

Romans 11:11-24

TRANSLATION

I say then, they [Israel] did not stumble to the end that they might fall, did they? God forbid; but by their offenses [has come], salvation to the Gentiles, for the purpose of stirring them [Israel] up exceedingly. But if their offenses are the riches of the world and their shortcomings the riches of the Gentiles, how much rather, shall be their fullness.

But I say to you, the Gentiles; inasmuch, therefore, as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry if by any means I might provoke to jealousy my flesh [kinsmen] and save some of them. For if their casting away is the reconciliation of the world, what shall be their reception, but life from the dead? And if the first-fruit is sanctified, so also the dough; and if the root is sanctified, so also the branches.

And if certain of the branches were cut off, and you, being a wild olive, were ingrafted in them and became a fellow sharer of the quality of the root of the olive, do not boast over the branches; but if you boast, [remember] you do not bear the root, but the root, you. You will say then, “the branches were cut off in order that I may be ingrafted”. Well enough; by their unbelief they were cut off, and you have taken your place by faith. Do not think too highly [of yourself], but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither indeed shall He spare you. Behold then, the graciousness and severity of God. Upon those who have fallen, severity; and upon you, the graciousness of God, if indeed you continue in His graciousness, or else you also will be cut off. And those [Israel], if they do not continue in unbelief, shall be ingrafted; for God is able to ingraft them, again. For if you, who were by nature from the wild olive, were cut off and ingrafted into the good olive contrary to nature, much rather shall these who are by nature [of the good olive] ingrafted into their own olive.

COMMENTARY

The Wild Olive and the Good Olive

Olive and fig and grape and grain; tree and vine and branch and harvest; all were symbols of the life-giving process of God's relationship to His people on earth. It was not merely ruler and subject or Deity and worshipper, with only a legal or social or religious connection; it was rather, the vital, life-giving relationship of seed energized by the Spirit of God, producing fruit as it pleased the Creator. Nor was it merely Divine energy encompassing the life-giving process, but the very Spirit of God imbuing His creatures with His own life.

In a sense, the trees were "God-trees;" the fruit, the fruit of "Godness." "Godness" does not mean "godliness." Godness has to do with the nature of God, so we are, in effect, "God-people." That is because we do partake of the very nature of God as part of our natures. A fruit tree is a good analogy. If we are talking about apricots, for example, an apricot is an apricot is an apricot. It may be plump and succulent or it may be hard and green, but it is, nevertheless, an apricot. We are "God-people" but there are a great many variables, in the capacity of the individual to reflect God in the actions.

Weak or willful; diligent or dilatory; stable or struggling; we are all partakers of the Divine nature, *"If so be that the spirit of Christ dwells in us."* No one is really satisfied that they are doing their best. Many never get their "act together" during their lifetime. There are always the regrets and remorse and haunting hindsights. There are the ambitions unrealized and the dreams unfulfilled—no one escapes the disorienting effects of the fall. In one way or another, everyone has been limited by the "Fall" to the space-time prison house of earth. Nevertheless, by the Spirit of God implanted within us, we transcend this earthly cocoon and relate to God in the

realm of the spirit. Thus, the symbol of the tree and its fruit is a most appropriate one. However, the idea of fruit-bearing in, terms of service or soul winning, confuses the figure. One plants a fruit tree to enjoy the fruit, and not to make other fruit trees. The Seed of God, planted in our spirits, transcends our earthly cocoon and enables us to communicate with God. The idea of bearing fruit as service, trivializes the whole process.

So now we come to what is the essence of the passage—the olive trees. It is tempting to attach some symbolism to the olive trees. Why olive trees? Why not some other kind of tree—perhaps the mustard, which Jesus used in His parable. But it is risky to use symbolisms that are not expressly stated. Olive oil was, indeed, used in the anointing of the high priest and that is significant, but hardly applicable here. In Zechariah 4, we have two olive trees mentioned, but these are identified by the angel as the two witnesses of the last days, mentioned in Revelation 11. This, again, is hardly applicable. The only thing that we can say, is that since olive oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, both the wild olive and the good olive were, nevertheless, symbolic of or symbols of the humans, whom God had created as vehicles for His spirit. But this is as far as we are allowed to go. The important point is that we have a "good" olive and a "wild" olive. It is obvious that the good olive represents the people of God, and the wild olive only potential people of God. Those who were once people of God as branches of the good olive, were cut off; and those who were not the people of God—the Gentiles—were grafted.

The meaning is quite clear since it has been often stressed both in the Old Testament and the New—those who were

the original people of God, turned away from Him and were cut off. Those who were not even seeking to be the people of God—the Gentiles—sought out by Him, nevertheless, and were engrafted on the good olive tree, and made His people. These, of course, are references to categories of Jews and Gentiles, and not everyone in particular. The same lesson is taught in the symbolism of the vine and branches (John 15) and the sheep and sheepfold (John 10). It is further taught in the rather bizarre allegory of Hosea and the adulteress woman. The general teaching of this passage then, is that God had called out a people for His name—Israel—who subsequently turned away from Him. He then reached out to the Gentiles and made them His people. We will now go back and look at the details of the passage.

They [Israel] did not stumble that they might fall, did they? As we indicated earlier, in spite of all the apostasy and transgressions of Israel, she never was obliterated as a distinct people. She had stumbled badly and paid dearly for her apostasy—indeed is still paying—but she had not fallen completely. Perhaps this was a prophetic statement by David, in Psalm 37—*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in His way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down [hurled vehemently], for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand.”* (23, 24) Whereas this verse has a primary reference to Israel there is no indication that it is exclusively so, and we are at liberty to take it personally. David certainly experienced this on a personal level, himself. We often suffer for earthly mistakes, and yet there is always that bedrock reality, that we are secure by reason of the presence of the Spirit of Christ within us.

But had not God already in His

foreordained purposes included the Gentiles?

Salvation [has come] to the Gentiles... That is true, but for reasons known only to Himself, He elected a process which tied together irrevocably, the destinies of the Jews and the Gentiles.

For the purpose of stirring them up exceedingly... The common translation involves a very human emotion—jealousy. Especially as perceived by human minds, jealousy is usually regarded as an unsound emotion. The idea of provoking one to jealousy is a ploy used by “lovers” to manipulate each other. It is hardly something God would be engaged in. Nor does the Greek word require this. The root word is—*zao*, which means “to boil.” The addition of a prefix—*para*—intensifies the meaning of the verb, and thus “to stir up exceedingly.” The observance of another group of people receiving the blessing of God, did not so much stir up jealousy as we know it in the human emotion since they had so readily given up God in the favor of other deities, but would, rather, cause them to realize that God was not a provincial object of worship; as in the case of the deities of surrounding nations, but was universal, affecting all the world.

The riches of the world... Thus, Paul confirms the universality of God. Leaving His chosen people to wallow in their trespasses, He turns to embrace the entire world. Thus they despised, to their ultimate sorrow, their privileged place as the oracles of God.

Much rather their fullness... Thus, Paul projects in no uncertain terms the ultimate recovery of Israel. One day they will be full and their destiny fulfilled; but it will not be fulfilled without the

Gentiles. *“Other sheep have I which are not of this fold: Them also, I must bring and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”* (John 10:16)

But I speak to you, the Gentiles... Paul now turns to the “other sheep.”

I glorify my ministry... Paul rejoices in the opportunity to aid in the process of recovering his fellow kinsmen. He sees his ministry to the Gentiles as expediting this process, since the recovery of the Gentiles will ultimately bring about the stirring up of Israel. If the casting away of Israel had resulted in the reconciliation of the world, how much rather, shall their recovery bring about life out of death.

If the first fruit is sanctified... The Greek word—*hagia* (αγια)—translated “holy,” really means “set apart.” The “first-fruits” refers to the initial gleaning of the grain, which determines what the rest of it will be. The lump of dough prepared from the first gleanings will possess the same quality as the grain. *“If the root is sanctified, so also will be the branches.”* The good olive tree which came up from the roots, is not affected by the failure of the branches. If Israel had failed, let her be cut off and let new branches be grafted which will then partake of the quality of the root. The grafted Gentiles will partake of the same quality as God’s original root.

Paul now raises the issue of the possibility of Gentiles boasting that they replaced Israel in the favor of God. He warns them that if the natural branch had been cut off, how much, rather, the engrafted one.

If God did not spare the natural branches... There is an obvious connection here, between John 15 and

Romans 11. Jesus spoke of the branches that were cut off and burned. In that symbolism, Jesus was referring to grape vines that did not bear fruit. It is important to understand that this passage cannot be used in terms of “soul-winning” or Christian perfection. It has to do with Israel and her position of apostasy. To use it as leverage for the performance of Christians is to miss its main point, and to trivialize it. The basic reference that Jesus was making, was to Isaiah 5, where Israel is identified as a vineyard which had been given the utmost in care. When the owner of the vineyard went to gather his grapes, he found that it had brought forth only wild grapes. *“What could I have done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it?”* (5:4) In his anger, He destroyed the vineyard, utterly. The symbolism in this parable is clear—*“For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.”* (v, 7) Again, to use John 15 as an evidence of the possibility of losing one’s salvation is a total misapplication. Jesus is not talking here about individuals, but a whole nation.

Similarly, in Romans 11, Paul is referring to nations, rather than individuals. As God had blinded the eyes of the nation of Israel, in general, so He could blind the Gentiles. And, as He spared individuals within the nation of Israel, so He would spare individuals within the nations of the Gentiles.

Behold then the graciousness and severity of God... In a stern warning to the Jewish people in the letter to the Hebrews, the author says, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (10:31) He has just told them that if they trample under foot the Son of God, and despise the blood of the covenant, they cut off all hope of salvation. He is not talking about Christians who sin after

they are converted. He is talking about Jewish people, who were the very oracles of God and knew the Law, and had received God's bounty, and turned away from Him. Those who did so, found the judgment of God irrevocable.

But to the Gentiles, who had not as yet known the truth, God has extended grace—if they, the Gentiles, do not make the mistake that Israel made, and turn a deaf ear to God.

If they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be engrafted... Even though this sentence seems to sound a note of uncertainty, Paul's whole theme in chapters 9 to 11 of Romans, is that Israel will indeed be engrafted, "for God is able to engraft them again."

How much, rather, shall these who are the natural [branches] be engrafted in their own olive tree...

The obvious implication of this sentence is that God's olive tree here referred to, is eternal, as well as His purposes for it. Obviously, the olive tree represents His planting on the earth of humans, both Jew and Gentile. The Jews, who were the natural branches, had to be cut off but will, again be restored. The Gentiles, who were not the natural branches, are engrafted and take their place with the Jews. So the tree, which represents the humans on the earth, is eternal; and those who are engrafted and "re-engrafted" in it, are also eternally fulfilling the purpose of God.

Romans 11:25-36

TRANSLATION

For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning this mystery, lest you be caught up in your own wisdom; because hardness in part of some has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes. And so all Israel shall be saved; even as it is written,

*There shall come the Deliverer, out of Zion. He shall
turn ungodliness from Jacob.*

And this shall be My covenant with them, when I shall forgive their sins.

On the one hand, as far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on account of you, but according to the elect they are beloved on account of the fathers. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. For even as then you were disobedient to God, but now have obtained mercy by the disobedience of these [Israel], so also these are now disobedient with reference to your mercy, in order that they also may now be shown mercy. For God has concluded all in disobedience, in order that He may show mercy to all.

O the depth of the abundance and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways incomprehensible.

*For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been His counselor?
Or who has given up to Him,
and it shall not be recompensed to Him?*

Because out of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things; to Him is the glory forever, Amen.

COMMENTARY

The Ultimate Restoration of Israel

The consummation of everything that Paul has been saying in chapters 9 to 11, is that “all Israel will be saved.” Moreover, not only will all Israel be saved, but large numbers of the Gentiles. The idea that only a very small number of elite “perfectionists” will be saved does not comport with the teachings of these three chapters, nor is it supported by the general teaching of scripture. It might be observed here, that if only a small number are saved, then Satan wins.

Concerning this mystery... The Greek word *musterion* (μυστήριον) does not mean a totally unknown thing, but rather, known only to the initiated—those to whom it is revealed. How God can, and will, fully restore His people is beyond the range of normal comprehension. But God has revealed it through His word to those who are open to receive it.

Lest you be caught up in your own wisdom... Pride is the province of human misconceptions. The most prominent of these misconceptions is that we know anything at all beyond the “play pen.” Paul makes a point of that, in I Corinthians 13. We are like children who see through a clouded mirror. If we only realized how ignorant we are of the ultimate truth of God, we would be far more tolerant of what we perceive to be the misconceptions of our fellow believers.

Hardness, in part... Not partial hardness. but hardness to a partial number. A strong remnant has been preserved from the days of Israel’s first apostasy to the present time. It was not a random act of God. hardening capriciously whomever he chose. but rather, a matter of fixing their minds in their rebel activity. They had “turned the

corner” of infidelity and would not come back.

There is a parallel in the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. Obviously. God did not harden Pharaoh’s heart before the fact. He had already set his face toward the opposing of God’s people, and God gave him no opportunity of recovery.

The Bible divides the people of earth into two groups—the Jews and the Gentiles. Everything must ultimately relate to the Creator—those who are His people and those who are not. For those who are not His people, there is nothing but oblivion. The Jews, who were originally His people, did not understand this when they made their tragic choice to ignore God. Having willfully chosen to ignore Him, God fixed their heart in their tragic choice. Their minds would be closed to the truth. A wall would separate them from God so that they would be blind to the truth. At this point, the time clock of the Jews stopped, and the time clock of the Gentiles began. God would now offer to the Gentiles what, His own people had despised. It was not that individual Israelites could not accept the Messiah, but as a nation, the Jews were cut off from God. In chapter 1 of His Gospel, John says, “*He came unto His own and His own received Him not, but as many as received Him, to them He gave the power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name.*” A great many Jews did receive Jesus as the Messiah; and a large number went on to receive salvation as given through the Holy Spirit after Pentecost. But, as a nation, the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Until the fullness of the Gentiles comes... This expression, used both by

Jesus and Paul, and alluded to the prophets, apparently indicates that, as there was a period where God dealt with the Jews and which ended with the Jewish apostasy, so there is a time when God deals with the Gentiles, both in offering to them salvation and in allowing them a period of world supremacy, which would keep the Jews in a state of oppression. The Jews did not believe that the Gentiles would ever have salvation. It was not until Peter came back from His ministry to Cornelius and his household, with the report of their salvation, that the elders of Israel were willing to acknowledge that God had indeed granted salvation to the Gentiles.

So on the one hand, the Gentiles, who did not really seek after God, were nevertheless, granted the privilege of His salvation. On the other hand, in terms of the supremacy of the Gentiles over the Jews, this will come to an end. Jesus said that Jerusalem would be “trodden under foot” by the Gentiles until the time of the fulfillment of the Gentiles would be accomplished. Apparently we are now in that period of time when there is a large number of Gentiles being saved and when they are still in supremacy.

One day in the future God will call a halt to this period, and then the Jews will once more receive His favor. Not only will He see to the restoring of their kingdom, but also, as Paul indicates, they will be restored spiritually as well. One of the most distressing things in Israel today is the apparent neglect of God. There are only about 17 synagogues in Jerusalem, with a few hundred in each. The widespread use of rituals, such as the Seder is more a matter of tradition than of identification with God. For the present time, Israel tends to feel that they have achieved their position by their own efforts. One day that will change, but it

will take a miraculous intervention by God.

As far as the time frame of the ending of the Gentile period is concerned, we have a fix in the words of Jesus. “*When you see the abomination of desolation as spoken by Daniel the prophet, stand in the Holy place*” The “abomination of desolation” that Daniel spoke of, had reference to the time when Antiochus Epiphanes ran pigs through the Holy of Holies. Assuming this to be a literal prophecy, we must assume also that there has to be a temple, which Ezekiel seems to predict with great clarity. (Read Ezekiel 44 to 48.) How soon that temple will be erected is not known, but that will signal the beginning of the events that can be rather precisely tied in with the prophecies of scripture. At the present time, there is nothing in the events of the Middle East that can be tied down specifically. That will be the main arena of the last days. The events of Revelation can be identified with that arena.

The “abomination of desolation” will signal the beginning of all the cataclysmic events relative to Israel, which will culminate in the return of Christ to deliver His people. According to Zechariah 14, He will actually stand on the Mount of Olives and will, together with His hosts, deliver Israel from the antichrist or false messiah. The actual sequence of events is not altogether clear, but one thing is clear—Israel will be restored both spiritually and physically.

There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer... When the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled, then will He turn His face, once again, toward Israel and deliver them from their ungodliness. He will make a new covenant with them when He has forgiven their sins.

According to the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes... Paul summarizes the peculiar relationship of Jew and Gentile, by indicating that when Israel was in a condition of apostasy and therefore enemies of God, it gave the Gentiles the opportunity to become God's people, also. Even in their apostasy, however, Israel was never less than the "beloved of God."

Without repentance... There are two words in Greek that are commonly translated by "repent." *Metanoeo* (μετανοεω) has to do with a changing of the mind. That is the word that is used with reference to salvation. It is the changing of one's attitude toward sin that causes one to seek salvation. The other word—*metamelomai* (μεταμελομαι)—has to do with the changing of feelings. Though there are some texts that may seem to indicate it, God never really regretted that He had taken Israel as a family. In the case of the flood, where God expressed regret over creating mankind, we are not dealing with particular gifts and callings. Perhaps the very reason God did not regret His choosing of Israel, was that He would ultimately bring them to restoration.

For even as you were then unbelieving, with reference to God... The word which is often translated by "obey" or, negatively, "disobey," has to do actually with "belief" or "unbelief." Sometimes it is used to mean "to follow." In Acts 5:32, where it says that the Holy Spirit is given "to them that obey Him," we are not talking here about Christian obedience, but rather, about the initial belief or decision to follow. In the same chapter in Acts, the word is used concerning those who were followers of Judas, the Galilean. The reason this is important is that many are confused about this verse and use it as a condition

for some "second blessing" experience with the Holy Spirit, subsequent to salvation. It really means, simply, to come to faith or to follow Christ. Here, in Romans 11, Paul speaks of the Gentiles who once were not followers of God, but now have obtained mercy; and the Jews who have, up to now, been apostate from God, but will one day receive mercy from Him.

For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all... The main condition of receiving mercy and help from God is the recognition of need. Jesus made it quite clear—"*Those who are whole do not need a physician, but those who are sick.*" When Jesus came as the Messiah, the Pharisees rejected Him mainly because He would not deliver them from Rome. In effect, they were saying, "Leave our religion alone—we are all right—but deliver us from Rome." Their failure to recognize their lost spiritual condition, eliminated them from participating in the sacrificial death of Christ, and hence in the eternal salvation. In the end times, this will represent a fatal error in the assessing of another claimant to the role of Messiah. The false Messiah (antichrist) will be received by them because he will promise to deliver them from their earthly struggles. They will receive this false Messiah with open arms and grant him the power he seeks, only to find that they have been deceived, when later he reveals his true identity.

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a mule, was the symbol of the real heart of His message—salvation belongs to those who are humble enough to know that they need it. The charging of Israel both with apostasy and with the crucifying of the Messiah, was not for the purpose of blame and retribution, but for the purpose of showing them mercy and

forgiveness. The pivotal and insightful statement by John, emphasizes this truth—*“For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.”* (John 3:17) Amid all the myriads of conditions and formulas and equations for salvation, as expressed within the church, one fact stands out—*“To want Christ, is to have Him.”* In the first place, we cannot want Christ apart from His Holy Spirit. And in the second place, we want Christ because we need Him.

O the depth of the abundance, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God...

The word *bathos* (βαθος) suggests more the unfathomable depths of things unsearchable, rather than the magnitude of His mercy. The mercy is there, to be sure, but this text refers to the unfathomable nature of God’s perception of His universe, as the rest of the text bears out.

Unsearchable... Unattainable... *Krime* (κριμα) means judgments, in the sense of decisions or determinations. The knowledge of His ways is unattainable by human understanding. Isaiah makes a point of this in his appeal to the people of Israel who were charting a course apart from God. *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8, 9) Paul tells the Corinthians, in his first Epistle, that the “deep [*bathos*] things of God” are revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who follow Him.

There are many things that trouble us in today’s world—things that seem to run counter to both the Divine sovereignty and Divine grace. Why does He allow them? The answer is not easy and, in fact,

not really available to us. It helps to understand that, as the “Commander-in-Chief” of the universal forces, He has plans that may not be fathomable by ourselves. They go far beyond our simple concepts of love and fatherhood. Human sentimentality and short sightedness often cloud our perception of the far greater purposes of God. What holds us steadfast in the midst of earthly chaos, is not our human “Christian” understanding of what God is doing, but the Spirit of Christ within us, Who assures us that somehow the glory of God will be realized in the end. In a real sense, the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us is the only ultimate comfort that goes beyond our human rationale. That is the greatest miracle of all—the energy of faith that God maintains within us, in spite of all the evidences to the contrary of the chaotic world around us.

For who has known the mind of the Lord? The Greek word *nous* (νοος) means much more than the mind, as brain function. It really means the aggregate of the whole person—intellect, feeling, and will. It is the whole being, apart from its purely physical functions.

But Paul says we have the mind (*nous*) of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16). Here, he quotes Isaiah 40:13. What does that mean? It means that, as far as our inner essence or nature is concerned, *“we are partakers of the Divine nature.”* As far as the Jews were concerned, to whom Isaiah spoke, they did not have the renewal of their spirits through the Holy Spirit, that would enable them to partake of the Divine nature. But Paul would urge the Philippians to let the *phronema* (φρονημα), or tendencies of Christ, be characteristic of them. This would suggest that though they possessed the *nous* or inner essence of Christ, the flesh was still a problem to them and did not

always reflect that inner spirit or essence.

The entire quotation from the Old Testament (part of which is of obscure origin) is that God's ways are unknown and unattainable by the natural man, but are revealed to the believers by His Spirit. However, He reveals only what and where He chooses.

Because out of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things... Christ, the aspect of the Godhead involved in the creation of the universe, was the source of all its energy (as the Light of the world), and also sustains it and holds it together

(the energy of magnetism). But not only was it created through His power, but also for His sake.

To Him be the glory forever... Since the universe came from God; was created through Christ; and came unto being for His sake, the ultimate end of 'It has a glory that is far beyond all human comprehension. When we struggle to understand why God does things in the 'world, let it be remembered that His glory, which shall ultimately be fulfilled, will justify the madness that we humans endure on the earth.

