole nation who are lumped together as the Chosen People. It is those individual men and women who have given their hearts to God, of whom the remnant is composed.

Paul's argument is that the Jewish nation has not been rejected; but it is not the nation as a whole, but the faithful remnant within it who are the true Jews.

What of the others? It is here that Paul has a terrible thought. He has the idea of God sending a kind of torpor upon them, a drowsy sleep in which they cannot and will not hear. He puts together the thought of a series of Old Testament passages to prove this (Deut. 29:4; Isa. 6:9-10; Isa. 29:10). He quotes Ps. 69:22-23. "Let their table become a snare." The idea is that men are sitting feasting comfortably at their banquet; and their very sense of safety has become their ruin. They are so secure in their fancied safety that the enemy can come upon them all unaware. That is what the Jews were like. They were so secure, so self-satisfied, so at ease in their confidence of being the Chosen People, that that very idea had become the thing that ruined them.

The day will come when they cannot see at all, and when they will grope with bent backs like men stumbling blindly in the dark. In Rom. 11:7 the King James Version says, "they have been blinded." More correctly, it should be, "they have been hardened." The verb is *poroun*. The noun *porosis* will give us the meaning better. It is a medical word, and it means a callus. It was specially used for the callus which forms round the fracture when a bone is broken, the hard bone formation which helps to mend the break. When a callus grows on any part of the body that part loses feeling. It becomes insensitive. The minds of the mass of the people have become insensitive; they can no longer hear and feel the appeal of God.

It can happen to any man. If a man takes his own way long enough, he will in the end become insensitive to the appeal of God. If he goes on sinning, he will in the end become insensitive to the horror of sin and the fascination of goodness. If a man lives long enough in ugly conditions he will in the end become insensitive to them. As Burns wrote:

"I waive the quantum of the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But och! it hardens a' within,
And petrifies the feeling!"

Just as a callus can grow on the hand, a callus can grow on the heart. That is what had happened to the mass of Israel. God save us from that!

But Paul has more to say. That is tragedy, but out of it God has brought good, because that very insensitiveness of Israel opened the way to the Gentiles to come in. Because Israel did not want the message of the good news, it went out to people who were ready to welcome it. Israel's refusal has enriched the world.

Then Paul touches on the dream which is behind it all. If the refusal of Israel has enriched the world by opening a door to the Gentiles, what will the riches be like at the end of the day, when God's plan is fully completed and Israel comes in, too?

So, in the end, after tragedy comes the hope. Israel became insensitive, the nation with the callus on her heart; the Gentiles came by faith and trust into the love of God; but a day will come when the love of God will act like a solvent, even on the callus of the heart, and both Gentile and Jew will be gathered in. It is Paul's conviction that nothing in the end can defeat the love of God.