

# Present Truth

A magazine dedicated  
to the restoration  
of New Testament Christianity  
in this generation

*Sola Gratia*      Solely by Grace  
*Solo Christo*      Solely by Christ  
*Sola Fide*          Solely by Faith

MAY 1974  
Vol. 3, No. 2

## POINTERS ON HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

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# Present Truth

**Present Truth** is a magazine dedicated to the restoration of New Testament Christianity and committed to upholding the great Reformation principle of justification by faith.

Editor: Robert D. Brinsmead  
Publishing Editor: Norman Jarnes

**Publishers:** A group of Christian scholars and businessmen without denominational sponsorship who have united to uphold the objective gospel amid the present deluge of religious subjectivism. Multitudes are being caught up in the popular and frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience. *Present Truth* is a voice in this barren wilderness of groveling internalism, a voice which boldly proclaims those great principles upon which the Reformation was founded—namely:

1. *Sola gratia.* God's saving activity outside of us in the person of Jesus Christ is the sole *ground* of our salvation.
2. *Solo Christo.* Christ's doing and dying on our behalf is the sole *basis* of our acceptance and continued fellowship with God.
3. *Sola fide.* The Holy Spirit's gift of faith through the hearing of this objective, historical gospel is the sole *means* whereby Christ's substitutionary life and death are imputed to us for justification unto life eternal. He who is thus justified by faith and filled with God's Spirit will glory only in Christ's cross and make God's saving work in Christ the central affirmation of his Christian witness. Though he will be careful to obey God and please Him in all things, he will continue to repent rather than glory in the feeble attainments of his own Spirit-filled life.
4. *Sola Scriptura.* The Bible and the Bible only is the Christian's objective and infallible rule of faith and practice, alone sufficient that he may "be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12).

*Present Truth* is not only committed to the task of upholding these founding principles of the Reformation, but it believes that we today must allow these principles to call all that we do and all that we teach into question. These principles call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine. Our vision is a new Reformation that will recover what the Reformers bequeathed us and complete the restoration they so nobly began.

**To Contributors:** Since truth is above the preferences and prejudices of any denomination, the editors welcome contributions from anyone and will judge them on their merit alone. If you wish a manuscript returned, please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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## Futurism

Sir / More, sir! Please, more! and soon!—especially the promised material on the historical view of prophecy as against the currently popular futuristic view. It seems to us that excessive charismatic subjectivism and futurism are twin evils in the church today, and we are eagerly awaiting your comments on the latter.

R.M.  
California

Sir / I am interested in your projected material on the issue of "futurism" (as it is often called). *All* of these latter-day millennial cults (some within evangelical Christianity, i.e., Scofieldism, and some without, i.e., Armstrongism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, etc.) have the following in common: that the great goal of history is a *carnal* golden age of fleshly peace, plenty and comfort—along with Jewish supremacy in some cases—on this present earth, in almost total contradistinction to the uniform teaching of the New Testament.

I trust that this "carnal golden age" idea will be one of the points, if not *the* focal point, of your upcoming material. Such an era involves a list of Scriptural contradictions and absurdities, e.g.:

- (1) a second humiliation of our Lord;
- (2) death, pain, suffering and tears *after* the "last enemy" has been destroyed;
- (3) a restoration (just like the Romish mass) of Old Testament sacrifices;
- (4) a supposed "golden age" in which a multitude worship the Lord "with their lips, but their

# Letters Letters Letters Letters

Address Letters to *Present Truth*,  
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California 92028.



heart is far from Him" in surly obedience to His "iron rod rule"!

R.W.  
University Professor  
Virginia

## The Protestant Era at an End!

Sir / I realize the desired response you wish one to have to the title of your brochure, "The Protestant Era at an End!" is one of shock and dismay. However, I find myself currently reacting to the title with, "At last!" and, "Praise God it's over!" You seem to take a great deal of pride in Protestant history and tradition, and apparently limit truth to this tradition alone. This is a grave mistake for at least two reasons: (1) there are some truly fine prayers and observations by early Roman Catholic theologians; (2) within Protestantism there is much false doctrine as well. Don't misunderstand—I'm not making a stand for Roman Catholicism. But it seems some of your writers are happier to be "Protestant" than to be Christian! Is Christ divided? Were they baptized in the name of Luther or Calvin? 1 Corinthians 1 does apply to this, I believe. And in making the Protestant fathers the authoritative interpreters of doctrine, you may run into the same heresy the Roman Catholics did in making the church equal to Scripture in its teaching.

M.B.  
Pennsylvania

## A Call to Question

Sir / The following statement in your masthead is of particular interest to me: "These principles [*sola gratia, solo Christo, sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*] call all traditions into question and all statements about the truth into question—even the ones set forth in this magazine." If you are so sure of your ground and have the courage to criticize yourselves and accept or invite criticisms from others, such attitudes and courage are Christian, objective, scientific and rather rare.

C.G.  
Minister  
Michigan

## Objective Viewpoint

Sir / I wish to commend your staff on its scholarly and fundamental approach to religious journalism. It is indeed rare to find such an objective viewpoint, particularly on such controversial topics, coming out of a twentieth century magazine.

L.B.  
Michigan

## Ecumenism

Sir / In a time when men of good will from all religious denominations are making the first efforts in 500 years to patch the cracks of fine doctrinal distinctions and emphasize the unifying effects of Christ's simple message to all ages, "Love God . . . and love your neighbor," your shrill and brassy sound is a good example of man's suspicious and baser nature earlier exemplified.

Roman Catholic  
Oregon

Sir / In these days of "cheap ecumenism," when there is so much loose talk of how all differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants have been resolved, your articles ring a note of truth and honesty which is sorely needed.

J.G.  
Lutheran Minister  
California

## Reformation Heritage

Sir / Your issues of *Present Truth* are of much help and interest in undergirding the Biblical truths of our Reformation heritage.

R.M.  
Lutheran Minister  
New York

## At Last!

Sir / I've made a notebook of your publications and am enjoying getting an education in the doctrines of the Reformed faith. I have shared some of the points of difference between objective and subjective religion with my senior high Sunday School class, and they were receptive to such a discussion, surprisingly. After having been the Campus Crusade route, it is so refreshing to hit at last upon the truth of justification by faith alone and the all-sufficiency of Christ.

A.M.  
Louisiana

## Life in Christ

Sir / I trust that your emphasis will help many see clearly that wonder and blessing of life in Christ as it is, and as it is based on the objective reality of the gospel, in contrast to the subjectivism that is so strong in many quarters.

C.M.  
Baptist Minister  
Illinois

## Imputation

Sir / I picked up a copy of the August, 1973 issue of *Present Truth* in our school library, and was greatly blessed and edified by your handling of the Biblical doctrine of imputation.

J.G.  
Seminary Student  
Pennsylvania

## The Charismatic Movement

Sir / In what I have seen of the charismatic movement, the focus is on Christ and His atoning work, who happens to pour out increasing joy in the Spirit—not, as you put it, on a "frantic effort to find satisfaction in some sort of religious experience."

The point of contention and trouble, it seems to me, is not upon salvation which has already been won for Christians but upon the use of the gifts with the proper guidance of the Holy Spirit. These gifts can be grossly misused and abused, just as the Lord's Supper has been misused and abused down through the centuries.

E.F.  
Lutheran Seminary Student  
Illinois

Sir / Your special issue of *Present Truth* gives the best presentation of "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement." It deserves as wide a distribution as possible.

W.F.  
Lutheran Minister  
Washington

Sir / I am sorry you feel that you have to start a new publication just to be anti-charismatic. I have glanced through *Present Truth*, and I see that you have done a lot of twisting of the truth. I think you could find more profitable things to do than to attack others and would strongly suggest you search for the truth rather than try to make everyone believe the way you do.

S.B.  
Medical Doctor  
Missouri

Sir / I read your magazine, *Present Truth*, and consider it a masterpiece in word manipulation and distortion of Scripture.

Christ told Nicodemus that he had to be born again!—that unless you are baptized of the water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God. These are two separate baptisms and do not necessarily occur simultaneously.

L.Z.  
Missouri

Sir / I recently received a copy of your special issue of *Present Truth* on "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement." I appreciated the basically level-headed and scholarly tone of the magazine.

The Scriptural message of justification by faith is never irrelevant. Perhaps your magazine will make some Christians, who have not known before, aware of the issues of the Reformation. Something many Protestants need to hear today is that depending upon feelings for one's salvation is simply another form of salvation by works. I personally grew up in that trap and am eager to help others avoid it.

E.H.  
Oklahoma

## From Lawyers

Sir / I have had opportunity to read the special issue of *Present Truth* entitled "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement," and I am very impressed. Your magazine was received in sufficient time for me to gain a lot of good thoughts from it in my presentation of our Sunday School lesson on "The Promise of the Comforter."

E.S.  
Attorney at Law  
Pennsylvania

Sir / I am excited about *Present Truth*, having just examined a copy of the special issue entitled "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement" which was mailed to a former partner at this law office. I heartily approve of the stand you take against the charismatic movement and of the emphasis you place on justification by faith.

W.S.  
Attorney at Law  
Louisiana

Sir / I have read your special issue of *Present Truth*, "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement," and find it well grounded in true Protestantism.

R.M.  
Attorney at Law  
Texas

## On Music

Sir / I have been an organist and choir director in the Lutheran Church for twenty years. My current efforts include a battle to keep music of the so-called charismatic movement out of the church I serve. That music is immature, uninteresting and irreverent. The people who "write" and "compose" it have little knowledge of the Bible or of music.

P.D.  
West Virginia

## On the Lookout!

Sir / I just devoured the entire special issue of *Present Truth* entitled "Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement." It is exciting and challenging. It seems just what is needed.

I am wondering just how much of the popular Lay Witness and Faith at Work and similar materials—also, the contemporary worship movement—will be seen to come within the deplored subjectivism. Certainly I shall be forced now to be more on the lookout.

C.B.  
Presbyterian Minister  
Texas

## Days of Confusion

Sir / A simple word of thanks is totally inadequate to convey my appreciation for your articulate voice in this day of confusion. *Present Truth* has been a real encouragement and support to me in my ministry.

W.H.  
Lutheran Minister  
Illinois

## Every Wind of Doctrine

Sir / In this day when men are being "tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine," it is good to know that some men are anchored in sound doctrine and are willing to share their knowledge with others.

T.B.  
Ohio

## Sorely Needed

Sir / It is my own conviction that in these present times when people neither believe nor think theologically, a Scriptural and Reformed publication such as *Present Truth* is sorely needed.

T.S.  
Presbyterian Minister  
Virginia

## A New Reformation

Sir / I read your October, 1973 issue of *Present Truth*, "The Question of Authority," with interest, and I find myself sharing in your longing that God in His sovereignty will revive us again and restore New Testament Christianity in this generation. May the Lord bless your efforts to bring about a new Reformation.

R.F.  
South Africa

Sir / I'm only fifteen years old. I've read some of your material, and it's mind blowing! I've been depending upon God's work *in* me instead of God's work *for* me, but am now being delivered from the subjective experience trip. Praise God for His objective revealed truth! *Present Truth* is deep yet so simple. I am sharing this truth, and I hope the Lord uses you to start a great new Reformation.

G.W.  
Canal Zone

## Evangelical Subjectivism

Sir / I started out as a dispensational fundamentalist, changed to a neo-Pentecostal, and then to a neo-evangelical, and have finally found a "home" in Reformed theology. Your magazine has helped greatly in clarifying in my mind just what the distinguishing doctrines of Reformed theology are.

Many of the local preachers here are swept away by "evangelical" subjectivism.

W.O.  
West Virginia

Sir / It seems to me that subjectivism has gone another step with the modern evangelists, who contend that God loves everyone with no vengeance for sin, and that salvation is a matter of "giving one's heart to Jesus"—this being just about whatever the person might conceive it to be in his own unilluminated mind. They get millions of "decisions" that way.

C.D.  
Minister  
New Mexico

## A Voice in the Wilderness

Sir / I teach a Sunday School class, but it wasn't until I saw a copy of *Present Truth* that I began to understand anything correctly. I look at your magazine as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

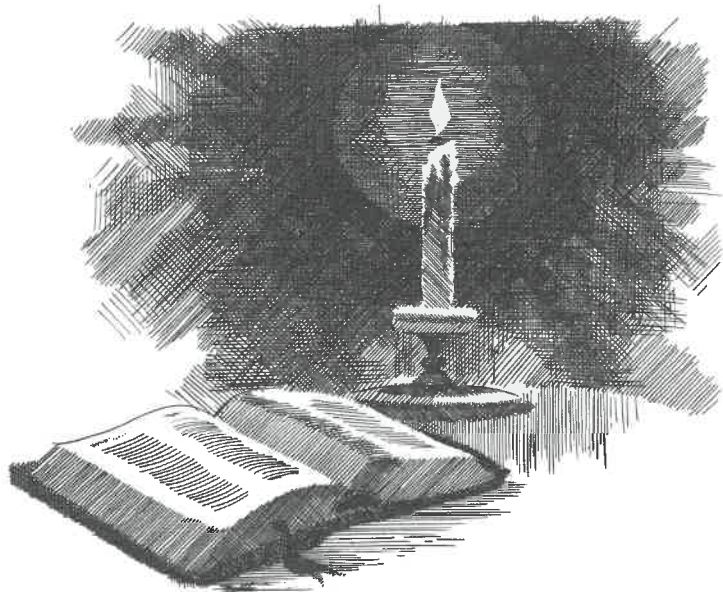
K.S.  
Kansas

## Different

Sir / I have, in the past, naturally shied away from almost everything interdenominational or non-denominational. In most of the publications sponsored by these groups, I've found the Word of God so watered down that it was a waste of time to read it. I found *Present Truth* very different and wonderfully bold in its contents.

G.M.  
Baptist Minister  
Ohio

# Editorial Introduction



## Pointers on How to Read the Bible

The previous issue of *Present Truth* dealt with *sola Scriptura* and the importance of correctly handling the Bible. In this issue we wish to carry on from there and discuss specific areas that will help us all to be better readers of the Bible.

1. The first article deals with hermeneutics—the basic rules of interpretation.

2. The next two presentations deal with the central Bible doctrine of justification by faith. Unless we have its meaning correctly in focus, other things are not going to be in focus either. Following G.J. Paxton's lecture on the meaning of justification is a challenging statement by T.F. Torrance on "The Radical Consequences of Justification."

3. Luther often said that no one can be a good reader of the Bible unless he gets a grasp of the doctrine of original sin. We have therefore reproduced Spurgeon's great sermon on "Indwelling Sin." What light it throws on true Christian experience! And what distortions of the Christian message would be avoided if this matter were properly considered!

4. Since the book of Romans is the most systematic presentation given of the gospel of Christ, we are reproducing Luther's famous "Preface to the Epistle to the Romans." The Reformer's incisive definitions of key words have opened a door to many who were searching for clearer light on the Bible. It

was this preface which led to the evangelical conversion of John Wesley. No doubt many of our readers have read it before, but this immortal classic is so moving that it is like a good song which one likes to hear again and again.

5. The final article is called "A New Reformation?" It discusses the contrast between Greek and Hebrew thought, and shows how Greek philosophy affects our theology today.

The editor is well aware that many of our readers will not agree with every point in every article. That would be too much to expect. The editor himself does not necessarily subscribe to every point by every writer, but he thinks that the material is challenging enough to merit serious attention. T.F. Torrance's statement, found in his article within this issue, applies to us as much as to anyone else: "Justification means that at every point in our theological inquiry we have to let our knowledge, our theology, our formulations, our statements, be called into question by the very Christ toward whom they point . . ." We therefore send out this issue of *Present Truth* with the earnest desire and prayer that it may be used to awaken many to a clearer understanding of the Bible.

R.D.B.

# Hermeneutics

Robert D. Brinsmead

If we are going to successfully read any scientific, philosophical or religious work, there are fundamental rules to follow. Basically, the same rules apply to a proper reading of the Bible.

We are not suggesting that people will understand the Bible if they follow correct rules. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that no man will understand the truth unless he is aided by the Spirit of God. Yet the Holy Spirit is not given as a substitute for human responsibility in the area of reason and common sense. *Hermeneutics* is the area of human responsibility in approaching the study of the Bible.

The person who follows no rules in studying the Bible, yet expects to be illuminated by the miracle of the Spirit, is no better than the sick man who refuses to accept reasonable medical attention while he expects to be healed by a divine miracle. The man who successfully prays, "Lead us not into temptation," is not unmindful of his part in steering clear of temptation. And the man who intelligently prays, "Lord, give me Thy Spirit to teach me the truth in Thy Word," will not ignore his duty to search the Word with diligence and discretion.

## A. A Grasp of the Overall Outline of the Bible

The Bible has been written by at least thirty authors from every rank and class of society over a period of about 1500 years. Yet it has a theme, and it is important to get a grasp of the dominant outline. It commences with creation, the fall of man and the intimation of divine intervention for the sinful race (Gen. 3:15). The activity of God for man's redemption is progressively and gradually unfolded, and climaxes in the coming of Jesus Christ.

In writing this article, the editor acknowledges his special indebtedness to Edward John Carnell's outline of hermeneutics in *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, (Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1961).

One of the greatest events in sacred history was the covenant, or promise, which God made to Abraham. He was promised a Seed through whom all the nations on earth would be blessed. As the drama of divine intervention unfolded, that Seed turned out to be Christ (Gal. 3:16). The significance of the Abrahamic covenant had to be progressively unfolded.

