

THE GOSPEL EXPLAINED



*Evangelistic sermons from
the book of Romans...*

by David Legge

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"The Gospel Explained"

Evangelistic Sermons from the book of Romans

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 1

"A Message To Be Proud Of"

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'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith' - Romans 1:16-17

I want to preach to you this evening from verses 16 and 17 [of Romans 1], under the title 'A Message To Be Proud Of'. The theme of the book of Romans is the righteousness that comes from God, that is, the glorious truth that God justifies guilty sinners, condemned sinners, by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. What that simply means is that we as sinners cannot bring ourselves to God, or curry God's favour by anything that we do or anything that we are. If we're going to come near to God, we must come by grace. Grace simply means 'undeserved favour', God is going to have to bring us to Himself.

Romans reveals the good news of Jesus Christ that, through His only begotten Son, God has paved a way by grace whereby we can come to Him through the Lord Jesus, through His death on the cross, through His resurrection. It is by faith in Him, and Him alone that we can know the righteousness of God. Chapters 1 to 11 present the theological truths of that doctrine: how we can know the righteousness of God, 'justification' we might call it. Chapters 12 to 16 detail its practical outworking in the lives of individual believers, and the life of the church as a whole.

So, though the book of Romans mentions some historical characters and situations, it is not an historical book, it is a work of doctrine. The reason why it is a work of doctrinal teaching is that it is God's inspired book, given to us as an explanation of the Gospel. If you're with us on Sunday mornings, we have begun a study in the book of Mark, the Gospel of Mark, and we looked at the first verse this morning: 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. In that Gospel, and indeed in many of the Gospels, we have the account - specifically in Mark - of the significance of the cross and Gospel of Jesus Christ. But here in the book of Romans we have, in great detail, an explanation of the Gospel so that we might understand how men can be justified by God.

Verses 16 and 17 crystallise the thesis of the entire book and Paul's argument. In other words, the proposition that Paul desires to prove in his writings: the Gospel of Jesus Christ Paul is setting forth, and unfolding, and explaining to us. The Gospel is the way that men and women, and boys and girls, can be justified in the eyes of God. That's what he does in the following chapters, right through to chapter 16, he seeks to explain the answer to the age-old question that Job asked: how can a man be right with God? Have you ever asked that question? Bildad, Job's friend in another chapter in Job, asked the same question: how can man be justified with God, or how can he be clean that is born of woman?

Here we have in the book of Romans the explanation of God's answer to man's sin problem: how can man get to God? Paul says in the book of Romans: 'Through the Gospel, and here is how it is done...'. The Romans' problem is our problem, the problem of sin. But contextually, in the Roman city where this letter from the pen of Paul was addressed to, they had a similar situation to ours today in our society. Someone has said: 'Today is a consumer society, and

religion is no exception'. How true that is! Today there are so many religions to choose from, so many answers given to the question: how can a man be right with God?

There were many answers offered in Paul's day to that same question: how can you be right with God? Rome was, of course, the capital of the Roman Empire, and as such there were about a million people populating that city. Of course, being the capital of an empire that spread over much of the known world, there were many different nationalities that would have congregated through that city. It was the heartbeat of the Empire, and because of the spectrum of nationalities there were obviously different religious persuasions that were represented, and therefore there would have been a plurality of gods that would have been worshipped in the city of Rome. Verse 25 shows us that, Paul addresses the problem of idolatry, men who have 'changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen'.

So there was, if you like, a supermarket spirituality. The consumerist idea had infiltrated into religion. People had different gods. You've heard the saying: 'You pay your money, you make your choice', well it's a bit similar with religion, certainly in the day that Paul was writing to the Romans, and I would vouch to say that it's not much different today. There is an attitude around that 'Well, there are many ways to God - and they're legitimate, some of them, if not all of them'. So there is a plurality of answers given to the question: how can a man be made right with God? Now idolatry always leads to permissiveness, and we have that in verses 26 and 27 - because of idolatry: 'For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet' - homosexuality. Lesbianism and homosexuality that resulted in various sexually transmitted diseases - that we see with us today in our world.

The result of leaving the one true and living God and following other false gods, whatever they may be, is a permissiveness in society. Supermarket spirituality gives way to a supermarket morality. In the same way as men decide: 'Well, I'll choose whatever god suits me', that then leads them to a position where they decide 'Well, I'll taste whatever my sensual appetites desire. Whatever I'm inclined to, or whatever thought crosses my mind, I will follow and obey'. Now, God's word says clearly - this is not very politically correct, but nevertheless we have to preach God's word - in verse 18 God says that He is angry with all violations of His law. 'Worship the Lord and serve Him only, have no other gods before Him. Do not bow down to idols', those are the first two commandments, and God is still angry with those sins today as He was in the days of the Romans, and as He was in the days when Moses wrote those ten commandments. Also He is angry with all immorality, whatever it may be: sexual, ethical - God is angry with that. Verse 18 says: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness'.

Now, I want you to imagine this: in the midst of such a cultural cosmopolitanism, a moral liberalism, and a religious pluralism, this one little Jew, Paul, stands up and says: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek'. In other words, there was only one message that Paul was heralding forth, and it was a message for the masses, it applied to everyone - but there was only one way. Let me share this with you from verse 16, first under this heading: this was a message to be proud of, a message to be proud of - that is our title. Now, even to preach Christian certainty in our society today is frowned upon, especially when you preach it in a cultural, moral and religious hodgepodge environment, where people don't know what they

believe, and some people just believe absolutely everything. When you preach certainty, assurance, definite fundamental truth in that environment you're inevitably going to court hostility.

That's what's happening today: people are rejecting the Gospel. Now the great danger is that the Christian and the preacher becomes intimidated by that hostility levelled towards them, but we see here that the apostle Paul refused to be intimidated: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, I am proud of this Gospel'. Now, of course, we're not to be proud in anything of ourselves, anything we are or anything that we do, but it's clear from the New Testament that the only thing and the primary thing that the Christian has to be proud of is the Gospel. We should exalt, uplift the Gospel. Paul said in Galatians 6:14 that he couldn't boast in anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in that he freely boasted. Paul said to the Corinthians: 'I am determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'. He boasted in this great Gospel, and he didn't care who accepted it, who rejected it, what it looked like to others - he was proud of this message!

Now where did his boasting get him? To what extent was he proud of this Gospel? Well, we know that he was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, he was a Pharisee, his father had been a Pharisee before him, and before his conversion he was a persecutor of the church and actually sought to lead Christians to their death. All of a sudden, miraculously, by God's grace he was converted, and his life was completely turned around. He, who was perhaps the chief persecutor of Christians, became the chief proponent of the Christian faith. He was converted about AD 33 or 34, and in chapter 1 and verse 1 of this epistle we see that he became an apostle. From Acts chapter 9 we find that immediately he was converted, he started preaching this Gospel - the one who once destroyed it became a proponent and preacher of it!