Romans 12:1-2

TRANSLATION

I urge you then, brethren, to present your bodies, through the mercies of God, a living sacrifice—separated, acceptable to God, as your expression of worship. And do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may approve what is the will of God—the good and acceptable and complete.

COMMENTARY

Crucified with Christ

This text is often seen as a “call to commitment.” As such, it has a veiled threat in it, producing guilt and distress. Are Christians ever really satisfied with their dedication and commitment? Properly used, these words should bring encouragement, assurance, and guideposts along the way.

In order to recover this text from “cattle-prod” to “shepherd’s staff,” we must examine the text in detail and provide adequate support for this interpretation.

I urge you then, brethren... The Greek word here, is παρακαλεω (*parakaleo*) and is the basis for the word “paraklete” or “comforter” which is used of the Holy Spirit. The fundamental meaning of the word is “to help.” The English word “comforter” is a reasonable translation. In its Latin derivative, it means “to strengthen together with.” In 1 John 2:1, the word is correctly translated by “advocate” or “defender.”

The basic concept of the word is “one called alongside to help.” Thus, the word “Paraklete” (a direct equivalent of the

Greek word) is used of the Holy Spirit, Whose chief office is to give assistance to the believers in providing the power to identify with God, by His indwelling presence. He thus provides the inner strength to stand fast in the midst of Satan’s kingdom.

Wherever the word occurs in the New Testament, it can be translated by “encourage” or “urge.” The translation “exhort” (used later in the chapter) gives a false impression of the word. It gives a hortatory or mandatory flavor that is inappropriate either to the Greek word or to the relationship between one believer and another. A command from one believer to another is inappropriate, even when it is alleged that God has spoken. It is very presumptuous for one human being to assume that God has given direct revelations regarding another, to say nothing of being extremely dangerous. Even Paul is careful to point out the difference between being commanded to speak in a certain, matter, versus being *allowed* to speak.

Actually, the word “beseech” really means the same thing as “entreat” or “urge,” but has acquired something of a mandatory meaning. In this particular verse, the conventional interpretation puts that kind of emphasis on it.

Through the mercies of God... There is a vast difference between “by” and “through.” The preposition “by” has an obligational note to it—“God has been merciful to you, therefore you owe Him.” As Paul has been saying all along, the obligational factor, so prevalent in the Old Testament, has been replaced in the New Testament by grace and enablement, through the Holy Spirit. Only the grace of God can give humans the capacity to give themselves as a living sacrifice to God. We need to note here, the difference between “grace” and “mercy.” Grace—*χάρις* (*chanan*) has to do with our status with God. Mercy, *οικτιρμον* (*oiktirmon*) has to do with the effective functioning of that grace toward the believer. It is really grace expressed, or actualized.

To present... We discussed the word in great detail, in the 6th chapter of Romans, but simply stated, it means “to bring oneself before another in an act of submission.” It would, of course, be used of any sacrifice presented before God. To present ourselves as **living** sacrifices, means that the death has already occurred. And that, of course, is exactly what we have in Christ. There is a very significant typology in the Old Testament. Abraham had laid Isaac on the sacrificial rock, but God provided the substitute, in the ram caught in the thicket. We indeed offer ourselves to God, but we accept the substitute of Christ.

A living sacrifice... This is not an appeal to sacrificial living. There is a difference between a living sacrifice and sacrificial living. It is the same difference

that must be noted in Jesus’ words to the disciples—“*Let him deny himself and take up his cross, daily.*” Jesus is not making an appeal to self-denial, but rather denying self, as the means of salvation. Salvation, as He explained to the Pharisees, came, not by a life of self-denial, but by denying the self as being able to save itself. This is the same concept that Paul gives to the Galatians—“*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ, lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” (2:20) Paul’s life in the flesh was lived, not by fleshly self-denial, but by the faith of Christ living within. Note: This is not faith **in** Christ but the faith **of** Christ. The very energy of Divine faith remains within us as the effective agent, in our ability to relate to Him. It is what Peter meant, when he said that we are “partakers of the Divine nature.” After the sacrifice of Christ, salvation could never again be acquired through human goodness. Nor can our identity with Christ be sustained day by day apart from the presence of Christ within.

Separated, acceptable... The word “holy” here, is *αγιος* (*hagios*), which means “separated,” and not “pious.” We are set apart unto God, as the vessels were set apart (sanctified) for temple use. This is the same word that Paul uses in addressing the “saints.” We are all saints, not in terms of flawless conduct but in terms of identification with Christ which separates us from Satan and his world. It is not a matter of living “separated” lives, but rather, that having identified ourselves with Christ, we are, *de facto*, separated unto Him.

The word for acceptable *ευαρεστον* (*euaireston*)—means, basically, “fitting in with His purposes.” The same word is

used in Hebrews 13:21—“*restore you in a very good thing to the end that you may do His will, working in you that which is acceptable before Him, through Christ Jesus...*” It is vital to understand that this acceptability is something that must be worked out in us, through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we present ourselves to God for salvation, His Spirit enters our spirits and begins working in us that which is acceptable to Him. To the Philippians, Paul says, “*Being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*” (1:6) As Paul and Jesus both continually point out, we are not able in the flesh ever to please God. “*So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*” (Romans 8:8)

Your expression of worship... Not, as some translations, “your reasonable service.” The Greek word—λογικός (*logikos*)—is, of course, the basis of our word “logical” or “reasonable.” But it is not always safe to assume that words from which we derive from our English words, were necessarily used in the same way in the original version. *Logikos* is built on the word λογος (*logos*), which means “word,” as an expression of reality. It is the word used of Christ, in John 1:1—*In the beginning was the Word (Logos)*, and identifies Him thus as the revelation of God. The Greek term used for word as a unit of speech, is ῥημα (*hrema*). The philosopher would use *logos* for his ideas; the accountant would use it for his accounts; the businessman would use it for his transactions. To Plato, *logos* was the ultimate meaning of the universe. John counters by saying the ultimate meaning of the universe is indeed *logos*, but Christ is that *Logos*. He is the living revelation of God. As applied here, the word means “expression,” not “reason.” Nothing about our identity with

God is reasonable in the human sense.

The word translated “service” is λατρεία (*latreia*), and, means service in the sense of a worship service. It does not mean service in the sense of work, which is δουλος (*doulos*). Paul uses *doulos* in referring to himself as “a servant of Christ.”

Thus, the phrase can be translated “expression of worship.” So Paul is telling the Romans to present themselves to God as a sacrifice, but one whose death has already been accomplished by Christ. Therefore, they are the “living sacrifice.” They recognize that they should be, rightfully, on the cross with Christ. Nevertheless, they live (Galatians 2:20). But this living sacrifice then becomes their expression of worship. We present ourselves to Christ the High Priest, Who is at once, the Priest and the Sacrifice.

Be not conformed to this age... συσχημα (*suschema*) means literally “formed together with.” However, it has to do with a surface conformity rather than an integral change. This age, αἰωνα (*aiona*) is not so much the material world as it is the cultural pattern of the human odyssey on earth.

But be ye transformed... The Greek word is μεταμορφω (*metamorpho*), and means a change of nature or essence. Metamorphic rock, for example, is rock that has changed its essential nature from vegetable to mineral. To be transformed in this sense, then, means to change one’s nature.

Renewing of the mind... The Greek νους (*nous*) is mind in the sense of the essential nature of one’s being. In Romans 11, Paul quotes Isaiah (40) as asking the question “*Who has known the mind of the Lord?*” The Septuagint uses

here, the word *nous*, which in referring to Christ, reflects His essential nature or person. Thus, the renewing of the mind here means, more than just the mental process, *per se*, but also includes the deeper sense of psyche or soul, as the Hebrew used it. Paul told the Corinthians—“*We have the mind of Christ.*” (2:16) *Metamorphe* is not merely a change of attitude, but a change of nature—not just a change of the way we think, but what we are.

That you may approve... δοκιμαζω (*dokimadzo*) means “attesting to”—as the result of a renewed spirit, to be able to discern the things of God. “*For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to Him; and He is not able to know them because they are spiritually discerned.*” (I Corinthians 2: 14)

The will of God... θελημα (*thelema*)—“will”—has to do with the will of God in terms of His overall purposes for His creation, and not so much for direction in personal matters. If we apply this text to our response in the details of personal life, it can become very confusing. If we think that the living sacrifice means that

every detail of our lives is under Divine scrutiny—to see to it that we get His approval for every action—we get on a treadmill. Some groups of believers seem to regard themselves as “celestial chipmunks,” running on the treadmill of doing everything “just right,” as though God were monitoring our every move. In His Omniscience He may be aware of our every move, but is certainly not hovering over us to keep us in line. Some parents treat their children this way and produce, alas, great insecurity.

The good and acceptable and complete... αγαθος (*agathos*) has to do with the overall goodness of God in the universe, as opposed to the πονηρος (*poneros*)—“evil”—of Satan’s realm. ευαρεστον (*euareston*), as explained above, has to do with that which is in harmony with God’s purposes. Τελειον (*teleion*) has to do with the design factor of God’s will—the fulfillment of all that He has designed the world to be. Jesus’ mandate—“*Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect*”—uses this word. It is not a command to be flawless, but to fit in with God’s design for His creatures. We do this by identifying with Him.

Romans 12:3

TRANSLATION

For I say through the grace which has been given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think moderately [in a level-headed way], as God has apportioned to each one the measure of faith.

COMMENTARY

On the Granting and Governing of the Gifts

There is probably no subject in Christendom handled more carelessly and irresponsibly, than the subject of ‘the gifts.’ In the first place, a gift is a gift and not something to be earned or sought after like the annual “Christmas list.” The one passage that seems to suggest this, is an unfortunate mistranslation. I Corinthians 12:31 is usually translated—“covet the best gifts” However, the word translated “covet” ζηλος (*zelos*), is more properly translated “to be appreciative of” or “warmly receptive of” (so also I Corinthians 14:1). In support of this, the gifts that are mentioned are often persons—apostles or prophets or teachers (e.g.). The believers are being asked to appreciate these gifts that are among them, and give them due regard. On the other hand, Paul implies that, while these special “gifts” among them are to be appreciated, it is possible that such gifts can be exercised without love—*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...* So Paul sounds a warning in chapter 13. Apparently, the gifts are given at God’s discretion, and not in response to special requests or special

spirituality. So Paul is not encouraging believers to “go after” the gifts.

In the second place, it is not left to human indiscriminate distribution. Misleading errors in judgment in this matter, can be very serious. For anyone to claim to know the mind of the Lord well enough to make authoritative pronouncements about another person’s gift, is quite presumptuous. To claim that one is a spokesperson for God is a felonious impersonation. And yet, this practice is rampant in the church. In such a serious matter, no one can be that absolute about the mind of God. Outside the express Biblical revelation, there is no way to prove the validity of any human’s revelations. In the church, over the centuries, much damage has been done by the careless giving and receiving of supposed “revelations” from God.

The practice of ordination is a different matter. The church leadership does have the authority to confirm their belief in the validity of the calling of a given individual. But this must be done as a corporate action with the concurrence of

the leadership, and not by unauthorized individuals. Further, the ordination is supposed to be based upon a careful evaluation of qualifications under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and not by some “revelation” presumed to be from God.

In the third place, there must be a compelling from the Holy Spirit, rather than humanistic motivations based upon obligations and/or needs. The need is everywhere. If the motivation is need, it can break a person. Nor can the motivation be love for Christ or love for humanity. There is a difference between love **for** Christ and the love **of** Christ. In II Corinthians 5:14, Paul says, “*The love of Christ compels us.*” The love of Christ refers to His love within us, as a fruit of the Spirit. Such love does not require a perfecting of emotional attitudes in the flesh, but is often expressed apart from the emotional responses. When the motivation is from the Holy Spirit, it does not always involve the fleshly feelings, whether in terms of human affection or dedication. The Holy Spirit reaches out through us to others and compels us to the task in spite of ourselves. No matter how much one may be committed to a task, there are often the “flat times,” when fleshly emotions are not adequate. When the motivation is of the Holy Spirit, these emotional “flat spots” will not make any difference.

Furthermore, when the gift is given through the Holy Spirit, there is a capacity as well as a compelling to do the task. Human beings have their fleshly ambitions—to write or teach or prophesy, for example. One test of the validity of the gift is the capacity to do these things. If one’s writing is of poor quality, it would bring a reflection against the Lord. Many seem to feel that if the Lord could take an “ignorant fisherman” and use him to

write, the Lord could use anyone to write, despite their ineptitude. But the truth of the matter is that, while Peter might have been ignorant of Pharisaical law, he was not ignorant in matters of the word. In fact, the Greek that Peter uses is some of the finest in the New Testament. Where he got it is unclear, but reflects the fact that he certainly was not just “an ignorant fisherman.” The comments by the Pharisees about “knowing letters, having never learned,” was a reference to the fact that he had never been to Rabbinic school.

However, when God gives one a gift, it by no means implies that there is no need for preparation to exercise the gift. In the modern era the need for extensive preparation is crucial. Obviously, the mastery of the Bible in its original text is essential. However, given the complexities of our modern society, even a seminary degree by itself, is not really adequate. A pastor ought to have a pretty good grasp of the behavioral sciences, as well. I know the arguments about getting one’s guidance from the Lord, but I know also the great amount of damage that has been done by well-meaning but inadequately trained pastors.

Furthermore, the gift must be seen not as a reservoir, but rather, a pipeline. It is not our power, but God’s. The gift cannot be used at our own discretion, but rather, God exercises the gift through us. Even Jesus functioned as a channel of God, rather than a power resident within Himself. That was the implication of His “emptying Himself.” He admitted freely that the works that He did were not His own, but the work of the Father through Him. There is an important clue in Luke 5:17, referring to Jesus—“*The power of God was there to heal.*” The gifts are not ours to use as we please. We are but channels of the Spirit.

When we exercise our gifts with the compelling and capacity and controlling of the Holy Spirit, we are not overcome with burden or “burn-out.” On the other hand, there is no place for self-ambition or “empire-building.” There is no place for doing “great things for God.” All assignments and achievements are under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. Under these conditions, the servant does not always come out “looking so good.” The more conspicuous Christ is, in one’s ministry, the less conspicuous will be the self. John expressed it concisely to his disciples—“*He must increase and I must decrease.*” And this gives rise to the next warning—**Not to think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think.** Where there is a genuine reliance on the Holy Spirit for one’s ministry, there will be little place for pride. Genuine service rendered in genuine reliance on the Holy Spirit, comes with genuine opportunities for humility.

Consider, for example the raising of Lazarus. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had remained three days after He heard of the sickness of Lazarus, during which time Lazarus died. Imagine the greeting he received from the sisters who, as recorded in simple terms, said, “If you had been here, our brother would not have died.” There was, no doubt, much more to it than that simple record. If we put ourselves in Jesus’ place and, let us say, were qualified medically to effect a cure but waited so long that the patient died, what a devastating experience that would be to ourselves and to others. “God’s ways are not our ways,” and if we follow His ways, we will not always be acceptable in the light of human ways.

Think moderately, as God has apportioned to each one the measure of faith... The constant challenge of the

church is to “be great Christians,” and “do great things for God.” We are told to “think big,” and that “your only limit is your own lack of faith.” This is totally contrary to what Paul is suggesting here. The measure of one’s faith is not the “will to believe” or the exercising of faith. The measure of one’s faith is the measure that God has apportioned to one. It is erroneously assumed by many that faith can be stretched and strengthened like muscles, by exercising it. There is a common teaching that if we reach out beyond ourselves, we will develop our faith. This is false, as we learn from this text.

It is important here, to understand the difference between faith and trust. This has been extensively discussed in previous chapters, but suffer a bit of repetition. Faith is a fruit of the Spirit—a gift of Divine energy within our spirits, and is not affected by human thought and emotion. Thus, faith remains intact, even when human feelings are negative. On the other hand, trust is a product of the human mind and is an unreliable emotion. When people speak of building up their faith, they usually mean to bolster their confidence. But human confidence can be quite misleading. The psychologist and unfortunately, many ministers, give the impression that anything is possible if we only believe it is possible. The truth is, it is possible only for those to whom it is possible. Leaders tend to feel that everyone should be able to do what they do.

Unfortunately, many believe that the only meaningful gift is a “mouth.” It takes far more grace to be a simple servant of the Lord with an unobtrusive gift, than a more public person with a conspicuous gift. Unfortunately, the tendency is to give the notice and accolades to the people with the conspicuous gifts. It is as

unsound to do more than one is called upon, as it is to do less. When we go beyond our gift, we are functioning in the flesh. We may be so busy doing what the flesh motivates us to do, that we do not have the time or energy to do what the Holy Spirit motivates us to do. It is a total fallacy to urge people to reach out for greater faith and greater works. It is God Who both apportions the faith and

assigns the task in keeping with it. It is human presumption that thinks that one may choose the task and seek to cultivate faith in keeping with it.

You must do what you feel comfortable with and compelled to, and close your ears to those around you, who seek to press you beyond your limits. God assigns the limits, and not man.

Romans 12:4-8

TRANSLATION

For even as we have many members in one body and all members do not have the same function, so we the many, are one body in Christ; and in the same way members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace which has been given to us; whether prophecy, let it be according to the proportion of faith; or stewardship, [let it be the same] in respect to stewardship; or teaching, [let it be the same] in respect to teaching; or he who comforts, [let it be the same] in respect to comforting. He who gives, let it be in singleness of heart; he who governs, let it be with diligence; he who shows compassion, let it be with cheerfulness.

COMMENTARY

The Diversity of Gifts

Apparently, the Holy Spirit in His inspiring of Paul, considered the human body to be the perfect analogy in the matter of gifts. The diversity of functions in the human body is limitless and intricate. In considering the gifts, we are inclined to think of the more obvious features—limbs, sense organs, vocal organs—and ignore the intricate systems that support them. The eye movements, for example, are controlled by the 12 reticular nerves. The failure of one of these tiny neurons can cause very serious eye problems. Instead of the usual category of the sense of feel, we have trillions of nerve endings that affect feeling and touching. In his discussion with the Corinthians, Paul indicates that some of the less obvious or less “comely” parts may, indeed, have a more important function. This concept opens up the realization of the infinite number of gifts that the members of the body may possess, most of them unobserved by the

casual observer. In his discussion of the gifts with the people at Corinth (I Corinthians 12), Paul makes it abundantly clear that all gifts have equal value. *“The eye is not able to say to the hand, I have no need of you...”* The assumption that the important gifts are all obvious, and that everyone should “recognize their gifts,” is totally unjustified in the light of the Biblical statements, as well as the physiological analogy, which the Holy Spirit presents to us.

All the members do not have the same function... It is assumed in some quarters that there are certain basic gifts, which everyone ought to have. It is assumed, for example, that the moment one has become converted, one will become a “mouth.” It is assumed that shy persons will suddenly become aggressive persons. It is assumed that everyone ought to “speak out for Jesus,” and that if

one does not do so, one's salvation may be in question. The burden of guilt which such teaching has caused, has driven many to assume that they are not acceptable to Christ, and to back away from Him. Remember well, that if you are, for example, the fourth reticular nerve, you have an important function in seeing, but you will not be recognized by very many.

Having gifts differing according to the grace which is given to us... The whole mood of this passage is that it is God Himself, Who measures out the faith and the grace and the gifts which require them. If you are uncomfortable or burdened, or "stressed out," about what you are doing, the chances are that God has not given you the grace and capacity to do it. The use of motivational techniques by the church has led too much mismatching of gift and servant, to say nothing of an unnecessary burden of guilt. Remember, when God gives the gift, He gives both the compelling and the capacity. It will not be a burden, even though it may be difficult or tiring.

According to the proportion of faith... All of the gifts or services listed here in these next verses, are governed by this principle. To go beyond this—to try and stretch one's faith—is to function in the flesh. When the Spirit is at work in us, there will be no need to "stretch out" our faith. The expression of the gift will be a natural flow.

Whether prophecy... According to Paul's definition in I Corinthians 14, prophecy really involves "the edifying of the saints." It may be a scripture text or word of encouragement or praise, prompted by the Spirit for the special needs of the assembly. It is not usually a predictive utterance, but an edifying one. Its special qualification is that is a timely

utterance from Christ. In this respect, it must be handled carefully, as becomes one's responsibility for speaking as an agent of Christ in the building up of the body of believers. One who gives a false utterance, supposedly from Christ, and thus offends the body, will have to face the Lord on this matter. Over the centuries, much damage has been done by those who make such utterances ill-advisedly.

Let it be so in respect to service... The phrase, "according to the proportion of faith," which was used with reference to prophecy, is picked up again in the rest of the series. (For the student of Greek we are referring to the "dative of respect.") The Greek word for service here—*διακονος* (*diakonos*)—often translated by the word "ministry," has to do with services to the body in practical matters. For instance, in Acts 6, there was a complaint to the apostles that certain of the widows were being neglected in the daily service (*diakonos*), which was a specific reference to the practical matters of provisions in material things. The apostles say, "*It is not reasonable [acceptable] that we should neglect the word of God to serve (diakonein) tables.*" It was not a disparagement of the service so rendered, but rather, that they had other gifts. And thus also, was born the title—"deacon." Deacons are those who serve the church in these practical matters, but are nevertheless, as much a gift to the body as are the other more didactic ministries.

The importance of this category was demonstrated in the decision by the Apostles to appoint *diakonoi* to attend to these matters, who would be "filled with the Spirit and wisdom." Among those selected was Stephen, whose main service was a memorable and dynamic speech to the Sanhedrin who had taken him in for

questioning. So powerful was his message that the entire body stopped their ears and attacked him. They stoned him to death and he became the first martyr. So the service of the “deacon” is not to be minimized, even though it does not represent the more vocal kinds of ministry. In fact, the qualifications of deacons, in 1 Timothy, are quite high.

Let it be so in respect to teaching...

Those who teach must do so with the compelling and capacity to do so. There are a great many teachers in the body—too many—who are simply not qualified. The demand for teachers is great, and the pastor may press into service those who do not have the gift for it. Realistically speaking, there should be no more classes than there are those who have the qualification to teach. If the church lacks the Spirit-filled and qualified teachers, it should combine the classes. James says, *“Be not many teachers, for you will receive the greater condemnation.”*

Let it be so with respect to encouraging...