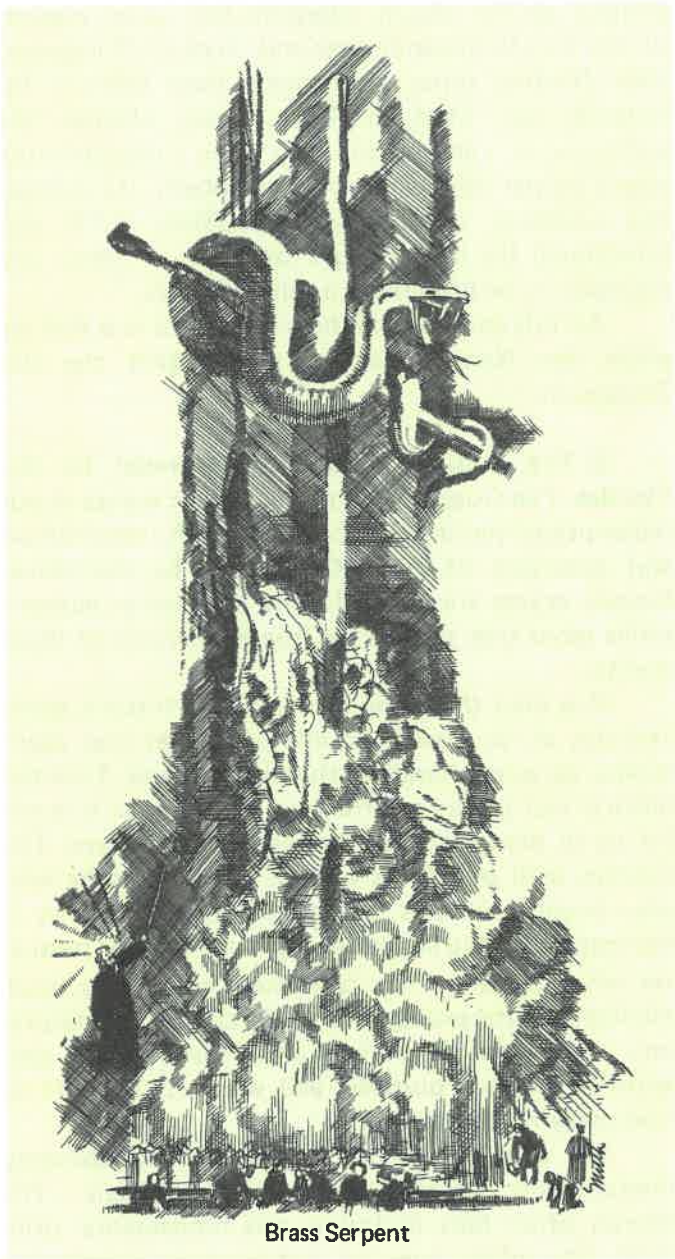
Although Abraham obviously did not grasp the full significance of the blessing through the promised Seed, it is clear that he knew it somehow pointed to the Redeemer to come (John 8:56). This much is clear: Beginning with Abraham, the Hebrew nation were given the promise of a coming Messiah, and it was their great privilege and responsibility to keep that hope alive in the waiting centuries.

Four hundred thirty years after God confirmed the promise of Christ to Abraham, another great event took place. God gave the Law to Israel. Since it was given through Moses, the Law is sometimes simply called "Moses." Moses (or the Law) embraced the whole corpus of instruction given for the existence and governance of Israel as God's special nation. It included laws that were ceremonial, judicial, hygienic and moral.

It is important that we correctly relate these two great events—the giving of the promise to Abraham and the giving of the Law to Moses. St. Paul says that the Law (Moses) added nothing to the promise (Gal. 3:17). The Law was given "because of transgression, till the Seed should come." Gal. 3:19. Without the Law, Israel would have degenerated into a pagan state and lost the hope of Christ's coming. The Law was therefore necessary to help Israel nurture and keep alive the hope of the coming Messiah. How did the Law do that? In two ways:

1. Its stern, unbending moral requirements served as a constant reminder of sin and kept God's people sensitive to their need of redemption.





Brass Serpent

2. Its ceremonial aspects foreshadowed that needed redemption. For example, the Passover not only commemorated Israel's redemption from Egypt, but it pointed forward to the real redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ. Every offering at the tabernacle served to be a shadow of the one great offering of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:10-14). The giving of manna, the water from the rock, the healing by the brazen serpent and many other things which took place under Moses, were a type of the coming Seed. They were a "shadow of good things to come." Heb. 10:1. These shadows and types of the coming Seed were what the writer to the Hebrews calls the "old covenant." The things under the old covenant could

not be the reality or the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Aaron, the high priest, was only a shadow of Christ. The earthly tabernacle was only a figure of the heavenly reality (Heb. 8:1-5). The land of Canaan was only a type of that "better country, that is, an heavenly," which the worthies looked forward to. Jerusalem and the kingdom of David were at best only a shadow of the "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." Heb. 11:16, 10.

We say again: That which God gave to Israel in the Law and under the Law—tabernacle, Canaan, Jerusalem, kings, etc.—was the old covenant, and at best it could only point to something better. It was not the reality of what God promised Abraham. The Jews in Christ's day tried to turn the shadow into the reality, and not a few are still trying to do this today. Since the Seed has come, how can we go back to a temple ritual, blood of animals, Palestine or old Jerusalem as if these things were any part of reality? Now that the full light of the gospel has come, we must see that real circumcision is of the heart (Rom. 2:29), the real Jerusalem is "above" (Gal. 4:26), the real Mount Zion and the real Jerusalem are heavenly (Heb. 12:22), the real tabernacle is in heaven (Heb. 8:1-5), the real country promised to Abraham is not any part of "this present evil world" (Heb. 11:10-16), and the real children of Abraham (Jews) are those who believe in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:29; Rom. 2:28).

Summarizing: The promise of Christ was given to Abraham. The Law (or old covenant) was given to help Israel keep the hope of Christ's coming alive. The Law was not the fulfillment of the promise but a shadow that pointed forward to its realization. To take anything of the Law (including Jerusalem and the land of Palestine) and call that the promise made to Abraham is to utterly miss the purpose of the Law.

When Christ finally came, the dispensation of Law (Moses, or the old covenant) had fulfilled its function in history. The blood of animals, feast days, the Jewish temple, Jerusalem and the "holy land" had fulfilled their function, and any return to those things now is a denial of the reality brought to us by Jesus Christ.

## B. A Grasp of the Rules of Interpretation

We need to pay attention to five fundamental rules of Biblical hermeneutics:

**1. The Old Testament must be interpreted by the New.** Once we grasp the overall outline of the Bible and see that it is a progressive revelation, we

will always look to see how the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. For instance, God promised Abraham a Seed which would bring a blessing to all nations. The New Testament interprets that Seed as Christ (Gal. 3:16). We are not to take the things of the old covenant and fabricate the meaning of them out of our own head. The New Testament interprets the meaning of the Passover, the offerings under the Law, the priestly ministry, etc.

The same principle applies to the handling of Old Testament prophecies. Those prophecies are not self-interpreting. Some people pride themselves that they can understand these prophecies if they simply take them "literally." And without consulting the interpretation of the New Testament, they arrive at all sorts of fantastic things which are supposed to happen in modern day Palestine. A prophecy may or may not be meant to be understood literally. For example, Isaiah declared that God would put a foundation stone in Zion, one that would support a building in time of wind and hail (Isa. 28:16). He does not say he means that the stone is a person. It is a veiled prophecy of Christ. We need the New Testament to interpret it for us. The same prophet speaks in terms of a highway building program in the desert to make a way for the King of Israel (Isa. 40:3, 4). Few would be foolish enough to see this being fulfilled in the freeways which the Israelis are now constructing in the new State of Israel. The New Testament authoritatively interprets the prophecy for us as meaning the mission of John the Baptist. Malachi 4:5 speaks of Elijah's coming before the day of the Lord. No intimation is given that it is not to be taken with strict literalness. When we read the New Testament, "Elijah" turns out to be John the Baptist.

The prophet Amos writes about the time when God would "raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen . . . and . . . build it as in the days of old." What does this mean? The rebuilding of Solomon's temple? The New Testament interprets it for us. This took place in the outpouring of the Spirit in the raising up of the Christian church (see Acts 15:16).

Not only does the New Testament show us how to interpret the prophecies of the Old Testament, but it shows us how to interpret the laws of the Old Testament. The New Testament shows us how the laws of ceremony have met their spiritual reality in the person and work of Christ. But not all the laws found in the Old Testament are ceremonial in nature. Some are moral, and their moral principles are perpetually binding. The apostle Paul refers to a number of them as a rule of life for Christians. The

Sermon on the Mount interprets the moral precepts of the Ten Commandments and, instead of lessening their binding force, strengthens their demand for holiness (see Matt. 5:17-28). Jesus claimed the authority to interpret the law. When a dispute arose about proper observance of the Sabbath, He claimed His Lordship of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) and interpreted the law to allow for works of mercy and necessity to be performed on the Sabbath.

All this goes to show how important it is that we allow the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament.

**2. The Gospels must be interpreted by the Epistles.** The Gospels record the historic events of our redemption—the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. But by themselves historic events are not sufficient. We need an authoritative word that tells us the true significance of those events.

If a man thinks he can look at a historic event and out of his own head interpret what that event means, he puts himself in the place of God. Take the historic fact of the resurrection for example. It is not for us to presume what the resurrection means. The Epistles spell out to us what it means, and he who goes beyond what is interpreted in the Epistles is fabricating a doctrine out of his own head—or passing on what someone has fabricated out of his head. Neither is it the prerogative of the church to interpret any of the events of redemptive history. God sent apostles for that purpose, and we must not add or take away from their word.

We need to go to the Epistles to correctly interpret the events recorded in the Gospels.<sup>1</sup> The church often fails to follow this fundamental principle. She often tries to justify some practice or custom by drawing some "spiritual" lesson from the life, death or resurrection of Christ, but this is a human rather than a divine interpretation of the gospel. "He that hath an ear, let him hear."

**3. The incidental must be interpreted by the systematic.** This rule applies to the proper reading of

<sup>1</sup> The same thing may be said about the historic portion of the book of Acts. It cannot necessarily be assumed that because an event is recorded in the book of Acts, it is normative for today's church. This is a basic fallacy of Pentecostalism. If speaking in tongues is normative for a man baptized in the Holy Spirit, why not wind and tongues of fire too? And why not the slaying of dishonest givers at the offertory as with Ananias and Sapphira? Because Acts records how Paul was converted, we must not make the manner of his conversion normative. A historical *is* must not be turned into an *ought*. We have no right to turn indicative historical narrative into imperative ecclesiastical precepts without a clear word from the Lord.

any literature. It is common sense, but how hard it is to use common sense when we are so anxious to prove our point!

For example, the heart of all Bible doctrine is the great doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. There are two books in the Bible (Romans and Galatians) which present this doctrine systematically, and they do it also in the perspective of sacred history—the promise to Abraham, the giving of the Law, etc. Common sense should teach us to build our understanding about justification by going to the places where the subject and all the ramifications of it are treated systematically.

Now there are places where Paul touches on justification incidentally, like in Titus 3:5-8. He is writing to a fellow minister and has no need to speak in detail. Some have used the incidental passage in Titus (i.e., the Roman Catholics at Trent) in an effort to substantiate the doctrine of justification by infused righteousness (inward renewal). Now let us grant the point that it is possible to get that idea out of Titus 3:5-8. Then there is the book of James, a wonderful place where some go to build a *prima facie* case for justification by works.

Major heresies are often the result of turning minors into majors. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul incidentally makes some reference to "baptism for the dead," and most scholars will admit that Paul's meaning here is obscure. But the Mormons use this as the basis of a whole doctrine on baptism for the dead. And while we are talking about the dead, how hard it is for us humans to think rationally when we are governed sentimentally. If we want to prove something about the intermediate state badly enough, we will find a text somewhere to support it, but the chances are that we will build a great edifice on an incidental passage. Rather, we should honestly go to where the subject is treated in a systematic way. Do not interpret the systematic passage in the light of the incidental one, but the incidental must be interpreted by the systematic. It is positively foolhardy to build a doctrine on an incidental passage.

**4. The local must be interpreted by the universal.** The Bible often inculcates universal principles in the context of a local culture. We must be very careful not to make some feature of local culture a universal norm. For instance, Moses took off his shoes as a token of reverence in the presence of God. That was an Eastern custom which is still practiced in some parts of the world. We Westerners show

reverence by taking off our hat. Christian men would not think of going into church with their hat on, for this would show disrespect. But if we were associating with people of another culture, we might take our shoes off before entering the church.

Paul commands us to greet the brethren with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16). A strict literalist may insist that this form of Christian fraternity is still obligatory today, but most Christians understand it to mean that we should treat fellow Christians like a blood brother. Similar things may be said about Paul's instruction on the behavior of women in the churches, advice to slaves, etc. We must not make the custom of a local culture a universal imperative.

**5. The symbolic must be interpreted by the didactic.** If we want to know something about the "rapture" question, we should not try to build a theory on passages that are written in a symbolic context. There are passages in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that speak on the matter of being "caught up," and if these didactic passages are not interpreted in the light of some speculation from a symbolic passage, they are clear enough. Our doctrinal positions should be established by a plain "Thus saith the Lord" from a straightforward didactic passage.<sup>2</sup> Then we should use this information to interpret a symbolic passage. If we do not do this, we might just as well follow those wild-eyed prophetic expositors who take their text from the Bible and preach from the newspapers.

## Conclusion

These rules of Biblical interpretation are by no means exhaustive. Neither are they suggested as a magic formula to solve all problems and cause all Christians to see eye to eye. Obviously, difference of opinion will remain. Yet if these rules are honestly applied, they will prevent us from using arguments not entirely sound and will perhaps help us to see the difference between "pet theories" and great testing truths. Again we say: These rules are not a substitute for the Holy Spirit, for without a conscious dependence upon His guidance and illumination, all is lost. But on the other hand, many good people need to be reminded that the Holy Spirit does not cancel the need for the human agent to use a sound and sensible approach to Bible study.

<sup>2</sup> To our knowledge, the popular American evangelical view of the "rapture" cannot be substantiated from any didactic portion of the New Testament.

# Lectures on Justification

Geoffrey J. Paxton



## LECTURE I: What Does “to Justify” Mean?

In this series on justification, we will first consider the question, What does “to justify” mean in the New Testament? All agree that justification is of God, but not all agree on the precise significance of justification. The most straightforward way of expressing the problem is this: Does “to justify” mean “to declare just,” or does it mean “to make just”? Another way is to speak of “objective justification” and “subjective justification.” That is, does justification mean an event objective and external to the person justified—an “outside of me” justification—or does it mean that something takes place “within” the person justified—a “subjective” reality? “Declarative” or “efficient” and “declarative” or “creative” are other ways of expressing the two views of justification which have been represented in the history of theology.

Some have refused to see the “either-or” that we have presented here. In their thinking, God declares a person just but also makes him just at the same time; God’s act of justification is both an “outside of me” act and a simultaneous “inside of me” act. However,

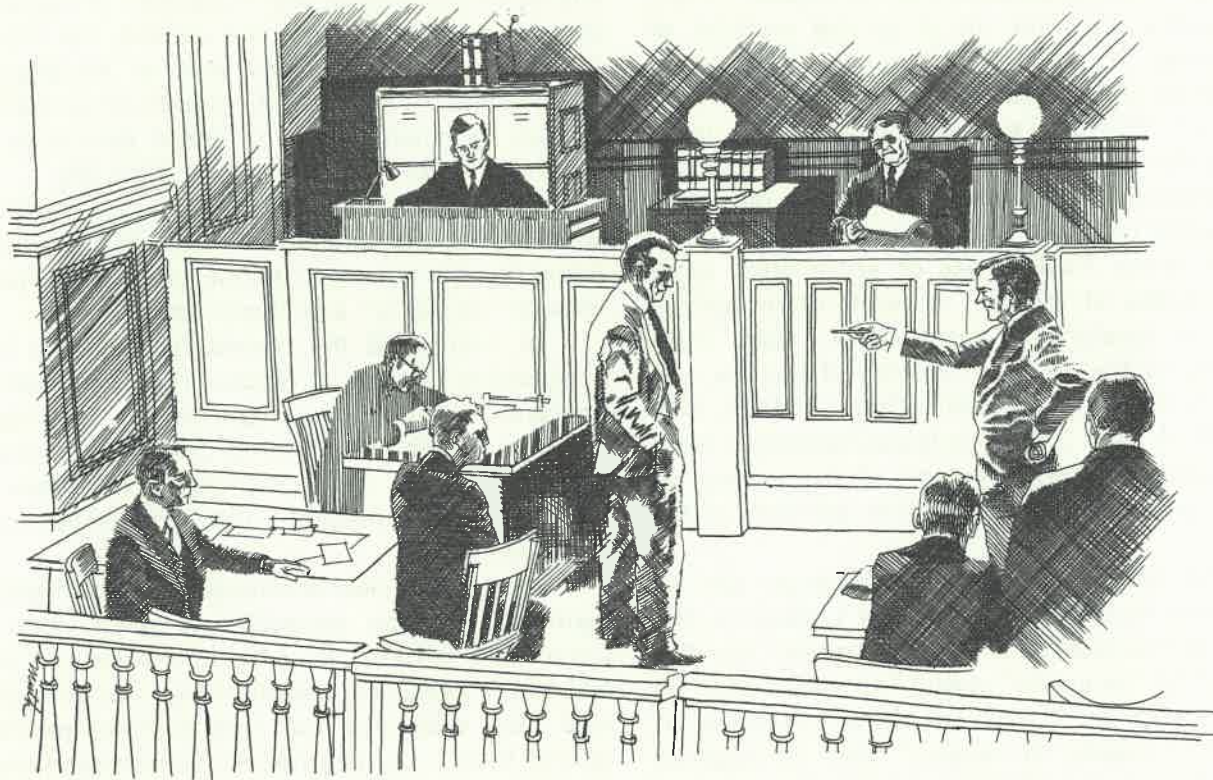
the great divines who have held that justification means “to pronounce just” have insisted on the “objective” side as being the *only* aspect of true Biblical justification. To them, justification is purely a “declaratory” act of God outside of the one justified. Such contenders have had no use for a “double justification.”

Of course, to contend for an “either-or” in justification is not to suggest that nothing takes place within the justified, as we shall see later. All we are insisting upon here is that justification is either “the declaration of” or “the creating of”; it is not both a declaration *and* a creation.

In this lecture it is our business to contend for the position that justification is God’s declaring a person just, not God’s making a person just. “To justify” means the same as “to pronounce righteous” a person who, in himself, is anything but righteous. In fact, the person who is justified is, in himself, full of rottenness and repugnant to true holiness. Justification is thoroughly and completely objective.