Humanly, this became the primary reason, I believe, for the Gospel spreading across the Roman Empire, because of this one man, the apostle Paul. Three missionary journeys were taken in the Mediterranean world by him, and during that time he never wavered to be proud of this message. He was never ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. On occasion he was falsely accused by the Jews. He was beaten, we read in Acts 21. He was arrested by the Romans, appeared before two Roman governors - Felix and Festus - and then before King Herod Agrippa. He was found not guilty, but pressure was put upon the authorities by the Jews to keep him in prison. After two years, eventually Paul exercised the right of a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, and he journeyed to Rome. After two weeks of a stormy trip in a boat, and after a shipwreck, he got to Rome. He was released briefly, and then arrested again, and we know from history that he was martyred around AD 65-67 at 66 years of age approximately. Converted at the age of probably 30, spending 36 years, thereabouts, serving Jesus Christ, suffering for the faith - and not once was he ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, and he went through an awful lot for it!

Why was he not ashamed to such an extent? There may have been those in the city of Rome who despised the simplicity of this message of the Gospel. We know that there were in Corinth and in other places: it was just too good to be true! Too simple! A Gospel of grace? A free Gospel? A Gospel of cleansing from sin just by an act of faith? No works of your own? No trying to achieve, or learn, or earn? Someone put it like this: 'The Gospel of a crucified Jewish carpenter, preached in the street of the Imperial Rome, would have been something to be embarrassed about' - but not Paul. It may have been a stumbling block to the Jew, it may have been foolishness to the Greek, but to Paul: he was not ashamed, it was a message to be proud of - why? Because it's the power of God, the Gospel is the power of God for salvation.

Now Paul's very conversion is evidence of that fact, and Paul's own converts are examples of the Gospel's power. Now that's not pragmatism, to say that just because it works it's right - and that's what a lot of people do today. They say that if a thing works it must be right, that is false reasoning. But the fact of the matter is it works because it is right. We establish, first of all, the authenticity and the truth of what the Gospel is, and who Jesus Christ really was; and when we put faith, exercise trust, in Him and His Gospel we find out that the Gospel works! Its effects are satisfactory and mind-blowing, life-changing!

So, right away we see that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not advice - no. 'Trust Jesus and your life will be a wee bit better, you'll have a spring in your step and a smile on your face' - that is not the Gospel of Jesus. The Gospel of Jesus is not: 'This is the best way to live' - whilst it might be, that's not the Gospel. It's not even advice on how you can make your life a little bit better, or lift yourself up into the standards that God may be pleased with. Let me say this: the Gospel does not give you power to lift yourself up, that's not the Gospel. The Gospel is power in itself, and the Gospel is divine power, God's power to lift men up to Himself! I say that because religion, generally speaking, in its myriad versions, is man's attempt at getting to God, man's attempt at making himself right with God - but the Gospel is the antithesis of that, it is God's attempt to make men right with Himself. God getting to man through the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the power of God! The Gospel - you're sitting here in a church, and there's a pulpit, and a preacher, and pews, and you're all sitting there as a congregation, don't think in your mind that the Gospel is simply a load of words, or a meeting that you come to on a Sunday night, or some verbose speech from a hot-air-filled preacher. It is the very power of God, the Bible says!

This message is infused, invested, invigorated with, the Greek word is 'dunamis', it's the word that we get our English word 'dynamic' or 'dynamite' from - it is powerful! It's not a nameless power, like some New Age force going round in the universe, no: the power of God has a point to it - what is it? It is the power of God unto salvation. Salvation, though it's a religious word to many, it simply means deliverance, it simply means to be rescued - 'From what?', you say. From being lost! Verse 18, God is angry with unrighteousness, and you have unrighteousness in your life. I hope we didn't skip over your sins too quickly when we thought about the unrighteousness that was self-evident in the city of Rome. You've got sin in your life, that is why God's anger is upon us - when we break His law, when we lie, when we blaspheme, when we lust, when we covet, when hate, when we murder. God is angry when we put other things before Him, when we worship idols, even if it is only materialism, worshipping things. God's wrath is against us, but the Bible declares that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the method whereby we can be delivered from that wrath.

Not only are we delivered from wrath and lostness, but spiritual ignorance. You don't have to go round all the cults to find out which one you think is true, or all the religions, the Gospel delivers you from all that ignorance and blind groping in the dark. It brings you to the truth, the self-evident truth, and it delivers you from self-indulgence, from wasting your life away in sin, self-destruction. Most of all, it delivers you from the greatest penalty that our sins have incurred upon us, and that is eternal separation from God forever. My friend, the Bible says that our sins will eventually take us to a place called the lake of fire, where we will suffer the second death - that is what we need to be delivered from. Have you experienced that deliverance? The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, for salvation - it's powerful!

One man put it like this: 'When the Gospel enters anyone's life, it is as though the very fire of God had come upon him. There is a warmth and a light in his life'. One of the early church fathers called Theodoret remarked like this, illustrating this fact, the power of salvation: 'Many

things have their own operation hidden from the senses', and he chose a pepper, a black pepper, to illustrate this fact, 'For', he says, 'pepper outwardly seems to be cold, and to those who are unaware it gives no outward appearance of heat, but the person who crunches it between his teeth experiences the sensation of burning fire'. This Gospel to many is just fuddy-duddy religious nonsense, and the Bible testifies that even Jesus Christ, there was nothing in Him that men should desire Him of particular human beauty or regality - but in Him the very power of God is revealed, because He is God's Son, and He went to accomplish God's work in the Gospel. Though men revile it and despise it, maybe you're even here tonight and you detest this Gospel, oh that you would see that the very power of God is in it. Oh that you would see that this message of Christ and Him crucified carries with it the omnipotence of God, His all-powerfulness, for only God's power can overcome our sinful human natures, only God's power can make us right with God. Only God can do it, you can't do that, a church can't do it!

Have you experienced such power in your life? Do you feel your need of it? It is needed to counteract all the other powers in your life: the power of greed, the power of lust, the power of anger, the power of jealousy - all those passions, all those habits, all those things you can't control: this is the only power that can nullify them!

It is a message to be proud of, Paul says, because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation. But then he says that the Gospel is offered to all who believe, that's why I'm proud of it. This is the scope of the Gospel. He says: 'the power of God unto salvation; to the Jew first, and to the Greek'. He combines the Jew and the Greek, and that's signifying the totality of mankind. He is communicating this fact that, yes, the Jew is first of course - that means that he's given priority in the sense that the Messiah came from the Jews, and the Gospel was taken first to the Jews, and that's the pattern that we find in the book of Acts that the Gospel should always be taken to the Jew first - but the point that he's making is: whether you're a Jew or a Greek, in other words a Gentile, a non-Jew, nationality is never a barrier to salvation! God's power in the Gospel is greater than any boundaries, any borders, any cultural differences, any skin tones - it is greater than every type of distinction that is known to mankind!