The word, often translated by “exhortation,” is the Greek word παρακαλεω (*parakaleo*). We have discussed it earlier in the Chapter, but it is the same word that is used for the Holy Spirit—the “Paraclete.” The word, in that respect is translated in many English texts by “comforter.” The category of “exhorter,” is a total misapplication. The assumption of such a “gift” causes many to be self-appointed judges of everyone. Paul says, *“Judge not one another.”* He also says, *“I do not even judge myself.”* The basic meaning of the word *parakaleo* is “one called alongside to help.” The “exhorter” usually is not so much concerned with helping people as he is with exercising his yen for judging people.

He that gives, let him do it with singleness of heart...

The Greek word is

ἁπλους (*haplous*). Jesus uses it in the Sermon on the Mount, where He says, *“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”* (Matthew 6:22) The opposite of *haplous* is διπλους (*dipλους*), which means “divided.” Since Jesus uses *haplous* in connection with light, a good analogy would be the difference between a laser beam and a flashlight beam. The laser beam gets its power from what we call “coordinated” light. It is based on the use of a ruby rod with mirrors at each end. The light energy is emitted in one single stream of the same wave length. The flashlight, on the other hand, is diffused (*dipλους*) light. That is, the wave lengths are different and dispersed. While the laser can burn through steel, a flashlight cannot even ignite a piece of paper.

Paul’s use of the term in connection with giving indicates that giving, should be done with one single motivation—the Holy Spirit. When we try to employ human motivations, we are in total confusion. Who has not felt the tug of children’s miseries, for example, dramatically exploited on television? How much of the motivation is purely emotional and psychological, who can say? How much of the money goes actually to the feeding of the child, who knows? But the motivation is there. The problem is, it appeals to the human mind, rather than the Spirit. In the case of those who have the “gift of giving,” how does one know? All you can do is ask the Spirit to see to it that you give what and where you are supposed to.

But what about general giving by the believers, aside from the special gift. This again, is a matter of the Holy Spirit. The idea of the “tithe” went out with the Law. The New Testament principle according to Acts, is that the believers came together on the first day of the week and

gave “*as the Lord had prospered them.*” Thus, one gives in the measure that *one is able*. If the Lord gives one the gift of *giving*, He gives *also* the wherewithal to give. The most abominable of motivations (or perhaps exploitations) is the salesman’s “pitch”—“Whatever you give, the Lord will give back,” or “double,” or “quadruple.” That is purely human motivation. One reason the church clings to “the tithe” so tenaciously, is that without it they lose their “leverage.” Many programs in the church are humanly devised and hence, depend upon humanly motivated giving. Nor can the need be an adequate motive. The need is everywhere and always. But which particular need? Only the Holy Spirit knows what He wants you to do. How do you know what to give and where? All you can do is ask the Spirit to see to it that you give what you are supposed to.

But there are principles to observe as follows:

1.) The tithe is an Old Testament law. If that’s what the Lord directs you to do, do it, but only because the Spirit directs you to, and not because you are obligated to do it.

2.) Disregard human motivational appeals. When you give because people ask you, you have no idea whether it’s what the Lord wants or not.

3.) Avoid giving to further secular causes. While the lord is trying to prove that the tragedies of the world are the result of the entrance of Satan, the secular organizations (and some churches) are trying to prove that we can make it better. Satan would love to have us join him in making a better world, apart from Christ.

4.) Don’t give beyond your means, no matter what the leader may say. It is very unsound to take money owed to pay off your bills, on the basis that if you give,

the Lord will make it up to you so you can pay your bills. It is unfair to those to whom you owe that money.

5.) Don’t go into debt over it. Some people are encouraged to borrow money to help pay for a new building. The very principle of that is absurd.

6.) Give to those who minister to you, not just to those who want your money. Paul says, “*If I minister to you in spiritual things, is it not right for you to minister to me in material things?*”

7.) Give to those whom you know well enough to know that their use of the funds is honest and wise.

8.) Don’t go by what other people think you ought to do. It is strictly between you and Christ.

9.) In the last analysis we must depend on the Lord to see to it that we give as He directs.

He who rules, let it be with diligence... There are administrative tasks in the work of the body of believers. That is especially true in these days of so many complications in matters of business and finance. This gift is perhaps akin to the gift of “government.” The Greek word προιστημι (*proistemi*) has nothing to do with the administrator as “overlord.” It means, literally, “to stand before,” and really means those who stand as the representatives of the group. There are practical matters in the overseeing of various assemblies of believers. These matters become more complicated as society itself becomes more complex. What could be handled by a “money bag” in the early church, now requires a system of property management and accounting, for example. In the modern church, they have appointed trustees and deacons to handle these practical matters. However, it must be pointed out that the service of the trustee is just as much of a Divine appointment as those things which we

might regard as the “spiritual” gifts. A mistake is often made in the church in the assumption that the work of the trustee can be done by those whose main qualifications are business experience.

Those who are “alms-givers”... The Greek word here is ἐλεεω (*eleeo*), which means, basically, “to show mercy.” However, there is a technical use of the word as a root for ἐλεμοσυνη (*eleemosune*), which refers, specifically, to the giving of alms or charity. We use the word charities today rather than alms. This gift has to do, of course, not with a dollar in the “Salvation Army pot,” but with a special gift of compassion, which expresses itself in involving oneself in the social needs of the community. Thus, for example, the “Rescue Mission” work would be part of this kind of gift. The reason we interpret the expression in this way, is that it would be assumed that all believers ought to be compassionate, and that it would not take a special gift to show mercy to one another in that sense.

Having explored thoroughly the issue of our relationship to God through Christ, Paul now turns to the outward expression of that relationship, in the various services which God has entrusted to His people on the earth. Paul is not here, attempting to motivate the believers to “get going for God.” He is rather, giving guidelines for the exercise of gifts which God has distributed according to His own will. Nor is it always possible for one to determine exactly what gift one has, since there are combinations of gifts, and there are gifts that are not that readily

distinguished. For example, one’s gift may be something of an influence among the believers for harmony and good will. This would not be as readily discerned as those whose gifts might be more publicly articulated.

So how do we determine what gift God has given us?

It is not our place to attempt to determine this, but rather to be open to Christ for the exercise of whatever He may give us to do. If He has given us a gift and we are of course willing to exercise whatever gift He gives, He will certainly see to it that we do that. Someone asked the author once, “How do I get into Bible class work?” The author’s reply was, “You don’t **get into Bible class work**, you do it as God brings it before you. You have to prepare yourself, but people have to want you and the opportunities have to arise. You would never want to promote yourself as a Bible teacher, looking for work.” We provide the willingness, God provides the capacity and the compelling. That idea is commonly taught in the church, but not commonly practiced. The leadership has often taken upon itself to press people into services for which they are not really qualified.

So put the matter in the Lord’s hands and be at peace. If you are open to Him, He will see to it that you do exercise the gift that He has given you, but you may not be able to sort out just what the particular gift may be or what combination of gifts.

Romans 12:9-13

TRANSLATION

[Agape] Love is unfeigned—shrinking from evil; cleaving to the good. With respect to brotherly love, having natural affection toward one another. With respect to honor, giving precedence to one another; with respect to application, diligence; with respect to the Spirit, being fervent. With respect to the Lord, serving. With respect to expectation, rejoicing; with respect to affliction, enduring; with respect to prayer being always at the ready. With respect to the needs of the saints, fellowshipping with them. With respect to hospitality, following after It.

COMMENTARY

Guidelines for Getting Along

If part of the outward expression of our inward relationship to Christ, is in the expressing of gifts; another facet is the relationship to our fellow human beings. So Paul discusses the attitudes that accompany agape love (as expressed in I Corinthians 13). The coming of the Holy Spirit into our spirits brings about a total change of nature. We become “partakers of the Divine nature.” This is what enables us to identify with God and maintain our eternal relationship to Him. This does affect, in many ways, our human minds in terms of attitudes and intentions. Basically, it changes our attitude toward God, toward others, and towards ourselves. We see things in a different light. But the change of attitude does not always bring about a change of action. Paul’s constant reminder is that the flesh is weak in itself. And yet, our human relationships are always subject to the inadequacies of our human natures, as inherited from our fallen forebears.

If we are going to get along in this world, however, it is important to cultivate appropriate attitudes and actions in our relationship to others. While the love of Christ comes automatically with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and while the gifts that accompany His coming are part of our spiritual endowments, our outward actions toward others are the result of a great many genetic and environmental factors that govern our behavior. Christians do not automatically become “lovely” people when they become saved. Jonathan Edwards, one of the great evangelists of the 18th century, when being asked permission for marriage to his daughter, refused the young man on the grounds that she was hard to live with. The young man said, “But she’s a Christian, isn’t she?” Jonathan Edwards answered, “Yes, but the Lord can live with people that we can’t.” This is one of the most insightful statements that I have ever come across, defining the

behavior of Christians. The common misunderstanding is, “how could that person do such a thing and be a Christian?” the answer is rather simple. How can one be a Jones or a Smith, for example, and not act right? We are saved by the miracle of a spiritual birth, and thus become members of the family of God. Behavior is, of course, a most important thing, but is not the basis of our salvation. If we cannot be saved by “being good,” we cannot be lost by “not being good.”

But doesn't that minimize the importance of behavior?

It only minimizes it as a fundamental factor in salvation. It does not minimize it in terms of our life on the earth. Unfortunately, commitment to Christ is not always a strong enough motivation to change one's behavior patterns. If we were to call in question the faith or commitment of everyone who misbehaves, we would be hard pressed to sort out the levels of misbehavior involved, and we would wreak havoc in the ranks of the believers. Who can make those kinds of judgments? Who, but Christ alone?

So what then does the Holy Spirit do for us if He does not change our behavior patterns?

That is a good question. In the first place, the assumption that the Holy Spirit does not change behavior patterns in the flesh, comes from Paul's own oft repeated statements regarding the inadequacy of the flesh. “*In my flesh dwells no good thing.*” If the Holy Spirit permeated the flesh as well as the spirit, Paul could not say such a thing. In the second place, it comes from the observing of Christians for over half a century, and observing that the potential of failure is germane in all believers, even the most “spiritual.” The

observation that the Lord does not cast off the sinful members of His family, comes from the constant lessons of scripture; as with David, for example, and a great many like him whom God forgave upon confession and brought spiritual restoration. Furthermore, the universal experiences of remorse and forgiveness throughout Christendom since its inception, indicates the grace of God to stay with His people in the midst of their continual struggles. When one comes to me with a concern about having lost favor with Christ because of some misbehavior, I always remind them that, if the Spirit were not with them, they would not have been concerned to ask about it.

So then what difference does the Holy Spirit make in our lives?

The essential change that the Holy Spirit brings, as we indicated before, is the change of nature and the change of attitude. The change of attitude, in addition to altering our view of God and the self and others, also gives us a sensitivity to right and wrong. But, being sensitive to right and wrong does not always include the capacity to act upon that sensitivity. The people of earth have, since the “Fall,” been subject to human limitations. And that, alas, includes Christians. With this in mind, we will examine the suggestions of Paul in terms of handling the “pesky” flesh. These are primarily matters of attitude and not a New Testament replacement for the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately, some have entitled this section—“Rules of the Christian Life.” And an unfortunately large number of people simply add this to the long list of requirements for Christians that make of their lives an intense struggle for perfection. It is often assumed that, even though these may not be binding laws, they are at least the *sine qua non* (without which, nothing) for

favor with God.

[Agape] love is unfeigned... It is not “putting on an act.” The Greek word ὑποκριτος (*hypokritos*) is a word used for the stage. Primarily, it had to do with actors and, thus, with “pretenders.” Of course, not all kinds of love are unfeigned. In the Greek trilogy of words for love—*agape*, *phile*, and *eros*—only *agape* could be said to be always unfeigned. As used in the New Testament, both by Jesus and the Apostles, it is a word germane to the spirit. Paul tells the Galatians that “*the fruit of the spirit is [agape] love...*” (5:22) It is a quality that comes with the coming of Christ into our spirits, and is expressed quite apart from the mental processes of emotion. It is probably best translated by “caring.” One can care about the welfare of others, without necessarily liking them. And yet, in many situations in society, the facade is all too common an experience. In a sense, the statement means that “*apape* love is genuine.”

It does not say that *agape* love ought to be genuine. The translation “let it be,” is not adequate. The same construction is used in I Corinthians 13, where there is no question; “love is longsuffering,” for example. On the other hand, to say that if one does not exhibit this kind of love, one’s salvation and/or “spirituality” is in question, would be missing the main force of *agape*. The *agape* love of Christ within us, is there as surely as He is there, but does not always exhibit itself in terms of fleshly emotion. However, in Christian circles, both *phile* and *eros* are often feigned. The very insistence on emotional love as a characteristic of salvation certainly promotes a counterfeiting of it. So *agape* love as a result of the Holy Spirit within us, is by its very nature, genuine. *Phile* love, or affection, is easily feigned, but does not call in question one’s salvation or commitment to Christ. It can

bring unfortunate social consequences, and can affect the harmony of the body of believers.

Actually, what we have here is not a mandate to adopt these attitudes but rather, a statement (as in I Corinthians 13) of the true nature of *agape* love. It does not say that this kind of attitude will always prevail if one is a Christian, but rather that this is the nature of the *agape* one possess within. Some of the confusion exists because of punctuation. A period after the first sentence, separates it from the rest of the attributes. It should rather, be, as in I Corinthians 13, something of a dash. Remember that the original Greek manuscripts, called the “uncials,” were distinguished by being all in capital letters and having neither divisions between the words nor punctuation marks. The punctuation was added later. We are therefore at liberty to make the suggestion that a dash could readily be placed after *anupokritos*, thus making the rest of the attitudes predicate adjectives or descriptions of *agape* love.

Detesting evil and clinging to good...

While believers often find a strange affinity for elements of Satan’s world that are not wholesome, the *agape* love within our spirits detests all that Satan and his world produces. This keeps us on something of an even keel. Breaking over in the flesh to entertain unwholesome or unsound elements of Satan’s world, has usually something of a check from the inner spirit and makes it an uncomfortable thing even if we ignore the check and continue the action.

In respect to brotherly love, having a natural affection unto one another...

Agape love is genuine not only in its caring, but in its natural sensitivities toward one another. *Agape* love does not play games with others emotions. To put

on a show of artificial affection is a common trait in the flesh, but the Holy Spirit within reaches out genuinely, in a spirit of *camaraderie* with our fellow believers. In the world apart from the Spirit, “game-playing with affections” is a rampant practice. It is so much so that one may become hardened to that way of life and cease to function in a natural way. Much of *eros* love is purely physical, and may obscure natural affection with illusory physical stimuli.

In matters that require earnest application... The translation, “business,” is too narrow. The word may apply to anything that requires diligence. The Greek word *οκνηρος* (*okneros*) really has to do with laziness or indolence. It is obvious that there are not a few Christians that are lazy. Sometimes it is a matter of genes or physical fitness. It cannot be a test of salvation, but the presence of the Holy Spirit is a vitalizing element within, as the next phrase indicates—**Fervent in spirit**. The word *fervent* comes from the word which means “to boil.” It would probably be a misapplication to translate this as being “on fire for God.” However, there is with the coming of the Spirit, a vitality that involves an ardent appreciation of the life we have in Christ. In the natural sense, it expresses itself in different ways that are not always obvious.

Rejoicing in expectation... Again, the common translation—“hope”—is inadequate. The word has been discussed at length, elsewhere, but the English concept of the word is generally accompanied by uncertainty. Such a translation is misleading in such phrases as “*looking for that blessed hope.*” (Titus 1:2) Obviously it would better be translated “looking for that blessed expectation.” The *agape* love in our spirits, fully assured of our expectations,

finds vitality in it.

The word *χαρη* (*chaire*) is akin to the word “grace”—*χαρις* (*charis*), which we have explored quite thoroughly. The word has here the same feeling of a river, or flow, of Divine benevolence. The human spirit immersed in that flow, responds with the feeling of its vitality. The Greek word is not equivalent to our English “rejoice,” which carries with it more of the idea of exuberance or “euphoria.” The Greek concept can be expressed even in the midst of sorrow and pain. Jesus’ words to the disciples—“*These things I have spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you,*”—were spoken on the way to the cross. These words reflect the true concept of a deep abiding sense of the “flow of Divine benevolence within the spirit.”

There is a faulty assumption within Christendom based on the mistranslation of this word, that if one is truly victorious, one will always feel good cheer or blissfulness. The truth is that one can be laden with sorrow and still know that vitality within the spirit. Much goes on in the spirit that never surfaces in the emotions. It is all right to have human feelings—sorrow, disappointment, frustration. The victory comes in the holding on to Christ in spite of the human distresses. The assumption that one must always “feel good” about things, gives rise to much self-delusion. The author has always said, “You can’t help how you feel; you can help how you deal with how you feel.” For the Christian, dealing with one’s feelings is ultimately a matter of staying with Christ in spite of everything. A corollary thought is in verse 15—“*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*” Those who feel that the display of sorrow reflects some lack of victory have failed to understand this point. This often leads to a certain

callousness of attitude that assumes that anyone who is not feeling “up” is not victorious. Sometimes weeping with one is the most effective expression of comfort. There are many situations in which only the grace of Christ can comfort, at the spirit level. Words can fall flat or even be abrasive. The most effective thing you can do in comforting others is simply to let them know that you know that they are suffering, and that you care.

Enduring in afflictions... The love that is born of the spirit is a love that carries us through the tragedies and traumas of life. Again, the English translation—“patience”—has to do with the emotions. Many people are under guilt because they are not feeling good about their afflictions. They feel impatient, perhaps angry. The Greek word here—ὑπομενω (*hupomeno*)—is a matter of the will. It means literally “to remain under.” A good analogy is the stress test of materials. It is not only a matter of how much stress the material will bear, but for how long. It is all right not to like your circumstances or be happy with them. The important thing, again, is that you stay with Christ. The denial of human emotions in times of stress can lead to self-deception in an effort to mask one’s true feelings. The “enduring” in view in this text, is a product of the Holy Spirit. Feelings are a product of the human mind.

Being always at the ready in prayer... The Greek word προσκαρτερω (*proskartereo*) does not focus so much on “pressing ahead,” as upon being constant and ready. In Mark 3:9, we have the story of Jesus at the seaside with the multitude. Because the crowd was pressing Him, He asked the disciples to have a boat ready for Him to be able to move out from the crowd. He uses the word *proskartereo*. The United States

Coast Guard has a motto—“semper paratus”—which means “always ready.” That is the feeling of this word. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us represents something of an altar of prayer, in which there is a continuous process of communion between ourselves and the Spirit of Christ; like the altar of incense in the tabernacle. The love in our spirits, which is the fruit of the Spirit, expresses itself in this constant communion between ourselves and Christ. It is not that we are told to “get ready,” but that we are, by virtue of the presence of the Spirit within us, always ready to commune with Christ; or perhaps that He is always ready to commune with us.

The use of the word “persevere” in some translations, implies that one will be more likely to get a response to one’s prayers by pressing one’s case with Christ. Some teachers have been known to suggest that one should “ding-dong Jesus”—that is, to keep after Him until we get what we want. That is totally false. God is neither deaf nor reluctant to help us. A simple prayer will do. It would also be faulty to think that we need to prove to Christ our “fervency.” To Isaiah God said, “*And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.*” (Isaiah 65:24) It is obvious that God knows, even before we ask Him, what we need.

Then why pray?

Because this is what we are instructed to do in the Bible, for one thing, and also because we participate in the process of our lives and share them with Christ. He knows what we need, but He wants us to know what we need. So the Holy Spirit within us initiates our communion with Christ, and we participate with Him in its fulfillment. (See Romans 8:26.) Prayer is

not a matter of changing God's mind so much as bringing our own minds into conformity with His. Thus, *proskartereo* is far more suitably translated by "being always ready."

Fellowshipping in the needs of the saints... The Holy Spirit within us brings about a *camaraderie* with the saints and gives us a base for sharing with them in their needs. The flesh being what it is, we do not always express that sensitivity by our actions, but there is, nevertheless, as a result of the Holy Spirit within us, a certain "caring consciousness" about one another. Apart from the Holy Spirit, humans tend to be consumed with greed and self interest.

Following after hospitality towards strangers... This is akin to the previous statement, but is applied to those without the Christian community. The attitude of believers in general through the Holy Spirit, is sensitivity to all, whether of the fellowship of believers or not. It must be noted, however, that we live in a vastly different society than the social order in which the apostle Paul was writing. The difference is that there were no welfare agencies in those days, or means of public benevolence. It might be said that those who were "beggars," were beggars, indeed. One does need to practice restraint in the ways in which we reach out to those that need help. It might be well observed that we do reach out to strangers, through the government process of taxation. In a way, the government does a more efficient job of

extending help to the needy than we do. This was discussed previously at some length, but needs to be repeated in the sense that it would not be appropriate, generally speaking in our society, to open one's doors indiscriminately to whomever came along. Prior to the establishing of the income tax, and especially during the depression, there were a great many homeless—especially men and boys on the road looking for employment—to whom many (including our own family) extended help. Things are quite different today. However, the inner sensitivity to extend help to the "stranger" is there, and when we feel at liberty to do so, we as Christians, want to extend help. Of course, it must be observed that the realities of the sensitivities in our spirit, are not always expressed appropriately *by* our fleshly natures.

The previous discussion has had to do with sensitivities in our spirits toward others, which are the natural expression of the love of Christ within us, through His Holy Spirit. As with many aspects of our relationship to Christ, the flesh is often faulty and failing in giving outward expression to these inner sensitivities. This weakness does keep us in a position of humility before God, in view of our inadequacies. If only those are saved who practice perfectly, the outward expression of the inner spirit, there would be few, indeed, that would ever make it. Nevertheless, we are sensitive and we do adopt a spirit of penitence before the Lord, in the respect to our human failures.

Romans 12:14-21

TRANSLATION

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Be of the same attitude toward one another, not inclining toward exalted things, but identifying with the lowly. Do not be focused on yourselves. Not returning bad for bad; being well-intentioned before all people. If possible, as far as that which is on your part, cultivate harmony with all people. Not avenging yourselves, beloved, but giving place with respect to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” sayeth the Lord. But, “If your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for this, you will heap coals of fire upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

COMMENTARY

Further Attitudes and Actions of Agape Love

Remember now that we are dealing with a quality of love that is the fruit of the Spirit within us, as indicated by Paul in Galatians 5:22. We are not dealing here with ultimate perfections. The attitudes and actions discussed here are resident within the reservoir of our spirits, but do not always find expression in the flesh. Nor is it assumed that mature Christians will always express these qualities. However, the presence of the Spirit within us does give us the desire to cultivate these qualities in our daily actions.