Take the two expressions “to glorify God” and “to glorify the body.” In the first instance it will be clear that it is impossible “to make God glorious,” because He already is absolutely glorious. In the

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second instance it is quite conceivable "to make the body glorious." Hence the two significations of the expression "to glorify." The thesis of this lecture is that "to justify" corresponds to the first meaning of "to glorify" in the preceding example. The expression "to justify" does not mean "to make just" but "to declare just," "to affirm as just." The meaning is the same as the first instance but for a totally different reason. You cannot make God glorious, because He is glorious. You cannot say "to justify" means "to make just," not because the believer is already just, but because Another is utterly just on his behalf—namely, the Son of God. "To justify" is an act of God based upon a perfect righteousness, not an act of God which produces a perfect righteousness. To glorify God is an act based upon a perfect glory, not an act which produces glory in God.

## Four Reasons Considered

What are the reasons for taking this position? The first place to turn is the Scriptures.

1. Justification in the New Testament is (a) the justification of the perfectly Righteous and (b) the

justification of the ungodly, or sinner. When the first justification is spoken of, the One justified is (1) perfect God and (2) perfect Man.

The justification of the perfectly Righteous, when it is the justification of perfect God, is instanced in Luke 7:29: "When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors justified God . . ." The New International Version captures the force of this by saying ". . . acknowledged that God's way was right." The justification of perfect God is the declaration (not the making) of God's justice.

The justification of the perfectly Righteous, when it is the justification of the perfect Man, is instanced in 1 Timothy 3:16: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated [or justified—see margin] in the Spirit . . ." According to the Expositor's Greek Testament (Vol. 4, p. 118), this justification took place "on a review of the whole of the Incarnate life." Christ was emphatically the Righteous One (Acts 3:14; 22:14; 1 John 2:1). Christ is declared to be righteous, not made righteous.

The justification of perfect God (Luke 7:29) and perfect Man (1 Tim. 3:16) is in *both* instances the declaration, not the creation, of righteousness.

What about the justification of imperfect man,

or the sinner? Obviously, if we keep in mind that justification is the justification of the ungodly, it will be impossible to think of it as the creation of righteousness. If the latter were so, justification would not be justification of the ungodly. But this is exactly how the New Testament refers to it. Romans 4:4, 5 speaks explicitly of justification of the ungodly and of justification consisting in God not reckoning our sin against us.

Also, when Paul speaks of justification apart from the works of the law, it should be recognized that he is speaking of justification apart from conformity to the positive demands of the law, i.e., holiness in thought and deed (Rom. 3:20-28; Gal. 2:16; 3:11; 1 John 2:2). This is justification of those who possess no holiness in and of themselves, no personal conformity to the positive demands of the law.

2. The true meaning of justification can be derived from its antithesis in the New Testament. The opposite of "to justify" is not "to deprave" but "to condemn." If "to justify" meant "to make holy," its opposite would be "to make unholy." However, if "to justify" means "to acquit," then its opposite would be "to condemn." This is exactly the situation. According to Paul, the opposite of "to justify" is "to condemn." From the context of Romans 5:12f., it is clear that the antithesis is one of condemnation and justification, not "making corrupt" and "making righteous." Hence: "... the judgment followed one sin [i.e., Adam's] and brought condemnation, but the gift... brought justification." Rom. 5:16. And Romans 5:18 declares: "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation... so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification..." This emphasis governs the way we understand Romans 5:19: "Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous." The propagation of a corrupt nature from our father Adam is a sound Biblical and theological truth, but it is not the emphasis of Paul in this passage (cf. Rom. 5:12f.). His emphasis is this: Because of our connection with Adam, that which *judicially* results is condemnation. However, because of our connection with Christ, that which *judicially* follows is justification. Just as condemnation does not mean "making wicked," so justification does not mean "making good." By looking at the antithesis of "to justify" ("to condemn"), we are able to see that "to justify" means "to acquit," not "to make holy."

In reference to this second point, we might add

that examination of the expressions used in the service of explanation and illustration in the Biblical passages reveals that they are derived, not from the operation of purifying the soul or infusing righteousness into it, but from the procedure of the courts in their judgments or of offended persons in their forgiveness of offenders (cf. Rom. 8:33, 34).

3. In determining the true Biblical meaning of justification, examination of equivalent expressions shows that the same idea is conveyed as in the judicial sense of "to justify" and "justification."

In John 3:18 the reward for believing is not purification (though it follows rightly enough) but noncondemnation, i.e., acquittal, or justification. Likewise, hearing the Word of Jesus and believing in Him (John 5:24) is said to bring, not freedom from corruption, but freedom from condemnation and judgment.

Perhaps the clearest passage which highlights the signification of an equivalent to justification is 2 Corinthians 5:19-21. In verse 19 the work of reconciliation is explained appositionally, not as purifying men from their sins, but "not counting men's sins against them." Justification is the nonimputation of sin. Verse 21 clearly states: "Him who knew no sin God made to be sin for us in order that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." In what sense was Christ made sin? By *imputation* or by *impartation*? By counting, or reckoning, Christ as a sinner, or by making Christ a sinner? There can only be one answer which does justice to the Biblical evidence. Christ was made sin by imputation and not by impartation; by having our sin *on* Him, not *in* Him! Likewise, we may ask how we are made the righteousness of God in Him. The answer is the same. We are made the righteousness of God by imputation and not by impartation. We are treated as if we were righteous and not because we are, in actual fact, righteous in ourselves. Christ was treated as a sinner because He came and took our lot, and we are treated as righteous because, by faith, we take His lot.

4. To speak of justification in the sense of "to make holy" is to give justification the same meaning as sanctification has in the greater portion of the Scriptures. Justification and sanctification become synonymous; both mean "to make holy." What in the Scriptures is meant to signify an outward deliverance from the penalty of sin (justification) is made to signify an inward deliverance from the power of sin (sanctification). This is the official position of the Church of Rome. What the Bible teaches as a judicial process Rome has made an infusion of a quality.



However, the judicial process and the infusion of a quality are different things indeed! The Council of Trent and some of her devotees after her have fallen into the terrible mistake of making one figure represent two inseparable but quite different things—pardon and renewal, deliverance from the penalty of sin and deliverance from the power of sin. The council declared that justification consists *both* of remission and internal renovation.

Rome has argued like this: When justification takes place, does this mean that nothing happens within the believer at all? The answer to this question is "No!" If then, says Rome, something happens within the believer *as well*, why make justification refer to the external reality only? It is obvious, says Möhler (and Boussuet before him), that the external figure is used to signify an internal reality. The judicial process, in conformity with the ancient mode of expression, is used to connote an inward personal deliverance.

Our reply to this is that the reality intended must correspond to the figure employed. To understand the judicial language of justification as including the necessary consequence of sanctification is like taking the figurative expression "the foot of a mountain" to mean both the base and the top of a mountain. You cannot separate the base from the top, but you must not use the (one) figure of the base

to include, at the same time, the top. Just as the foot and the top of the mountain are inseparable, so are justification and sanctification inseparable. However, just as the foot of the mountain must be distinguished from its top, so justification must be distinguished from sanctification. Further, just as the top of the mountain is not necessarily meant when one is referring to its foot, so sanctification is not of necessity referred to when the figure of justification is used.

It could well be that Protestants, in the interests of stressing the utter objectivity of justification, have aided (albeit unwittingly) Rome in her error by not giving sufficient stress to the internal work of the Spirit. However, to confuse what must be distinguished is as bad as dividing what is inseparable.

## The Argument of Newman

We have looked at an argument put forward by Rome and, I trust, have clearly showed its deficiency. We must now consider another argument, which was put forward by John Henry Newman in his *Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification* (Lect. 3), and which also seeks to identify justification and sanctification. Whereas the argument we have just looked at was one which tried to make one figure refer to two quite

distinguishable realities, Newman's argument is based on the power of the divine Word. Newman said that what begins as a Word ends with a fact when it is the Word of God. "Let there be light, and there was light," said Newman. The Word of God is a creative Word. God speaks, and it is done! When, therefore, He declares a person righteous, He of necessity makes him so. Justification is the Word, said Newman, but renewal is the effect of that Word. The Word declaring is, with God, the Word making. Hence, in conclusion, justification may be called renewal.

There is a *prima facie* forcefulness about this argument because it is based upon the truth of the power of God's Word, just as the previous argument of Möhler and Boussuet had a certain force because it was based on the inseparability of justification and sanctification. However, Newman's argument is no more valid than Möhler's. The Word of the Lord effects. We will not deny that. However, we need to add that it effects what the Almighty intends it to effect. Did not God speak to bring the world out of chaos? Yes indeed. Did that Word also bring forth light? No, it did not. A second Word was employed to bring light out of darkness. Separate acts of the Word of God produce quite separate and distinct effects. Or put it this way: God does not bring about all things by the utterance of His Word but only that which He intends by that particular utterance. When God says, "You are just," He brings about only what He intends; and it is clear from the rest of Scripture and the great gift of the Mediator, that God does not intend to make us just by the utterance of His mouth but by the satisfaction of His justice claimed by faith and brought about by grace.

In sum: We have asserted the meaning of "to justify" as "to declare righteous" and not "to make righteous." We have adduced four major reasons for so affirming: (1) the signification of the word in the justification of the perfectly Righteous (God and Christ) and the sinner (the believer); (2) by noting the antithesis of "to justify," which is not "to corrupt" but "to condemn"; (3) an examination of equivalent expressions; and (4) the necessary distinction between justification and sanctification.

## Conclusion

To conclude this lecture, we shall endeavor to make some positive statements concerning the meaning of justification which shall be taken up and elucidated in subsequent lectures.

1. Justification, while it includes pardon, is not merely pardon. In order to be justified, a person must possess a Righteousness upon the ground of which the verdict must be pronounced. Justification as mere pardon and justification as the infusion of righteousness both fail to do justice to the immutable law of God's holiness and the deep-seated guilt of the rebel subject.

2. Justification is the reversal of God's attitude to the sinner because of the sinner's new relation to Christ. The justified sinner is "in Christ," and "behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17)—even the attitude of the Almighty. God did condemn; now He acquits. God did repel; now He admits into His favor. The new attitude of God corresponds to the sufficient satisfaction of the law by the Mediator. The justified sinner is pardoned because Christ, the Mediator, has paid the penalty for the transgression of the law. The justified sinner is accepted into heaven as a reward for perfect conformity to the positive demands of the law. Pardon alone or acceptance alone would be inadequate. Whereas holiness is under a single obligation—the continued fulfillment of the positive demands of the law—sin is under a double obligation—that of meeting the penalty and fulfilling the precepts of the law. The work of Christ was in the sinner's stead.

3. The justification of the sinner is different from that of a righteous person. The former is unmerited, while the latter is merited. Our justification is without works, while the justification of Christ is because of works (active and passive). For justification *per se* to be work-less—that is, for God merely to forgive "out of the blue" as it were—the law would have to be abrogated, not fulfilled (cf. Matt. 5:17). This would be mercy without justice and, hence, no peace to the troubled conscience.

4. While the justification of the sinner is not by his works, if the justified sinner does not have good works, his justification is spurious. Good works are the "evidential cause" of justification, while God's glory is the final cause, the work of Christ is the meritorious cause, and faith is the instrumental cause.

5. A person is justified in order to be sanctified, not sanctified in order to be justified. Sanctification is glorification begun, but glorification at Christ's coming is sanctification completed. Thus the scripture shall be fulfilled, "... whom He justified, them He also glorified." Rom. 8:30.



# The Radical Consequences of Justification

Thomas F. Torrance

... the Scots  
Confession laid the  
axe to the root ...



Justification means justification by Christ alone—that is the reference of the expressions *sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura*, used in Reformed theology. Justification means that we look exclusively to Christ, and therefore that we look away from ourselves altogether in order to live out of Him

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alone. That radical nature of justification is expressed and its radical consequences drawn by the *Scots Confession* in the words we cited earlier: "We willingly spoil ourselves of all honor and glory of our own salvation and redemption, as we also do of our regeneration and sanctification."

This is something that very badly needs to be reiterated today within the Churches of the Reformation. Justification by Christ alone means the rejection of *all* forms of self-justification and all forms of justification by anything or out of any source other than Jesus Christ. Let us consider what this means in several areas of doctrine and life.

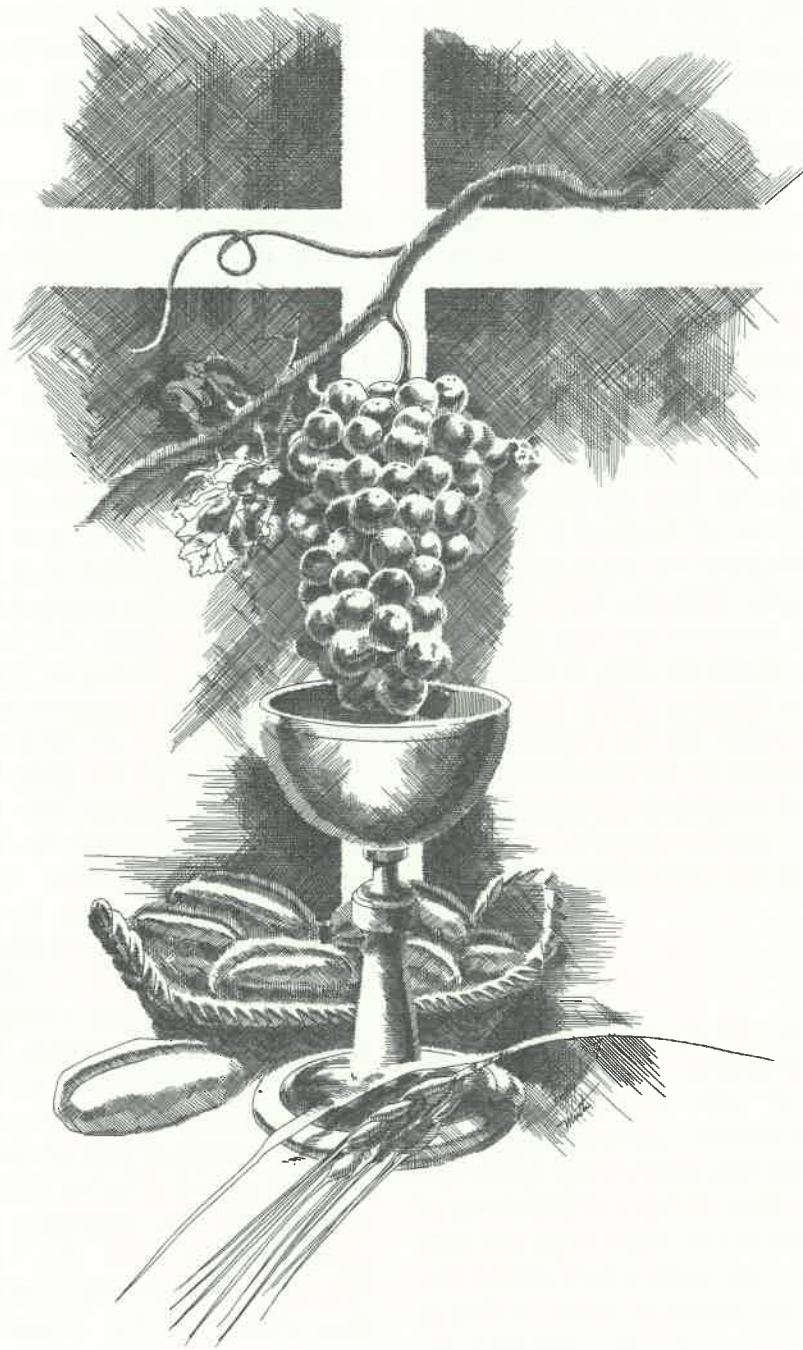
## Natural Goodness

(a) At the Reformation Justification by the Grace of Christ alone was seen to set aside all *natural goodness*, and all works-righteousness; but this applies to all goodness, Christian goodness as well, that is, to "sanctification" as it came to be called. This is powerfully driven home by the *Scots Confession* in several articles, such as the twelfth and the fifteenth. All that we do is unworthy, so that we must fall down before you and unfeignedly confess that we are unprofitable servants—and it is precisely Justification by the free Grace of Christ alone that shows us that all that we are and have done even as believers is called in question. Justification by Grace alone remains the sole ground of the Christian life; we never advance beyond it, as if justification were only the beginning of a new self-righteousness, the beginning of a life of sanctification which is what we do in response to justification. Of course we are summoned to live out day by day what we already are in Christ through His self-consecration or sanctification, but sanctification is not what we do in addition to what God has done in justification. And yet that is the tendency of the *Westminster Catechisms*, where we have a return to the Roman notion of infused sanctification that has to be worked out through strict obedience to legal precepts—hence the exposition of the Ten Commandments takes up the greater part of the Catechisms. But the *Scots Confession* laid the axe to the root of any such movement when it insisted that we have to spoil ourselves even of our own regeneration and sanctification as well as justification. What is "axed" so radically was the notion of "corredemption" which in our day has again become so rampant, not only in the Roman Church, but in Liberal and Evangelical Protestantism, e.g., the emphasis upon existential decision as the means whereby we "make real" for ourselves the *kerygma* of the New Testament, which means that in the last resort our salvation depends upon our own personal or existential decision. That is the exact antithesis of the Reformed doctrine of election, which rests salvation upon the prior and objective decision of God in Christ. It is Justification by Grace alone that guards the Gospel from corruption by "Evangelicals," "Liberals," and Romans alike.

## Natural Knowledge

(b) Justification by the Grace of Christ alone calls in question not only all natural goodness but all *natural knowledge*. Natural knowledge is as much the work of the flesh as natural goodness; it is a work of the natural man. It is at this point that Karl Barth has made such an immense contribution to the Reformation. We cannot separate knowing and being for they belong to the same man, and it is the whole man, with his knowing and his acting, with the whole of his being, who is called in question by Justification. Justification puts us in the right and truth of God and therefore tells us that we are in untruth. Now, let it be clear that Justification by Grace alone does not mean that there is no natural goodness in man, but that man with his natural goodness is called in question. Jesus Christ died for the whole man (with his good and his evil) not for part of him, the evil part, but for the whole man. He died for all men, the good and the bad, and all alike come under the total judgment of His Death and Resurrection; all alike have to be born again in Him, and made new creatures. That is the radical nature of the Gospel, which becomes so clear to us when we communicate at the Holy Table in the Body and Blood of our Lord, for there we feel ashamed for our *whole being*, for our good as well as for our evil. But the same applies to our natural knowledge. Justification by the Grace of Christ alone, does not mean that there is no natural knowledge—what natural man is there who does not know something of God even if he holds it down in unrighteousness or turns the truth into a lie? But it does mean that the whole of that natural knowledge is called in question by Christ, who when He comes to us says: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." The whole man with his natural knowledge is there questioned down to the root of his being, for man is summoned to look away from all that he is and knows or thinks he knows to Christ who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one goes to the Father but by Him. The theology of Barth can be described, then, as the application of Justification of the whole realm of man's life, to the realm of his knowing as well as the realm of his doing. In that, he has sought to follow through the radical consequences of the Reformation from which our forefathers resiled when they took refuge again, like the Romans, in the works of the natural man, for justification.