Now may I apply this, because I feel that this, being the message to the masses, is the message that Ireland, the United Kingdom and the whole of the world needs to hear - a world that is divided by racism, nationalism, fascism, communism, you-name-the-isms. We need to hear in Northern Ireland and on this island of Ireland that there is no difference with God, He is no respecter of persons. Let me say this, and this is controversial and will offend maybe some folk in the meeting tonight, but I've got to stick with God's word: to politicise the Gospel is sin, for this is to the Jew first, and to the Greek. This is something that knows no barrier! All who are saved are saved by the one Gospel, Paul says there are no restrictions at all!

Even when we're converted, the apostle in Galatians says that we become brothers and sisters of one another who were never related: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ'. The distinctions are erased - why? Because Romans 3:23 says that just as all have sinned, all may be saved! Just as we're all guilty before God, and we've all broken God's law, and we're in this awful lost state needing salvation, needing God's power to deliver us from the power of our flesh and the world and even the devil himself: praise God that all can be saved!

I love the story of the sceptic Edwin Rushworth. He began to read the book he hated so much, the Bible, and he decided he was going to read it an hour every day. The first day: 'Wife', he said, 'if this book is right, we're all wrong'. Then he continued reading for another week: 'Wife', he exclaimed, 'if this book is right, we're all lost'. He went on reading keenly: 'Wife', he said a

few nights later, 'if this book is right, we may be saved'. That's the Gospel! That's the message of these two verses, verses 16 and 17. If this book is right, we're all wrong - and we are all wrong. We come to God's holy law and we're condemned, because none of us can live up to it, that's the purpose of God's law: to show us that we haven't a hope of getting to God on our own steam. The conclusion of that is that we're lost, all of us. But praise God, the power of God unto salvation is in the Gospel so that men can be saved! Praise God, Edwin Rushworth and his wife were saved, and they left all their 'ifs' behind them. God's word was true, and they were converted.

Let me say this: the only restriction that there is in the Gospel message and the power of God unto salvation is faith. 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to' - who? Everybody? No. To him that believeth. Let me dispel a modern fallacy, because in the spectrum of religious belief that we have today in our world, just like Paul's, people are saying: 'Well, as long as you have faith in a god, or faith in a system, I mean you Christians are always propagating that it's faith that saves'. Whilst we say those words, they are qualified, because it's not 'faith' that saves - no, no. It is faith in the Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who He is and what He did, that saves. Because there's no power in faith, that's why there's no power in the ecumenical movement or in other religions, because it's this attitude that 'All roads lead to God', and as long as your faith is sincere and devoted that's all that matters - no! Your faith has got to be in the Gospel that's got power in it, and there's only one with God's power, the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Let me say also that it doesn't matter how weak your faith is in that Gospel, a strong Christ can receive a man or woman with weak faith. That demolishes a number of objections. People say: 'Ach, it's not for me'. Paul says it is for you, if you believe it's to the Jew first and also to the Greek, it's a universal offer. People say: 'Ach, but that's not my persuasion, that's not my way. You know, I was born into this religion, or this denomination'. Listen: banish the thought! Paul says, God's word is saying through Paul: no distinction, all that matters is that your faith is in Christ. What it also does in the converse is that it shatters the faith of anyone who trusts in a church, in a saint, in a catechism, in an ordinance or a sacrament, or a religion or whatever other than Christ, or above Christ, or added to Christ. There's no power in that, that faith will never save, but faith in Christ and Christ alone.

This is an offer that's only to those who believe, but can I finish by saying that this is not just a message to be proud of, but a message to be justified. Paul says in verse 17: 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith'. Man's problem is sin. If I can say it, you understand what I mean when I say it, God's problem in bringing man to Himself is His holiness. Our sin is our problem, but God's problem is that He is a holy God and can't look upon sin. So how does He bring us together? The only answer, this is what Romans is telling us, is to give men the righteousness of God, give men the holiness of God - but we certainly couldn't live up to that. How can we have the righteousness of God? Verse 17 says that in this is the righteousness of God given: 'For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith', better translated, 'the righteousness from God, given from God' - the Gospel is the way that God makes men right with Himself, to bring them to Himself, and that is operated by faith in Christ.

The Chinese language is a pictorial language, and the character in Chinese for 'righteousness' is interesting, it is composed of two other characters, separate characters. One represents a lamb, and the other is the word for 'me'. I'm led to believe that when the lamb is placed directly above 'me', there's a new character created that means 'righteousness'. That's the Gospel: the Lamb was put above me, He was made sin for me, He took my place on my behalf,

and He came to be the Saviour on God's behalf to bring righteousness to men, to bring satisfaction to God, so that God could bring Himself and men together. He who knew no sin became sin, was made sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him - that is the Gospel! It's not about you, my friend, or what you can do, or how you can be. Horatius Bonar put it like this:

'Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die;
Another's life, Another's death,
I stake my whole eternity'.

Christ dying for you, bleeding for you, taking your sin - and faith in Him, and that alone. This, Paul says, is the way that God is revealed. It doesn't come through your natural knowledge, or through your religious work or effort, it is the revelation of God; and, as such, all that must be done is for it to be received. How do you receive it? By faith! Oh, I can't make it any clearer. 'From faith to faith', verse 17 says, that means 'by faith from first to the last', faith through and through. To reinforce his point, Paul quotes an Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk 2:4, that: 'The just shall live by faith', or 'He that is just, by faith will live'. Righteousness has been revealed from God in the Gospel, and that righteousness can be received by faith alone in Christ.

Romans 4:5 puts it well: 'And to the one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted unto righteousness'. Now let me ask you very plainly as we close our meeting: have you exercised faith in Jesus Christ and in His Gospel? Let me be plain here. You're saying, perhaps, 'How do I exercise faith?'. Well, faith consists of three things, there are three aspects: one is mental, two is emotional, three is volitional. The mental is: you've got to understand in your mind what the Gospel is all about, and we've been talking about that tonight. You understand the truth of who Christ is, God's Son and also flesh of your flesh apart from sinfulness. Do you understand that? Do you understand that He died for your sin? Do you understand that you cannot earn your salvation, and there's nothing in you that is worthy of God's favour? Nothing! You deserve hell, my friend - but Jesus came to save people like you and me who deserve hell. Do you understand it?

The next step of faith is emotional, that is: 'Saving faith', as one has said, 'is grasping God with the heart'. It is to embrace the truthfulness of the things that you've understood with your mind - that means that you've got to have sorrow over your sin! Not just saying: 'Oh, I wouldn't mind going to heaven one day, I think I'll have that' - no, that consumerism has no part in God's salvation. Sorrowing over your sin means repentance, because repentant faith is saving faith. It also means, not only being willing to turn from your sin and change your mind about what sin does and where sin is taking you, but have great joy at the wonder of God's mercy and God's grace, realise emotionally what He is offering you!