Bless those who persecute you... Paul now slips into imperatives, whereas he has been using participles describing the true essence of *agape* love (as in I Corinthians 13). The word “bless”—*εὐλογεῖν* (*eulogeo*)—means to have a “good word for.” This, however, must be balanced out by Jesus’ words for the

Pharisees, which were hardly “benevolent.” On the other hand, Jesus did not curse the Pharisees. And this is the contrast here. It is not becoming for Christians to put a “curse” upon anyone. The word *καταραομα* (*kataraoimai*) is based upon a word meaning “prayer,” but rather, a prayer to the gods that tends toward desiring evil to befall someone. That indicates that what is intended here is something more serious than a simple oath. Today we tend to relegate curses not to the realm of the occult, but to the place of a casual wish. Many a person has been consigned to the “nether” world, without a serious assumption that the imprecation will indeed be a serious request to the deities. Here it is in the same vein as Jesus’ analysis of the Law, which forbids swearing at all. It does not refer to crude speech, but rather to the practice in those days of giving a serious affirmation before God. It was not a light matter.

Rejoice with the rejoicing... The word “rejoice” and its companion, “joy,” have been discussed at length. Suffice it then to say here that we are not dealing with the emotional expression of exuberance, but rather with a flow of Divine benevolence in the spirit, which is, of course, far more steadfast than the vacillating emotions of the mind.

Similarly, we are to “weep with the weeping ones.” It does not say that we are to tell them not to weep or to dry their tears. Weeping is a very legitimate thing for believers. It does not in any way suggest a “lack of victory.” It does not say that we are to tell people not to weep. Jesus experienced the whole gamut of human emotions—weeping, rejoicing, loving and even anger (as in the case of the Pharisees). In some circles, it is assumed that such emotions are not allowable. And there are some cultic groups that strive for the end of having no emotions at all—flatland. The only thing we have to watch is putting too much weight on human emotions. They are very unreliable. That is why true worship must be in the spirit. The flesh often creeps in, in human efforts to worship. Music that is purely secular in nature can often evoke emotions quite similar to those that accompany our religious efforts.

Weeping with those who weep, is the best comfort that we can give. I am often asked what to say to people who are in need of comfort. My response is that they should let them know that they know they are hurting, and that they care. Actually, only Christ can provide the grace to handle the need. Our human words can often be misapplied, however well intentioned. There is nothing like a “shop-worn” platitude to grate on the nerves of someone who is trying to cope

with sorrow. We provide the caring; God provides the grace. The worst thing to say is that you know how they feel. You probably don’t, since every individual is different.

Having the same attitude toward one another... The Greek word φρονεω (*phroneo*) basically has to do with the process of thinking that takes place in our minds. It is not just a single thought, but a pattern of thought, more like an attitude. Paul goes on to say that we should not let that pattern of thought or attitude focus on exalted things, but to identify with the lowly ones. In a way, he is warning against “snobbishness.” Actually the *agape* love of Christ in our spirits is not discriminating. That is, it regards everyone alike and is “no respecter of persons.” Our spirits within tell us that this is so, but in our human actions we do not always follow our spirits. One of the evidences that Christ is within us, is that we know we ought to be like that.

Identifying with the lowly... The common translation—“to condescend” means almost the opposite of what is intended, here. Actually, condescension has the feeling of “looking down upon” or “tolerating.” The verb συναπαγω (*sunapago*) means to “lead away” or “conduct,” when it is in the active voice. However, in the middle voice it means “to go along together with,” or to “identify with.”

Do not be focused on yourselves... Once again, we are dealing with the word that means “a process of thinking” or “pattern of thought.” Paul is simply saying not to let that pattern of thought be consumed upon, or focused upon oneself.

Not returning bad for bad... We are

dealing with a word that is different than the word for “evil,” as it applies to the satanic forces in the world. This is more a word that has to do with unsound conduct. It is the basis of our English word “cacophony,” which is best illustrated by the sounds of an orchestra tuning up. It has to do with attitudes or actions that are not wholesome. In contrast, the spirit within us urges us to be “well-intentioned” to all.

If possible, as for your part... When it comes to living at peace with others, sometimes their attitudes or actions make that very difficult. Paul is not here giving a blanket requirement, but rather, realizes that there are limitations to our peace-making efforts. Jesus, for example, found it impossible to be at peace with the Pharisees without unreasonable compromise. Generally speaking, however, the Holy Spirit within us reaches out to others in the desire for harmony.

Not avenging yourselves... We are dealing here, with the quality that

evolves from the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. As a human function, revenge is a matter of taking justice into one’s own hands. Humans are very ineffective at this, especially since the effort is usually immersed in emotion. There is also a strong element of the irrational in it since a chain reaction often takes place that cannot be predicted. This is how feuds start. Revenge elicits more revenge which in turn provokes further revenge, and so on *ad infinitum*. Usually the original episode that started the process is forgotten in the emotional avalanche that follows the unleashing of the process.

God is so much better at justice than we are that whatever He does will always satisfy the situation. Turning the matter over to Him is the better part of wisdom. It follows then that if we will return good for evil, we will actually come out better in the end, even in the human desire to see that justice is done.

Romans 13:1-7

TRANSLATION

Let every soul be submissive to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except by God and the authorities that are based on an order established by God. So then he who resists authority sets himself against that which is an institution of God, and they who have resisted, shall receive judgment to themselves. For the rulers are not a fear to the good deed, but to the bad one. Do you wish not to fear the authority? Do the good thing, and you will have praise from the same; for he is a servant of God to you unto good. But if you do the bad deed, fear, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a servant of God, an avenger unto wrath to the one who practices the bad. For this reason it is necessary to be submissive, not only on account of wrath, but also on account of conscience. For this reason, also, you pay tribute; for public servants are prepared of God unto this very purpose. Render to everyone, that which is due—to the one to whom tribute is due, tribute; to the one to whom taxes, taxes; to the one to whom reverence, reverence; to the one to whom honor, honor.

COMMENTARY

The Child of God and the World Order

This chapter takes up a most crucial subject—the relationship of the Christian to government. First of all, we must ask some basic questions—what is government? Where did it come from? What is our responsibility to it?

First of all, what is government? It might seem rather obvious from the word itself, but the question is, what is the technical government which is under consideration in this chapter? Here, the word *ὑποτάσσω* (*hupotasso*) is most significant. It comes originally from the word *τάσσω* (*tasso*), which has to do with an orderly arrangement. The noun form—*τάξις* (*taxis*) (not the city cab)—is found in such

words as taxonomy. Taxonomy is a word of science which has to do with naming things in a proper classification. Thus, we have classes and sub-classes; families and species. The basic meaning of the word *hupotasso* then is to put things in a proper order. To be “submissive” means simply “to be in an orderly relationship to.” Thus, to be “submissive” to the powers that be, does not mean to be under their jurisdiction in every aspect of life, but only that which is relevant to their civil authority. In high school, the course that deals with government is called “civics.” That is actually a Latin equivalent of the Greek word *πόλις* (*polis*), from which we get another group

of names such as political, metropolis, and even police. Unfortunately, in some forms of government, such as totalitarianism, the authorities have gone quite beyond their jurisdiction as outlined by God.

That leads us to the next question—where did government come from? The answer, according to Paul, is that it is an institution of God. God ordained the idea of government for the welfare of the people. The fact that there has been an excessive abuse of authority does not take away from God's original benevolent intention. Unfortunately, government, like everything else in Satan's world, has been corrupted by the very humans whose welfare was its chief object.

Actually, government started with the tribal and family group. The head of the family became the tribal chief, as the family expanded and branched out. As population grew and tribes multiplied, the problem of governance became more complex. Disputes and wars between the tribes called for broader reaches of authority, and so developed the monarch, who reigned over a number of tribes. The need for broad powers of government was dramatically demonstrated during the so-called "feudal" era. Feudalism was a system of "loyalties and land tenures." One who had come into possession of land would grant portions of that land or "fiefs" in exchange for loyalty and the obligation to fight for the security of the land. Under this political system, one's rights derived from within oneself—one had a right to whatever he could get and keep. And so wars raged back and forth throughout the land—especially Europe—where there were numbers of rather equally balanced political units—monarchies, duchys, and baronial estates, all of which vied for the expansion of their realms. In many parts of the world, such

as China, there were the warlords or overlords, who ruled with tyrannical oppression over very large areas. Of course, there were many evils in this system and no recourse for the general population, which was made up of serfs and peasants and other categories, which were afforded little status beyond the beasts of the field.

Into this widespread reign of tyranny and oppression there came, in about the 14th Century, the advent of the renaissance, which was, as the name implies, a rebirth of human dignity and enlightenment. Such names as Leonardo DaVinci, Dante, Raphael, Galileo, and Copernicus are associated with this period of time.

As an outgrowth of the renaissance, there were, in the 15th century, the various revolutions in science and exploration, and especially in political enlightenment. In this, we cannot help but see the hand of God bringing great relief to the oppressed condition of mankind on the earth, and bringing into focus the right to participate in one's own governance. Thus, you have the concept which is basic to our own Declaration of Independence—the "consent of the governed." Up to this point, it was assumed that kings had their right to rule from God and that the people had no place to challenge them. Remember that God established the principle, or institution, of government but not the individual applications of government. The 17th century writings of Rousseau and Montesquien of France, as well as John Locke of England, were crucial to the development of western democratic political theory. This was the basis of American democracy.

From this matrix was formed our own government, which was based on the general principle of classic liberalism, that one's rights derived from the society

of which one was a member, and were not from within one's own self. In our own Declaration of Independence this principle was further refined to include the Divine purpose—"All men were created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed..."

Whereas the system of government had gotten out of hand throughout the world, God had evidently intervened, to establish in America a system more in keeping with His original intentions. This is why we have taken so much liberty to give an, all too brief, account of the emergence of the institution of government. There is, of course, a great deal of abuse and tyranny in the world, but the United States does remain today, with all of its admitted inequities, a government "of the people and by the people and for the people," as Lincoln expressed it.

The point to all of the above, is that God never intended government to tyrannize and oppress the people, but rather, to benefit them. It was obvious that in view of the deterioration of man through the "Fall," there would need to be some controls exercised, especially in the realm of those who were not part of God's family. Thus today, while the church might be able to exercise some degree of control over its own people, there is that large area of the secular world that is not under its jurisdiction. Of course, in a great many instances, even Christians have had to resort to the juridical process; even though, in some respects in the early Church, there was a far more simple society, and one that could be controlled fairly readily from within the church

family. The bottom line is that government was, indeed, established by God as an instrument of control in a society that had been invaded with an "evil virus."

Now Paul discusses simply, but profoundly, the essence of the relationship of Christians to the established government. It is, of course, vital to remember that the period in which Paul was writing was ruled over by the Roman Empire, with an insatiable lust for power and for world dominion. Not only so, but a dynasty had been established in Rome that seemed rotten at the roots, and was presided over, in Paul's time, by the mad and bestial, Nero. Ironically, Paul was beheaded by the very authority that he had supported in his Epistle to the Romans. So how, then, do we make sense out of this passage which urges submission to a government that was obviously sated with abhorrent corruption?

And what of American democracy? What of the maze of indiscretions and ineptitude; of graft and corruption; of self-seeking and office seeking (often synonymous). Alexis de Toqueville, in his 19th Century classic on America—a Frenchman's point of view—made the observation that the whole affair of politics in America was simply the getting and keeping of office. There are many activist groups in America today, whose disappointment in the process of government has led them to anarchical demonstrations. There are not a few Christians who defy the government on the basis of personal causes of their own. What of all of this? In the midst of it all, remember the nature of the governments to whom Paul was telling the Roman Christians to be submissive.

Let every soul be in an orderly

relationship... First of all, what does it mean “to be in an orderly relationship?” Many translations use the word “subject.” Remember the explanation given above, of the word *hupotasso*, which has to do with orderliness. We are not dealing here, with a blanket submission in every aspect of one’s life, to a secular government. Neither does one have the right to choose the things to which one is going to be submissive. To be in an orderly relationship to a government means, to obey its laws. What laws? All the laws that one can obey without violating one’s relationship to God.

But what about unreasonable laws?

Yes, unreasonable laws.

But what about unfair laws?

Yes, unfair laws also.

And what about laws that violate human rights?

Yes, even those must be obeyed.

But what about “civil disobedience?”

Adding the word “civil” does not make it any less disobedient.

But what if in all good conscience, you can’t obey some laws?

Then you must prepare to pay the penalty. If you know, for instance, that certain acts of disobedience are going to result in a penalty, you pay the penalty. If one prefers to go to jail, for instance, rather than obey a certain court order (as for example failure to disclose sources), then one exists in an orderly relationship to the government, as long as one pays the penalty. In World War II, there were a number of conscientious objectors, who satisfied the government by going to conscientious objectors camps. They, too, were in an orderly relationship to the government.

But what about those who engage in violence as a protest?

They are not in an orderly relationship to the government. You see, democracy is in a sense, a rule of law established by the majority. We are not free to do what we please. The laws of the multiple society are just as binding as the Laws of the single dictatorship. The difference is that the laws are established by a majority of decision makers—the voting public. Those who try to achieve their ends by violence, are really asking for an aristocracy—rule by the few. Aristocracy does not necessarily mean rule by the rich few, but rule by the few. The word “oligarchy” means the same thing. Such ones are saying, “We believe that the majority should follow the will of the minority.” But in truth, the law is the law. If it is on the books, you obey it. If you do not obey it, you pay the penalty. If it is an unsound law, there are legitimate ways, in a democracy to change it.

The word “soul” is very important. It is the Greek word ψυχη (*psuche*). It is the root of our word “psychology,” and refers to the mental processes or what might be regarded as the human nature. It is to be contrasted with the word spirit—πνευμα (*pneuma*)—which refers to that which is the domain of God. Obviously, the government has no authority over that realm. When the Christians were asked to worship the Caesars they refused, and rightly so. For this, great numbers of them were slain, and considered that a small enough price to pay for refusing to bow down to Satan. Furthermore, having been denied the right to worship, they went to the catacombs, in many cases, and fulfilled their need of worship. This too was acceptable behavior. Actually, there was no law against private assemblies. The thing that was violating

Roman law, was allegiance to Christ.

In today's world, there is a fine line between what constitutes interference with proper worship, and what constitutes disobedience to a legitimate request by the government. It is not easy to define. A rule of thumb might be that, if a government edict prevents worship, then it is out of order. If it requires only a change of method, then it is within its rights, especially if that Change of method is a matter of the majority. For example, there is a good deal of distress over the issue of how Christmas may be celebrated in the public schools. But in a democracy, for example, there are groups of people who cannot, for their own conscience sake, follow the Christian concept of Christmas. In a pluralistic society such as ours, all legitimate groups—that is those who are not advocating the overthrow of the government—have a right to be heard. If a teacher in a public school, for example, were to defy the rules and insist on putting a creche (manger scene) in the classroom, that could offend non-Christian children and would be a definite act of disobedience. If the teacher were disciplined for that act, that would be in keeping with the responsibility of the government. If Christians do not wish to abide by these rules, they have every right to establish their own schools, which many do.

So there is a difference between laws that violate the spirit, such as the demand to worship a pagan deity, and those which are restrictions to one's own preferences in, terms of methodology. Incidentally, many Christians do not realize that the demand to permit religious instruction in the classrooms can be very counterproductive. The question is, who is going to conduct these religious exercises or instructions?

The key point to remember is “to be in an orderly relationship to.” The government may be obliged to enact certain laws that protect the rights of all, at the expense of certain restrictions. Freedom is never an absolute thing. Freedom is relative. It is always bound by the freedom of others. There is an old saying—“My freedom stops where my neighbor's nose begins.” Freedom can only function when it is formed on the matrix of compromise.

We must also remember that the Rome of Paul's day was a model of Republican government. In fact, our government is fashioned more after the Roman republic, than the Greek democracy. Pericles of ancient Athens, is regarded as the “father of modern democracy.” However, it was only the beginning. Voting actually took place in a counsel of 1,001 members, all of whom were property owners.

There is not any authority except by God... The process of government, is something that God Himself established. As we said earlier, He did it for the welfare of His creation. Without a substantial government, the whole world would be a jungle. Actually, if one were to review the history of government, as one would do in political science, one would discover that in all the history of mankind, there has rarely been a government that has not had many flaws in it, as we might expect from the fact that it is all handled by humans. Even the theocracy of the days of the judges had its human failures.

And the powers that be are part of the Divine order... Again, we encounter the word *tasso* and are dealing with a matter of order, rather than orders. There is a considerable difference. Paul is not suggesting that every government in the world is under God's orders. God has

established the institution of government, but does not preside over each individual expression of it.

But why doesn't God stop the outrageous tyranny of the brutish despots of the world?

It is not God's purpose to interfere with the process of a world that is under the control of Satan. God can, and does, restrict the actions of Satan from time to time, but His fundamental purpose is to prove to people that apart from the Spirit there is no hope. If God stopped all carnage and inequity in the world, no one would pay attention to the Spirit. He wants us to realize that we must put our trust in the Spirit and not in the flesh. This world is not "nice," nor is it "fair," nor are we ever without a struggle, but our survival depends upon our focus on the Spirit of Christ within us. He will take us through every earthly crisis, give us the grace to handle it, and preserve our spirits intact.

So then, he who is out of order with respect to authority, has stood against that which God has ordained... Anarchy is contrary to God's stated purpose and established order for the world. Anarchy means "without rule." Total freedom is total anarchy. Those who resist authority risk the judgment which authority, has the right to wield, "for they bear not the sword in vain."

Does that then give the government the right to capital punishment?

According to this text, yes. It has a right, but not a mandate. Some debate its effectiveness. Although, in our country we have come to a place where the "right to life" of the criminal seems far more important than the "right to life" of the

victim. We cannot always explain these things on human terms, but if they are clearly stated in the text, we cannot avoid them.

For [the authority] is a servant of God on your behalf, for good... God does exercise ultimate authority over the world. Although Satan has a certain free reign, there is always the point at which God must step in for the preservation of society. He uses government as a means of exercising His control. Although there are certainly numbers of miscarriages of justice, as would be expected in a society of humans, generally speaking there is a large amount of order in the world as a result of these governments. And, generally speaking, those who do the right thing and obey the laws have very little trouble with the government. We would, however, have to exclude certain satanic agents (perhaps such as Nero) who are under direct control of Satan. Of course, we must realize that all of these statements are broad generalizations. There are obviously a number of exceptions. The government is a "servant" of God, in the sense that He makes use of it for His purposes and not in the sense that it is conscious of serving God.

For this reason also, you pay tribute; for the public servants are prepared of God unto this very purpose... The paying of tribute, which is in question here, was something Jesus accepted as a part of the world in which we live. He therefore, made the famous statement to Peter—"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:25) Although there is no indication that all public servants would behave as under a Divine order.

Do you mean God condones the paying of tribute and taxes?

Apparently; Jesus made it quite clear and participated in it, Himself. Remember that God has to control the entire world (and the universe as well) and uses many means to do that. It takes money for governments to function and, since God established governments as a legitimate process, He has to give them the means to support themselves. Those who fight the paying of income taxes on the basis of rights, do not understand this passage. They may object to the way income taxes are spent, but that is something for the electorate to ultimately control. But the principle of paying taxes was legitimized by Jesus Himself.

Render to all that which is due them... Paul is obviously referring here, not to debt in general, but rather, to those to whom money is owed as part of participation in the civil government. Φορος (*Phoros*) here, means tribute, in the broader sense of nations. Τελος (*Telos*) has more to do with local taxes, and is the root of the word for “publican,” which was one authorized by the Roman government

to collect taxes on the local scene. The publican, therefore, was a very unpopular fellow. He collected taxes from his own people for the Roman government. That Jesus should include one among His apostles, shows the breadth of Jesus’ perspective on the world scene, as well as the breadth of Divine grace.

In addition to the obligation of taxes, Paul also includes obligation to respect authority, and to render respect to those who are in authority, and honor or worth to those to whom it was due. Paul was constantly respectful of authority on the secular scene, but certainly reacted vehemently to authority over the spirit that was usurped by those who had no right to it.

The very next sentence on what we owe to one another, follows this very closely, and so, must be seen not in a general sense of involving ourselves in fiscal indebtedness, but in the particular sense of failing to fulfill the obligations, as God has assigned them. Read on.

Romans 13:8-14

TRANSLATION

Owe no one anything, except to love one another. For he who loves another has fulfilled the Law. For the [essence] of it is—you shall not commit adultery; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet; and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” For love does not work ill to his neighbor; therefore, love is a fulfillment of the Law.

And knowing this—the time—that It is already the hour for you to rise up out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night has advanced, and the day has drawn near. Let us then put away the works of darkness; and let us be clothed with the armour of light. Let us walk with propriety as in the day—not in revelry and drunkenness; not with promiscuity and indecency; not with strife and malice. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not make provision for the flesh, unto unsound cravings.

COMMENTARY

Of Agape Love and Sound Behavior

Arising out of this discussion of giving to everyone their due, Paul suggests that love is one of these things that is due to everyone. This, of course, is the *agape* love of caring. He uses the analogy of an accounting procedure. We owe certain things to the society around us—not only in terms of tribute, but also in terms of certain occasions of honor and respect; and the constant obligation of love. He suggests that we not fall behind in these obligations, but then, as an afterthought, he recognizes that the “love account” will never be fully paid.

Owe no one anything... Many have erroneously concluded that this text means that they should never enter into any kind of financial obligation. Some have even been uneasy about entering into a contract for a house or automobile. If you take this in a monetary sense, the implications are limitless. One can hardly function in our modern society without some kind of debt factor. In that sense, even entering into a lease agreement puts one under obligation (if one does not come up with the lease money, one is evicted). On the other hand, if one does not come up with the mortgage payment, the property is repossessed. But the whole

issue is resolved when we realize that Paul is referring to the matters of tribute and respect, which he has just been discussing.

Except to love one another... Paul takes a detour to discuss the obligation of love. He uses Jesus' own words in identifying love as the essence of the Law. The Law was primarily a code of conduct to regulate the relationships among humans on the earth. The ultimate implication of the Law is the respect for the rights and property of others. The coming of the Holy Spirit to abide within the individual, however, brings to one the abiding presence of the love of Christ, which obviates the need for the Law as a guide to conduct. This is the meaning of the prophets who said that the Law would be written on the heart, instead of on tables of stone.