But if we are to take the *Scots Confession* seriously, then we have to apply this not only to



natural knowledge but to *all* Christian knowledge; we have to learn to spoil ourselves of our own vaunted knowledge, we have to let our own theology be called into radical question, by Christ. If we translate the word "justification" by the word "verification," we can see the startling relevance of this to modern theological and philosophical discussions. Justification by Grace alone tells us that verification of our faith or knowledge on any other grounds or out of any other source, than Jesus Christ, is to be set aside.

Justification has an *epistemological* as well as an ethical reference—epistemologically it insists that the only legitimate demonstration of Christian truth is that which is in accordance with its nature, which is Grace, and that to seek justification of it on any other ground is not only fundamentally false in itself but to falsify the Gospel at its very basis. But apart from the contemporary debate on "verification," Justification means that at every point in our theological inquiry we have to let our knowledge, our

theology, our formulations, our statements, be called into question by the very Christ toward whom they point, for He alone is the Truth. Justification means that our theological statements are of such a kind that they do not claim to have truth in themselves, for by their very nature they point away from themselves to Christ as the one Truth of God. Therefore whenever we claim that our theological statements or our formulations have their truth in themselves we are turning back into the way of self-justification. Out of sheer respect for the majesty of the Truth as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures, we have to do our utmost to speak correctly and exactly about it—that is the meaning of orthodoxy and the way of humility—but when we have done all this, we have still to confess that we are unfaithful servants, that all our efforts fall far short of the truth. Far from seeking justification on the ground of our “orthodoxy,” we can only serve the Truth faithfully if we point away from ourselves and our statements to Christ Himself, and direct all eyes to Him alone. He who boasts of orthodoxy thus sins against Justification by Christ alone, for he justifies himself by appeal to his own beliefs or his own formulations of belief and thereby does despite to the Truth and Grace of Christ. Once a Church begins to boast of its “orthodoxy” it begins to fall from Grace.

## Tradition

(c) Justification by the Grace of Christ alone calls in question all *tradition*. The radical consequence of Justification was keenly felt in this direction at the Reformation. Concentration upon the Word of God, the self-utterance of the Truth, and the acknowledgment of its primacy, cut the strings of prejudice and prejudgment and made clear the path of faith and obedience. Justification here meant that faith is determined by the objective Word of God as its ultimate authority, and so it was freed from the shackles of every lesser authority, for devotion to the Truth of the Word (the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth) inculcated a readiness to rethink all preconceptions and to put all traditional ideas to the test face to face with the Word. In other words, sheer attachment to the Word of God as the real object of knowledge meant detachment from all other sources and norms of knowledge, and the demand that all traditional ideas and notions had to be tested at the bar of the Word. That did not mean that tradition was to be despised, but that it was to be subjected to the criticism of the Word and the Spirit, and

corrected through conformity to Jesus Christ. The Reformation stood, therefore, for the supremacy of the Word over all tradition, and for theological activity as the repentant rethinking of all tradition face to face with the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

But that applies no less to the Reformed and Evangelical tradition; to our Presbyterian tradition as well as to the Roman tradition. When we examine our own position today, it is astonishing to find how close we have come to the Roman view even in the Church of Scotland. How frequently, for example, we find that appeal is made to “Christian instinct” or to “the mind of the Church” over against the plain utterances of Holy Scripture, and often just at those places where the Word of God offends our will, opposes our habits, or cuts against the grain of our desire! And how massive is the effect of our several traditions upon the interpretations of the Bible! How easy it is to allow the Presbyterian tradition to determine our reading of the New Testament, especially when it is a question of justifying our tradition before the critique of others! There can be no doubt that every one of the great Churches of the Reformation—the Lutheran, the Anglican, and the Reformed—has developed its own masterful tradition, and that that tradition today exercises massive influence not only over its way of interpreting the Bible and formulating its doctrine but over the whole shape and direction of its life. Those who shut their eyes to this fact are precisely those who are most enslaved to the dominant power of tradition just because it has become an unconscious canon and norm of their thinking. It is high time we asked again whether the Word of God really does have free course amongst us and whether it is not after all bound and fettered by the traditions of men. The tragedy, apparently, is that the very structures of our Churches represent the fossilization of traditions that have grown up by practice and procedure, have become so hardened in self-justification that even the Word of God can hardly crack them open. There is scarcely a Church that claims to be *ecclesia reformata* that can truthfully claim to be *semper reformanda*.

## Systems and Orders

(d) Justification by Christ alone calls in question all *systems* and *orders*, and calls them in question because Jesus Christ alone is central and supreme in the one Church of God. In any true theological system, Justification is by reference to Christ alone,

for conformity to Christ as the Truth of God for us is the one ultimate principle of unity. Likewise Justification in ecclesiastical order or polity ought to be through appeal to Christ alone. Our quarrel with the Church of Rome in doctrinal matters concerns the centrality of Jesus Christ, the primacy and supremacy of Christology which is so obscured and compromised by Roman doctrines of merit and tradition, and above all by Mariology. In our debate with the Church of England over questions of order, we are also concerned with the centrality of Christ, and the primacy of Christology—and therefore the doctrine of the Church as the Body of *Christ* is in the forefront. It is Justification by Christ alone that makes it so, for He alone is the ground and Head of the Church, and in Him alone is the Church's unity constituted and its order maintained. But for that very reason Justification by Christ alone disallows any appeal from one Church to another for recognition of its orders, as it also rebukes the self-justification of a Church in calling in question the orders of another Church. Justification by Christ alone means that we renounce the way of the flesh in seeking honor from men, or justification from one another; and therefore Justification by Christ alone means that in any movement for reconciliation between Churches, the question of the recognition of orders cannot have priority without radical betrayal of the Reformation, nay, without radical betrayal of Christ for He is thereby ousted from His place of centrality.

It becomes more and more clear that in the ecumenical movement it is the doctrine of Justification by Christ alone that is at stake, and that it can just as easily be sinned against by those who shout loudest that they are upholding the Reformation tradition as by those who make no such boast. He is truest to the Reformation tradition who is always ready to subject it to the ruthless questioning of the Word of God.

## Ministry and Worship

(e) Nowhere does Justification by Christ alone have more radical consequences than in regard to the pastoral ministry. Justification by Christ is grounded upon His mighty act in which He took our place, substituting Himself for us under the divine judgment, and substituting Himself for us in the obedient response He rendered to God in worship and thanksgiving and praise. In Himself He has opened up a way to the Father, so that we may approach God solely through Him and on the ground of what He has

done and is—therefore we pray in His Name, and whatever we do, we do in His Name before God. Thus the whole of our worship and ministry reposes upon the substitutionary work of Christ. Now the radical nature of that is apparent from the fact that through substituting Himself in our place there takes place a displacement of our humanity by the humanity of Christ—that is why Jesus insists that we can only follow Him by denying ourselves, by letting Him displace us from a place of centrality, and by letting Him take our place.

At the Reformation this doctrine had immediate effect in the overthrow of Roman sacerdotalism—Jesus Christ is our sole Priest. He is the one and only Man who can mediate between us and God, so that we approach God solely through the mediation of the Humanity of Jesus, through His incarnate Priesthood. When the Humanity of Christ is depreciated or whenever it is obscured by the sheer majesty of His Deity, then the need for some other human mediation creeps in—hence in the Dark and Middle Ages arose the need for a human priesthood to mediate between sinful humanity and the exalted Christ, the majestic Judge and King. There was of course no denial of the Deity of Christ by the Reformers—on the contrary, they restored the purity of faith in Christ as God through overthrowing the accretions that compromised it; but they also restored the place occupied in the New Testament and the Early Church by the Humanity of Christ, as He who took our human nature in order to be our Priest, as He who takes our side and is our Advocate before the judgment of God, and who once and for all has wrought out atonement for us in His sacrifice on the Cross, and therefore as He who eternally stands in for us as our heavenly Mediator and High Priest.

The Church on earth lives and acts only as it is directed by its heavenly Lord, and only in such a way that His Ministry is reflected in the midst of its ministry and worship. Therefore from first to last the worship and ministry of the Church on earth must be governed by the fact that Christ substitutes Himself in our place, and that our humanity with its own acts of worship, is displaced by His, so that we appear before God not in our own name, not in our own significance, not in virtue of our own acts of confession, contrition, worship, and thanksgiving, but solely in the name of Christ and solely in virtue of what He has done in our name and on our behalf, and in our stead. Justification by Christ alone means that from first to last in the worship of God and in the ministry of the Gospel Christ Himself is central, and

that we draw near in worship and service only through letting Him take our place. He only is Priest. He only represents humanity. He only has an offering with which to appear before God and with which God is well pleased. He only presents our prayers before God, and He only is our praise and thanksgiving and worship as we appear before the face of the Father. Nothing in our hands we bring—simply to His Cross we cling.

But what has happened in Protestant worship and ministry? Is it not too often the case that the whole life and worship of the congregation revolves round the personality of the minister? He is the one who is in the center; he offers the prayers of the congregation; he it is who mediates “truth” through his personality, and he it is who mediates between the people and God through conducting the worship entirely on his own. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the popular minister where everything centers on him, and the whole life of the congregation is built round him. What is that but *Protestant sacerdotalism*, sacerdotalism which involves the displacement of the Humanity of Christ by the humanity of the minister, and the obscuring of the Person of Christ by the personality of the minister? How extraordinary that Protestantism should thus develop a new sacerdotalism, to be sure a psychological rather than a sacramental sacerdotalism, but a sacerdotalism nonetheless, in which it is the personality of the minister which both mediates the Word of God to man and mediates the worship of man to God! Protestant Churches are full of these “psychological priests” and more and more they evolve a psychological cult and develop a form of psychological counselling which displaces the truly pastoral ministry of Christ. How frequently, for example, the minister’s prayers are so crammed with his own personality (with all its boring idiosyncrasies!) that the worshipper cannot get past him in order to worship God in the name of Christ—but is forced to worship God in the name of the minister! How frequently the sermon is not an exposition of the Word of God but an exposition of the minister’s own views on this or that subject! And how frequently the whole life of the congregation is so built up on the personality of the minister that when he goes the congregation all but collapses or dwindles away!

There can be no doubt that the whole concept of the ministry and of worship in our Reformed Churches needs to be brought back to the criticism of the Word of God in order that we may learn again the

meaning of Justification by Christ alone in the midst of the Church’s life and work. Jesus Christ must be given His rightful place by being set right in the center, as Head and Lord of the Church, as its sole Prophet and Priest and King, and that means in the midst of our preaching, in the basic notion of the ministerial office, in the fundamental mode of worship, and in the whole life of the congregation as the *Body of Christ alone*.

# Indwelling Sin

Charles H. Spurgeon



“Then Job answered the Lord and said, Behold, I am vile.”—Job xl. 3, 4.

Surely, if any man had a right to say, I am *not* vile, it was Job: for, according to the testimony of God himself, he was, “a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil.” Yet we find even this eminent saint, when by his nearness to God he had received light enough to discover his own

condition, exclaiming, “Behold I am vile.” We are sure that what Job was forced to say, we may each of us assent unto, whether we be God’s children or not; and if we be partakers of divine grace, it becomes a subject of great consideration for us, since even we, although we be regenerated, must exclaim, each one for himself, “Behold, I am vile.”

It is a doctrine, as I believe, taught us in Holy

Writ, that when a man is saved by divine grace, he is not wholly cleansed from the corruption of his heart. When we believe in Jesus Christ all our sins are pardoned; yet the power of sin, albeit that it is weakened and kept under by the dominion of the new-born nature which God doth infuse into our souls, doth not cease, but still tarrieth in us, and will do so to our dying day. It is a doctrine held by all the orthodox, that there dwelleth still in the regenerate, the lusts of the flesh, and that there doth still remain in the hearts of those who are converted by God's mercy, the evil of carnal nature. I have found it very difficult to distinguish, in experimental matters, concerning sin. It is usual with many writers, especially with hymn writers, to confound the two natures of a Christian. Now, I hold that there is in every Christian two natures, as distinct as were the two natures of the God-Man Christ Jesus. There is one nature which cannot sin, because it is born of God—a spiritual nature, coming directly from heaven, as pure and as perfect as God himself, who is the author of it; and there is also in man that ancient nature which, by the fall of Adam, hath become altogether vile, corrupt, sinful, and devilish. There remains in the heart of the Christian a nature which cannot do that which is right, any more than it could before regeneration, and which is as evil as it was before the new birth—as sinful, as altogether hostile to God's laws, as ever it was—a nature which, as I said before, is curbed and kept under by the new nature in a great measure, but which is not removed and never will be until this tabernacle of our flesh is broken down, and we soar into that land into which there shall never enter anything that defileth.

It will be my business this morning, to say something of that evil nature which still abides in the righteous. That it does remain, I shall first attempt to prove; and the other points I will suggest to you as we proceed.

## Indwelling Sin in the Righteous

I. The *fact*, the great and terrible fact, that *even the righteous have in them evil natures*. Job said, "Behold, I am vile." He did not always know it. All through the long controversy he had declared himself to be just and upright; he had said, "My righteousness I will hold fast, and I will not let it go;" and notwithstanding he did scrape his body with a potsherd, and his friends did vex his mind with the most bitter revilings, yet he still held fast his integrity, and would not confess his sin; but when

God came to plead with him, he had no sooner listened to the voice of God in the whirlwind, and heard the question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" than at once he put his finger on his lips, and would not answer God, but simply said, "Behold I am vile." Possibly some may say, that Job was an exception to the rule; and they will tell us, that other saints had not in them such a reason for humiliation; but we remind them of *David*, and we bid them read the 51st penitential Psalm, where we find him declaring that he was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him; confessing, that he had sin in his heart, and asking God to create in him a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within him. In many other places in the Psalms, David doth continually acknowledge and confess, that he is not perfectly rid of sin; that still the evil viper doth twist itself around his heart. Turn also, if you please, to *Isaiah*. There you have him, in one of his visions, saying that he was a man of unclean lips, and that he dwelt among a people of unclean lips. But more especially, under the gospel dispensation, you find *Paul*, in that memorable chapter we have been reading, declaring, that he found in "his members a law warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin." Yea, we hear that remarkable exclamation of struggling desire and intense agony, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Do you expect to find yourselves better saints than Job? do you imagine that the confession which befitted the mouth of David is too mean for you? are ye so proud, that ye will not exclaim with Isaiah, "I also am a man of unclean lips?" Or rather, have ye progressed so far in pride, that ye dare to exalt yourselves above the laborious Apostle Paul, and to hope that in you, that is, in your flesh, there dwelleth any good thing? If ye do think yourselves to be perfectly pure from sin, hear ye the word of God: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say we have no sin, we make God a liar."

But scarcely do I need to prove this, beloved; for all of you, I am sure, who know anything about the experience of a living child of God, have found that in your best and happiest moments sin still dwells in you; that when you would serve your God the best, sin frequently works in you the most furiously. There have been many saints of God who have abstained, for a time, from doing anything they have known to be sin; but still there has not been one who has been inwardly perfect. If a being were perfect, the angels would come down in ten minutes, and carry him off



to heaven, for he would be ripe for it as soon as he had attained perfection. I have found in talking to men who have said a good deal about perfection, that after all they really did not believe in any such thing. They have taken the word and attached a different meaning to it, and either then proved a doctrine which we all knew before, or else supposed a perfection so absurd and worthless, that I would not give three half-pence for it if I might have it. In many of them it is a fault, I believe, of their brains, rather than their hearts; for as John Berridge says, "God will wash their brains before they get to heaven." But why should I stay to prove this, when you have daily proofs of it yourselves? how many times do you feel that corruption is still within you? Mark how easily you are *surprised into sin*. You rise in the morning, and dedicate yourselves by fervent prayer to God, thinking what a happy day you have before you. Scarce have you uttered your prayer, when something comes to ruffle your spirit, your good resolutions are cast to the winds, and you say, "This day, which I thought would be such a happy one, has suffered a terrific inroad; I cannot live to God as I would." Perhaps you have thought, "I will go up stairs, and ask my God to keep me." Well, you were in the main kept by the power of God, but on a sudden something came; an evil temper on a sudden surprised you; your heart was taken by storm, when you were not expecting an attack; the doors were broken open, and some unholy expression came forth from your lips, and down you went again on your knees in private, exclaiming, "Lord, I am vile." I have found out that I have a something in my heart, which, when I have bolted my doors, and think all is safe, creeps forth and undoes every bolt, and lets in the sin. Besides, beloved, you will find in your heart, even when you are not surprised into sin, such an *awful tendency to evil*, that it is as much as you can do to keep it in check, and to say, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." Nay, you will find it more than you can do, unless a divine power is with you, and preventing grace restrains your passions and prevents you from indulging your inbred lusts. Ah, soldiers of Jesus, ye have felt—I know ye have felt the uprisings of corruption, for ye know the Lord in sincerity and in truth; and ye dare not, unless you would make yourselves liars to your own hearts, hope to be in this world perfectly free from sin.

Having stated that fact, I must just make a remark upon it, and leave it. How wrong it is if any of us, from the fact of our possessing evil hearts, to excuse our sins. I have known some persons, who

profess to be Christians, speak very lightly of sin. There was corruption still remaining, and therefore they said they could not help it. Such persons have no visible part nor lot in God's covenant. The truly loving child of God, though he knows sin is there, hates that sin; it is a pain and misery to him, and he never makes the corruption of his *heart* an excuse for the corruption of his *life*; he never pleads the evil of his nature, as an apology for the evil of his conduct. If any man can, in the least degree, clear himself from the conviction of his own conscience, on account of his daily failings, by pleading the evil of his heart, he is not one of the broken-hearted children of God; he is not one of the tried servants of the Lord, for they *groan* concerning sin, and carry it to God's throne; they know it is in them—they do not, therefore, leave it, but seek with all their minds to keep it down, in order that it may not rise and carry them away. Mind that, unless you should make, what I say, a cloak to your licentiousness, and a covering to your guilt.