A mental response, an emotional response, and a volitional response - that is your will, your volition. That is, you must submit to Christ's will and trust Him alone as your only hope of salvation. William Gurnall, the Puritan, put it like this: 'Faith has two hands. With one it pulls off its own righteousness, and throws it away. With the other it puts on Christ'. Have you thrown away your own righteousness, and attempts at it, and your unrighteousness, and by faith put on Jesus Christ? Such a faith will always produce obedience.

My friend, let me say tonight: this is the only way to be right with God - through the Gospel - and it requires a response. You must have faith in Christ to be right with God.

Oh Father, what an expression of utter helplessness and abandonment: 'Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace. Foul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die'. Oh Lord, may a sinner, conscious of their sin and their need, come just like that to Jesus; and by faith hide themselves in the Rock. Lord we, Your children, afresh hide ourselves in the cleft of the Rock - for as we have been saved by grace, we don't keep going on in the flesh. It's grace that saves us and grace that keeps us. Lord, if it wasn't for Your grace, none of us know where we'd be tonight. Help all of us, no matter who we are or where we are, to cling always to the cross and hide ourselves in Thee. Amen.

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 2

"The Wrath Of God"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles this evening to Romans chapter 1. You will remember that last week we looked at verses 16 and 17 of Romans chapter 1. This evening, God willing, we'll be looking just at one verse, verse 18, under the title 'The Wrath of God'. We'll begin reading at verse 16 through to verse 18:

Paul, writing to the believers in the city of Rome, says: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"*.

I did share with you last Sunday evening that the book of Romans is an inspired explanation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What Paul the apostle is doing for us is, he is describing how a man can be right with God. His thesis is found in verse 16, what he sets out to prove is that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, it is the only method whereby a man can be saved. Then in verse 17 we saw that he introduces us to the righteousness which comes from God, and that is, of course, a theme that he develops from chapter 3 verse 21 through to chapter 5 verse 21.

But what Paul is presenting to us tonight in verse 18, as we will see in subsequent weeks in the following verses, is the overwhelming evidence of man's sinfulness. So though the theme of the book of Romans is the righteousness of God, Paul begins in verse 18 showing us the unrighteousness of man. Now, why does he do that? Well, his purpose in doing that, I believe, is to underscore how desperately man needs the righteousness that only God can provide. So he presents God's case, first of all against the irreligious or the immoral - pagans.

In verses 18 to 32 of chapter 1 he speaks, many believe, about the Gentiles who are sold in idolatry and various forms of immorality - though he doesn't mention the Gentiles because the descriptions of the sinner that are found in those verses can apply to all men, wherever they come from, whatever particular colour or creed they aspire to. Then later on in chapter 2 through to chapter 3 about verse 18, he speaks about the religious, and how even the religious are guilty before God. Whilst you may not be a Gentile, you may even be an outwardly religious Jew, yet Paul concludes that whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you have done, that all men alike deserve God's judgment - all men are guilty before God.

So if you like, in verse 18 of chapter 1 Paul is bringing us into God's court room, and he is indicting all mankind, Jew and Gentile, religious, immoral pagan, indicting them as sinners before a holy God. His goal is, as Romans 3:19 tells us, that every mouth may be stopped, and that all the world may become guilty before God. Now the question is obviously posed to us tonight in the light of that: why does Paul need to present evidence of man's sinfulness? The simple answer is because many do not believe they are sinners - many in Paul's day and many in our day. Therefore a Gospel that Paul is presenting, which he claims is the power of God unto salvation if you believe in it, is pretty useless, it is irrelevant to those who don't believe

they're lost in the first place! That's why, for most people in society today, the Gospel is irrelevant - because they deny that they are sinners. Why do you need a Gospel to save you if you've no need of being saved because you're not lost?

So, in order to convince men of their need of this Gospel, Paul needs to convince them in his argument that they are lost, that they are sinners, they are guilty before God and they are under the wrath of God. An evangelist by the name of Ray Comfort illustrates it like this: 'Imagine I told you I've got some good news for you, somebody has just paid a £25,000 speeding fine on your behalf - what would you think? You probably would react by saying, 'What are you talking about? That's not good news, it doesn't make any sense, I haven't got a £25,000 speeding fine'. To you it would seem foolishness, but more than that it might even be offensive because I'm insinuating that you have broken the law when you don't think that you have. However, if I put it this way it might make more sense: On the way to this meeting this evening you broke the law. The law clocked you travelling at 55 mph through an area set aside for a blind children's convention. Along the way there were ten clear road signs stipulating that 15 mph was the legal limit. Therefore the law is about to set in motion, taking its course to punish you for breaking it. But all of a sudden, someone who you don't know stepped in and paid the fine for you. You are very fortunate.

Ray Comfort is making the point, and I hope that you can see it tonight, that in order to make you see your need of the Gospel, you must first realise that you have done wrong. In order to understand the good news, that it is good news, you've got to grasp the bad news that before God's holiness you are guilty. If you don't understand that, the Gospel is foolishness, it might even be offensive because you don't understand that you're guilty and have broken God's holy law. So if I came along to you, as often is done even on the street, and say: 'You know, God loves you and Christ died for you', it's foolishness! It's like saying that your fine has been paid, without knowing that you have caused the offence. So Paul is saying that you need to understand God's law, and you need to understand that you have broken it, and you need to understand that by breaking it you have made God angry with you.

Do you understand it? You see, most people think on the whole that they're pretty decent. They may not be perfect, but as far as they're concerned they have not done any great wrong, and since they're not conscious of any real disastrous sin in their life they feel that they must be right with God. God couldn't possibly be angry with them! But for Paul the significant thing is not that people have met their own standards, but that people have not met God's standards! This problem is perpetuated by ministers and so-called Christians who don't preach that men are sinners, they don't make people aware of the consequences of being sinners. Often, even in a Gospel presentation like this, the choice is given to people in a sort of quasi-religious form: 'If you keep on living your way of life, well, that's only life; but if you want life to the full, and life at its best, and better life, you need to trust Christ'. It's this idea that He'll transform your life into something better than it is now, even though you might be already enjoying yourself a little bit. That is not the Gospel.

The Gospel is the choice between life and death, between heaven and hell, between God's righteousness provided in Christ and God's wrath for those who reject His righteousness in Jesus! Paul is reasoning that if the Gospel is going to have any affect - that is, save people - people must first know their need of it. The best way to make them aware how much they desperately need the Gospel is to show them how angry God is with sin and with sinners, tell them about God's wrath. When was the last time you heard a sermon on God's wrath?