However, the recognition of one's obligation to others, as provided through the Holy Spirit, does not always result in the expression of that inner sensitivity. And thus the admonition to the believers who possess the love of Christ within, but are not always consistent in their performance.

It is most important to understand that this problem is germane to believers everywhere, in spite of efforts at and claims of "perfect love." The evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit within is not perfect performance, but the desire to perform and the deep concern that accompanies failure. Apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit, one would not care.

It is already the hour for you to rise up out of sleep... Now we come to a passage that has been used continually as leverage to motivate people to "get going for God." The effort to expand the text

into broad definitions of what it means "to arise out of sleep," has given rise to much guilt. The list is ever longer, of the things that are commonly set forth as indicators of the condition of the believers who are "asleep."

It is necessary to clarify the issue by first asking who it is that Paul is addressing here, and then by confining ourselves to the things that he considers to be indicators of the "sleepers." Obviously, he is talking to believers.

Let us put off the works of darkness... And what are these works of darkness? They have nothing to do with inadequate service or "spirituality," as is usually included in the "wake up" alarm.

What Paul is dealing with here, are practices that would be regarded as gross inequities in the church of today—revelry, drunkenness, promiscuity, indecency, and malicious strife. Paul is obviously not talking about improving one's pure life or service or faithfulness in giving. Actually, the church has come a long way from the "brutish" society of the early Christians, in Rome and throughout the Greek world. In spite of its inadequacies, the church of today has, through the work of the Holy Spirit, indicated a keenness of concern about its vital relationship to Christ.

Paul offers the antidote to the profligate behavior of these believers whom he is addressing—the focus on Christ. Furthermore, he suggests that one should not premeditate or focus beforehand on human indulgences. The word "provision," as in the King James, is not altogether out of order except that our understanding of the word has drifted from its original intent. Broken down, the word includes *προ* (*pro*)—beforehand—and *νοια* (*noia*)—understanding or thought process. Literally it would mean

to “see beforehand.” The idea here, is simply not to set our minds upon mischief. Impulsive actions are one thing, but focusing, beforehand, on fleshly indulgence is quite another. The Greek word ἐπιθυμία (*epithumia*) is a word that is generally applied to strong desires. Here, it seems to imply something of unsound desires or “overindulgence.” The common translation “lust” is too strongly slanted toward evil. It means “strong desire” and is so used in many places, but seems to imply here something unwholesome.

So the main focus of this section is on unsound behavior. Paul warns against it, but nowhere implies that even the extremes of such behavior annul the effects of our spiritual birth; which does give us something in our spirits of the

nature of God. Paul, of course, continually makes the distinction between flesh and spirit, and indicates that the flesh is not to be trusted and has in it no good thing.

But where then, is the leverage or motivation to behave?

The motivation comes from the power of the Spirit at work within us. Even though Paul connects behavior with the coming of Christ, there is no threat, stated or implied, that failure to improve one’s behavior will cause one to be “left behind.” Only Christ really knows what awaits those who have been careless in their conduct on the earth. I certainly do not know, but I assume that whatever it is, Christ will deal justly with His people.

Romans 14:1-9

TRANSLATION

Receive the one who is weak in the faith, but not unto vacillating argumentation. One believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables. Let not the one who eats [all things] discredit the one who does not eat [all things] and he who does not eat all things let him not judge the one who eats [all things], for God has received him. Who are you who judges another servant? To his own Lord, he stands or falls; and he shall stand, for the Lord is able to cause him to stand. One person judges one day above another; and one judges every day alike. Let each one be fully persuaded in his own mind. He who considers the day, considers it to the Lord; and he who eats [all things] eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God. And he who does not eat [all things], to the Lord he does not eat [all things] and gives thanks to God. For no one of us lives to himself, and no one [of us] dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord and if we die, we die to the Lord. If then we live or if we die, we are the Lord's. For unto this end Christ died and lived, that He may be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

COMMENTARY

Of Faith and Individuality

Large segments of the church have broken up over the treacherous shoals of traditions and customs that are of uncertain application in the scripture. There are many matters of practice that are, as Paul points out, better left to the individual conscience. It is obvious that many such issues are not of primary importance, else they would have been declared in the scripture with greater clarity and emphasis. One Bible teacher, many years ago, stated this principle—“Make much of that which God makes much of” (A.S. Petrie). It is a most important principle, and one that the author has followed ever since. I have

said, “If you have to find it with a pair of tweezers, forget it.” Unfortunately, there are a number of such relatively unstressed points, that have become the platform from which entire sects and denominations have been launched. The keeping of the Sabbath, which Paul deals with specifically in this chapter, is one such issue. Paul says specifically, “*Let each be persuaded in his own mind.*”

Chapter 14 is a classic passage on the subject of individuality, with reference to one's faith. Obviously there are many things in the scripture that are not open to personal choice. These are the

absolutes that are the *sine qua non* of our faith. They are things that will affect our salvation or our identity with God. One example of this is the need of coming to God through Christ.

The one who is weak with respect to the faith... Paul sees the weak as those who need religious forms and traditions to maintain faith. In I Corinthians 8, Paul discusses the issue of “meat offered to idols.” In the Greek and Roman world there was a great deal of idol worship. In many cases, food was placed at the feet of the idol and left there. Enterprising merchants decided that such food was really not unfit to eat, except to those who might consider it sacred. Therefore, it was taken to a special place at the market and sold at a discount. Many Christians felt that the food had, thus, been contaminated by having been offered up to an idol, and was tantamount, in their minds, to having upon it the curse of Satan. This was quite an issue in the early church and many believers were divided over it. Apparently, it was a special problem with the believers in Corinth. Paul’s attitude was that the idol was merely a chunk of stone and had no capacity to bless or curse. Therefore, he felt perfectly free to eat such food himself. And, when he went to someone’s house for a meal, his practice was not even to ask about it. However, he said that those who, for conscience sake, did not want to eat of such food had a right to this attitude, and that others should not influence them to go against their conscience in the matter. Therefore, if he was eating with those who had such a conscience, he would not partake of food offered to idols lest he influence the other persons to compromise their principles. *“If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world stands, lest I cause my brother to offend.”* He is not saying here that he would give up the practice of

eating meat in general, but only that which had been offered to idols. Furthermore, he was not saying that he would abstain if his Christian brother did not like it, but rather, that if he would cause his Christian brother to stumble and to give up his principles too carelessly.

Of course, the matter can be applied very specifically today to many areas of conscience. Whether or not one may be overly sensitive is not the issue. The issue is that one should not violate one’s conscience in a deliberate ignoring of it. It may be important to re-think the issue or re-train the conscience, but until the conscience can be thoroughly in harmony, one should refrain. That was Paul’s point. He did not want to be responsible for causing someone to stumble.

This 8th chapter to the Corinthians is quite relevant to what he was saying to the Romans. Many things are a matter of individual conscience and should not be the basis, either of dividing the body or of judging one another, unless there is ample evidence in the scripture that these matters are absolutes and allow no latitude.

Paul makes it very clear here, that those who are “hung up” on these matters are really, weak. The general tendency of the church is to account those who are the most rigid in their practices as the strongest. The ascetic has always been seen as the most pious, and therefore godliest. Paul sees it the other way, accounting legalism as more of a prop than an expression of “spirituality.”

Receive ye, but not to vacillating argumentation... If such ones may be regarded as weak, we are not to criticize or make light of their particular convictions, but to receive them. In the

very next chapter, Paul says, “*We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*” (15:1) This is exactly what Paul said to the Corinthians—“Don’t affect others with your own kind of liberty.” Enlightenment is a far different thing than persuasion. If others feel uneasy about their position and desire further help, it is certainly in order to give them additional information. But, if it is a matter of trying to persuade others to change their attitudes, and thus go against their conscience, that is another matter.

Paul specifically warns against argumentation. Actually, argumentation reflects uncertainty on both sides. One who feels the need of argumentation is really trying to bolster one’s own position. One who feels confident in what one believes, does not need to argue. The best response to anyone who seeks an argument is, “You are certainly welcome to your beliefs.” The Greek word here for “vacillating” is διακρίσεις (*diakriseis*), and is the word used by James in his discussion of the “wavering one.” Argumentation is actually διαλογισμος (*dialogismos*), and is the word from which we get “dialogue.” It is actually a sort of debating contest; where one tends to employ scripture texts, especially out of context, that may be something in the nature of “proof text ping-pong.” It produces nothing but contention and confusion. It is usually better to keep one’s beliefs to oneself, unless there is some indication of a desire for help. Even then, it is risky. I have often said that there are two times when one should not give advice—when one is not asked, and when one is asked. Later on Paul will say, “*Hast thou faith; have it to thyself before God.*”

He that is weak, eats vegetables...
Whatever one may believe about the

dietary and nutritional aspects of the vegetarian diet, Paul puts to rest here any idea that it is a matter of spirituality. Without the slightest hint of there being any kind of question about eating meat, Paul says that some feel that they may eat all things. In the Old Testament, despite numerous dietary laws that had to do with matters of health, the Levites, who were God’s priestly class, were urged to eat of the meat that had been brought for sacrifice. In fact, God Himself ate meat. In Genesis, when three travelers came to visit Abraham, he set forth before them a newly dressed “kid.” That one of these men was an earthly appearance of God (probably a pre-incarnate Christ) was indicated by the discussion that Abraham had with Him later on, in which He spoke with the direct authority of God. This does not necessarily mean that meat ought to be included in the diet, but rather, that there is no injunction of God against it. Many believe that, from a nutritional point of view, the quality of proteins that one would get in vegetables is not the same as one would get in meat. The Greek word λαχανω (*lachano*), which is translated in some versions by the word “herbs,” is the Greek word for “digging.” This would have a more likely reference to vegetables that we know from the ground rather than the foliage of plants, which are commonly used as herbs.

The bottom line here, is that dietary laws which were quite crucial in the old Levitical system, are no longer—in God’s New Covenant with the people of earth—a matter of obedience, but of personal choice. There is little question but that the dietary laws had a very important effect upon the health of the children of Israel, especially in their wilderness trek, and were matters of obedience in order to enforce that need; and there may still be some validity to those matters. However.

Paul says that it is a matter of personal choice and has nothing to do with obedience or faith.

Who are you who judges another servant? The word “servant” here, is not the *δουλος* (*doulos*) of servitude, *per se*; but rather, *οικετης* (*oiketes*) as the member of a household presided over by a lord or master. And thus, Paul says we have no right to judge another man’s “household.” That kind of consideration must be left to the lord of the household. This analogy, of course, does refer to those who are the members of the family of Christ. And so also, Paul shifts to the figure of Christ Who, he says, is the One before Whom the servant stands or falls, and indeed does stand; “because Christ is able to make him stand.”

And thus, the whole issue of “judging another” becomes the primary error, rather than what one may eat.

One person regards one day above another day... And so similarly, as with the matter of eating, Paul deals with the issue of the celebrating or remembering of certain days. He does not here, make an exception as far as the Sabbath is concerned. He simply says that some regard one day above another and others regard every day alike. And here he makes the specific statement, “*Let each one be persuaded in his own mind.*”

He who considers the day, considers it to the Lord... On the other hand, the one who does not regard the day as special, takes that attitude in the name of Christ. The Greek word *φρονεω* (*phroneo*) has to do with a prevailing attitude. Thus, one who considers a day as special, reflects a certain prevailing attitude. The important thing is that each one takes his position in the name of Christ. It is certainly not, in any respect, a willful

disregard of the wishes of God in the matter. By the same token, the one who has certain dietary laws, eats or does not eat in the name of God.

For no one of us lives to himself.. The moment the Holy Spirit enters our spirits, we belong to Christ by virtue of His presence within us. Whether or not we always obey Him is another matter. The practice of “committing” or “dedicating” one’s life to Christ can often be a human exercise in redundancy. And the presumptuous thought that “whatever the Lord says we will always do,” is a confidence in the self that is not warranted by the realities of the human nature. We may find ourselves making vows that we cannot keep and therefore, being false with God. We belong to Him. He will do with us as He chooses. He will somehow see to it that we get where He wants us to go, unless we should function in a rebellious way and simply refuse Him. In a way, human vows to obey the Lord in everything are like saying to Him, “I want you to know. Lord, that I’m not going to be rebellious.” The human mind really does not have the capacity to make determinations about what one ought to do with one’s life. That is something the Lord has to bring about within us, both by giving us the understanding of what He wants and by giving us the capacity to carry it out.

Paul does not qualify his statements about our belonging to Christ in life or in death, as far as the Christian is concerned, by giving a choice. He does not say, “You belong to Christ if you are submissive to Him.” Paul himself experienced the power of Christ to change one’s course. In the Old Testament, a classic example of this is the prophet Ezekiel, who said, “*So the spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness in the heat of my spirit; but the*

hand of the Lord was strong upon me.” (Ezekiel 3:14) Jonah, of course, is another example. Even though he tried to escape his charge, the Lord had a way of bringing him back to obedience. The Lord does not entrust the crucial work of salvation to mere human whims. He gives the gifts as He chooses, as well as the will to exercise the gifts. He gives the capacity and the compelling.

And so, “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. Death is as much a part of God’s ultimate meaning for us as life. On the other hand, there is no death to the spirit. If we die, we are in the presence of Christ. If we live, on the other hand, we have His presence within us. So, either way, we are forever identified with His Spirit.

So then, is everyone automatically doing the Lord’s will? Are we puppets dangling on a string?

No indeed. We do belong to Christ as children belong to parents, and He does provide us with both gifts and calling, as well as the compelling of His Holy Spirit; but to say that we are irrevocably fated on a mindless track, would be to misunderstand the meaning of the work of the Holy Spirit within us. The precondition of the positive exercise of the Spirit in guiding our lives into the fulfillment of His purpose for us, is the desire to do His will. On the other hand, the desire to do God’s will does not, *de facto* include the capacity to do it, given the human condition. It is here that the Holy Spirit helps us out. So we are not left with human inadequacy. It is one thing to want the Lord’s will, but run afoul of the fleshly inability to know what He wants, for sure; or knowing what He wants, to find the strength to do it. It is quite another thing to let human ambition and preoccupation cloud the

sensitivity to God’s purposes and intentions for us.

Of course, there are the “chest-beating” heroics of Peter—*“Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.”* (Matthew 26:35) On the heels of that declaration, Peter blatantly denied the Lord and revealed the fleshly nature of his declaration. Vows and promises are cheap. Paul said, *“We are they who worship God in the spirit; make our boast in Christ Jesus; and have no confidence in the flesh.”* (Philippians 3:3) Humility in the face of human weakness, demands reserve. Realism recalls Jesus’ words—*“Without Me you can do nothing.”*

But what about the commitments and dedications that we are often urged to make?

Such general commitments are often made in the flesh. Vows can have a human ring to them. Heroic responses to challenges are a common part of human egotism. There is really nothing spiritual about rising to challenges. It happens constantly in the secular world, where the human mind is stimulated by stirring speeches and noble goals. Tennyson’s famous “Charge of the Light Brigade” is a prime example of heroism and disaster. “Theirs not to reason why; Theirs but to do and die. Into the valley of death rode the six hundred.”

The Holy Spirit motivates where there may be no grand design or noble exploits. The compelling is from the spirit within and has no promise of reward. Nor is it always rational. Nor are the purposes or results always obvious. One goes because one is compelled of the Spirit, and for no other reason. How the mission fits into the grand design, is not our concern. It may be a very minute detail of that design. It will not likely be noble or

understood. It will have no “because” in it. One does not act because of the need, or because of rewards, or because of penalties, or because of any reason. The Spirit compels, and one acts. How a given service or act may contribute to the overall plan of God, may not be known at all. It may, in fact, seem an insignificant act. God’s purposes are beyond the human purposes, and therefore, cannot be devised in the human mind.

So how do we know what God wants?

You’ll know. If God wants you to do something and you want to do what He wants, He’ll find a way to see that you do it. You can’t trust your capacity to figure out God. You can’t trust your spirituality or your devotion or your piety; or your prayers. It is not a matter of feelings of trust or confidence, but a response of the spirit to the Spirit of God, based upon the faith of Christ that is in us. That faith is like a force field. It is like a receptor of the energy impulses from God. We respond, often not knowing why we respond. The energy required to do the will of God and to respond to Him, is far greater than any capacity of the human mind to muster up devotion and commitment. We may have our doubts and fears and misgivings and uncertainties, but all the while the Holy Spirit is interacting with the willing heart, at the spirit level.

For unto this purpose Christ died and lived... The descent of Christ to the earth was a magnanimous deed, the full extent of which is not readily comprehended by the human person. The human knows nothing of the true magnitude of God’s glory, which was shared by Christ. The event of the cross was tragic, indeed and not to be minimized in any way. However, the greatest sacrifice was the emptying of

Himself of His original power which He had in the Godhead, in taking upon Himself the human nature. The classic passage in this matter is in Philippians 2. *[Christ] being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [a thing to be grasped] to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation [emptied Himself] and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* (6-8) The phrase, “made Himself of no reputation,” should be translated “emptied Himself.” From the time Jesus entered into His earthly sojourn, He was subject to God, the Father. He frequently indicated that He received His power and His words from the Father. *“The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do...”* (John 5:19) In the process of emptying Himself, He became subject to the Father in the sense that He relied upon the Father’s power, instead of upon a residual of His own power.

Does that mean then that He was ever in a position of not being God?

No, indeed. God could never not be God. However, the seed that was implanted in Mary was the seed of the Holy Spirit, which remained as an essential part of His nature throughout His life on the earth. He did possess a human nature which He acquired through Mary, but at the same time, He never lost the essential Deity. This clarifies the somewhat troublesome passage in the gospels where Jesus is being baptized. The Son comes out of the river; the Holy Spirit descends on Him like a dove; and the Father declares from Heaven that this is His “beloved Son.” (Matthew 3:17) The Father is the source of all the energy of the universe; the Holy Spirit is the effective agent of that energy; and the Son was the

human embodiment of the Holy Spirit on the earth. In the resurrection, Christ triumphed over death; and freed those who were caught in the bondage of death as a result of sin. Now, those who wish to may participate in His eternal life. He thus, becomes Lord of the dead and of the

living. In death and in life we belong to Him; in which case, death is merely the shedding of the earthly cocoon in which the Spirit has maintained His earthly abode. We will be no longer prisoners of the space/time cocoon.

Romans 14:10-19

TRANSLATION

Why do you Judge your brother? Or why do you consider your brother nothing? For we shall all stand at the tribunal of God; for it is written,

*“As I live,” says the Lord, “every knee shall bow to Me
and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

Therefore, each one of us shall give an account of himself to God. Let us therefore no longer judge one another; but judge this rather—not to place a stumbling block or an offense before our brother. For I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself, except to the one who considers something to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. For if on account of dietary matters your brother is caused distress, you no longer walk according to love. Do not, for the sake of your dietary concerns, destroy that one for whom Christ died. Let not, then, your good be treated with contempt. For the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in this manner, is pleasing to God and acceptable to men. Let us then, pursue the things of peace and the things which are edifying to one another.

COMMENTARY

Self-Righteous “Stumbling” Blocks

Paul deals harshly with the self-styled standard bearers of the church, who presume to be the guardians of the church’s faith and practice. There are, of course, the moral and ethical values which the church must uphold, but what Paul is talking about here, are matters of religious practice. These are the issues that continuously divide the church, and keep it in a constant state of turbulence and conflict. Paul identifies two major

areas of such conflict—the observance of special days (the Sabbath, e.g.) and dietary matters (the eating of meat, e.g.). Strangely enough, in spite of all that Paul has to say about it in Romans 14, these issues still divide the church, and remain as an insurmountable barrier to fellowship in many cases. The tragedy is that the issues that cause the most conflict in the church are not clearly defined in the scripture. If they were

clearly defined, there would certainly not be the conflict, at least among those who are serious students of the Word.

Several major problems are responsible for the confusion—1.) inadequate study of the scripture; 2.) the use of single texts taken out of context (I call it “proof text ping-pong”); 3.) the expanding of a few casual comments into a whole system of belief, with much having to be filled in by human conjecture; 4.) the failure to draw a distinction between issues that were strictly part of the Old Testament legal system, and those that are part of the new era of the indwelling Spirit and the process of grace. (Some think that any verse in the Bible is applicable to anyone, anytime, anywhere.) Paul’s two examples are classic cases of this particular problem.

In terms of the inadequate study of the Word, for those who claim to be the authorities and spokesmen for the interpretation of the scripture, the mere reading of a translation is not enough. It is essential to have a command of the original languages, as well as a broad knowledge of the historical and cultural aspects of the times in which the Bible was written. Without the knowledge of the original languages, one is merely guessing as to which commentator is correct. And thus, error is perpetuated by depending on secondary sources. It is extremely important to check the credentials of those who claim to be the authorities in the body of believers. (Of course, anyone can give an opinion or a personal testimony.) It is equally unsound to assume that any text, simply because it is in the Bible, is universally applicable. Furthermore, details of faith and practice fill many volumes without adequate scriptural support. Texts that are lifted out of context can be extremely misleading. On the other hand, non-

Biblical traditions can be as erroneous in the church today, as they were among the Pharisees of old. Thus, it is well to check not only the credentials of the one presuming to be an authority, but also the Biblical base for any concepts perpetuated by a given group.

Why do you judge your brother? Paul is not here discussing the validity of individual beliefs, so much as he is concerned about the practice of judging one another. Jesus was very explicit about this—“*Judge not, that ye be not judged.*” (Matthew 7:1) He is not denying the right to evaluate practice and determine whether or not we approve personally, but rebuking the practice of determining whether or not God approves. Strangely enough, the church continues to engage in this practice relentlessly.

Why do you regard your brother as nothing? This is the same word that Paul uses in addressing the Corinthians—“*God has chosen the things that are nothing to render ineffective the things that are [something].*” (I Corinthians 1:28 A.T.) It is common in the church, for those who disagree with other’s practices to completely shun them. Paul says that this indicates that one is not, walking in the love of Christ, Who opens His arms to all.