## The Effect of Indwelling Sin

11. Thus we have mentioned the fact, that the best of men have sin still remaining in them. Now, I will tell you what are the doings of this sin. What does the sin which still remains in our hearts do? I answer—

1. Experience will tell you that *this sin exerts a checking power upon every good thing*. You have felt, when you would do good, that evil was present with you. Just like the chariot, which might go swiftly down the hill, you have had a clog put upon your wheels; or, like the bird that would mount towards heaven, you have found your sins, like the wires of a cage, preventing your soaring towards the Most High. You have bent your knee in prayer, but corruption has distracted your thoughts. You have attempted to sing, but you have felt "hosannah's languish on your tongue." Some insinuation of Satan has taken fire, like a spark in tinder, and well nigh smothered your soul with its abominable smoke. You would run in your holy duties with all alacrity; but the sin that doth so easily beset you entangles your feet, and when you would be nearing the goal, it trips you up, and down you fall, to your own dishonor and pain. You will find indwelling sin frequently retarding you the most, when you are most earnest. When you desire to be most alive to God—you will generally find sin most alive to repel you. The "evil heart of unbelief" puts itself straight in the road, and saith,

“Thou shalt not come this way;” and when the soul says, “I will serve God—I will worship in his temple,” the evil heart saith, “Get thee to Dan and Beersheba, and bow thyself before false gods, but thou shalt not approach Jerusalem; I will not suffer thee to behold the face of the Most High.” You have often felt this to be the case: a cold hand has been placed upon your hot spirit when you have been full of devotion and prayer. And when you have had the wings of the dove, and thought you could flee away and be at rest, a clog has been put upon your feet, so that you could not mount. Now, that is one of the effects of indwelling sin.



2. But indwelling sin does more than that: it not only prevents us from going forward, but at times even *assails us*, as well as seeks to obstruct us. It is not merely that I fight with indwelling sin; it is indwelling sin that sometimes makes an assault on me. You will notice, the Apostle says, “O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Now, this proves that he was not attacking his sin, but that his sin was attacking him. I do not seek to be delivered from a man against whom I lead the attack: but it is the man who is opposing me from whom I seek to be delivered. And so sometimes the sin that dwelleth in believers flies at us, like some foul tiger of the woods, or some demon, jealous of the celestial

spirit within us. The evil nature riseth up: it doth not only seek to stop us in the way, but, like Amelek, it labours to destroy us and cut us off utterly. Did you ever feel, beloved, the attacks of inbred sin? It may be, you have not: but if not, depend upon it you will. Before you get all the way to heaven, you will be attacked by sin. It will not be simply your driving out the Canaanite; but the Canaanite, with chariot of iron, will attempt to overcome you, to drive you out, to kill your spiritual nature, damp the flame of your piety, and crush the new life which God has implanted in you.

3. The evil heart which still remaineth in the Christian, doth always, when it is not attacking or obstructing, *still reign and dwell within him*. My heart is just as bad when no evil emanates from it, as when it is all over vileness in its external developments. A volcano is ever a volcano; even when it sleeps, trust it not. A lion is a lion, even though he play like a kid; and a serpent, is a serpent, even though you may stroke it while for a season it slumbers; there is still venom in its sting when its azure scales invite the eye. My heart, even though for an hour, it may not have had an evil thought, it is still evil. If it were possible that I could live for days without a single temptation from my own heart to sin, it would be still just as evil as it was before; and it is always either displaying its vileness, or else preparing for another display. It is either loading its cannon to shoot against us, or else it is positively at warfare with us. You may rest assured that the heart is never other than it originally was; the evil nature is still evil; and when there is no blaze, it is heaping up the wood, wherewith it is to blaze another day. It is gathering up from my joys, from my devotions, from my holiness, and from all I do, some materials to attack me at some future period. The evil nature is only evil, and that continually, without the slightest mitigation or element of good. The new nature must always wrestle and fight with it; and when the two natures are not wrestling and fighting, there is no truce between them. When they are not in conflict, still they are foes. We must not trust our heart at any time; even when it speaks most fair, we must call it liar; and when it pretends to the most good, still we must remember its nature, for it is evil, and that continually.

The doings of indwelling sin I will not mention at length: but it is sufficient to let you recognize some of your own experience, that you may see that it is in keeping with that of the children of God, for that you may be as perfect as Job, and yet say, “Behold, I am vile.”

## The Danger of Indwelling Sin

III. Having mentioned the doings of indwelling sin, allow me to mention, in the third place, *the danger we are under from such evil hearts*. There are few people who think what a solemn thing it is to be a Christian. I guess there is not a believer in the world who knows what a miracle it is to be kept a believer. We little think the miracles that are working all around us. We see the flowers grow; but we do not think of the wondrous power that gives them life. We see the stars shine; but how seldom do we think of the hand that moves them. The sun gladdens us with his light; yet we little think of the miracles which God works to feed the sun with fuel, or to gird him like a giant to run its course. And we see Christians walking in integrity and holiness; but how little do we suspect what a mass of miracles a Christian is. There are as great a number of miracles expended on a Christian every day, as he hath hairs on his head. A Christian is a perpetual miracle. Every hour that I am preserved from sinning, is an hour of as divine a might as that which saw a new-born world swathed in its darkness, and heard "the morning stars sing for joy." Did ye never think how great is the danger to which a Christian is exposed from his indwelling sin? Come let me tell you.

One danger to which we are exposed from indwelling sin arises from the fact that *sin is within us*, and therefore it has a great power over us. If a captain has a city, he may for a long time preserve it from the constant attacks of enemies without. He may have walls so strong, and gates so well secured, that he may laugh at all the attacks of besiegers; and their sallies may have no more effect upon his walls than sallies of wit. But if there should happen to be a traitor inside the gates—if there should be one who hath charge of the keys, and who could unlock every door, and let in the enemy, how is the toil of the commander doubled! for he hath not merely to guard against foes without, but against foes within. And here is the danger of the Christian. I could fight the devil; I could overcome every sin that ever tempted me, if it were not that I had an enemy within. Those Diabolians within do more service to Satan than all the Diabolians without. As Bunyan says in his holy war, the enemy tried to get some of his friends within the City of Mansoul, and he found his darlings inside the walls did him far more good than all those without. Ah! Christian, thou couldst laugh at thine enemy, if thou hadst not thine evil heart within; but remember, thine heart keeps the keys, because out of

it are the issues of life. And sin is there. The worst thing thou hast to fear is the treachery of thine own heart.

And moreover, Christian, remember *how many backers* thy evil nature has. As for thy gracious life, it finds few friends beneath the sky; but thine original sin hath allies in every quarter. It looks down to hell, and it finds them there, demons ready to let slip the dogs of hell upon thy soul. It looks out into the world, and sees "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life." It looks around, and it seeth all kinds of men, seeking, if it be possible, to lead the Christian from his steadfastness. It looks into the Church, and it finds all manner of false doctrine ready to inflame lust, and guide the soul from the sincerity of its faith. It looks to the body, and it finds head, and hand, and foot, and all other members ready to be subservient to sin. I could overcome my evil heart if it had not such a mighty host of allies; but it makes my position doubly dangerous, to have foes without the gates, in league and amity with a foe more vile within.

And I would have thee recollect, Christian, one more thing, and that is, that this evil nature of thine is *very strong and very powerful*—stronger than the new nature, if the new nature were not sustained by Divine power. How old is my old nature? "It is as old as myself," the aged saint may say, "and has become all the stronger from its age." There is one thing which seldom gets weaker through old age—that is, old Adam; he is as strong in his old age as he is in his young age; just as able to lead us astray when our head is covered with grey hairs, as he was in our youth. We have heard it said that growing in grace will make our corruptions less mighty; but I have seen many of God's aged saints, and asked them the question, and they have said, "No," their lusts have been essentially as strong, when they have been many years in their Master's service, as they were at first, although more subdued by the new principle within. So far from becoming weaker, it is my firm belief that sin increases in power. A person who is deceitful becomes more deceitful by practicing deceit. So with our heart. It did inveigle us at first, and easily entrapped us, but having learnt a thousand snares, it doth mislead us now perhaps more easily than before; and although our spiritual nature has been more fully developed, and grown in grace, yet still the old nature hath lost little of its energy. I do not know that the house of Saul waxeth weaker and weaker in our hearts; I know that the house of David waxeth stronger; but I do not know that my heart gets less

vile, or that my corruptions become less strong. I believe that if I should ever say my corruptions are all dead, I should hear a voice, "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson;" or, "The Philistines be in thee, Samson." Notwithstanding all former victories, and all the heaps upon heaps of sins I may have slain, I should yet be overcome if Almighty mercy did not preserve me. Christian! mind thy danger! There is not a man in battle so much in danger from the shot, as thou art from thine own sin. Thou carriest in thy soul an infamous traitor, even when he speaks thee fair he is not to be trusted; thou hast in thy heart a slumbering volcano, but a volcano of such terrific force that it may shake thy whole nature yet; and unless thou art circumspect, and art kept by the power of God, thou hast a heart which may lead thee into sins the most diabolical, and crimes the most infamous. Take care, O take care, ye Christians! If there were no devil to tempt you, and no world to lead you astray, you would have need to take care of your own hearts. Look, therefore, at home. Your worst foes are the foes of your own households. "Keep thine heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life," and out of it death may issue too,—death which would damn thee if sovereign mercy did not prevent. God grant, my brethren, that we may learn our corruptions in an easy way, and not discover them by their breaking into open sin.

## The Discovery of Indwelling Sin

IV. And now I come to the fourth point, which is *the discovery of our corruption*. Job said, "Behold, I am vile." That word "behold" implies that he was astonished. The discovery was unexpected. There are special times with the Lord's people, when they learn by experience that they are vile. They heard the minister assert the power of inbred lust, but perhaps they shook their heads and said, "I cannot go so far as that;" but after a little while they found, by some clearer light from heaven, that it was a truth after all—"Behold, I am vile." I remember preaching a little while ago from some deep text concerning the desperate evil of the heart; and one of my most esteemed friends said, "Well, I have not discovered that," and I thought within myself, what a blessing, brother! I wish I had not; for it is a most fearful experience to pass through: I dare say there are many here now who say "I trust in no righteousness of my own. I trust nothing in the world but the blood of Christ; but still I have not discovered the vileness of my heart in the way you have mentioned." Perhaps

not, brother; but it may not be many years before you are made to learn it. You may be of a peculiar temperament. God has preserved you from all contact with temptations which would have revealed your corruptions, or perhaps he has been pleased, as a reward of his grace for deeds which you have been enabled to do for him, to give you a peaceable life, so that you have not been often tossed about by the tumults of your own soul; but nevertheless, let me tell you, that you must expect to find, in the inmost depths of your heart, a lower depth still. God comfort you, and enable you, when you come out of the furnace, to lie lower than ever at the footstool of divine mercy! *I believe we generally find out most of our failings when we have the greatest access to God.* Job never had such a sight of God as he had at this time. God spoke to him in the whirlwind, and then Job said, "I am vile." It is not so much when we are desponding, or unbelieving, that we learn our vileness; we do find out something of it then, but not all. It is when by God's grace we are helped to climb the mount, when we come near to God, and when God reveals himself to us, that we feel that we are not pure in his sight. We get some gleams of his high majesty; we see the brightness of his skirts, "dark—with insufferable light;" and after having been dazzled by the sight, there comes a fall: as if, smitten by the fiery light of the sun, the eagle should fall from his lofty heights, even to the ground. So with the believer. He soars up to God, and on a sudden down he comes. "Behold," he says, "I am vile. I had never known this if I had not seen God. Behold, I have seen him; and now I discover how vile I am. Nothing shows blackness like exposure to light. If I would see the blackness of my own character, I must put it side by side with spotless purity; and when the Lord is pleased to give us some special vision of himself, some sweet intercourse with his own blessed person, then it is that the soul learns, as it never knew before, with an agony perhaps which it never felt, even when at first convinced of sin, "Behold, I am vile." God is pleased to do this. Lest we should be "exalted above measure, by the abundance of the revelation," he sends us this "thorn in the flesh," to let us see *ourselves* after we have seen *him*.

There are many men who never know much of their vileness till after the blood of Christ has been sprinkled on their consciences, or even till they have been many years God's children. I met, some time ago, with the case of a Christian, who was positively pardoned before he had a strong sense of sin. "I did not," he said, "feel my vileness, until I heard a voice,

'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions;' and after that, I thought how black I had been. I did not think of my filthiness," said he, "till after I saw that I had been washed." I think there are many of God's people, who, though they had some notion of their blackness before they came to Christ, never knew how thoroughly vile they were till afterwards. They thought then, "How great must have been my sin to need such a Saviour! how desperate my filth, to require such a washing! how awful my guilt, to need such an atonement as the blood of Christ." You may rest assured, that the more you know of God and of Christ, the more you will know of yourself; and you will be obliged to say, as you did before, "Behold, I am vile;" vile in an extraordinary sense, even as you never guessed or fancied until now. "Behold, I am vile!" "I am vile, indeed!" No doubt many of you will still think, that what I say concerning your evil nature is not true, and you may, perhaps, imagine that grace has cut your evil nature up; but you know little about spiritual life, if you suppose that. It will not be long before you find the old Adam as strong in you as ever; here will be a war carried on in your heart to your dying day, in which grace shall prevail, but not without sighs, and groans, and agonies, and wrestlings, and a daily death.

## Our Duties

V. Here is the way in which God discovers our vileness to ourselves. Now, if it be true that we are still vile, *what are our duties?* And here let me solemnly speak to such of you as are heirs of eternal life, desiring as your brother in Christ Jesus to urge you to some duties which are most necessary, on account of the continual filthiness of your heart.

In the first place, if your hearts be still vile, and there be still evil nature in you, *how wrong it is to suppose that all your work is done.* There is one thing, concerning which, I have much reason to complain of some of you. Before your baptism you were extremely earnest; you were always attending the means of grace, and I always saw you here; but there are some, some even now in this place, who, as soon as they had crossed that rubicon, began for that moment to decrease in zeal, thinking that the work was over. I tell you solemnly, that I know there are some of you who were prayerful, careful, devout, living close and near to your God, until you joined the church; but from that time forth, you have gradually declined. Now, it really appears to me a matter of doubt whether such persons are Christians.

I tell you I have very grave doubts of the sincerity of some of you. If I see a man less earnest after baptism, I think he had no right to be baptized; for if he had had a proper sense of the value of that ordinance, and had been rightly dedicated to God, he would not have turned back to the ways of the world. I am grieved, when I see one or two who once walked very consistently with us, beginning to slide away. I have no fault to find with the great majority of you, as to your firm adherence to God's word. I bless God, that for the space of two years and more you have held firm and fast by God. I have not seen you absent from the house of prayer, nor do I think your zeal has flagged; but there are some few who have been tempted by the world, who have been led astray by Satan, or who, by some change in their circumstances, or some removal to a distance, have become cold, and not diligent in the work of the Lord. There are some of my hearers who are not as earnest as they once were. My dear friends, if you knew the vileness of your hearts, you would see the necessity of being as earnest now as ever you were. Oh! if, when you were converted, your old nature were cut up, there would be no need of watchfulness now. If all your lusts were entirely gone, and all the strength of corruption dead within you, there would be no need of perseverance; but it is just because ye have evil hearts, that I bid you be just as earnest as ever you were, to stir up the gift of God which is in you, and look as well to yourselves as ever you did. Fancy not the battle is over, man; it is but the first trump, summoning to the warfare. That trump has ceased, and thou thinkest the battle is over; I tell thee, nay, the fight has but now begun; the hosts are only just led forth, and thou hast newly put on thine harness; thou hast conflicts yet to come. Be thou earnest, or else that first love of thine shall die, and thou shalt yet "go out from us, proving that thou wast not of us." Take care, my dear friends, of backsliding; it is the easiest thing in the world, and yet the most dangerous thing in the world. Take care of giving up your first zeal; beware of cooling in the least degree. Ye were hot and earnest once; be hot and earnest still, and let the fire which once burnt within you still animate you. Be ye still men of might and vigour, men who serve their God with diligence and zeal.

Again, if your evil nature is still within you, *how watchful you ought to be!* The devil never sleeps; your evil nature never sleeps; you ought never to sleep. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." These are Jesus Christ's words, and there is nothing needs repetition half so much as that word "watch."

We can do almost anything better than watch; for watching is very wearisome work, especially when we have sleepy souls to watch with. Watching is very fatiguing work. There is little open honor got by it, and therefore we do not have the hope of renown to cheer us up. Watching is a work that few of us, I am afraid, rightly perform; but if the Almighty had not watched over you, the devil would have carried you away long ago. Dear friends, I bid you watch constantly. When the adjoining house is on fire, how speedily do persons rise from their beds, and if they have combustibles, move them from the premises, and watch, lest their house also should become a prey to the devouring element! You have corruption in your heart: watch for the first spark, lest it set your soul on fire. "Let us not sleep as do others." You might sleep over the crater of a volcano, if you liked; you might sleep with your head before the cannon's mouth; you might, if you pleased, sleep in the midst of an earthquake, or in a pest-house; but I beseech you, do not sleep while you have evil hearts. Watch your hearts; you may think they are very good, but they will be your ruin if grace prevent not. Watch daily; watch perpetually; guard yourselves, lest ye sin. Above all, my dear brethren, if your hearts be, indeed, still full of vileness, how necessary it is that we should *still exhibit faith in God*. If I must trust my God when I first set out, because of the difficulties in the way, if those difficulties be not diminished, I ought to trust God just as much as I did before. Oh! beloved, yield your hearts to God. Do not become self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency is Satan's net, wherein he catcheth men, like poor silly fish, and doth destroy them. Be not self-sufficient. Think yourselves nothing, for ye are nothing, and live by God's help. The way to grow strong in Christ is to become weak in yourself. God poureth no power into man's heart till man's power is all poured out. Live, then, daily, a life of dependence on the grace of God. Do not set thyself up as if thou wast an independent gentleman; do not start in thine own concerns as if thou couldst do all things thyself; but live always trusting in God. Thou hast as much need to trust him now as ever thou hadst; for, mark thee, although thou wouldst have been damned without Christ, at first, thou wilt be damned without Christ now, unless he still keeps them, for thou hast as evil a nature now as thou hadst then.