Well, I'm going to break up this text, verse 18, into three headings which are found within the

text. First of all: what it is; secondly: where it is; and thirdly: why it is. God's wrath, what it is. Let me say first of all what it is not: God's wrath is not an impulsive outburst of anger that's aimed erratically or capriciously against people who God just doesn't like. When we think of anger, we often think of an emotional rage, that is not the wrath of God - perhaps the problem is our understanding of the word. In the Bible God's wrath is a settled determined response of a righteous God against sin. It is a steady and a steadfast, absolute opposition to all that is evil - that is right throughout the whole Bible. It's documented in the Old Testament that God is presented as a God who loves righteousness and hates wickedness. In Psalm 76 verse 7 we read that the Psalmist says to God: 'Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?'. Psalm 90, written by Moses, verses 7 and 8: 'For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance'.

Now many people have a false conception, they feel that the Old Testament God is a God of wrath; but the New Testament God, to the contrary, is a God of love who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Of course, God is a God of love, and John 3:16 is that famous verse that describes God, who loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. But what many overlook is that where that text is found, John 3:16, at the end of that chapter, John 3:36, we read: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him'.

Scripture reveals that God is, yes, a God of love, but He is also a God of wrath, a God who has a settled, determined, steadfast, absolute opposition to all that is wicked and sinful. Scripture never reveals one attribute of God at the expense of another, and God's love does not contradict God's wrath - in fact, if anything, it compliments it. God's wrath is essential for a right understanding of His love, and of His grace and forgiveness. Let me make sure you understand what I'm saying: in the Gospel it's all about God's mercy, God's compassion, God's lovingkindness, His forgiveness - but mercy is absolutely meaningless in relation to justice if there is no such a thing as God's anger. I looked up the dictionary definition of 'mercy', and it simply 'compassion shown to offenders'. You cannot know mercy unless you have offended. So any attempt to in some way retain a doctrine of divine love, that God loves everyone, without a doctrine of divine wrath is completely illogical and irrational. A God who cannot be angry is a God who cannot have mercy!

We often think, you see, erroneously that the opposite of love is wrath. No, the opposite of love is hatred. God's wrath is in complete agreement with His love, it is essential to the character of God. As one has put it: 'As long as God is God, He cannot behold with indifference that His creation is destroyed and His holy will trodden underfoot. Therefore He meets sin with His mighty and annihilating reaction'. Do you know what the real problem is for us when we contemplate the wrath of God? It is not that it is illogical or does not agree with God's love, it is that it is uncomfortable for us as sinners - that is the problem. James Montgomery Boice put it this way: 'The wrath of God is not ignoble, rather it is too noble, it is too just, it is too perfect, it is this that bothers us'. It frightens us, because the wrath of God is as pure as the holiness of God, and when God is angry that means that He is perfectly angry - and that means that when He is displeased there is every reason that He should be! When His displeasure is toward our personal sins we get uncomfortable.

Now, there is great hypocrisy on man's part when it comes to God's wrath and justice. Let me illustrate it like this to you: I don't know when you do your shopping, but say it's tomorrow, Monday morning. You drive down in your new car to the supermarket, and as is often the case

somebody backs into the side of your car. This gentleman won't allow you to claim on his insurance, although he is clearly at fault, and so you decide that you take him to court. Finally in the courtroom they admit that they were in the wrong, but then they express to the judge these words: 'But my Lord, I didn't mean it' - and he gets off! Now we could almost envisage this happening today in our legal system, but if it did you would be up in arms, wouldn't you? 'But he admitted that he did it, it doesn't matter whether he meant it or not! He did it, that's not justice!'. Some men, whether in a football stadium or sitting in front of the television, if the referee makes the wrong decision they blow a fuse! 'That's not fair, where was the justice in that call?', yet when it comes to God, He's not allowed any justice at all! He's not allowed to be just! The referee is allowed to have it, the justice is allowed to have it, the policeman is allowed to wield it, but not God.

What it is: it is God's anger towards sin. Where it is: verse 18 says, 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven', that means it's holy, 'against all ungodliness' - but this is the word I want you to notice, it is 'revealed' from heaven. That literally could be translated 'constantly revealed', the word essentially means 'to uncover something, to make something visible or to make known'. Now God's wrath is revealed from heaven in two ways, and I want you please to remember this. First of all: the self-inflicted consequences of sin. The context of this chapter, as we'll see in subsequent weeks, is where God's word is speaking directly to those in immorality. In verse 24 we see that some of the self-inflicted consequences of sin for these pagans was that God gave them over, verse 24, to uncleanness. He gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves - sexual immorality. In verse 26 we see another self-inflicted consequence, that God then 'gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature' - lesbianism. In verse 28, another self-inflicted consequence: He gave them up to a reprobate mind, 'even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient'.

In verse 27 we actually read that there was a physical consequence: 'Likewise also the men', homosexuality, 'leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet' - in other words, the self-inflicted consequences of their sin, STDs, sexually transmitted diseases. This is the law of sowing and reaping. In other words, if you sow maize in a field you're not going to produce wheat. It is the natural consequence of violating God's universal moral law, and if you sin against God you will reap a whirlwind. I heard someone say recently: 'If you sow your wild oats you can't pray for a failed harvest'. The law of the harvest dictates that what a man sows, that will he also reap, for God is not mocked.

Are you sowing sin before a holy God? Are you reaping the self-inflicted consequences? It could take one hundred, one million forms - but you know all about it, that is what the wise man meant when he said: 'The way of the transgressor is hard'. You are reaping that way every step of your life, because of the self-inflicted consequences of sin. Now that's indirect, but it's true that God occasionally breaks through into human history and experience to show His extreme displeasure at man's sin, the direct divine intervention of God. Genesis 7 tells us that there, just after the beginning of all time, that man got to such a peak of sinfulness, the imaginations of his heart were only evil continually, that God said: 'I've had enough, I must wipe man off the face of the earth', and He sent a flood. In Genesis 19 we have the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and many of these features in Romans 1 were found there also - homosexuality and sexual immorality. Again God, in a very graphic sense, sent fire and brimstone upon those cities in judgment because their sin had reached its stench to heaven.

Let me say this to you: there are the self-inflicted consequences of sin that we reap in everyday personal experience, and there are these direct interventions of God that we have in Old Testament history, but the most graphic revelation of God's holy wrath against sin was when it was poured out upon His only begotten Son in divine judgment at the cross. If you want to know where God's wrath has been revealed from heaven, look to the cross! The Psalmist, prophetically speaking of Christ, said in Psalm 88:7: 'Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves'. When we look at the cross we see the most violent and most mysterious outpouring of God's wrath. It is wonderful when we believe in Christ, it is Good Friday when we put our trust and faith in Christ alone and avail of His righteousness that He gives freely to those who trust in Him - but yet what I want you to see tonight, particularly if you're not a believer and you're estranged from God's forgiveness, is that the cross, more than anything, is the most terrible warning to the unrepentant.

Why is that? Simply because if God spared not His Son on whom was laid - only laid, imputed now - the sins of others, He was not dying for His own sins, He's taking your sin and my sin as His own. If God spared not His Son in those circumstances, will He spare sinners whose sins are their own?