We shall all stand at the tribunal of God... The word βῆμα (*Bema*) is simply the place where individual matters were brought for a decision by the local authorities. To see this as a great judgment hall of Divine wrath would be out of keeping with the word. In ancient Corinth, there is a stone wall about five or six feet high with a block in the center of it labelled *Bema*. There was a low dais in front of it, and the citizens of Corinth came to hear the decisions of the

magistrate in civil matters. It was very unimpressive as a “court of law.” Nor is it to be assumed that the defendants were prejudged to be guilty. Their case was merely being heard. Standing before the judgment seat of Christ does not mean that there will be a long list of misdeeds reviewed for sentencing. In fact, the whole issue of human frailty has been covered by the atonement of Christ. John puts it in perspective in his first epistle—*“My little children I write unto you that you sin not, but if anyone sin, we have an advocate [defender], Jesus Christ, the righteous One.”* (1 John 2:1, 2) When indeed our human fleshliness is judged, we have as a defender, Jesus Christ, Who identifies us as His own, for whom He died. It is certainly not likely that there will be some long line stretching over the clouds as each one steps up to a “tribunal” before God, and discusses with Him their misdeeds. The truth of the matter is that we shall “know as we are known,” and will recognize instantly, as we come before the Lord, that our sins are covered by His blood. We may indeed recognize that from which we have been delivered, but will hardly be sentenced to some eternal penalties for the misdeeds of the flesh. Christians are often paranoid about what God has against them.

And, of course, it is assumed that Christ has some edge over us, by having been born without the sin nature. The truth is, that Christ has taken care of that in His death on the cross. We are covered by the atonement, even as the day of atonement covered the sins of the children of Israel. What we do in the flesh today has its own kind of penalties—we do reap the rewards of inordinate behavior—but that does not mean we are cut off from God. It is important, however, to understand that only God can judge us, and that He judges us in the light of our involuntary position in the flesh. We did not ask God to create

the world, neither did we ask to come here; but He understands that, and has covered that human factor in the sacrifice of Christ.

So, why then, do we judge our brothers and sisters in the flesh? They struggle as we do. They are as uncertain about things as we are. They do the best they can under the circumstances, as we do. Paul told the Corinthians, whom he criticized for judging one another, that he did not even judge himself. We are as incapable of judging ourselves as we are of judging others. We are, in fact, probably more biased about ourselves than we are about others. But the church seems more consumed about judgment than about grace. Thus, a simple statement about our being accountable to God, only, and not to man, is turned around to be a crucial issue and the basis of continual guilt feelings. It is as though the atonement of Christ merely gave us access to the “treadmill.” This is an unfortunate misconception. It is not that God is indifferent to our behavior, but rather that He treats us on a familial basis rather, than as criminals in the juridical process.

If on account of [matters of] food you cause your brother distress, you are no longer walking according to love... Of course, *agape* love means “caring.” The issues that Paul discusses in this chapter are, by his own admission, debatable. They will not have any profound effect on the spiritual welfare of the believers. They are certainly not important enough to cause distress to one’s fellow believer. More than that, they are not important enough to destroy one’s brother. *“Destroy not with the matters of food, him for whom Christ died.”* (14:15) The Greek word here is not “eternal destruction,” but rather, “devastation.” Guilt feelings have a way of eating out

the heart. Paul is demanding here, a more responsible attitude toward one's fellow believer. Christians are continually tampering with one another's "psyche." Discouragement is one of Satan's favorite tools. Judging one another can bring such discouragement. If the judging of one another would make the believers more disciplined and spiritual. Satan would not do it. By judging another, we can cause such discouragement to the point of causing them to "give up." It is not that they will lose their souls in such discouragement, but it can certainly jeopardize the vitality of their relationship to Christ, and rob them of their peace on the earth.

Let not, then, your good be treated with contempt... The despising of fellow believers who do not agree with us in these matters, is a rampant problem in the church. It becomes, not just a matter of disagreeing with others, but being openly contemptuous of their practices. Paul goes on to say. *The kingdom of God*

is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy, in the Holy Spirit." (14:17) The righteousness that Paul speaks of here is, as we have discussed in earlier chapters, not personal piety but rather, being on the right course in identifying ourselves with the righteousness of Christ. Peace and joy are the rightful heritage of the believer, especially as we understand these qualities in the spirit. Both of these represent the flow of Divine benevolence within us, in spite of the surface turbulence of our circumstances. He does not even mention here, service or "spirituality." Our lives upon the earth are to rest in the peace and grace of Christ, and not to be under the constant pressure of performance that is the stock-in-trade of the modern-day legalist. The truth of this statement is born out by Paul, in the next verse—"For he who serves Christ in this, is well pleasing to God and acceptable to men." (14:18)

Romans 14:19-23

TRANSLATION

Therefore then, let us pursue the things of peace and the things which are of the edifying of one another. Do not for the sake of dietary matters, destroy the work of God. All things are pure, but it is unsound for the person who partakes as an offense. It is good not to eat flesh or to drink wine or to do anything in which your fellow believer is caused to stumble. Your faith which you have, have it to yourself before God. In favor with God, is the one who does not judge himself in the things which he allows. But the one who is doubting when he eats is already condemned, because it is not of faith. Everything which is not of faith is sin.

COMMENTARY

Christian Practice, and the Vitality of Faith

If Christianity were just another religion, then the practice of it would be governed by rules and regulations. The more detailed the list of rules, the more thoroughly religious the practice. Such was the assumption which was the heart of Judaism, as taught by the Pharisees. But this very misguided perception of what was required to be acceptable to God, was what infuriated Jesus and caused Him to lash out against the religious imposters, who regarded themselves as the shepherds of Israel. The New Covenant that God made with His people and inaugurated at Pentecost was on an altogether different basis. Rather than a law code applied only to outward conduct, the new expression of God's desires for His people would be written on the heart. And life would be supplied through the Holy Spirit apart from the Law. The Law itself would be based upon love—of God and of man—as a gift of God, accompanying the faith

which was, also, a gift of God. And whereas behavior was still governed by God's moral code, the vitality of one's spirit connection with God would be based upon the indwelling Spirit; with appropriate behavior the expression of that indwelling Spirit. Misbehavior would be treated on a familial basis and not a legal basis. That is, one would be dealt with as a member of the family (a son/daughter), and not as a "felon" violating the Law.

Further, the regulations that had religious or practical significance (such as the observance of special days) were set aside in favor of the voluntary observances that would be highly personal, depending upon one's own interests and inclinations and not upon universal requirements. Thus, for example, if it suited one's personal desires to set aside one day of the week above another, then they were free to do

so. On the other hand, if that was not important, they were not required to do so. On this basis, Paul made it quite clear to the Romans that they should let one another alone to pursue their own expressions of faith as it suited their own personal needs.

Therefore, then, let us pursue the things that pertain to peace...

Whereas the believers were being consumed with things that kept them constantly in conflict with one another and distressed within themselves, Paul urges them to focus instead, on the more rewarding and fulfilling things that would bring to their hearts peace. And also, the things that would be edifying to the believers, rather than disruptive. In a certain sense, Satan may be trying to belie God's promise of peace by keeping the believers stirred up in the pursuit of religious perfection, which of course he knows they will never attain. Paul urged the believers to focus on Christ, and let His Spirit within govern the expressions of faith that would suit the individual temperament and needs.

One of the common misconceptions of the church is that everyone's expression of faith should be alike, without regard to the great varieties of personality. It is certainly an egregious error to assume, for example, that the coming of the Holy Spirit to the individual, alters the personality to make everyone an outgoing, effusive, marketeering personality. That is, that everyone who is "spiritual" will naturally be "telling everyone about it," and getting together for "show and tell" meetings. For many people, this is a valid form of expression; for many, it is not in keeping with their personality. Again, for some people, it is very important to have a highly structured life with a certain amount of discipline. For these people, regulation is

important and Paul gives them the liberty to follow whatever patterns they choose, so long as they do not impose their patterns on someone else. By the same token, those who seem to function with greater liberty are urged not to try to impose their freedom on others. The believers are specifically warned not to treat with contempt, those who have a different way of expressing their faith.

The things that edify one another...

The believers are urged to lift one another up and not put one another down. It is easier to put others down because then we do not have to be bothered with understanding anything, or come up with positive help. It is like the anarchists. They do not come up with any positive solutions—they only condemn the status quo. It is far more difficult to encourage people than it is merely to criticize them. Paul puts the whole thing in perspective with the statement, "*Do not, for the sake of dietary matters, destroy the work of God.*" (14:20) Many of the things that destroy the unity of the body of believers are trivial, as compared with the greater issues of salvation and eternal life. Furthermore, many of these matters are not clearly defined in the scripture, and depend for their presumed validity on a good deal of human inferences and speculations. Nor can the purveyors of such speculations give evidence of being more knowledgeable, or more spiritual or more in tune with God. In chapter 14, Paul puts such presumptions to rest. "*Let each be persuaded in his own mind.*" (14:5)

Do you have faith? Have it in terms of your own self before God... There is a certain sense in which the quality of faith differs from one individual to another. To be sure, the source of that faith is the same, but as it touches individual lives it meets with a wide variety of personalities

and needs. Thus, Paul introduces the idea of the weaker believer as one whose experience of faith needs to be structured with certain regulations and forms. For example, for one to believe that one is more spiritual with the observance of dietary rules, is to cling to earthly concepts. It is perhaps like the child who needs training wheels on the side of the bicycle. However, it is important to note that Paul says that such ones should not be treated with contempt.

Furthermore, Paul is very specific about not judging one's self, if such additional supports seem to be helpful. Paul thus

allows a good deal of individuality in terms of one's relationship to Christ. It is this wide range of human differences that gives substance to the variety of gifts.

Whatsoever is not of faith is sin... On the other hand, the latitude of Christian liberty is not to be exploited to permit one an unlimited range of behavior patterns. The conscience must be considered. One who would willfully violate his conscience in the name of Christian liberty, would certainly be expressing the kind of human willfulness that brought the race to catastrophe in that awful hour of Eden.

Romans 15:1-6

TRANSLATION

We who are able ones, ought to bear the weaknesses of those who are unable, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please our neighbor unto the good which is toward edifying. For even Christ did not please Himself, but even as it is written—“The reproaches of those who reproached you, fell on Me.” For whatsoever things were written beforehand were written for our instruction, in order that through the endurance and through the comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope. Now the God of endurance and comfort grant you to be of the same mindset among one another, according to Christ Jesus; in order that with one harmonious mouth, you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

COMMENTARY

Of Christian Unity and Support

The body of believers has grown to immense proportions. The Word has certainly gone out through the entire world. It has covered the continents from pole to pole and completely girdled the globe. With such great hosts of people there are many problems, as would be germane to the human race. Paul told the Corinthians that their divisions reflected the fleshly condition of their natural estate—“*Are you not carnal [fleshly] and walk as men [people]?*” (I Corinthians 3:3) He was not so much indicting them for this, but helping them to recognize that such divisions marked the inadequacy of the human mind. Many of the divisions are quite serious and many are rather minor, but all reflect the human condition—a condition which will, no doubt, exist as long as there are humans on the earth.

Of course, this does not excuse faulty human behavior or encourage laxity in the matter. What it does do, is suggest that humans have difficulty relating to one another and being at peace with one another, especially since there are many who are weak. Paul tells the Hebrews to support the weak and hold them steady (12:12). Obviously, there are those among the believers who will always be weak, and always require the grace and patience of the body.

We who are able... The word “strong” here, is incorrect. Paul never claimed to be strong, and received a rather painful lesson in the matter, which he recounted in II Corinthians 12. In the distress of the occasion, he cried out for help and was told that God’s strength is made perfect in weakness. Paul then realized that when he was weak, that was the very time he would be strong; going in the

strength of God and not in his own strength. In fact, his whole message was replete with admissions of his own inadequacy in the flesh. And to the Corinthians, he also said that God used the weak of the world to overcome the mighty (I Corinthians 1:27-30). Unfortunately, the church seems bent on making everyone strong. Not only is it a hopeless task, but also is contrary to the very point that it is the energy of Christ in us that accomplishes His purpose, and not our own capacities. Jesus Himself acknowledged this in His own human condition. It is not that God encourages indifference and lethargy, but rather, that He wants us to realize that without Him, we can do nothing.

Nor is it that the human brain is useless. We must develop it to its fullest capacities; but even then, it depends upon the energy of Christ for its effectiveness. Thus, the word “strength” is really inappropriate, as well as inaccurate. The Greek word here, is from *δυναμι* (*dunamai*), which means “to be able.” There is a vast difference here. We cannot be called “strong,” but we can receive the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

So then why do we not always see such enablement?

Perhaps it is a matter of personality differences. There are many kinds of limitations that are based upon genetics, environment and biochemical patterns. All enablement is a gift of the Spirit, but the gift of the Spirit is related to the vessel. There are vast differences in the vessels. Nor can the vessel say to the maker—“Why have you made me, thus?” The Bible is very clear in the fact that God distributes gifts according to His own will and purpose, and not according to our human ambition.

But if weakness is a matter of genetics, how can there be guilt attached? The weak are always condemned.

In the first place, not all weakness is a matter of genetics. Some are weak through self-indulgence. But where weakness is a matter of personality problems there is no guilt attached. It must also be remembered that genetics is a very complex thing. Obviously God does not control all marriages. People who would marry without God’s approval may be mixing weak strains. God cannot be responsible for that and, of course, neither can the one that receives such genes. It is not all that clear why some are weak and some are strong, but Paul is describing a fact of human existence. He is telling believers how to respond to it. It is certainly obvious that a universal appeal to everyone to be strong is misplaced. Among Christians everywhere, there are people who have personality problems who require our patience.

Let each one of us please our neighbor... Jesus Himself identifies the neighbor—everyone we come in contact with. His example was the poor wayfarer who was robbed and beaten and required treatment. A Samaritan—despised by the Jews—saw him as “a neighbor.” In that respect, everyone around us is “a neighbor.”

The word “to please” is not used here in the common sense of satisfying everyone’s demands. That would be impossible. The old adage, “You cannot please everyone,” is certainly a well-tested truism. It is more in the sense of “acceptable.” In other words, Paul was urging acceptable behavior, seeking the welfare of others before our own. For the believer, acceptable behavior toward others would always be in the nature of that which is on the side of good and that which builds

up, rather than tears down. Jesus certainly did not please the Pharisees in the common usage of that term, but He did deal with them on the side of good, even though they were not open to the true meaning of the good. Jesus' behavior toward them was certainly acceptable in the sight of God. Jesus claimed to do always "*those things that please Him.*" The same word is used there. We may not feel that we can be equal to Jesus in pleasing God. It helps to understand the word as meaning "acceptable," rather than perfect. Our behavior is acceptable with God so long as we are seeking, within the limits of human weakness, to do that which is right.

The reproaches of those who reproached Thee... This quotation is from Psalm 69—a so-called Messianic Psalm. It depicts the intense suffering that Jesus endured during His lifetime on the earth—suffering that was not confined to Calvary. He was an outcast to His countrymen—even to His own family—because of His claims to a special position with God. His words often cut across the traditions of the Jews; to which they seemed to cling in spite of the oppressive use of these traditions by their leaders. The people often regarded Jesus with much suspicion and, at one point, turned away from Him in large numbers. It was at that point, that He said to His disciples—"*Will ye also go away?*" To this they responded, "*To whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life.*" (John 6:66-68) It was not very reassuring—"We would leave, but we do not know where else to go." In all of this, Jesus did what was acceptable to God. He suffered much at the hands of the people, even to the point of death; but was true to His mission to save the world, even though it must have seemed, at times, a questionable task. It was, of course, the Spirit of God in Him that reached out to a

contentious and antagonistic people.

It was similar to Paul's situation, who said—"*The love of Christ compels [constrains] me...*" (II Corinthians 5:14) He spoke these words in the context of his reaching out to declare the redemption in Christ Jesus. He was not constrained by his personal love for Christ, but rather the *agape* love of Christ reached out to the world beyond personal motives. This love was in him and it superseded all personal feelings, either for Christ or for people. An energy came from his inner spirit to accomplish a task beyond human capacity or feelings. Human love has little relevance to the *agape* love of the Spirit. Human feelings are not wrong, but neither are they of primary importance in the relationship to Christ. It is quite essential to understand this, else the vacillating feelings of the flesh will continually interfere with the changeless flow of the energy of Christ within our spirits.

It is never sound to gauge the effectual work of the Spirit, within us, by our transient and unreliable human emotions. Doubts and fears and depressions, as well as loves and joys and ecstasies, all have a common characteristic of transiency. However we feel today, it may change tomorrow. The reason for this, of course, is that human emotions are part of our brain function as a physiological process. A good deal of our mental attitudes are based upon physical processes genetics, biochemical balance, health conditions, and a host of factors that have no more to do with the spirit than does bone structure or muscle tone.

Sometimes the two facets—spirit and flesh interface, and the inner condition of one's spirit is more readily expressed in the flesh. However, generally speaking, the condition of one's spirit, being indwelt

by Christ, is far stronger than the flesh—far stronger than we may imagine. If our spirits are energized by the same energy with which God raised Christ from the dead, then our spirits are eternal and changeless. And thus, they are not subject to the vacillations of our human emotions. It is popular today to use such phrases as “full of anger.” These are technical categories used by counselors as a convenient category for undefined personality problems. (If the psychologist does not find some solution, the patient will not be back.) Such phrases have caused the general public to feel that anger is wrong. Thus, a conflict is set up between flesh and spirit. Actually, to be angry is to be human. Jesus expressed anger; Peter expressed anger; Paul expressed anger. Paul said, “*Be angry and sin not.*”—Don’t hurt people with your anger. Diagnoses are often self-fulfilling. One fails to sort out legitimate Objects of anger. Who is not furious at some of the tyrants of the world—the oppressors, the exploiters, the opportunists. This is not to say that there are not people who do have a problem with anger that needs to be sorted out and dealt with. But even at that, it is a problem of the human psyche, and should be dealt with at that level rather than tying it into a matter of spirituality.

So how did we get from the reproaches of Christ to the problem of anger?

We were discussing the ministry of Christ, which He carried on in the midst of a great deal of reproach; both by His fellow countrymen as well as by His family and many of the Gentiles. It was the energy of God flowing through His Spirit that enabled Him to continue in strength, in spite of the constant battle in the flesh. We were observing that the same was true of Paul, who declared that it was the “love of Christ which compelled

him.” We observed that it was not love **for** Christ, but the love **of** Christ—a completely different thing. Love for someone—even for Christ—can be a fleshly motivation which is no stronger than human emotions. The ministry of Christ, as well as of Paul, went quite beyond human feelings. We then showed that human emotions must be distinguished from the process of the spirit within. The practice of gauging spirituality by human feelings is unsound, and leads to unnecessary discouragement, as well as placing a barrier between ourselves and Christ. The issue of the reproaches of Christ was discussed in connection with the sojourn of Christ on the earth, wherein it was said that He “did not please Himself.” We indicated that the Greek word for “please” could more readily be translated by “acceptable.” In other words, the attitude and behavior of Christ towards the people was acceptable to God, even though it often displeased the people to whom He ministered. In fact, the Bible continually warned against being “men-pleasers.” Those who try too hard to “please” people, may find themselves, not infrequently, displeasing to God.

The entire discussion that we have had about “pleasing others,” must be seen in the light of a proper definition of the word. We must also be careful to make a proper distinction between that which is human emotional response, and that which is germane to the spirit.

For whatsoever things were written beforehand... We are obviously dealing here with the Old Testament scriptures. Both the gospels and the epistles make constant reference to them. However, it must be understood that not every scripture is of universal application. Paul, here makes quite an appropriate use of Psalm 69. On the other hand, there are

judgments and promises to Israel, for example, that are not at all applicable to the Gentile world or to the Christian church. For example, the bizarre episodes relating to Lot and the city of Sodom may contain some secondary warnings, but nowhere did God ever promise that if He could find 10 righteous in any city of America, He would spare the city. The sins of Sodom are certainly reprehensible and quite common in America, but to assume therefore that God would wipe out America as He did Sodom, would be very inappropriate. The number of rather strongly involved Christians in America would exceed 50 percent (some say 80 to 90), so there is very little relevance.

Or take, for example, another commonly misapplied text in II Chronicles—*“If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* (7:14) Any use of this text for America would be quite inappropriate. In the first place, America cannot be identified with “My people, which are called by My name.” (America certainly does not have the name of God in it in any way.) The name “Israel” is built around—EI—“God.” The effort to identify America as symbolically the continuation of Israel, is totally speculative and has very little substance in it. In the second place, there is nowhere in the letters addressed to Gentile nations, a nation mentioned with the same promise from God. God never promised America that if it would repent He would restore it. Israel still has a large number of prophecies that relate to the entire nation, but the Gentile nations are all dealt with in terms of its individual citizens. And so, picking up texts out of the Old Testament and applying them “willy-nilly” to anyone, anywhere, anytime is extremely risky, to

say nothing of abusing the scripture.

That is not to say, of course, that there are not a great number of passages in the Old Testament which do have applications of a secondary nature. For example, God’s warnings to Israel certainly imply that He is a God of mercy and justice, as well as power and might. He is certainly not to be trifled with, but to those who return to Him, there is abundant mercy and grace. Certainly the prophecies that have to do with the coming of the Holy Spirit are specifically applicable, as was the case in the grand sweep of Pentecost. Peter, in fact, makes a general application to a prophecy which had been directed specifically toward Israel, at the time of its declaration by Joel. In many respects, the prophecy went beyond the involvement of the Gentiles, *per se*, and included a future fulfillment with Israel, after the rapture of the church. However, it is obvious that the Gentiles were included in part of that prophecy.

The implication of the matter is that the interpretation of the scripture requires a great deal of understanding and carefulness. Assuming the position of authority in the church, is a very serious matter. Speculations are acceptable, but they must be carefully presented as speculation, wherever the text is not that clear. Much of the current prophetic utterances are quite speculative, and yet, alas, are often presented as ultimate truth. By the same token, many New Testament passages are misapplied as well. A very strong case in point is the use of the parables. For example, the parable of the talents—such a favorite text for urging responsible use of gifts—must be applied to Israel, and not to the church. Without going into detail, remember that the lot of the one who didn’t use his “gifts” was to be cast into outer darkness—

hardly an appropriate penalty for Christian lethargy. The same case could be made for a number of parables that Jesus spoke to Israel, but have been misapplied on a universal basis.