Dearly beloved, I have just one word to say, not to the saints, but to the ungodly—one cheering word, sinner, poor lost sinner! You think you must not come to God because you are vile. Now, let me tell

you, that there is not a saint in this place but is vile too. If Job, and Isaiah, and Paul, were all obliged to say, "I am vile," oh, poor sinner, wilt thou be ashamed to join the confession, and say, "I am vile," too? If I come to God this night in prayer, when I am on my knees by my bedside, I shall have to come to God as a sinner, vile and full of sin. My brother sinner! dost thou want to have any better confession than that? Thou wantest to be better, dost thou? Why, saints in themselves are no better. If divine grace does not eradicate all sin in the believer, how dost thou hope to do it thyself? and if God loves his people, while they are yet vile, dost thou think thy vileness will prevent his loving thee? Nay, vile sinner, come to Jesus! vilest of the vile! Believe on Jesus, thou off-cast of the world's society, thou who art the dung and dross of the streets, I bid thee come to Christ. Christ bids thee believe on him.

"Not the righteous, not the righteous,  
Sinners, Jesus came to save."

Come now; say, "Lord, I am vile; give me faith. Christ died for sinners; I am a sinner. Lord Jesus, sprinkle thy blood on me." I tell thee, sinner, from God, if thou wilt confess thy sin, thou shalt find pardon. If now with all thy heart thou wilt say, "I am vile; wash me;" thou shalt be washed now. If the Holy Spirit shall enable thee to say with thine heart now, "Lord, I am sinful—

'Just as I am, without one plea  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou bid'st me come to thee,  
O, Lamb of God, I come, I come.'

Thou shalt go out of this place with all thy sins pardoned; and though thou comest in here with every sin that man hath ever committed on thy head, thou shalt go out as innocent, yea, more innocent than the new-born babe. Though thou comest in here all over sin, thou shalt go out with a robe of righteousness, white as angels are, as pure as God himself, so far as justification is concerned. For "now," mark it "now is the accepted time," if thou believest on him who justifieth the ungodly. Oh! may the Holy Spirit give thee faith that thou mayest be saved now, for then thou wilt be saved for ever! May God add his blessing to this feeble discourse for his name's sake!

# Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans

## Preface

This Epistle is in truth the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel. It would be quite proper for a Christian, not only to know it by heart word for word, but also to study it daily, for it is the soul's daily bread. It can never be read or meditated too much and too well. The more thoroughly it is treated, the more precious it becomes, and the better it tastes.

Accordingly, I, too, shall offer my service and with the ability God has granted me prepare an introduction to it by this preface in order that it may be better understood by everybody. For heretofore it has been miserably darkened by glosses and all sorts of twaddle, while in itself it is a shining light, quite sufficient to illumine the whole Scripture.

## PART I: Explanation of Terms Used in This Epistle

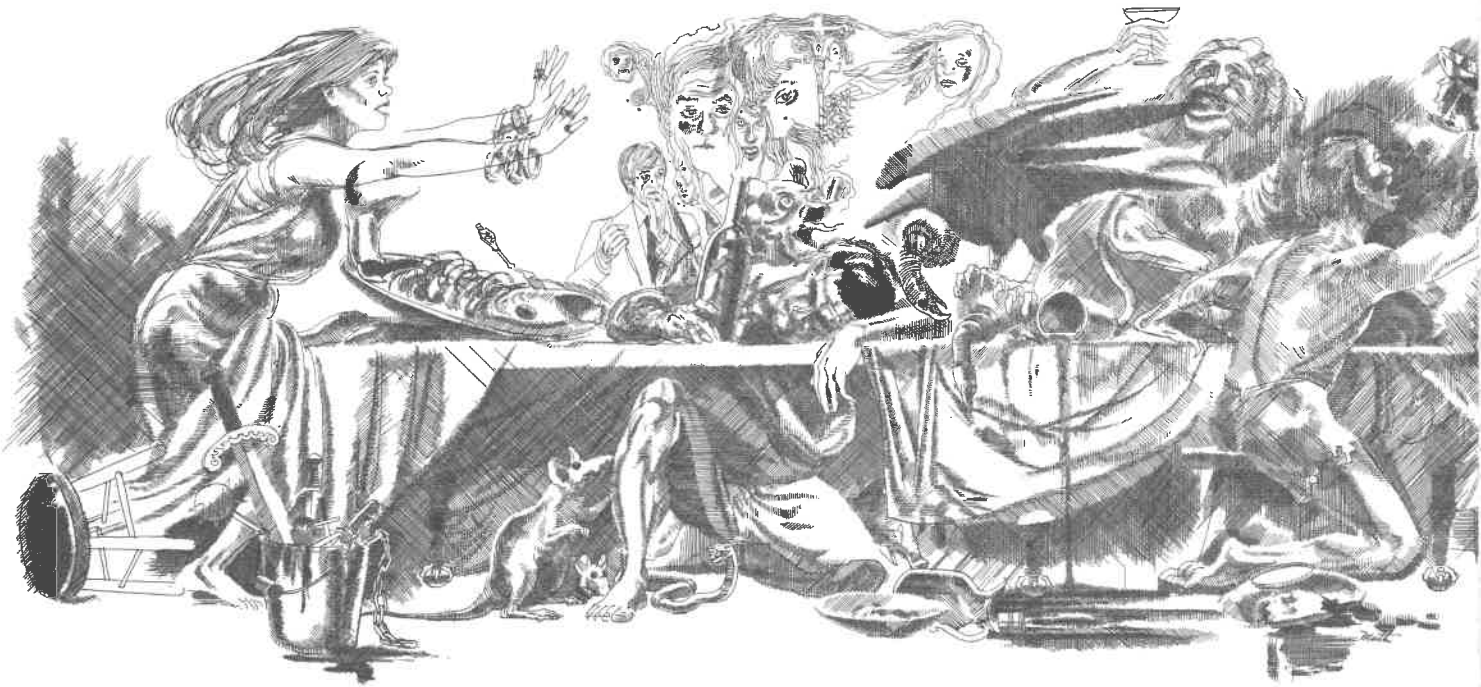
In the first place, we must acquaint ourselves with matters of language and understand what Paul means by these words: *law, sin, grace, faith, righteousness, flesh, Spirit*, and similar terms; otherwise we shall derive no benefit from reading this epistle.

### (a) Law

As regards the term "law" in this epistle, you must not understand it after the fashion of men, as denoting a doctrine that shows us what works we must, and what works we must not, do. That is the meaning of human laws, with which we comply when we do the works commanded, though our heart may have no share in them. God frames His verdict in accordance with the condition of our inmost heart. His law, accordingly, makes demands upon our inmost heart, and is not satisfied with mere works, but *brands as hypocrisy and lies all works in which our inmost heart has no share*. For this reason all men are called liars, Psalm 116:11, because no one of them keeps, nor can keep, the Law of God from his inmost heart; *everyone discovers in himself aversion*

*to what is good and a desire for what is evil*. Now, where there is no unconstrained desire for what is good, the inmost heart is not attached to the Law of God. In such a case there is surely also sin and merited wrath of God, although to a superficial observer there may appear many good works and an upright life.

Hence Paul concludes, chapter 2:12, 13, that the Jews are all sinners, and says that only the doers of the Law are justified in the sight of God. He means to say that no one is a doer of the Law by works. This is the way he speaks to them, v. 22: "Thou sayest a man should not commit adultery, and thou committest adultery;" likewise v. 1: "Wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." As though he were to say: In public you are leading a good life in the works of the Law, and you are passing judgment on those who are not leading such a life. You know how to teach everybody; you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye. Matt. 7:3.



Revelation 3:20

### The Law Demands Willing Obedience

For although you keep the Law outwardly by your works, from fear of punishment or love of reward, still you do everything without a free desire and love of the Law, with loathing and under restraint. You would rather do otherwise if there were no Law. *It follows, then, that in your inmost heart you are an enemy of the Law.* Your teaching others not to steal—what does it amount to when at heart you are a thief yourself, and would gladly be one publicly if you dared? In the long run, even the manifest work (against the Law) is not omitted by these hypocrites. Thus you are teaching others, but not yourself; nor do you know what you are teaching. You have never yet correctly understood the Law. In fact, in addition to this the Law increases sin, as he says, chap. 5:20, because man's enmity against the Law becomes greater in proportion as the Law makes demands upon him, none of which he can fulfil.

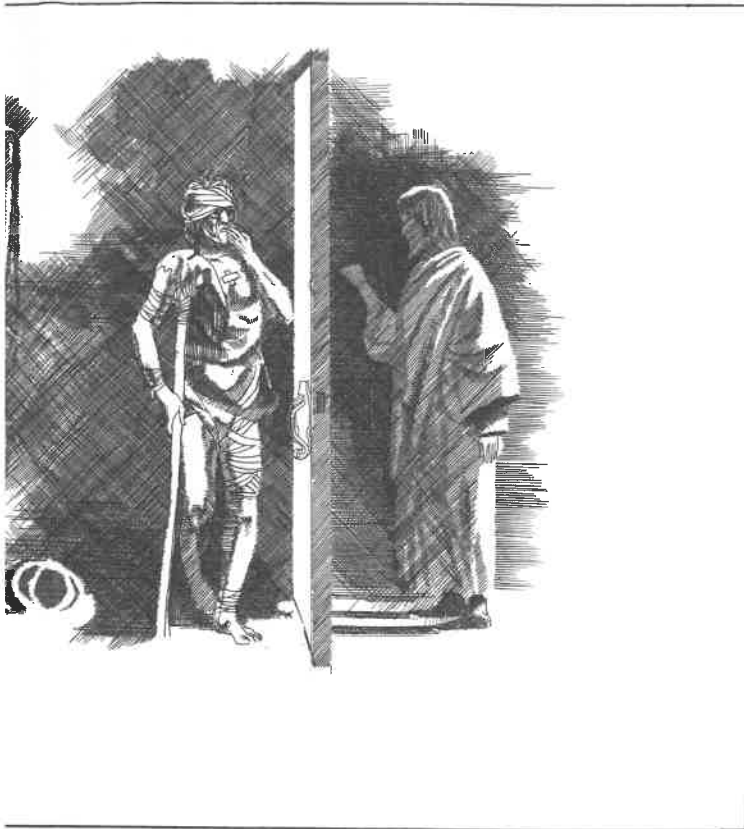
### The Law is Spiritual

Therefore he says, chap. 7:14: "The Law is spiritual." What does that mean? If the Law were an affair for the body its demands could be met by

works. But since it is *spiritual*, no one can satisfy its demands except by doing all that he does *from the inmost heart*. But such a heart is bestowed by no one except the Spirit of God; He makes men to agree with the Law, causing them to conceive a love of the Law, causing them to conceive a love of the Law from the heart and henceforth to do all, not from fear or constraint, but from a willing heart. In that way the Law is spiritual: it wants to be loved and fulfilled from a spiritual heart and requires such a spirit. *If He is not in the heart, there abide in the heart sin, loathing, and enmity against the Law*, which in itself is good, just, and holy.

You must become used, then, to this mode of speech, viz., that "doing the things contained in the Law" is quite another thing than "fulfilling the Law." The things contained in the Law are all those things which man does, or is able to do, in relation to the Law of his free will and by his natural powers. However, while a person is engaged in such works there remains in his heart a loathing of the Law and a constraint; for this reason all these works are a sheer waste and useless. That is what Paul means when he says, chap. 3:20: "By the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." From this you see that the wranglers at the universities and the sophists are false guides when they teach men to prepare themselves for grace by works. How can a person prepare himself for what is good by works





when he does no work without loathing and a dislike in his heart? *How can God be pleased with a work that proceeds from such an unwilling and rebellious heart?*

### Fulfillment Possible Only Through Faith

However, fulfilling the Law means to do its works *with delight* and *from love*, and to lead a godly and good life *freely*, without the Law's constraint, just as if there were no Law and no punishment. Such a delight of unconstrained love, however, is instilled in the heart by the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says, chap. 5:5: But, as he says in his introductory remarks, the Spirit is not given except in, with, and by faith in Jesus Christ. Hence there is no faith except by the Word of God, or the Gospel, which proclaims Christ, namely, that He is the Son of God and man, that He died and rose again for our sakes, as he states, chap. 3:25; 4:25; 10:9.

That is the reason why faith alone justifies and fulfils the Law, for it fetches the Spirit from Christ's merit. The Spirit, however, creates a *willing and unconstrained* heart, such as the Law requires; and then good works spring directly from faith. That is what he (the apostle) means in chap. 3:31, after he has rejected the works of the Law in terms that might

lead one to think he meant to make void the Law through faith. "Nay," he says, "we establish the Law through faith," that is, we fulfil it by faith.

### (b) Sin

As regards "sin," by this term Scripture denominates not only the external work of the body, but every movement and incitement to some external work that takes place in the inmost heart and all its powers. The term "commit," accordingly, denotes that a person falls completely and rushes into sin. For no external sinful work is done except a person rushes into it with his whole body and soul. Scripture takes particular notice of the heart and of the *root* and *main source* of all sins, which is *unbelief in the inmost heart*. Accordingly, even as faith alone justifies and obtains the Spirit and willingness for good external works, so unbelief alone sins and rouses the flesh and the desire for evil external works, as happened to Adam and Eve in paradise. Gen. 3:6.

For this reason, Christ calls only unbelief sin, when He says, John 16:8, 9: "The Spirit will reprove the world of sin because they believe not on me." Hence, before good or evil works are done (which are good or evil fruits), there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief, the latter being the root, sap, and main strength of every sin. For this reason it is called in Scripture the serpent's head and the head of the old dragon, which, in accordance with the promise made to Adam, must be bruised by Christ, the woman's Seed. Gen. 3:15.

### (c) Grace

The difference between "grace" and "gift" is this: *Grace*, in the proper sense of the term, denotes *God's favour and good will towards us*, which He cherishes in Himself, and by reason of which He is inclined to pour into us Christ and the Spirit with His gifts. This is manifest from chap. 5:15, where St. Paul speaks of "the grace of God and the gift of grace, which is by . . . Jesus Christ." Now, the gifts and the Spirit are increased in us daily and *are not yet perfect*; hence evil lusts and sins still remain in us, which war against the Spirit, as is stated in Rom. 7:14 f. 23; Gal. 5:17; Gen. 3:15, where enmity between the woman's Seed and the seed of the serpent is predicted. Notwithstanding this, grace accomplishes so much that we are *accounted completely and fully righteous in the sight of God*. For

the grace of God is not divisible and piecemeal as the gifts are, but receives us altogether into God's favour for the sake of our Advocate and Mediator Christ, and for the reason that there is in us a beginning of the gifts.

Now you will understand the seventh chapter, where Paul still chides himself a sinner, and nevertheless, in chap. 8:1, declares that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, because of the imperfect gifts and the Spirit. We are still sinners because of the flesh in us that has not yet been mortified. However, since we believe in Christ and have the beginning of the Spirit, *God is favourably inclined and gracious to us*, so much so that He will not regard nor condemn our sins, but deal with us in accordance with our faith in Christ, until sin is slain.

### (d) Faith

"Faith" is not the human notion and dream which some regard as faith. When they see that it is not followed by an improvement of life nor by good works, while they are, nevertheless, able to hear and talk much of faith, they fall into the error of saying: Faith is not sufficient; we must do works if we want to become godly and be saved. The reason is because, when hearing the Gospel, they go to work and by their own power frame up a thought in their heart which says: I believe. That they regard as genuine faith. But, inasmuch as it is a human figment and thought of which the inmost heart is not sensible, it accomplishes nothing and is not accompanied by any improvement.

On the contrary, *faith is a divine work in us*, which transforms us, gives us a new birth out of God, John 1:13, slays the old Adam, makes us altogether different men in heart, affection, mind, and all powers, and brings with it the Holy Spirit. *Oh, it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith*. It cannot but do good unceasingly. There is no question asked whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked the works have been done, and there is a continuous doing of them. But any person not doing such works is without faith. He is groping in the dark, looking for faith and good works, and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, although he indulges in a lot of twaddle and flummery concerning faith and good works.

Faith is a *living, daring confidence in the grace of God*, of such assurance that it would risk a thousand deaths. This confidence and knowledge of

divine grace make a person happy, bold, and full of gladness in his relation to God and all creatures. The Holy Ghost is doing this in the believer. Hence it is that a person, without constraint, becomes willing and enthusiastic to do good to everybody, to serve everybody, to suffer all manner of afflictions, from love of God and to the praise of Him who has extended such grace to him. Accordingly, *it is impossible to separate works from faith*, just as impossible as it is to separate the power to burn and shine from fire. Accordingly, beware of your own false thoughts and of idle talkers, who pretend great wisdom for discerning faith and good works and yet are the greatest fools. Pray God that He may create faith in you; otherwise you will be without faith for ever and aye, no matter what you may plan and do.

### (e) Righteousness

Now, faith such as I have described is "righteousness," and is called the righteousness of God, or the righteousness that is valid in God's sight, because He bestows it and counts it for righteousness for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. This righteousness causes a person to render to each his due. For through faith man becomes void of sin and conceives a love for the commandments of God. Thus he gives due honour to God and pays Him what he owes. On the other hand, he willingly serves his fellow-man in whatever way he can, and in that way also pays his debts to everybody. Such righteousness human nature, man's free will, and our powers cannot achieve. For just as little as anybody can kindle faith in himself, just as little can he remove his unbelief. How, then, is he to remove one single sin, even of the paltriest kind? Therefore, whatsoever is done without faith or in unbelief, no matter what a splendid appearance it may present, is falsehood, hypocrisy, and sin. Rom. 14:23.

### (f) Flesh and Spirit

As regards the term "flesh" and "spirit" in this epistle, you must not understand "flesh" to mean only unchaste matters, nor "spirit" to mean the inward matters of the heart. St. Paul, as well as Christ in John 3:6, calls everything flesh that is born of flesh, hence the entire person with his body and soul, his reason and all his senses, because everything in him lusts after the flesh. Thus you will understand that you must call any person "carnal" who is full of

his own imaginations concerning sublime, spiritual matters, teaching and twaddling about them. You can readily gather this from what is said concerning the works of the flesh in Gal. 5:20, where also heresy and hatred are called works of the flesh. Moreover, in Rom. 8:3, the apostle says that the Law is weakened by the flesh. This does not refer to unchastity, but to all sins, chiefly, however, to unbelief, which is the greatest vice affecting the spirit.