My friend, God's wrath - where is it? It is seen in everyday life in the circumstances where you reap what you sow in sin. It is seen in some cataclysmic divine interventions of God in history, particularly in the Old Testament. It is seen at Calvary, where Jesus is dying and exhausting the wrath of God because He loves sinners. But, my friend, I want you to note that in verse 18 that word 'revealed' from heaven, speaking of the wrath of God, is in the present tense. That means that it is being revealed now, constantly revealed. People often project God's wrath to a future day, they talk about the last judgment when the books will be opened - and that is true. Hebrews 9:27 says: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' - but death will not end God's wrath. Revelation 20 verse 15 tells us that there is a lake of fire, whosoever is not found in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. But have you ever thought, my friend, of how God's wrath is being constantly revealed now, at this moment. Matthew Henry, the puritan, put it like this: 'As God's mercies are new every morning towards His people, so His anger is new every morning against the wicked'. The Psalmist in Psalm 7:11 said: 'God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day'.

My friend, if you're not clothed in the righteousness of Christ, God's wrath abides on you now, God is angry with you now - but the good news of the Gospel, when you understand that, is that the good news is also in the present tense. Verse 17 speaks of the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, that's the present tense. God's salvation that can clothe us to make us worthy in God's eyes to come into His presence, it is being revealed now, you can have it now. In chapter 5 and verse 8 God demonstrates His love toward us, reveals His love 'in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. That is also in the present tense - God, though Christ died 2000 years ago, is still communicating His love through the cross now - it's constantly being revealed in the Gospel!

My friend, you are under God's wrath now! But God's righteousness in Christ is available to you now, and the great question that poses to you tonight is: what is my response? That is where it is: it is here now. We've heard what it is, but finally why it is. Maybe you're still doubtful that you deserve God's wrath. Verse 18 shows us what God's wrath is vented against - two aspects of sin: ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. God has revealed His wrath against those two things. Now ungodliness is sin against God - un-god-liness. A lack of reverence, devotion to, and worship of the true God. It's having a defective relationship with God. It may be that you

disregard His existence, you're an atheist or someone who says 'I just don't know', agnostic, or it may be a refusal to retain the knowledge of God in your mind. You believe He's there, but you just don't want to think about Him, you don't want to answer to Him.

Then this second word is 'unrighteousness', and that, if you like, is sin against man - it is the result of ungodliness. If you don't have a right relationship with God, you'll not have a right relationship with mankind. This is a lack of conformity in your thoughts, in your words, in your deeds to the character and the law of God. It's the condition of not being straight, not being right with God or with others according to God standards, but even at times according to the standards of men. Here is Paul's point: God's wrath is revealed from heaven against ungodliness, sins against God; and against unrighteousness, sins against mankind. In other words, sin, whatever kind it may be, will not go unpunished. Whether it is against God or men, ungodliness or unrighteousness, these two cover both tables of the law. The first five commandments, our duty toward God: no other gods before the living God; no images; do not take the name of the Lord in vain; remember the Sabbath day; honour your father and your mother. Then the next are toward man: do not kill; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not covet. God-ward and man-ward, God is angry at transgressions of His law whatever form they take! All ungodliness and unrighteousness, no exceptions, nothing overlooked - in other words, we cannot say that God does not mind some evils, He is angry toward them all!

Then we see that He is also angry at those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. That word 'hold' means 'hold down, or suppress, or hinder the truth' - in other words, people who know the truth about God. He outlines for us, as we'll see in verse 19 through to chapter 2, that in conscience men know God. God has written His law on their heart so that we know what is right and what is wrong. In creation, as Graham has already alluded to, in chapter 1 verse 20 we see that God's fingerwork is written across the whole universe! But also in God's word, the revelation of Himself and His Son and the Scriptures, it's irrefutable - yet there are men who resist it, who oppose God's truth, holding fast to their sin. They do not allow God's truth to work in their lives, and like the Psalmist says in Psalm 14: 'The fool has said in his heart, There is no God'. John put it in chapter 3:19 that men love darkness rather than light, this is the condemnation that has come upon them.

Are you a person who suppresses God's truth in your life in order to live your own life the way that you want, and in order to avoid the conviction that comes from knowing God's truth? How do you know if you've done it? You're sitting here: 'How do I know if I'm a person who suppresses God's truth in my life, and God's wrath is upon me?' - very simple. When the still small voice of conscience speaks to you about wrong, and you disregard it, God's wrath is upon you. Next, when you hear that voice, and you don't just discard it but you thwart it, you try to do away with it completely. Then eventually the next phase is that that conscience becomes systematically deadened, seared, sterilised, and the truth of God which God left with you and left in you is completely obstructed, until you get to the position where you hardly know right from wrong, good from evil - are you doing this now, my friend? Your understanding is darkened, the Bible says, you're alienated from God and the wrath of God is upon you!

Oh, what God's wrath is I could never explain. Where it is is not only in hell, but it's on you now if you're outside of Christ. You know the reason why it is, particularly if you're a person who has known God's truth and has suppressed its influence in your life. Let me say to you tonight, as Thomas Watson the puritan put it, 'Sinners may oppose God's ways, but not His wrath'. You can suppress His truth now, you can have your innings now, but the day of God is coming soon. The essence of God and administration of His wrath is basically giving sinners

what they chose, nothing more, nothing less.

One day the governor, Felix, stood before the apostle Paul. 'Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ', and as it says in the book of Acts, Paul 'reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee'. Felix trembled at God's wrath, but in the end he chose it. You might tremble tonight at God's wrath, even God's wrath on Christ that has provided a way for you to be saved - make sure, my friend, you don't choose God's wrath over God's righteousness by faith in Jesus.

Father, we thank You for this evening, and we thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus, for His great provision as He exhausted, soaked up the wrath of God for us on that centre cross, shedding His blood that we might be forgiven and cleansed, and never lift up our eyes in hell. Yet Father, we know that that wrath is still upon those who are impenitent, and have never turned from their sins and believed the Gospel. Lord, we pray tonight that this would be the evening when some soul will see their sins on Jesus, and their faith and trust in Him, and go on their way rejoicing that their sins have been forgiven. Those of us who are converted give You our heartfelt, deep thanks for so great salvation. Thank You for ever saving us from wrath, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 3

"When God Gives Up"

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I want us to turn in the scriptures together to Romans chapter 1. Whilst this is somewhat a special title that I've taken tonight, it is part of an ongoing series that we're looking at from time to time on a Sunday evening - not every Sunday night, but from time to time - entitled 'The Gospel Explained'. It is a series of Gospel messages in Paul's epistle to the Romans, and that's what this book is all about in the Bible - it is an explanation, sometimes a bit difficult, of what the Gospel is all about. It's worth spending time in, breaking up and applying, so that we can really understand what many folk are confused about. The portion that we have reached is very contemporary to what has been going on in our past week, particularly in the Houses of Parliament and the House of Lords, and I feel led to take up chapter 1 again.