Through the endurance and through the comfort of the scriptures... The word “patience” is an inadequate translation. Such a word implies a rather benign “tolerance.” The more accurate translation is “endurance”—“steadfastness.” Literally, the word means “to remain under.” It would be well illustrated by “materials testing.” In the testing of steel beams, it is not only a matter of how much weight they can stand, but also for how long. The scripture has the quality of everlasting endurance. We can put our weight on it, with complete confidence. It is a book of “steadfastness.” Similarly, the word “consolation” could well be translated by “comfort.” In fact, that is the name used for the Holy Spirit—the Παράκλητε (*Paraclete*). Essentially, the Greek word means “an ever-present helper.” It implies response to a call for help. The English word “consolation” seems to imply the same thing, but actually it is quite a different word. It is one thing to console someone, it is another thing to come with assistance. We can console others in their trouble, but only the Spirit can really give the substantial help that is needed. It is well to remember this in the situation of trying to offer comfort to the sorrowing. We can let people know that we know they are suffering and that we care, but our human words will be very inadequate in truly offering assistance. Most things we try to say in such situations, seem rather empty and inadequate. Only the grace of Christ is truly adequate, and that is where people ultimately will receive their true comfort. So, the Bible is not merely a book of sympathy, even though many of its

passages are comforting—it is a book of true assistance which can come only through the Spirit of God. Thus, the scriptures may be said to be the book of enduring assistance to the spirit. It is a reliable guide to the true meaning of life as God sees it, and directs its ultimate fulfillment.

Through the enduring and steadfast assistance of the scripture, we have expectation. As previously discussed, the word often translated by “hope” means much more than that. Our English word “hope” implies much of uncertainty. The Greek word—ἐλπις (*elpis*)—is rather a word of certainty. It means “expectation.” Everywhere in the New Testament that the word hope would be replaced by the word expectation, you would have much more assurance. Thus, in Colossians 1:27, the expression “*Christ in you, the hope of glory,*” “becomes “*Christ in you the expectation of glory.*” And so throughout the entire New Testament. The word *elpis* has nothing of uncertainty in it.

The God of endurance and comfort... What is said of the scripture, is also said of God, its Author. He is here, seen as the God of steadfast assistance, which is in keeping with His grace and mercy. Unfortunately, He is so often presented as the God of wrath and judgment, that the body of believers seem more overwhelmed by guilt than consoled by grace and help. In chapter 15, He is called, also, “the God of peace.” In fact, the great message of the angels at the birth of Jesus, was a message of peace—“*Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth, good will to men.*” Even this has gotten twisted to give the judgment side of God. Some translators have opted for a totally unnecessary translation—“*Peace on earth to men of good will.*” Obviously, the translators assume that they are people of “good will.”

Grant you the same mindset among one another... The Greek word here—*φρονεω* (*phroneo*)—has to do with the general attitude or inclination of the mind. It is not an appeal to think exactly alike, but rather, to have the same attitude toward God; an attitude which, according to this text, is a gift of God, as is faith. The word “mindset” covers this concept nicely. Apart from God, we humans would have no concept at all of who or what He is. How can a particle in the vastness of space even think about God? It is even more absurd than to think that an ant might crawl up on one’s nose and communicate with a human being. But inasmuch as the Seed of the Spirit within us transcends the mind and worships God at the spirit level, we can expect that all of those who have received Him into their spirits will communicate in a similar way.

There is much worship that is of a fleshly nature. There are many traditions that have little to do with the Bible, *per se*, but that tend to separate the kinds of worship that people engage in. At that level, people generally tend to gravitate together with those of a similar cultural

and emotional requirement, but this does not affect the ultimate reality that all worship in the spirit unites the believers, who with one voice, glorify God. Worship that is at a fleshly level is not really wrong, but does bring about many divisions. As with the Samaritans, the debate over worship tends to settle into what and where and how, whereas Jesus insisted that true worship was in the spirit. Paul tells the Corinthians that we are all like children in our understandings and actions—we are citizens of the “cosmic sand box.” In some respects, the church might be the “Ecclesiastical Nursery School.” We are all children. If we would realize that we would be, perhaps, more tolerant to the external and fleshly forms of worship that others engage in. However, underneath it all—all the pomp and ceremony and cultural expressions—runs the true thread of the Spirit, which unites our hearts as one, in Him. Whatever the when and where and how, God, Who knows us, receives it in the spirit in which it is given. One day, “*we shall know as we are known.*” The veil shall be lifted, and we will have done with the paltry, earthly cocoon and its childish expressions.

Romans 15:7-13

TRANSLATION

Wherefore, receive one another, even as also Christ has received you unto the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a minister of circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, unto the end of confirming the promises of the fathers, that the Gentiles might glorify God on the basis of mercy; even as it is written,

*“For this reason I will confess You among the Gentiles,
And I will sing praise to Your name.”*

And again, It says,

“Exult, Gentiles, with His people.”

And again,

*“Praise the Lord all Gentiles
And let all the people praise Him.”*

And again, Isaiah said,

*“There shall be a root of Jesse
and He is the One Who is appointed to rule the Gentiles,
Upon Him shall the Gentiles have their expectation.”*

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, unto the end that you should abound in expectation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY

The Gentiles and the Power of God

Racial distinctive did not originate with the American slave traders, or with Rome, or Egypt, or Babylon; they came with the dawn of civilization, in the determination of God to develop a nation that would have a very special place with Him, and would be His oracles to declare His truth to the world. While it was obviously not His intention to exclude the

rest of the world from His truth and grace, the effect upon Israel was the assumption that they would be the exclusive recipient of salvation, forever. That they had failed to fulfill God's purpose through the years, never really came into consideration by them. They took for granted their place with God, ultimately despised their mission, and as

a nation, rejected the Messianic claims of Jesus Who came to restore them. It did not dawn upon them that they would no longer be the exclusive recipients of God's favor. Large numbers of Jews believed that the Gentiles were outside the providence of God, and were not entitled to salvation.

The day of Pentecost, which ushered in the coming of the Spirit of God to dwell within the individual, brought also the new universality. The gospel was the declaration of God that "*Whosoever would call upon the name of the Lord would be saved.*" (Romans 10:13) The last appearance of the risen Christ to His disciples, was the occasion in which He revealed to them that this message should be taken to Jew and Gentile alike—to Jerusalem as well as to Samaria; to the Judeans as well as to the Gentiles in the extremities of the land (not earth, see Matthew 12:42). This latter expression was really a reference to Asia Minor (as e.g., Ephesus).

Peter became the apostle of this revelation and was the first one to offer it to the Gentiles, in the home of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius. The Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles as abundantly as He had upon the Jews, and Peter went back to Jerusalem to report it to the elders. To their credit, and by reason of the touch of the Holy Spirit upon them, these Jewish elders finally accepted Peter's report and agreed that God had now granted salvation to the Gentiles. There were still, however, many Jews that, were reluctant to accept this reality. So Paul, here addresses the Romans—both Jew and Gentile—with the assurance that God had, indeed, offered to the Gentiles the energizing power of His Holy Spirit. And as He has repeatedly pointed out, it is this energizing power of the Spirit that unites all of those who identify with

Christ—"Jew and Gentile"—as well as those of differing persuasions within the body of Christ, as discussed in Romans 14. Of course, it should be noted here that Paul was not giving theological license, as would be indicated by the number of times he urged the believers to hold fast to the truth as he had delivered it to them. Obviously, that body of teachings he was referring to, did not include much of the details of the personal expressions of faith.

Even as Christ also received you... A point that we often forget in the judging of others, is what it takes for Christ to accept us. What patience Christ exercises toward us as He takes us through our "sand box sophistries"—the childish notion that we know so much. Teenagers are the most knowledgeable of all, followed in a close second by new Christians and amateur Bible teachers (a tongue-in-cheek statement). Of course, those who get their "revelations" directly from God consider themselves the ultimate authorities. The truth of the matter is that the more one knows, the more one realizes how much one doesn't know. But Christ has to put up with all of us in our various stages of development. Unfortunately, the same grace is not always extended by ourselves to fellow believers. Earlier intensities, so characteristic of the young, often tend to mellow out and we have need of patience to allow this process.

Unto the glory of God... It is within the framework of God's eternal purpose and therefore to His glory, that we maintain unity among the believers, as Paul also constantly urged. To maintain unity does not presume that we will all think alike or have exactly the same attitudes or beliefs about everything. But within a certain framework of latitude, especially where the scripture is not that certain

and where the glory and power of Christ is not in any way diminished, we need to be open to one another and to focus on the things wherein we may join hands to strengthen our calling upon the earth. Fighting tooth and nail over minor points of doctrine or practice just for the sake of the “principle of the thing,” is certainly not to the glory of God. Believe what you will, as intensely as you must, but don’t impose your intensity upon others. As Paul said in the previous chapter, “Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.” This does not in any way abridge your right to personal beliefs (and you may engage in much “head shaking” at others), but don’t divide the body.

A minister of circumcision... What does this mean? Certainly Paul is not suggesting that Jesus became the spokesman for the Jewish side of circumcision. Nor is the word *διακονος* (*diakonos*) to be translated as minister in the sense of spokesman. The word fundamentally means “servant.” It is the basis of our word “deacon.” It means “servant,” but not in the sense of “slave.” Jesus said, *“The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister [serve], and to give His life a ransom for many.”* (Matthew 20:28) Our use of the word “minister,” today, is quite different. The multiplicity of “ministries,” are usually seen as agents for some given cause. Jesus came as the servant of circumcision. But the expression “circumcision” is often used by Paul as a classification of the Jewish people in terms of their distinctive right. Circumcision more than any other right of the Jews, would separate them from the Gentiles around them. Hence, Paul refers to them often as “the circumcision.”

In order to rescue the people of God, Jesus had to become one of them. That is a truly remarkable thing. Remember that

Christ could have taken upon Him any human form He chose. He could have come as a Roman or a Greek; or a potentate; or a wealthy merchant; or (God forbid) a philosopher. He chose to come as a Jew and identify Himself with the people of God because the Jews were God’s primary responsibility. Given a” of His purposes and promises for the Jewish nation, God had to fulfill these first, before He could turn to the Gentiles. And having come as a circumcised Jew, He led His people through the physical symbolism of circumcision unto the reality of “a circumcision of the heart.” What God was really after was purified hearts and not purified “foreskins.” This was the “truth of God” that would deliver the people of God from an involuntary bondage under the Law, to a voluntary freedom in the grace of Christ.

That the Gentiles may glorify God on the basis of mercy... As Paul so clearly points out in Romans 11, the very process by which the Jews were placed under the Law and attempted to keep it, failed utterly and were offered deliverance through the Messiah, was the very process through which the Gentiles became the object of mercy, and the object “lesson” of the universal grace of God.

Upon Him shall the Gentiles have their expectation... Paul now quotes a number of passages from the Old Testament which give certainty that God intended to include the Gentiles in His universal atonement. It is difficult for the Gentiles today, who have gone through a great many generations of grace and gospel and enlightenment, to consider the position of the Gentiles of the ancient world, who had no such enlightenment.

But what will God do with them? How can He judge them?

Paul faced the same question in the earlier part of the epistle. According to Him, those who did not have the Law will be judged according to the law of conscience.

But then, if they are going to be given a concession, were they not better off without being enlightened?

Much heartache and sorrow comes from not being enlightened about the grace of God, or having His help and care. Eternal life is one thing. Living under human ignorance and fear is something else. In the field of medicine, there is so much more we know today that can bring relief to those suffering from mental disorders, for example. We know now that many of these disorders were not in any way the fault of the victims. But how much better today to relieve them of their distress?

There are many grand passages in the Old Testament, including the whole of Psalm 68, where the Gentiles were assured of deliverance in the same remarkable way that the Jews were. According to Psalms 68, even Egypt, in the final Kingdom period, will bring her worship offerings to Jerusalem. Christ, Who rules over the everlasting kingdom of David (from the root of Jesse), will rule also over the Gentiles. And they too, like the Jews, have their eternal hope, or expectation, in Him.

But the God of expectation... Here again, we select expectation over “hope.” There is no uncertainty whatever to God’s promises of His eternal redemption of the human race.

Fill you with all joy and peace in the circumstance of believing... Galatians 5 promises joy and peace as a gift of the Holy Spirit. All who receive the Holy Spirit receive joy and peace.

So what, then, if we do not have joy and peace? Do we then not have the Holy Spirit?

A most important question. There is a widespread misunderstanding of both the meaning of the coming of the Holy Spirit and of the gifts that He brings with Him. First of all, the Holy Spirit is not given as a reward for piety. To go through all the conditions often suggested as the basis for receiving the Holy Spirit, would then make the coming of the Holy Spirit unnecessary. The fact that one would care about the whole issue of the Holy Spirit indicates that He has already come—else they would not care.

But there is a great necessity of understanding the difference between the fruit of the spirit and the expressions of the flesh. One can be filled with the Spirit and filled with joy and peace in the spirit, and yet have turbulence in the flesh. There are many circumstances in life where carelessness or errors have fostered turbulence and distress. But that is in terms of our human activities. In spite of this turbulence, one’s relationship to Christ may remain vital and His presence unailing. We have gone into this subject at length in earlier chapters, but suffice it to say that the joy and peace which is mentioned both here and in Galatians 5:22, is part of the river of Divine energy that flows through our inner spirits and gives to us life and integration with the very nature of God. That is part of our eternal heritage. And we have such expectation, not by reason of any virtue of our own or faith or piety or goodness; and certainly not by reason of getting all the circumstances of our lives under control. It is ours by reason of the “power of the Holy Spirit.”

This earthly cocoon is filled with all

manner of things that might choke out our religious fervor. It is a veritable “junk box” of inadequacies, and failures, and errors, and misconceptions; all of which affect our lives in one way or another, even though these human fallacies are understood by Christ and forgiven by Him. Remember that we are “faultless,” but not “flawless.” In many respects the effects of these human factors will affect the grid pattern of our thinking all of our lives. However, in the midst of this

wretched cocoon there is implanted the Seed of the Spirit—the Spirit of God—Who transcends the paltry patterns of our humanity and interlaces with God in the realms of His energy and Eternal Spirit reality. This is the message of Paul in Romans 8:26—the Spirit within us lifts our spirits beyond human inadequacy, and meets God with *“an interaction that goes beyond human articulation.”*

Romans 15:14-21

TRANSLATION

I am persuaded, my brethren, even I myself, concerning you that even you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, being able also to contribute to each other's thoughts. And I have written more boldly to you in part, as putting you in remembrance on account of the grace which was given to me by God, to the end that I may be a servant of Christ Jesus [in matters of faith] unto the Gentiles; laboring [with a Divine commission] in the gospel of God that the offering up of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified in the Holy Spirit. I have then a touch of glory in Christ Jesus in the things pertaining to God. For I would not dare to speak of the things which Christ had not wrought out through me, unto the submission of the Gentiles in word and work, in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem and circulating unto Illyricum, I might fulfill the gospel of Christ. And thus, I have labored intensely to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I build upon another foundation, but even as it is written,

*Those to whom it was not declared concerning Him, shall see,
and they who have not heard, shall perceive.*

COMMENTARY

Paul's Assignment—Grace to the Gentiles

Paul and his Jewish forebearers had long been struggling to maintain the vitality of their relationship to God under the highly structured system of the Law, as delivered by Moses on Mt. Sinai, and endlessly extended by a multiplicity of details added by the Scribes and Pharisees. But God had chosen Paul a "Pharisee of the Pharisees," to be the spokesman for a whole new order in which the Law was written upon the heart; the sins covered by the sacrifice of

Christ once and for all; and human frailty immersed in the grace of God.

Such a message would require expressions of the power of God to change a religious system embedded in the culture of a people who claimed to be God's people, and a message presumed to be God's eternal word. But who better to bring such a dramatic message but one who had, himself, been immersed in the old system. A zealot, doing to death the followers of the hated Messiah; a scholar,

recognized by Jew and Gentile alike; and as far as the righteousness of the Law was concerned—blameless.

And who but Christ could strike such a one with His energy, turn him around 180 degrees, and send him out to be his own spokesman for the new order? But such was the person of Paul, and such was the power of Christ, and such was the dramatic and startling message that Paul delivered to his own countrymen.

However, Paul's fellow countrymen were as loath to hear him as they were to hear Jesus. And so Paul, who had given his countrymen a first opportunity to hear the word turned, rejected, to take up an assignment as the spokesman of God to the Gentiles.

If Paul had been a fit choice to speak to his countrymen, he was equally equipped to speak to the Gentile world. A free-born citizen of Rome; brought up in a wealthy Greek household with tutors and privileges; and shattered in his worldly station by the power of Christ, he was a well-equipped spokesman for the revelation of God to the Gentile world.

You are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct... In a most unusual statement, especially for a “flawless Pharisee,” Paul declared that he is persuaded about these Romans, that they have been so touched by the Spirit of God as now to be full of goodness (whom once he called dogs), and to be the possessors of all knowledge. Since he frequently had admitted that there was no good thing in the flesh, it is obvious that He is identifying these characteristics with the presence of the Holy Spirit within, whom He has just mentioned as being the source of power and expectation within them. The words “full” and “fulfill” are not synonymous.

μεστως (*mestos*) means full, in the sense of replete or “filled up;” and πληρωω (*pleroo*) means “fulfill,” in the sense of purpose. Able to instruct one another. The word νουθητεω (*noutheteo*) means to communicate ideas. Literally it means “to place in the mind.” Generally speaking, this word was applied to the ideas of caution or warning.

On account of the grace which has been given to me by God... This, of course, was the crux of Paul's entire ministry. It is the crimson thread that runs through all of his epistles—that through the grace of God, Christ has covered all their sins with His own sacrifice. Sacrifices were no longer needed to validate the individual's relationship to God. Sins were covered and forgiven—not merely excused. But the flesh still retains its Adamic perversity and needs continually to be immersed in the grace of Christ.

Unto the end that I may be a servant of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles... The word λιτουργος (*leitourgos*) is not a servant in the sense of *doulos*—a slave—but one who is an official performer of a religious duty. This is further born out by the next phrase, which indicates that he was functioning in a priestly capacity ιερουργεω (*ierourgeo*) as regards the gospel of God, indicating that he was not merely coming on his own to give his philosophy, but rather, was an appointed agent of God in the communication of the new order.

The sacrificial offering of the Gentiles... Paul saw this priestly service as offering up a sacrifice—his ministry among the Gentiles. He received his commission from God in this respect, and effected his service as an offering unto God. And this, he says was “sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit had

touched his ministry among the Gentiles and sanctified it for his glory. And this touch of the Holy Spirit immersed him in the “radiance of Christ Jesus in the things pertaining to God.” “Radiant” is a better translation than “boast,” which would hardly be appropriate applied to Christ. The word is from the ancient concept which had to do with the brilliance of burnished brass.

Christ wrought out through me...
Paul says here that he would not “dare to speak” of those things which have not been worked out in him by Christ. That is to say, the lifetime of Paul’s experiences in his ministry and suffering for the sake of Christ, became the matrix out of which Paul presented the revelation of God to the world. The message came through him. He did not speak of that, concerning which he did not have firsthand experience. In a sense, he was, himself the message.

In the power of signs and wonders...
So radically different and dramatic was the message that the apostles brought to the Jewish people, that it was essential that it be validated by signs and wonders that would designate it as, surely, from God. This was the intent of Jesus’ declaration that, “*Signs and wonders would follow them that believe.*” To use this as a modern-day panacea for personal ills, is to abuse the deeper meaning of this point. Today the ministry

is validated by the scriptures. One’s ministry is judged by the faithfulness to the word of God. But after Pentecost, there was no written revelation and hence, no validation except through miracles. This was, of course, a fundamental meaning to the miracles of Jesus—“*But these are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God...*” (John 20:31) The miracles of Jesus were not intended to prove that God exists—but rather that Jesus was the true Messiah. And so also the miracles of the apostles.

By the power of the Spirit of God...
Not only was the power of God demonstrated in the miracles, but also in the capacity of those who saw them, to receive them as truly from God.

Not where Christ has been named...
Paul was the planter of the seed. Apollo’s watered, and “God gave the increase.” Each has his gift. Whereas Paul was widely gifted in both the work of evangelism as well as the work of teaching, yet he recognized his fundamental place in pioneering the process of the gospel. He was, after all, the chief spokesman for God, to the Gentiles. And thus, was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah—*those who had neither seen nor heard would now be introduced to the truth of God, for all people of earth.*

Romans 15:22-33

TRANSLATION

Wherefore, I was also hindered by many things, to come to you. But now no longer having a situation in these regions and having had a great longing to come to you for many years, and since I am going into Spain, I hope that while passing through I may behold you and be sent along the way by you; if indeed first I may be satisfied by you in part. But now I am going to Jerusalem to render service to the saints. For it pleased those of Macedonia and Achaia to put together a sharing for the poor of the saints who are in Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do so, even as they are debtors to them. For if they have shared their spiritual things with the Gentiles, they ought also to serve them in material things. Then when I have completed this task and this fruit has been accepted by them, I will depart from you into Spain. But I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

But I encourage you, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, that you engage in the conflict with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the disobedient [unbelievers] in Judea; and that my ministry in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, in order that I may come to you in joy, through the will of God, to rest together with you. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

COMMENTARY

Sharing With the Saints- Both Spiritual and Material Blessings

Paul had been moving arduously and ceaselessly about the countryside, ministering to the believers. He did not have very much for himself. But there were those whom he wished to visit, both for their blessing and for his own personal refreshing. Unfortunately, his own personal desires were not always possible, and in the case of the Romans, he had been hindered from getting to them for a

period of years. Here, Paul does not identify the hindrances, but elsewhere, as with the Thessalonians, he made a definite declaration that it was Satan who had hindered him (I Thessalonians 2:18). Paul had suffered a good deal and was often alone, and so it was natural that he would seek out the personal refreshing of other believers.

To be sent on my way by you... Paul would be passing through Rome on his way to Spain. He was hoping to be able to get together with the fellow believers and have a time of sharing. He would go first to Jerusalem to deliver the donations that the Macedonians and Achaians had sent to the poor saints there. After that he would come through Rome.

For if in their spiritual matters they shared with the Gentiles... The Gentiles actually owed to the Jews their salvation. It was only fair that the Gentiles would share with the Jews of Jerusalem in their material needs. This is one of the most fundamental principles of giving.

The believers are often in a quandary as to how and where to give to the Lord. What is the true essence of giving? In the modern era, it has become quite complex. In Paul's day it was rather simple. The believers who were in want, were helped by the believers who were able to do so. Some could give largely; some had only the "widow's mite." But all shared in ministering to the needs of the saints. Paul was reminding the Gentiles that they had received their very salvation from the Jews and were legitimately concerned about the material welfare of their brethren. By the same token, those who received from the spiritual ministry of Paul, were also reasonably encouraged to help him in his material needs. Sometimes he provided for his own needs, in making tents. Sometimes he needed the help of the believers. It was more than just a "trade-off," it was a Spirit-led process, in which the believers had an outlet for their giving.