On the other hand, you will have to call even that person "spiritual" who is engaged in most obvious work, as, for instance, Christ when He was washing His disciples' feet and Peter when he was

rowing his boat and fishing. Accordingly, "*flesh*" denotes a person who spends his life inwardly and outwardly in serving the interests of his flesh and temporal existence, while "*spirit*" denotes a person who spends his life inwardly and outwardly in serving the spirit and the interests of the life to come.

Without this understanding of the terms noted you will never grasp this epistle of St. Paul, nor any book of the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, beware of all teachers who employ these words in a different sense, no matter who they are, even if they should happen to be Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Origen, and men like them or still higher than they.

## **PART II: Now We Shall Take the Epistle Itself**

### **Ch. 1—The Gross Sins of Men**

It behoves a preacher of the Gospel, first of all, by means of the revelation of the Law concerning sins, to reprove and denounce as sin *everything in a person's life that does not proceed from the Spirit and from faith in Christ, in order that men be enabled to know themselves and their misery, become humble, and crave help.* Therefore, St. Paul, following this rule, starts in the first chapter to rebuke gross sins and unbelief which are manifest, such as the sins of the Gentiles were and as are still in those who live without the grace of God. He says that by the Gospel is revealed the wrath of God from heaven upon all men because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness. For although they know and perceive every day, that there is a God, still their nature, outside of grace, is in itself so evil that they neither thank Him nor honour Him, but inflict blindness on themselves and without ceasing fall into worse evils, until, after practising idolatry, they commit, without shame, the most abominable sins and every vice and, moreover, do not rebuke them in others.

### **Ch. 2—Hypocrisy and Self-righteousness**

In the second chapter this reproof is still further extended, so as to embrace those who are outwardly pious or sin in secret. Of this class were the Jews, and are all hypocrites today, who lead a good and honest life without real love for it, because at heart they are enemies of God's Law. Yet they are ready to pass judgment on other people, as is the manner of all hypocrites, so as to esteem themselves pure, although

they are full of avarice, hatred, pride, and all vileness. Matt. 23:25. These are the very people who despise the goodness of God and heap up wrath for themselves because of their hardness. Thus St. Paul, a true expounder of the Law, does not suffer anyone to pass for a sinless person, but denounces the wrath of God to all who would lead a good life *by their natural strength or free will.* He does not suffer them to pass for anything better than manifest sinners; in fact, he tells them that they are hard-hearted and impenitent.

### **Ch. 3—All Men Are Sinners**

In the third chapter the apostle casts them all on the same heap, saying that *one is no better than the other, and all of them are sinners in the sight of God.* The only difference is that the Jews have had the Word of God, though many of them did not believe it. But that has not made the faith and truth of God of no effect. Incidentally, the apostle introduces the passage from Psalm 51:4, which declares that God is righteous whenever He judges. This point he takes up again in what follows and proves by Scriptures that all are sinners and no one is justified by the deeds of the Law, but that the Law has been given only that man might know sin.

### **Salvation by Grace**

Next the apostle begins to teach the true way of becoming godly and being saved. He says:—"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." They

must all be saved *without any merit of theirs, by faith in Christ*, who has earned our salvation by shedding His blood. He has been set before us as a *Mercy-seat* by God, who forgives us all our past sins. In this manner he proves that only the righteousness which God gives to faith can help us. This righteousness was revealed at that time by the Gospel, but had been witnessed previously by the Law and the prophets. Thus the Law is established by faith, and the deeds of the Law, together with their glory, are dashed to the ground by this argument.

#### **Ch. 4—Good Works the Outward Signs of Faith**

Having revealed sin in the first three chapters and having taught the way of faith unto righteousness, the apostle now begins to meet several objections and claims. First, he takes up the one which is commonly advanced by all when they hear that faith justifies without works. They say: Are we then, not to do any good works? He reminds himself of Abraham and says: What has Abraham accomplished with all his works? Was it all in vain? Did his works not benefit him at all? He winds up by declaring that Abraham was justified without any works, by faith alone, so much so that prior to the work of circumcision he is extolled in Scripture as a righteous man solely for the sake of his faith. Gen. 15:6. Now, if the work of circumcision, which God enjoined upon him and which was a goodly act of obedience, contributed nothing to his righteousness, surely no other good work will contribute anything to a person's righteousness. But just as the circumcision of Abraham was an external sign, exhibiting his righteousness by faith, so all good works are *merely external* signs flowing from faith and, as good fruits, attesting that a person is already inwardly righteous in the sight of God.

By this argument, as by a powerful example drawn from Scripture, St. Paul establishes his former teaching concerning faith in chap. 3:27, and, in addition, introduces another witness, David, in the thirty-second psalm, who also says that man is justified *without works*, although he does not remain without works after he has become justified. Continuing, he expands the example which he has introduced, so as to make it cover all other works of the Law, and concludes that the Jews cannot be the heirs of Abraham because of their descent, much less on account of the work of the Law, but that, if they

wish to be genuine heirs, they must *inherit Abraham's faith*, inasmuch as Abraham was justified by faith and called a father of the faithful prior to the Law, both that of Moses and that of circumcision. Moreover, the Law works wrath rather than grace, because no one obeys the Law willingly and from love; hence by the Law comes disfavour rather than grace. Therefore it must needs be that faith alone obtains the mercy promised to Abraham. For these examples have been recorded also for our sakes, in order that we might believe.

#### **Ch. 5—The Fruits of Faith**

In the fifth chapter the apostle proceeds to discuss the fruits and works of faith, such as peace, joy, love of God and of all our fellow-men; moreover, assurance, boldness, cheerfulness, courage and hope amidst tribulations and sufferings. For all these things follow where there is genuine faith, because of the superabundant treasure which God has bequeathed to us in Christ, when He caused Him to die for us before we could pray Him to do this, nay, while we were still enemies. Thus we arrive at this result, viz., that faith justifies without any works, and yet it does not follow from this that we must not do any good works, but that genuine works will not be wanting. Of these works those who are saints by their own merit know nothing; they frame up works of their own, in which there is neither peace, joy, assurance, love, hope, boldness, nor the quality of any genuine Christian work and faith.

Next the apostle attempts a pleasure stroll for a diversion, and tells whence sin and unrighteousness, death and life, come, and in a splendid comparison places these two, Adam and Christ, over against each other. He means to say: For this reason Christ had to come, as another Adam, who was to bequeath his righteousness to us *by a new, spiritual birth through faith*, just as the former Adam had bequeathed sin to us through the old, carnal birth.

By this illustration it is made plain, and the teaching is confirmed, that no one can by means of works advance himself out of sin into righteousness, just as little as he can control his physical birth. This is also proved by the fact that the divine Law, which, if anything, might be expected to aid man toward righteousness, has not only come without such aid, but has even increased sin. For man's evil nature becomes all the more incensed against it and seeks to gratify its lust in proportion as the Law checks it. Hence the Law makes Christ all the more necessary and requires more grace to aid nature.

## Ch. 6—The Daily Struggle with Sin

In the sixth chapter, the apostle takes up a special work of faith, viz., the struggle of the Spirit against the flesh, which aims at the complete mortification of the remaining sins and lusts left over after justification. This teaches us that we are not so utterly freed from sin by faith that we can be *idle, lazy and secure*, as though sin did no longer exist. There still is sin, but for the sake of faith, which battles with it, *it is not imputed for condemnation*. Hence, as long as we live, we have all we can do to tame our body, to mortify its lusts, and to force its members to obey the Spirit and not the lusts. By doing this, we share the death and resurrection of Christ and perfect our baptism (which typifies the death of sins and the new life of grace), until we become completely rid of sin and rise with Christ also in our bodies and live for ever.

We can do this, the apostle says, because we are under grace and not under the Law. He explains his meaning thus: To be without the Law is not the same as having no law and being at liberty to do as one pleases, while to be under the Law means to engage in works of the Law without grace. In the latter case sin surely reigns by means of the Law, because no one is by nature a lover of the Law. This state of affairs, however, constitutes a great sin. But grace makes the Law pleasant to us, and then there is no more sin, and the Law is no longer against us, but in harmony with us.

### Christian Liberty

This condition, now, is genuine freedom from sin and from the Law. Regarding this matter the apostle writes to the end of this chapter, telling us that it is a liberty to do good gladly and to lead a good life without constraint by the Law. This liberty, therefore, is a spiritual liberty, which does not abolish the Law, but supplies us with the things which the Law demands, viz., willingness and love. These render satisfaction to the Law, so that it can no longer urge us nor make demands upon us. Suppose you were in debt to your landlord and unable to pay. You might obtain your release from him in one of two ways: either he might not take anything from you and tear up your account, or some good person might make payment for you, giving you enough to liquidate your account. In the latter way Christ has made us free from the Law. Therefore the liberty which He gives *is not a wild, carnal liberty*, which is not under

obligation to do anything, but it is very active in many ways, and yet it is not subject to the Law's demands, and not indebted to it.

## Ch. 7—Dead to the Law

In the seventh chapter the apostle confirms this teaching by an illustration taken from married life. When a husband dies, his wife, too, becomes free, and each is released from the other. Not in this sense, that the woman is not to take another husband, but rather in this sense, that she is now truly free to take another, which she could not do before she became released from her former husband.

Likewise, under the sinful old man our conscience is bound to the Law; when he has been mortified by the Spirit, the conscience is free, and each is released from the other. Not in this sense, that henceforth it is to do nothing, but in the sense that it is now to cling truly to Christ, the other husband, and yield the fruit of life.

Continuing, the apostle expands his teaching concerning sins and the Law, and shows how sin begins to become quite active and grow powerful through the Law. For the old man becomes more incensed against the Law, because he cannot pay what the Law demands. For sin is his nature, and of himself he cannot but sin. Therefore, the Law is his (instrument of) death, and inflicts on him all manner of torment. *Not that the Law is evil*, but the person's evil nature cannot tolerate what is good, and that good is required of him, just as a sick person cannot bear that people ask him to run and leap like a hale person.

St. Paul, then, in this epistle, draws the conclusion that the Law, when correctly understood and fully comprehended, accomplishes no more than that it brings our sins to our remembrance, slays us by means of them, and makes us subject to the wrath everlasting. All this is well learned *by the experience of our conscience* when it has been fully smitten by the Law, and we find out that we must have something else, *something better than the Law*, to make us godly and to save us. But those who do not understand the Law correctly are blind. They strut about in their conceit and imagine that they can satisfy the Law by their works. For they do not know how much the Law demands, namely, a willing, cheerful heart. They do not look Moses straight in the eye; the veil is before them, and the meaning of the Law is hidden from them.

## The Conflict Within the Believer

Next he shows how the Spirit and the flesh struggle with one another in an individual and offers himself as an example to teach us the right understanding of this work of slaying sin in ourselves. He calls both the Spirit and the flesh a law; for as the nature of the divine Law is to urge and make demands, so the flesh in its struggle with the Spirit urges and makes demands and rages in an effort to achieve its desire. On the other hand, the Spirit keeps urging and makes demands in opposition to the flesh and wants to achieve His desire. *This struggle lasts as long as we live;* it is more violent in one person, less so in another, according as the Spirit or the flesh grows stronger. And yet the entire person is himself both Spirit and flesh, struggling with himself until he becomes altogether spiritual.

### Ch. 8—Afflictions an Aid Against the Flesh

In the eighth chapter the apostle comforts these strugglers, telling them that their flesh does not condemn them. Furthermore, he shows what is the nature of the flesh and of the Spirit, and how the Spirit is derived from Christ, who has given us His Holy Spirit. This Spirit makes us spiritual, subdues the flesh, and assures us that as long as we follow the Spirit, resist sin, and endeavor to slay it, we are, nevertheless, the children of God, no matter how violently sin rages in us. However, since nothing serves the purpose of bruising the flesh as well as crosses and sufferings, he comforts us in our sufferings by reminding us of the help afforded by the Spirit of love and by all creatures. He tells us that both the Spirit groans within us and all creatures are yearning with us for deliverance from the flesh and from sin. Thus we see that these three chapters, 6, 7, and 8, urge upon us this single work of faith which is called mortifying the old Adam and taming the flesh.

### Ch. 9-11—Predestination or Election

The apostle's teaching in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters is concerning the eternal predestination of God, whence it originally flows, whether a person is to believe it or not, become rid of his sins or not, in order that our becoming godly may be taken *entirely out of our own hands and placed in the hands of God.* And this is of the very highest importance. For we are so feeble and full of uncertainty that, if it depended on us, not a single

person would be saved; the devil would surely overpower all. But God being reliable so that His predestination does not fail, and no one can defeat His purpose, we have still reason for hope over against sin.

However, at this point a limit has to be staked off against presumptuous and arrogant spirits, who lead their reason to this point first, start from the top, undertake to explore before everything else the abyss of divine predestination, and worry to no purpose over the question whether they are predestinated. These people become the cause of their own downfall; they either despair of their salvation or abandon themselves to recklessness.

As to yourself, I say: *Follow the order of this epistle.* Occupy your mind with Christ and His Gospel in order that you may know your sin and His grace, and then wrestle with your sin, as chaps. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 have taught you to do. After you have arrived at the eighth chapter and are subjected to crosses and sufferings, you will be rightly taught *how comforting predestination is,* as explained in chaps. 9, 10, and 11. For outside of a condition of suffering, cross-bearing, and mortal anguish, a person cannot contemplate predestination without injury to himself and without harbouring a secret grudge against God. Therefore Adam must be quite dead before a person can bear to listen to this teaching and drink of this strong wine. Beware, then, of drinking wine while you are still a suckling infant. There is a proper limit, time, and age for every doctrine.

### Ch. 12—God-pleasing Worship

In the twelfth chapter the apostle teaches us the true worship of God, and declares all Christians priests, calling upon them to offer up sacrifices, which are to be not money or cattle, as under the Law, but their own bodies and the slaying of their lusts. Next he describes the outward conduct of Christians in their spiritual government; how they are to teach, preach, rule, serve, give, suffer, love, live, and act towards their friends, enemies, and everybody else. These are works such as a Christian does. For, as was stated before, faith is never idle.

### Ch. 13—Our Duty Towards Government and All Men

In the thirteenth chapter the apostle instructs us how to honour and obey the civil government, which has been ordained for the following purpose: Al-

though it does not make people pious in the sight of God, still it effects this much, that the godly enjoy external peace and protection, and the wicked are not free to do evil without fear, with impunity and unmolested. For this reason the civil government must be honoured even by the godly, although they have no need of it. Finally, he comprises everything under the head of love, and encloses it in the example of Christ; as He has done for us, we are to do likewise and follow after Him.

### **Ch. 14—Our Duty Towards Weaker Brethren**

In the fourteenth chapter the apostle teaches us how to treat tenderly the weak consciences of believers, and to spare them, by using the liberty of Christians, not to the injury, but to the advancement of weak brethren. For wherever this is not done, discord and contempt of the Gospel, which is of paramount importance, will ensue. Accordingly, it is better to yield somewhat to those weak in faith until they become stronger than to permit the teaching of the Gospel utterly to perish. To do this is an especial work of love, and it is quite necessary even today, because by boldly and inconsiderately eating forbidden meats and taking other liberties when there is no necessity for it, the tender consciences of people become confused before they learn to know the truth of this matter.

### **Ch. 15—Christian Love**

In the fifteenth chapter the apostle places before us the example of Christ, to teach us that we must bear with other weak brethren, such as show their frailty by manifest sins or by unpleasant manners. Such persons we must not cast aside, but bear with them until they, too, are improved. For so Christ has treated us, and is still treating us every day; He tolerates in us a great many things that are not virtues, but evil habits, in addition to all our imperfections, and succours us unceasingly.

In conclusion, he prays for them, praises them, commends them to God, indicates to them his office as a preacher, and solicits in a very seemly manner a contribution for the poor at Jerusalem. In short, it is all love that he is talking about and inculcating.

### **Ch. 16—Salutations and a Warning**

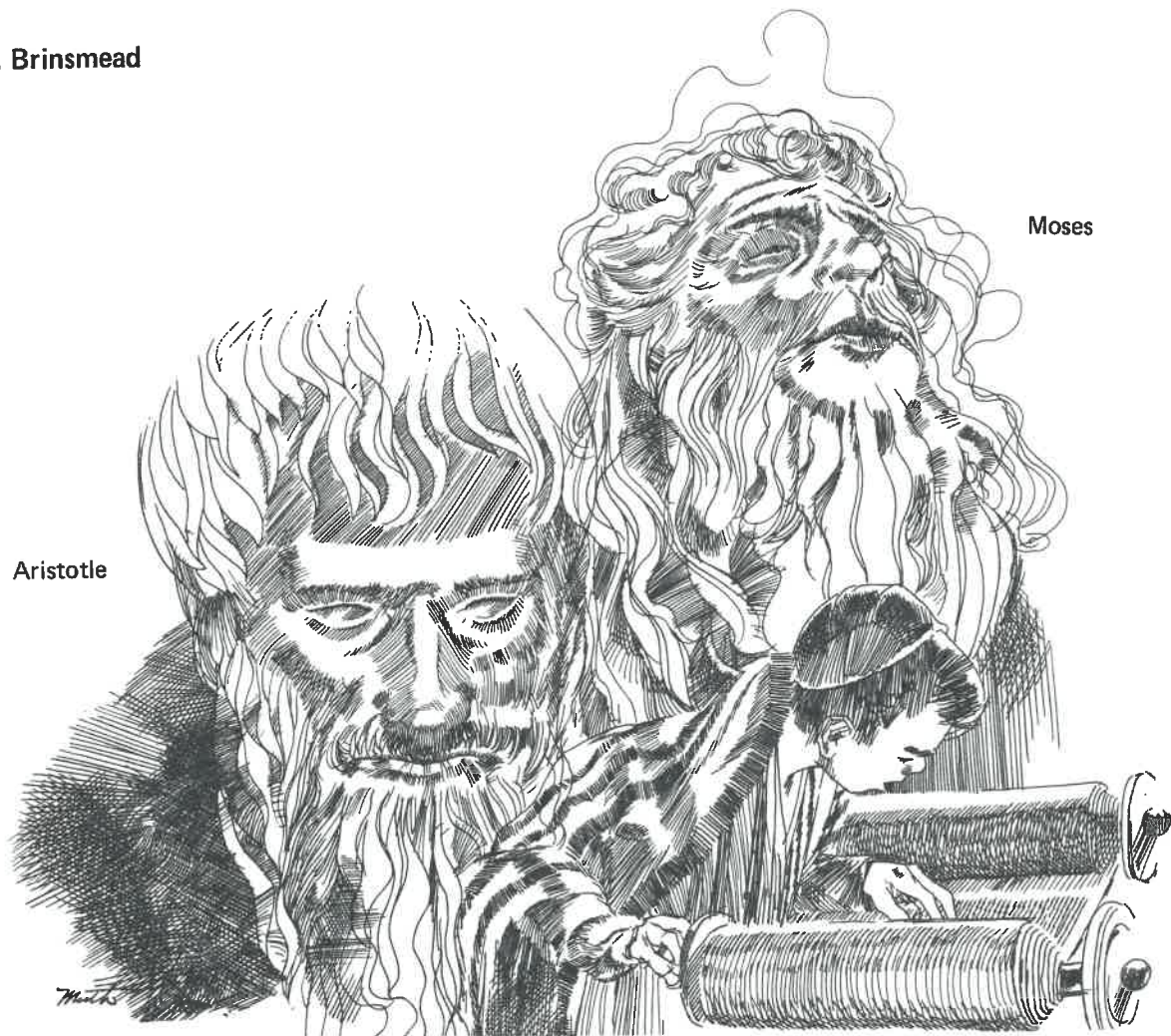
The last chapter is a chapter of salutations, but he weaves into it *a very solemn warning against doctrines of men* which are introduced along with the teaching of the Gospel and cause offences. It reads as if he had foreseen with certainty that *out of Rome and through the Romans* would come the misleading, offensive canons and decretals, and all the brood and breed of human laws and commands which now have overwhelmed the whole world, so that they have done away with this epistle and all the Holy Scriptures, together with the Spirit and faith, leaving nothing except their idol, the belly, as servants of which St. Paul denounces them in this chapter. God save us from them! Amen.