We'll read from verse 16, though we have already dealt with 16, 17 and 18, and we'll be looking at 19 through to the end of the chapter this evening. We'll read from verse 16 so that we understand Paul's flow of thought, so do read with me. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry, just listen to God's Word or share with someone kind, perhaps, beside you, their Bible. Paul says in verse 16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness", or who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over", or gave them up, "to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them".

It's important that we stress this evening that everything we say is based on the scriptures, we're not expressing our own opinion, but we are expressing what the Bible teaches in everything that we say. Perhaps we can bow just now in a word of prayer, and express to the Lord what has just been sung - that we need Him. Let us pray: Father, let us never ever get to the stage where we don't need You, or feel that we don't need You any more. Lord, we need You now, and this moment has the greatest need ever, and Father we just pray that You will come and be everything that we need in understanding. Lord, we pray that folk in this gathering would have hearts that are open, minds that are disposed to understand what the scriptures teach: the awful situation that our land is in, and we as individuals are in, if we are without Christ. We pray that the good news of the hope that is in Jesus will be what will remain with folk this evening from what we share. Lord, open the windows of heaven, pour out a blessing. As You blessed churches in this province in bygone days, we pray that You will bless them again, and bless this company tonight with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with salvation, and Your children with revival. In the Saviour's name we pray, Amen.

'Why God Has Given up on the United Kingdom'. What led me to take that title is, on Tuesday evening the House of Lords failed in an attempt to annul the Sexual Orientation Regulations for Northern Ireland. You may or may not know that the Sexual Orientation Regulations for England, Scotland and Wales have not been published yet, but they are to be soon. It is envisaged that they will be imposed upon those nations around April. However, we have already, here in the province, had the Sexual Orientation Regulations for Northern Ireland imposed on us by Westminster. Even though 2000 people gathered outside to protest, the motion was rejected by 199 to 68 - that is a two thirds majority. The government obviously is intent on bringing forward laws not only here in Ulster, but across the United Kingdom, to outlaw sexual orientation discrimination - laws which many religious and non-religious commentators believe will pose a significant threat to freedom of conscience and freedom of speech in our land.

It has been widely acknowledged how these laws could interfere with our freedoms. Even the BBC, which I'm sure you will agree is no friend to Christianity, on the 10 O'Clock News on Tuesday evening said, and I quote: 'A photographer refusing to work at a civic partnership', that is, the civic partnership of two homosexuals, 'could be prosecuted under this new law. A printer asked to produce leaflets for a Gay pride march might also fall foul of it. A hotel owner who would not allow a gay couple to sleep together may find himself in court'. This controversy over the Bible's teaching on homosexuality has already affected many people in our land and organisations. I want to really stress that: this is not something that is going to happen. I am not prophesying or predicting that it will occur. It is taking place now in our land.

It has affected university Christian Unions, some of which have been expelled from the Students Union of the universities that they belong to. The present one in the news is Exeter University. This is beginning, and will affect schools. It will force teachers to teach that homosexuality as an orientation is an equally valid lifestyle to heterosexual marriage. Teachers may be prosecuted for insinuating, even, that marriage between a man and a woman is the desirable choice for relationships. Now I've highlighted these examples, but you can only imagine how these new laws will affect churches and Christians.

Let me say, before I go on any further that we strongly oppose, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, harassment or hatred of anyone. I don't want anything I say this evening to be misinterpreted. It is not an incitement for people to go out and 'gay-bash'. It is not in any way trying to get folk to be unkind to others who are of a different persuasion than us. But let me

stress this: though that is the case, there are already firm criminal laws protecting everyone in our land, whatever their race, whatever their culture, whatever their religion, whatever their sexual persuasion - the laws are already there. These laws will do more damage to those who believe that homosexuality, according to God's word, is sin. It is certain that there are those in our society who will seek to use these laws against churches and Christians.

Let me give you a few examples. Take a church like ours, where to be a member you have to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who is converted, and of course, if the Bible teaches that we are to repent of all sin, a practising homosexual could not become a member of this church and many others in our land. That will become grounds, potentially, for suing churches like ours. But it's more general that - forget about membership - even a night like this evening, preaching on this subject, a homosexual may be given the right to sue if they feel that an offensive environment has been created for them. There are already many examples of how Christians are being affected for their faith, and for their stance against sin - not against individuals, but against what God has said is abomination in His sight.

In 2005 a Christian couple from England, Joe and Helen Roberts, were interrogated by the police because they complained about their local council's gay rights policy. The police said that they were responding to a reported homophobic incident. Later the police admitted that no crime had been committed - but that was after the event. In 2002, you may have read this in the press, an elderly street preacher was assaulted by gay rights activists, and then he was arrested - he was arrested! - for carrying a placard which said: 'Stop immorality, stop homosexuality, Jesus is Lord'. At his trial he was convicted, fined £300, plus costs of £395. Shortly after that the elderly gentleman died.

On the screen you will see an advertisement that was published by the Gay Police Association in the UK. What it does is it effectively blames Christians for homophobic attacks. Now maybe your eyesight doesn't allow you to read it, but this is what it says: 'The Name of the Father', a picture of the Bible and blood spilt on the ground, and the caption says 'In the last 12 months the Gay Police Association has recorded a 74 percent increase in homophobic incidents where the sole or primary motivating factor was the religious belief of the predator. Verbal abuse and physical assault against gay men and women is a criminal offence, and should always be reported to the police. Discrimination against gay people in the workplace is also unlawful and should be reported to the employers, who have a duty of care to prevent it. Homophobia can never be justified, and must never be tolerated'. Down below, on the bottom right, you can see: 'Gay Police Association in Scotland and Northern Ireland'.

Now whilst, we repeat again, we do not encourage or condone physical violence against anyone, but clearly this advertisement is blaming Christians, and those who believe that homosexuality as a practice is a sin, for these homophobic attacks. Now, just in case you think I'm some kind of religious fanatic, the Advertising Standards Agency ruled that that advertisement breached the industry's rules on decency and truthfulness. They were, in fact, saying that it was wrong to blame Christians and those with a religious conscience for homophobic attacks. This is the propaganda being released by even the police.

On the 7th of September 2006, Melanie Phillips, a journalist with the Daily Mail, wrote an article, and this was the caption on it, the headline - as an evangelist, his name was Stephen Green, is arrested for handing out Bible verses, that was at a Gay Pride march - 'How Britain Is Turning Christianity Into A Crime'. Her premise was that that is exactly what our government is seeking to do, turn the faith of our fathers into a crime for the stance that we take against sin, upholding God's word.

Now all of these contemporary developments, I believe, according to Romans chapter 1 are definite signals that God has given up the United Kingdom. Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying: the United Kingdom has always been a sinful land. We do not believe in the unification of church and state, and there is no such a thing as a Christian country - but our land has always come under the benefit and the blessing of days gone by, when she revered the Bible and Christian Gospel. That influence has been detracted over several years, decades, we could say centuries, and we are beginning to see signs that are also evident in Romans chapter 1 to show us not that God is about to give this nation up, but God has given the United Kingdom up. Now why is that? Simply, to answer, because the United Kingdom has given up on God. God gives up on those who give up on Him.