Today, the issue has become quite complex. There are many thousands of organizations that are outside the church fellowship itself. Many of them are doing

a fine work that might not be possible for the individual assemblies. On the other hand, there are large numbers of these organizations that are not being faithful to Christ or are not handling faithfully, the funds. We have had some rather major examples of this recently. But how do we know? The first obligation would be to the believers and ministry of one's own fellowship. On the other hand, there would be a limit as to what was being done with the money. One might not feel, for example, that the erecting of a very large building would be truly in the Lord's interest. In the church at large today, there is a great deal of competition for membership, which often becomes the motivation for building programs that go beyond the actual needs of the fellowship. The basic question is how much is this money going to be used in the ministry to the people? Secondly, one may give to organizations that are well enough known, that one is quite certain that the gift will not be misused. It is always risky to give to organizations with which one is not too familiar. It is especially risky to give to organizations that are not Christian, or whose Christian label is uncertain.

Another rule of thumb would be that the source of one's personal blessing in the ministry should be the object of one's support. It is not an easy issue, and one must simply trust the Lord to see that one does what is right. The Spirit will surely guide the efforts of the believers to minister to Him through their giving. In Acts, it says that the believers came together on the first day of the week and gave "*as the Lord had prospered them.*" That is also an important rule. The tithe is rarely mentioned in the New Testament, but on the other hand, there would be many for whom a tenth of what they receive would be quite a hardship. It is grossly misleading to suggest that

whatever one gives will be multiplied. This is not only a mercenary attitude, but it does not comport with reality. The few “shining examples” that are set forth by those who teach this, are often only a specially selected minority. The bottom line is, of course, that the Spirit of Christ will have to direct you, and see to it that you do what is right. We must be careful not to be moved by human motivation.

Since I am going into Spain... After delivering the donations to Jerusalem, Paul expected to head over to Rome on his way to Spain. In his intention to visit Rome, Paul was expressing the essence of the interaction between believers. He sought their comfort; he, in turn, expected to bring comfort to them; and he recognized the value of sharing with the believers the impact of his mission to Spain. Whether by prayer or by fellowship or by mutual service, the interfacing of believers with one another is a vital agent in the formation and growth of the body of Christ on earth.

To be sent on my way by you... Why did Paul need them to “send him on his way?” The phrase suggests something of a “rest-stop” or perhaps the old “stage stop.” Here he suggests that he would be “satisfied” by them. The Greek word for “satisfied” is *πιμπλημι* (*pimplemi*)—“to fill.” It refers more to human needs—that is to give a lift or encouragement.

The fullness of the blessing of Christ... The Greek word here is *πληρωμα* (*pleroma*) and refers to more of a spiritual fulfillment. The word *pimplemi* (as stated above) would be used of a human satisfaction. Paul was certain that coming to the people of Rome, he would be a channel of the very energy and fullness of Christ. In that respect, it would not be a matter of coming merely with words of encouragement, but rather,

a ministry of the Spirit to their spirits, through Paul. The inserting of the word “gospel” here (not in the earliest manuscripts), puts the whole idea back into the context of words, rather than spirit.

The fellowship with the believers at Rome would bring to him a certain refreshing and satisfaction. His ministry to them, on the other hand, would be as a channel of the very Spirit of Christ.

In addition to the encouragement and physical refreshing that the believers in Rome would provide, Paul desperately needed the prayers of the fellow believers in the arduous struggle. The Greek word suggests “fellow agonizers.” This, in turn, is from a Greek word referring to conflict which is the basis of our word “agony.” It was used of the Greek games or contests, where the exertion of the contestants brought great physical distress. It can be seen readily in the athletic competitions of our day. Paul saw his ministry as a constant battle with Satan, which was, in many respects, an agonizing conflict. He needed the support of the prayers of the saints. They needed to surround him with a bulwark against the unbelievers, especially among his fellow countrymen who sought in every way to “scuttle” his ministry. Moreover, the saints would share with him, by their prayers, in the effectiveness of the ministry. To the Colossians, he uses the phrase, “*you helping together with us, by your prayers.*” Anyone in the forefront of the battle—in the frontline trenches, so to speak—depends upon the support group of fellow believers.

We have here, then, a classic passage on the vital necessity of believers working together and sharing in the ministry. There are those who have the gift of public expression in teaching and

evangelism, but they are only representatives of the larger body of those who have been called to share in that ministry. Contrary to what many believe today, not everyone is a public speaker. Some seem to feel that the only significant gift is one of public utterance. That is only a small part of it. Often the battles of David, in the Old Testament, had allegorical implications for helpful instruction to the believers of today. Thus, there were those soldiers who went out to battle and there were those who stayed behind in supportive roles. David made the statement that they who went to the battle, would be rewarded in the same way as those who “stayed with the stuff.” In the case of the author, his ministry has been very much reliant upon the network of believers that has been established throughout this country and others. These are the support group, without which the ministry would not be possible. Throughout his epistles, Paul makes very clear the meaning of the body,

and it’s interdependence on each of the members for the fulfillment of the purpose of Christ on earth.

The God of peace be with you all...

This is a constant refrain throughout all of Paul’s epistles. His ministry was not a ministry of judgment and condemnation, as some seem to think. It was a ministry of reconciliation, and grace, and peace with God. If the believers are constantly under condemnation, how can they ever enjoy the peace of Christ? And if that peace comes only when their performance is flawless, when will they ever know that peace? Peace is a gift of the Holy Spirit to our spirits. Christ is our peace. The grace of Christ covers human frailty and provides us with a familial relationship to Himself which, while often faulty, nevertheless gives us a constant access to Him. Paul never made his pronouncements of peace contingent upon the flawless performance of the believers.

Romans 16:1-16

TRANSLATION

I commend to you Phebe, our sister, who is a servant of the church which is in Cenchrea, that you receive her in the Lord as befitting to the saints, and that you stand with her in the matters in which she has need of you; for she also has been a champion of many, even of myself.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, which ones have risked their necks on behalf of my life; for whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles, and the church which is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first-fruit of Asia unto Christ. Greet Mary, who has labored much for your sakes. Greet Andronicus and Junias, who are my fellow kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; who are noted among the apostles for they also came to Christ before me. Greet Amplias, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbane, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys, my beloved. Greet Apelles, who is a tested one in Christ. Greet those of the family of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my fellow kinswomen. Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord. Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet Persis, my beloved, which one labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, the elect in the Lord, and his mother and mine. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes and the brothers that are with them. Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints that are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the Churches of Christ greet you.

COMMENTARY

The Functioning Body of Christ—A Symphony of Service

There are several things that stand out in this section. First of all, you have the constant recurrence of the Greek preposition *συν* (*sun*)—"together." From this preposition we get the constantly recurring prefixes *sym* and *syn*, which

speak of "togetherness." Believers knit together in the Spirit of Christ are a great symphony of service as well as of fellowship.

In identifying the special Objects of greetings, Paul makes a number of different comments about each of them, which suggests the variety of relationships that the believers enjoy with one another. As the symphony orchestra has many different kinds of sounds blended together in concert, so the believers have many different functions and relationships, but all resulting in the grand symphony of the Spirit. Most of this blending takes place outside the consciousness of the individual, and functions in the realm of the spirit.

Thus, we can have a spiritual unity and a functioning of the gifts, that go quite beyond the fleshly factors of human harmony and the effort on the part of the leadership, to assign and identify gifts on the basis of human evaluation and motive. In the final analysis, only Christ can orchestrate the gifts as well as identifying them in the first place. As we have said before, the Holy Spirit provides both the capacity and the compelling to bring these gifts into focus.

There is a good analogy in the lifting of heavy objects. One is sometimes told to “lift with legs and not the back.” Actually that is an erroneous idea. One should really lift with the brain. If one focuses on where one is going to put the object, instead of on the object itself, the brain will coordinate the activity and bring all muscles into play as they effect the task. To try to sort out which muscles to use would not only be impossible, but also inefficient. Thus, we have to let Christ coordinate the gifts and the functioning of the body through the Spirit, and not through the effort to determine these things on a human level.

So Paul and his workers all represented a great symphony of service and support, and eventuated in a most effective

ministry for Christ.

I commend to you Phebe, our sister...

Phebe was a servant—a διακονος (*diakonos*)—which was of the nature of the ones appointed in the book of Acts to care for practical needs, though probably not the same as the office of deacon in the church today.

That you receive her in a manner befitting the saints...

This had nothing to do with some special usage of the word “saint,” but was a term applied to all believers; who were saints, not by reason of special piety, but by reason of being set apart to God. In receiving her, believers were to stand with her in whatever matter she might have need. For she herself had been a “champion” of many, including Paul himself. The word προστατις (*prostatis*), translated often by the word “succor,” is perhaps better translated by “champion.” Its basic meaning is “to stand in front of another,” and was sometimes used of the “protector.” Phebe’s place was probably more to “stand with” the believers in their persecutions and afflictions.

In whatever matters...

The word πραγμα (*pragma*) was often used of business matters, *per se*, but was not exclusively so used. We get “pragmatic” from this word. It had reference to “things” of this world. It was, thus, not a call by the apostle for spiritual assistance, but rather, sharing with her in the ordinary affairs of life. Sometimes believers can become so “spiritual” about things, that they fail to see the need of helping one another in the earthly matters of life. Some people become so “heavenly-minded” that they are no earthly good.

There follows now an extensive list of names of people who had been of special

help to Paul. Some of them are identified as fellow workers; some of them are merely named as “beloved.” All were given equal recognition; none was regarded more highly than another. In fact, in Romans 12, Paul had clearly warned against the tendency to *“think of themselves more highly than they ought to think.”* There is a very obvious and rampant tendency in the church today to do the very thing that Paul warned against. A person of influence or affluence is usually given different treatment than the “commoner.” Jesus exemplified God’s attitude when He launched the greatest movement of human recovery that ever swept the world, with a handful of fishermen. The phrase, “God is no respecter of persons” is known throughout the church, but rarely considered. If the governor of a state, for example, should ask for an audience, there are few religious leaders that would not cross the country to accommodate him. But an ordinary person would not be likely to get such treatment. In 20/20 hindsight, if someone had been asked to cross the country for a poor student at Wheaton, the average minister would probably not have done so, little realizing the potential of a Billy Graham. By the same token, if a “Volkswagen bug” pulled into the church parking lot, few, if any, would pay much attention. If, however, a limousine pulls into the parking lot, it is a different story. To be honest, the whole thing is as

rampant as it is absurd. There was nothing special about the “lost lamb” in the famous parable of the “ninety and nine.”

So in the list of names, there is a conspicuous absence of any mention of nobility. There are hints that some whom Paul dealt with, were of fairly high rank, but the obvious point is that they are not given special attention. It was certainly in keeping with Paul’s very specific statements to the Corinthians—*“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world and things which are despised, hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence [before Him].”* (I Corinthians 1:26-29). Observe the kind of people that the various religious groups bring before the public. The excuse always is that people will be more likely to listen to those of position and authority in the world. Stephen did not seem to have difficulty getting the ear of the Pharisees, who were so pierced to the heart by his message that they killed him.

Romans 16:17-24

TRANSLATION

I urge you, brethren, to mark those who cause departures and stumbling blocks contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and stay away from them. For they are such ones who do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and through ingratiating words and blessings they deceive the hearts of the unsound [vulnerable]. For your submissiveness has been reported unto all. I, therefore, rejoice concerning you. I want you to be wise concerning the good, and pure concerning the bad. And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet, shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Timothy, my fellow worker, salutes you and Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, who are my fellow kinsmen. I, Tertius, the one who has written this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius salutes you, who is my host and also of all the church. Erastus salutes you who is a steward of the city, and also Quartus, his brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

COMMENTARY

An Enemy Hath Done This

This bold declaration is from the familiar parable of the tares and the wheat, in Matthew 13. In the parable, the lord of the fields had sown good grain, but during the night an enemy had come and sown weeds with it. When the crop came in, the servants came to him and asked him what had happened to the good grain that he sowed—“*Why does it have weeds in it?*” Their master said, “*An enemy hath done this.*” In a similar figure, Paul warned the people of Ephesus that, “*Grievous wolves would come in, not sparing the flock.*” He was well aware that Satan would bring in his own agents to foster error and confusion. He urges

the Romans to mark those who were such, and keep away from them. Unfortunately, the tendency of the church is to shun the sinners and entertain those who are careless about their teachings. It is tragic that they let anyone teach who is willing, irrespective of qualifications. Much error in the church has been disseminated by unqualified teachers.

These are they who serve their own bellies... The word “bellies” is more a figure of speech and not to be taken literally. Viscera—internal organs such as heart, kidneys, bowels—were commonly used to express human emotions. Paul

was not saying that these people were looking for food and sustenance, but that they were promoting religious ideas that focused on the flesh. Much of today's worship satisfies the emotions, but does not nourish the spirit. The whole issue of legalism, which Paul was concerned about during his ministry, put the weight of salvation on human behavior and not on the power of the Spirit.

Through ingratiating words and blessings... These were not, by any means, good words and fair speeches, as the King James text suggests, but the deceptive charm and grace of the opportunists. We use the slangy phrase “confidence game,” because the person who is trying to sell a bogus scheme, does all in his power to win the confidence of the victim. They are often the most charming and gracious people that you will ever meet. Religion is full of such opportunists. Beware the hucksters of religion who seek to win you, not by the substance of their message, but by their charm and wit. The first step is often to invite one to a social function.

Nor were the “blessings” spoken of; genuine ministry from the Holy Spirit. Jesus accused the Pharisees of offering blessing and cursing from the same mouth. Beware the one who goes about offering to “bless you.” Only Christ can minister blessing through His servants.

The hearts of the unsound... The word *κακος* (*kakos*) does not mean evil, *per se*, but faulty behavior. Such ones are vulnerable to deception. It is not that unsound behavior (not uncommon in Christians) inevitably produces deception, but rather, that one is more vulnerable to deception.

For your submissiveness has been reported unto all... The word

“submissive” is a more accurate translation than “obedience.” The Greek word *υπακωνω* (*hupakouo*) means literally, “to be under the hearing of one.” It has more to do with a general attitude of receptivity to what the Lord has to say, than with a guarantee that one will never fail to obey Him. It is doubtful that any human being could make that kind of guarantee. Of course, Paul did find many things among the believers that needed correcting. A most important point to consider here, is that believers can be in a state of openness toward Christ and His will, and have every intention of doing it, but, as Paul often confessed, fall short of that intention.

I want you to be wise concerning the good... When we are joined to Christ through His Spirit, we are lifted out of the realm of Satan and his process of evil, and brought into the realm of God and a process of good. That does not mean that we forever avoid doing anything bad, we are no longer characters in the devil's drama. Accordingly, we should become knowledgeable in regard to God's kingdom, as becomes His children; pure with reference to the realm of the bad. The Greek word here—*ακεραιους* (*akeraious*)—is from the word *κεραιους* (*keraious*), which means “clay,” and from which we get our word “ceramic.” Wax that was used in the making of candles, had to be pure and unmixed with clay. The word “sincere” is from this basic root and means “without wax,” or “pure.” It is not that we should necessarily be ignorant of the things of this world—that might make us too naive to live in it. It is rather, that we should strive to be free from being swept up in it.

But the God of peace shall crush Satan... For the Christian attempting to be free from the world of evil, life is a constant struggle. The struggle is not

with the spirit, but with the flesh. The struggle with the flesh (Paul's continual experience) does not in any way imply that God is not at peace with us in our spirits. In fact, the struggle, itself, is the very evidence that God is with us, else we would not struggle, but rather, simply give place to the flesh. Our promise is that, ultimately, God will crush Satan and we will be forever free from him. How He can use the word "quickly" is another matter, and may imply the fact that the era of humans is rather short as compared with the eons of God's eternity.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you... It is this very grace that has allowed us to survive thus far. Apart from that, we would never make it. The

forces of Satan are far too great for us. But they are no match for Christ, Who guarantees our security.

I Tertius, who has written this epistle... Did not Paul, indeed, write the letter to the Romans? Yes, it is certain from all evidences that he did write it, but that he dictated it to Tertius. Elsewhere, he refers to an Amanuensis, which was something of a stenographer. Apparently, Paul had trouble with his eyes and indicates that whenever he wrote, himself, he used very large letters.

Tertius concludes his work with special greetings to his own friends and fellow workers, and especially to Gaius, who was evidently given to hospitality.

Romans 16:25-27

TRANSLATION

To the One Who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the message of Jesus Christ; according to the revelation of the mystery which had been silent for the times of the ages; but is now made manifest through the prophetic writings, according to the decree of the Eternal God; unto a submission of faith having been made known unto all the Gentiles; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever. Amen.

COMMENTARY

The Mystery of the Universe Revealed to the Gentiles

Paul took the measure of the Gentiles, in his statement to the Corinthians—“*The Greeks seek after wisdom.*” (I Corinthians 1:22) Furthermore, he said that the Greeks thought that the answer given by the followers of Jesus was foolishness. (The Greek word *μωρος* (*moros*) gives us our word “moron”). The Greeks thought that the answer of the followers of Jesus was “moronic.” That was, of course, because the truth had not, as yet, been revealed to them. In the next chapter, Paul declared that “*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to Him, and He is not able to know them because they are discerned in the Spirit.*” (I Corinthians 2:14) The word for “wisdom” which Paul used in his statement about the Greeks, was *σοφία* (*sophia*), which means, not the practical wisdom of daily living, but basically referred to the “meaning of the universe.” The famous (or infamous) Sophists were engaged in endless debate on this subject—“What’s it all about?” They even set up special places in the *agora* (marketplace), where they debated

all comers on the subject. At that point, such ones never had a clue. To the Jews, God’s chosen people, God had revealed the basic meaning of the universe and its Creator fifteen hundred years earlier, and had given them the responsibility of communicating such truths to the world. When they failed to do this and took the path of idolatry, God turned to the Gentiles. The effort of both Jesus and Paul to restore the revelation to the Jewish people, fell on deaf ears. Such was, as a matter of fact, the declaration both of Jesus and Paul—that their hardness of heart was a penalty decreed by God as the recompense for their apostasy. These verses at the end of Romans are something of an epilogue. The entire epistle has been a revelation of God’s openness to the Gentiles. Historically, they had not been seekers after God. They had no interest in the peculiar religion of the Jewish people, who had claimed to know God but had fallen away to follow the same idols of their Gentile contemporaries. Those who had sought God, had lost it. Those who

had not sought God, were finding it. Those who had been established as “the people of God,” now became “not His people.” And those who were not His people, now became “the people of God.” Thus was God’s grace administered to the Gentile world. The mystery of the ages had been hidden from them. Now it was being made manifest. Those who had no footing in the vastness of the universe, now would know what it was to find a place in it. Their years of wondering and wandering would come to an end. Obviously, they would not all receive it, but the invitation was out and all who would, could enter into the refuge of God. The vastness of the universe could not help but mystify and terrify even the most resolute seeker after its riddle.

To the one who is able to establish you... The word “establish” is from a word which means “to fix,” or “to render immovable.” The force of it is illustrated in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where Jesus said that there was a, “*chasm that was fixed between the rich man and Lazarus and neither one could pass over it.*” So now the Gentiles, intellectual wanderers in the universe and finding no footing in it, could at last know the refuge of the Creator. The truth was given by God Himself through Jesus Christ, for all who would receive Him.

The tragedy of the universe is that people have a false sense of security, in terms of the earth which they inhabit. People who are fearful of flying are always relieved to finally touch down on the landing strip—at last they are safe. Or so they think. The reality is that the earth, whose bosom they cherish, is merely a tiny object in the vastness of space—there is nothing supporting it, in the sense that the aircraft is supported by it. Instead of 30,000 feet, the inhabitants of earth are over endless space. Thus, the

expression—“*To the One Who is able to establish you*”—has a crucial meaning. Those who are possessed by the Spirit of God, are safe eternally in His bosom. The passenger in the aircraft has far greater security in the Spirit of Christ within him, than the aircraft itself, or even the earth, could ever afford. The Spirit of Christ in us, which makes us “*partakers of the divine nature,*” makes us eternally one with the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. This was the great mystery which had been hidden from the Gentiles (on a universal basis) for ages.

According to my gospel... Paul was not, here, suggesting that the gospel which he preached had been fashioned by himself. Far from it—it was the message of Jesus Christ. The word translated “preaching,” really means the message preached, rather than the act at preaching. Literally it is the “preachment” of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it was a revelational message which had remained silent, as far as the Gentiles were concerned, from the times of the ages.

To the prophetic scriptures... The writings of the prophets had been there for a thousand years. To the Gentiles, these writings were a closed book. So also they were to the Jews, who had failed to remain true to God.

According to the decree of the Eternal God... The word “decree” is based upon a word for “orderliness.” God’s decree was in keeping with His own order of things in the universe. Paul tells the Galatians that Jesus came, “in the fullness of time.” It had to do with God’s timing. And that timing was based on the will and purpose of the “Eternal God.”

Unto a submission of faith... The word “submission” has been discussed in

previous chapters, as has the word “faith.” The gift of God’s Spirit producing the energy of faith in our spirits, gives to the human the force field, or receiving set, needed to receive the signals from God. The human has the ability to be open to God because of the equipment that God has given him, through the Spirit, to receive Him. John says, “*As many as received Him He gave to them the power to become the children of God.*” (John 1:11) We have learned that faith is not something acquired by human efforts or religious exercise or human knowledge, but by the energy of God beamed to the spirit of man. This was what the Gentiles were invited to receive, in order to open up to them the mysteries of the universe. On the other hand, if faith is an energy process from God, submission is human reaction to it. It is not so much the human determination to obey God, as it is the openness to God that is the recognition of the very inadequacy of the human to get along without Him.

To the only wise God... God is the Key which the Greeks had sought in the unlocking of the riddle of the universe. The Greeks were the fathers of modern philosophy. But in all their philosophizing

and intellectualizing, they could never open the door without the only Key. They were seeking for some intricate combination to the safe—a combination which, they assumed, only masterminds could discover. The truth is that it could only be opened with one Key, and the Key could be inserted by a child. Thus Paul says, “*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*”

To whom be glory forever... The word “glory” is almost impossible to define by humans, where it involves the God of the universe. Perhaps the only way to catch a glimpse of its meaning is to contemplate the inscrutable majesty of the universe. Look up at the stars. They are held in place by Jesus Christ—the Life and the Light-Energy of the universe. The message of the epistle to the Romans is, “*God, Who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the presence of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.*” (II Corinthians 4:6,7)