### **Summary**

You find, then, in this epistle, the greatest abundance of things that a Christian ought to know: what the Law is, the Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, cross-bearing, also how we are to conduct ourselves in every relation toward the godly and toward sinners, toward those of strong and those of weak faith, toward friends, toward enemies, and toward ourselves. Moreover, all this teaching has been masterfully built up on the Scripture ground, and illustrated by the apostle's personal example and by the example of the prophets, so that there is nothing left for us to desire. It seems, therefore, that the apostle's object in this epistle was to draw up *a syllabus of the entire Christian and evangelical doctrine*, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For any person who has received this epistle into his heart has without question the light and strength of the Old Testament in himself. Accordingly, let every Christian become familiar with this epistle, and put it into constant practice. To this end may God grant us His grace! Amen.

# A New Reformation?

Robert D. Brinsmead



“New Reformation Aborning?” This was the anxious and hopeful question raised by the editor of *Christianity Today*, October 26, 1973. Wrote he:

It is a dark, depressing day. But the first Reformation sprang from just such a climate. There may be a new Reformation aborning somewhere, perhaps in some obscure place, that will erupt suddenly and dramatically. . . . Let’s pray for a ‘revival of true religion from its primitive sources.’

The primitive source for this new Reformation is the Word of God. The Word of God was communicated to us through Hebrew people. The Hebrews had a unique way of thinking and speaking. Our culture today is quite different, and even our way of thinking is sometimes quite different. Consequently we do not always appreciate the true force of words and

concepts that are presented by those who wrote the Bible. We may read the words which these inspired men wrote, but we all tend to filter the words through the framework of our own culture, traditions and theological presuppositions. Sometimes we may have to scrape away the accretions of centuries so that the plain words of the Bible, in the framework in which these words were written, can speak to us in their primitive power.

In recent years a number of scholars throughout the world have done some valuable work in the area of Greek and Hebrew thought. They have drawn attention to the striking contrast between the two modes of thought. This is of great interest to every student of the Bible. Even though the New Testament was written in Greek, we must not suppose that it



always expresses the typical forms of Greek thought. We must remember that the writers (with the possible exception of Luke) were Hebrews. The apostles' native language was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. But above all, the New Testament has its roots in the Hebrew Old Testament and bears the unmistakable impress of the Hebraic mind.

## Examples of the Contrast Between Greek and Hebrew Thought Patterns

Let us cite several examples of the contrast that exists between the two modes of thought:

**1. Concrete and Abstract.** There seems to be a general agreement among scholars that the Hebrew manner of thinking and writing tends to be very *concrete*, while the Greek tends to be more abstract. For instance, when the apostle John says, "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4), he writes in Greek, but the thought form is Hebrew. To the Hebrew, righteousness and sin were very concrete things. God had made known His will and given His law. Righteousness meant conformity to the law, and sin was nonconformity to the law. That is the concrete framework out of which the Bible writers give their message.

The Greeks, on the other hand, were more inclined to speak of sin in an abstract way, and even though what they said might sometimes be true, sin could mean a great variety of things to a variety of people.

**2. Dynamic and Static.** In his book, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*,<sup>1</sup> Thorliff Bowman says:

If Israelite thinking is to be characterized it is obvious first to call it dynamic, vigorous, passionate, and sometimes quite explosive in kind; corresponding Greek thinking is static, peaceful, moderate, and harmonious in kind. . . . To the person to whom the Greek kind of thinking occurs plainly as ideal, Hebrew thinking and its manner of expression appear exaggerated, immoderate, discordant and in bad taste. — p. 25.

To the Hebrew, life is activity and motion. Jehovah is the God who is constantly acting in history.

For the Israelite the true reality was action and movement, and the inactive and motionless was no reality at

all. . . . Time is not an empty vanity, but a scene of meaningful action. — James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford University Press, 1961).

To the best Greek philosophy, reality was that which was beyond activity and motion, and was therefore something static and unchanging.

Now let us see how these two modes of thinking can affect our understanding of the Bible. Take for example the word "hear." Someone has pointed out that when you think of the rabbi reading the Scriptures, you must visualize him walking up and down in the synagogue as he reads. On the other hand, you must picture the Greek in a static, contemplative mood. When the Bible commands us to "hear" the Word of the Lord, we must not get the impression that we are simply being urged to make it the subject of contemplative meditation. It means that we are to responsively listen and act upon it. That is the Hebrew way of thinking. When Peter preached the gospel in the home of Cornelius, the record states, ". . . the Holy Ghost fell on all them which *heard* the Word." Acts 10:44. Obviously the "hearing" involved more than submitting Peter's message to contemplative consideration.

The same thing may be said about "faith." When the New Testament is read in the context of the Old Testament and the Hebraic mind, faith means much more than a nod of assent. Read Hebrews 11 for instance, and see how the apostle associates dynamic action with faith. Believing (in the true sense) without action, faith without works, is inconceivable; indeed, as James declares, it is no faith at all. Faith cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual process. As Luther declared, ". . . it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith."

The Hebrew concept of "remember" is also to be understood dynamically. When God saw the affliction of the Hebrews in Egypt, the Bible says, "God heard their groaning, and God *remembered* His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." Ex. 2:24. This certainly does not mean that the crisis of the Israelites jogged God's memory. To "remember" actually means that God was "ready to take action." Of great Babylon, it says in the Revelation, ". . . God hath *remembered* her iniquities." Rev. 18:5. Although this is written in Greek, it certainly conveys the Hebrew sense of action. God acts against the sins of Babylon and punishes her. When the Bible tells the penitent that God will not remember his sins, it means that God will not take action against him on account of them.

<sup>1</sup> SCM Press, London. Published in 1954 in German and 1960 in English.



The Whole Man

### 3. Wholistic and Dualistic

In Greek thought man is seen as a duality, with an immortal soul imprisoned or confined in a mortal body; the two are only temporarily or accidentally related. In Hebrew thought the "soul" and "flesh" are not separable, but one is the outward and visible manifestation of the other. — Bowan, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

It makes a lot of difference whether we think the body is a prison or a "temple of the Holy Ghost." 1 Cor. 6:19. Socrates faced death calmly because of his faith in his own immortal soul. The apostles exhorted believers to put their faith in their life

which was hidden in Christ (Col. 3:2-4), and they comforted the bereaved with the hope of the resurrection. Our *anthropology* and *eschatology* will not be Biblical if we read the Bible with Greek glasses.

**4. Relational and Ontological.** It is very characteristic of the Bible to think about the value of things *relationally*, whereas the Greek mind tends to value a thing on the basis of its own inherent quality. Since the very gospel itself is at stake here, we will spend some time explaining the vital difference and looking at some concrete examples.

a. Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat of



a certain tree in the midst of the Garden, but when Eve examined the tree on the basis of its own inherent quality, she was convinced it was "good for food." Gen. 3:6. This shows us that a thing does not have to be inherently "poisonous" to bring us the curse of death. In the case of the forbidden fruit, the only thing that made it sin was the Word of God. So it is not sufficient that we judge a thing or a deed by the sight of our eyes or by the hearing of our ears. We must first ask, "How does it stand in *relation* to the Word of God?"

b. The same principle often holds true for things which are declared to be holy. The first time that the

Bible declares anything to be holy is found in Genesis 2:1-3:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.

No quality in the day set it apart as holy any more than any special quality in the tree of knowledge set it apart as evil. The Hebrews were not commanded to regard the Sabbath as holy as if God

had done some great work on that day. (In fact, Genesis 2 says He did not work on the seventh day.) Then why was it holy, and why the command to "keep it holy"? Ex. 20:8. Simply because God's Word declared it holy.

The same thing may be said about the holy vessels of the tabernacle. They were made of clay, brass and various other material. The material itself was not holy. The vessels were holy because they were *related* to the tabernacle and to the service of the Lord. The Israelites were a holy people, not because they were *ontologically* better than Hittites or Egyptians, but because the covenant set them apart as belonging to God.

c. This brings us to the Biblical concept of man's value. The Greeks looked at man ontologically and declared that he was valuable because, as they said, he had within him a spark of divinity—an innate, death-proof entity called the immortal soul. The Bible sees man as valuable because he stands related to God by creation and to Jesus Christ by redemption. In fact, man is considered precious, not because of some great value within, but by a great value without. He has been bought by the blood of Calvary's cross.

Mephibosheth was a derelict cripple, yet he was precious to David because he was related to Jonathan. One woman thought so little of a child that she was willing to have Solomon divide him with the sword. To the other woman he was exceedingly precious because she was his mother. The preciousness was not in the child but in the eye of the mother. This illustrates how value is often determined relationally.

d. This relational principle is crucial when we come to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The righteousness of faith which is offered to us in the gospel is not a quality in us but is a righteousness which is credited to us by faith-union with Christ. The believer stands before God with perfect righteousness, but that perfection which the believer enjoys is not *ontological* but *relational*. God deals with the believer on a relational basis, and there is no other way he can stand approved at God's judgment seat.

When we look to the cross on which the Son of God died, we may see how God treats a man according to his relational position rather than his personal qualifications. Jesus Christ was righteousness personified, but when He identified Himself with sinners, God treated Him as a sinner. It is now our privilege to identify ourselves with Christ and be treated as righteous. It is not who we are, but who we are related to, that determines our eternal destiny. ". . . he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of



Plato

a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." Matt. 10:41. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Rom. 5:19.

## The Grecian Influence on the Christian Church

Grecian philosophy is man at his philosophical best. Plato represents the acme of Greek intellectual life. W.F. Albright thinks that no real advance in human thinking has taken place since the golden age of Greece in the fifth century B.C. (W.F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* [1940], p. 83). A.N. Whitehead calls the last 2500 years "footnotes to Plato."

Greece figures largely in Bible prophecy. According to Zechariah 9:13 Greece is the great enemy of the people of God. This is corroborated by some of the prophecies of Daniel. It seems that these Bible prophecies are not just talking about ancient Greece as a nation, but Greece which represents the acme of human wisdom.



Zechariah 9:13

The early church suffered a “falling away” from the faith and purity of the apostolic period. Church historians are generally agreed it was largely due to a seductive leavening of Grecian concepts, a sort of “marriage” between Christianity and Grecian philosophy. For several centuries Plato was the philosophical authority of the church’s leading thinkers. “The mental decline which clearly sets in at the beginning of the Middle Ages coincides with the rising authority of Aristotle.” — Bowan, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

As the church came more and more under the influence of Greek philosophical thought, theology was greatly affected—namely:

1. As Greek thought tends toward the *abstract*, medieval theology developed into a labyrinth of abstractions and hair-splitting distinctions. The common people could not longer understand the faith, so they left it to the hierarchy of the church to define doctrine and mediate to God for them.

2. Faith lost its *dynamic* Biblical meaning and came to be regarded as an intellectual assent to the doctrines of the church. “Works no longer coming after it, behoved to be placed beside it, and the

doctrine that man is justified by faith and by works gained a footing in the church.” — J.H. Merle D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. 1, p. 28.

3. Under the influence of Greek *dualism*, the church lost its eschatological hope, for instead of looking to the coming of Christ and the resurrection, it placed its hope in the continuation of life after death by virtue of the immortal soul. Men began to hope in their *going* rather than in Christ’s *coming*.

So too, the Biblical teaching on “flesh” and “spirit” was read with the glasses of Greek dualism. Men thought that “flesh” referred to the activities of man’s “lower” nature—things such as eating, drinking and sexuality. And “spirit” was taken to mean the activities of man’s “higher” nature—things such as meditation, prayer and other religious activities. In this framework celibacy was considered better than marriage, fasting better than eating, and pious meditation in a monastery better than secular work. Men became so “heavenly” minded that they were of little earthly good.

4. Above all, the church lost the heart of the gospel when it lost the *relational* way of Biblical thinking. Theologians put on their Greek glasses and saw the whole process of salvation only in an *ontological* way. When they read the word “grace,” they understood it to mean a quality which God puts within men’s hearts instead of simply taking it to mean a quality in the heart of God. When they read “the righteousness of faith,” they understood it to mean the renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit instead of the vicarious obedience of Jesus Christ. “Justify” no longer meant “to declare righteous” and was read as if it meant “to make righteous.” “Impute” became “infuse.” The great *relational* truths of the gospel were converted into *ontological* concepts, and men groveled in their own religious internalism.

## The Reformation as a Recovery of Biblical Thinking

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was, in many respects, a revolt against the Aristotelian and Platonic thought patterns which had such a stranglehold on the church. The Reformers partially, if not fully, recovered the Hebraic, or Biblical, way of thinking. This was especially true of Luther, who unleashed a terrific assault against medieval scholasticism. The thinking of the Reformers was more

Hebraic than Greek in the following ways:

1. Anselm had done some great work on the doctrine of the atonement in the eleventh century. He argued for the necessity of the atonement on the grounds of the holiness of God's nature, and in this made a great contribution. But he still left the doctrine largely in the realm of the *abstract*. The Reformers were the first men since the apostles to *concretely* relate the atonement to the law of God. Says Dr. George Smeaton:

A further explanation of truth was reserved for the Reformation, by penetrating more deeply into the nature of the divine Law than was ever discovered by the great scholastic. What his theory wanted, indeed, was a full recognition of the claims of *the divine law*, and of the atonement as a satisfaction of these claims in all their breadth and extent. . . .

Previous theories wanted a full recognition of *the claims of the divine law*, and of the atonement as a satisfaction of these claims in all their extent; and this became the element in which the theology of the Reformation moved, and by which all other truth was coloured. . . . Their main position, to which they were conducted by deeper views of *the extent of the law*, and of its unbending claims, was that Christ's satisfaction was perfectly identical with that which men should themselves have rendered; and in the atonement they read off the unalterable claims of the divine law. — George Smeaton, *The Atonement According to Christ and His Apostles*. Republished by Sovereign Grace Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

2. Luther's concept of "flesh" and "spirit" was a brilliant recovery of the *wholistic* Hebraic way of thinking. He understood "flesh" to mean the whole man without the Spirit, and "spirit" to mean the whole man who is guided by the Spirit. Thus the most devout religious activity could be called "flesh," and the most corporeal or secular activity could be called "spirit." This exploded the whole system of medieval piety.

The Reformer did not have any time for the medieval concept of immortality. Says Paul Althaus in *The Theology of Martin Luther*:

The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection on the Last Day. It is this which first calls the dead into eternal life (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:20f.). This resurrection happens to the total man and not only to the body. Paul speaks of the resurrection not of "the body" but of "the dead." This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands death as also affecting the total man. . . .

Thus the original biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from Hellenistic gnostic dualism. The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects the total man has had to give way to the immortality of the soul. The Last Day also loses its significance, for souls have received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological tension is no longer strongly directed to the day of Jesus' coming. The

difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is very great.

. . . the decisive New Testament insights reappear in Luther and once again become the dominating elements in his thinking. — pp. 413, 414.

4. Above all, the Reformation was a recovery of the heart of the gospel, which proclaims salvation through a *relational* righteousness that is accepted by faith. Said Luther:

Christian righteousness is not a righteousness that is within us and clings to us, as a quality or virtue does, that is, something that is found to be part of us or something that is felt by us. But it is a foreign righteousness entirely outside us, namely, Christ Himself . . . — *What Luther Says*, ed. Ewald M. Plass, Vol. 3, p. 1230.

The entire world is scrambling after personal righteousness and does not want to be saved by a righteousness that is foreign. This is the devil! For God has made a different arrangement. Our Adam is tickled only by personal righteousness. — *Ibid.*, p. 1234.

## The Situation Today

The same humanistic influences that worked in the early church have made their mark on the Protestant movement. Instead of going on from the Reformers to a more complete recovery of Biblical thought, there has been a going back. We must not underestimate the influence of Greek philosophy on Christian theology. For instance, Bowan maintains that "for centuries in English universities there has been a living Platonic philosophical tradition which has also had a great influence upon English theology." — Bowan, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

The evangelical wing of the church is often just as guilty of reading the Bible with Grecian glasses as the liberals. In fact, sometimes the liberal scholars are more aware of the problem and are candid enough to admit it. Sometimes we evangelicals are so obscurantist that we imagine it would be blasphemy even to question any of our Grecian theology.

If we are ever going to participate in a new Reformation, we will have to take off our Greek glasses and read the Bible in its Hebraic framework—*concrete, dynamic, wholistic* and *relational*. In that day will God fulfill His Word to His people:

I will raise up thy sons, O Zion,  
Against thy sons, O Greece,  
And make thee as the sword of a mighty man.  
See Zech. 9:13.

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