Now the book of Romans is a book explaining the Gospel, in other words it teaches us how man can be right with God. Now that presupposes that man is wrong with God in his relationship - because man has given up on God, generally speaking, right across the globe. So what Paul does in these first two chapters of Romans is, he proves to us how wrong man is in God's sight. In verse 18 we read these words: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness'. Now what Paul is doing is, he is causing us to enter into God's courtroom, and he begins to indict all mankind before God as the Judge. His general charge is: mankind has suppressed truth in order to sin.

That applies to nations: they reject truth in order to get up to what they want. It applies to individuals: we reject God's word, and the claims of the Gospel upon our lives, in order to sin and be selfish. We shut out God's light because, as Jesus says, 'This is the condemnation of this world, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil'. We are moral burglars that like to go about our ill-gotten gain in the dark, morally speaking. We shut out God's light so that we might dwell in the dark. That's why the Bible says God is angry.

Let me dwell on that thought for a moment: 'The wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all sin'. Now what is the reasoning behind that? People don't like to hear about an angry God these days, but let me try and explain it for you. Verse 19 tells us: 'Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them'. This is why God is angry, because what can be known about God, God has made known to mankind. Paul says God has made it plain from the beginning, He has shown to humanity what can be known about Him. Now that means that He has shown it to you. Now you might debate that, but bear with me: how has God showed Himself to you and everyone else? Well, He gives us in verse 20 how - first of all, creation. 'The invisible things of him from the beginning of the world, from creation, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse'.

Paul is saying that men, from the beginning, should have perceived God in the wonderful creation all around us - but they didn't perceive Him, they chose to suppress that knowledge by futile thinking! The reasoning of the passage is that because of their suppression of truth, rather than opening themselves up to it, they became foolish and their heart was darkened even more. So first of all, what he does is he tells us that God has designed this world intelligently, just as a watchmaker makes a watch, and everything you see around you is a creation coming from an intelligent mind and imagination. This world around us is no accident. Because of that, through the order, the laws of nature and science, the principles of this universe, we should reasonably conclude that God made everything, and we should bow to His

mastery. But what man has done in verse 21 to 23 is, he has suppressed that knowledge, he has shut out the light because he loves the darkness, because he can sin in the darkness.

So, a hardening process of foolishness has entered into his life. A hardening process when light has been rejected. Do you know that ice is produced not just through the drop in temperature alone, but because of the subtraction of the sunlight's rays? That is a very basic and simple, yet profound explanation for the reason of the demise of our nation and many lives of people in it. Men have suppressed the knowledge of God and have exalted their own knowledge rather than His knowledge, and verse 22 says they have become fools! The process of suppression and darkening results in an incredible rejection of the knowledge of God.

Paul says that man has rejected the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men, birds, animals, reptiles. So what he is saying is that animism and idol worship that we see in the jungles and third world nations of our planet - that has not evolved, or that has not come because these people never knew the true and living God, or never heard who the God of the heavens and the earth really is - what that is is a living lesson to all of us, that these people once had knowledge, Paul says in Romans 1, of the true Creator, of the living God, but because they suppressed that knowledge and light to get up to a depraved, darkened way of life, they have grown harder and harder and harder, until there is no remembrance of that God at all.

Our nation, I believe is on the same downward spiral. Now what is God's reaction? He has revealed Himself in creation, man's response has been suppression - and what is God's reaction? Verse 24 tells us: condemnation. 'Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves'. Because men have suppressed the knowledge of God and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, God gave them up. Let me say that you don't have to bow down to stone or idols of wood to be an idolater: you can worship yourself and forget about God; you can worship your sin, live it up, forget about God and spirituality and your soul. How do you know if a nation is under condemnation like I have alluded to? How do you know if an individual is coming under the judgement of God now? Remember what I'm saying: I'm not talking about something that's going to happen a hundred, a thousand years from now - although there is a judgement coming - I'm talking about what's going on now in our land.

How do we know? Well, there are four regressive steps that are, in themselves, proof that God has given up a nation, and at times a person. Verse 24 says that the first step is He gives people up to immorality. Lust, sexual immorality, deviance. Callum Brown, in his book 'The Death of Christian Britain' - I quoted this at Christmas time - says: 'It took several centuries in what historians used to call the Dark Ages to convert Britain to Christianity, but it has taken less than 40 years for the country to forsake it. Really quite suddenly in 1963 something very profound ruptured the character of the nation and its people, sending organised Christianity on a downward spiral to the margins of social significance'. What happened? The sixties happened, a sexual revolution, a social, moral revolution where they didn't just burn their bras, they burned their Bibles. They rejected the light of God for their own way.

The first step was immorality. The second step is found in verse 25: idolatry. Immorality and idolatry are always linked: 'They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen'. Now there is an increase in the worship of foreign gods in our land, and let me say that everyone should be free to worship as they see fit - even when it is, according to God's word, sin. But you don't have to

worship a foreign god to be an idolater. Affluence, materialism, egotism, selfishness provides us with plenty of our own little idols and gods.

Immorality, the first step. The second step, idolatry. The third step, verse 26 and 27, homosexuality. Men with men, women with women, and I've already cited examples in recent politics, how our nation and our people are going headlong down this third step. Genesis 19 tells us of Sodom and Gomorrah, that God destroyed because of this practice. Leviticus 18 tells us that it is a sin in God's eyes. Romans 1 that we read, 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9 tells us that people will be shut out of heaven for committing this sin, along with many other sins. It is sin, and God's word says it is a perversion of God's design - but it is also the third signal that a nation and an individual has given up on God, and He them.

The fourth and final step is verse 28: 'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient', mental perversity. Immorality, idolatry, homosexuality and mental perversity. Verse 30 talks about 'inventors of evil'. We've lost the ability to be surprised, haven't we, regarding sins that are being committed. Even verse 32 tells us that not only are those condemned who do these things, but those who give approval to those who practice them. We have legislators for sin in our government. They may not be homosexuals themselves, but they are legislating for those who are - taking pleasure in those that do these things. Many sins and sinful practices in our land are causing people to be tortured in their minds, and it derives from their sin, rebellion against God.

That is the fourth step, where people are losing their minds and all reason concerning morality. Can I say to you that there is a precedent for this in Scripture. In Genesis 6 God cited the reason for the flood: 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them' - and He destroyed the world with a flood. We are seeing this fourth, final step in our land now - mental perversity. Today people are filled with what is found in verses 29 to 31, they are filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness; people are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

I wonder where your personal problem lies in that list of sins? I wonder can you say that you feel given up to sin, the thing that you have dabbled in has caught hold of you, and there is a condemnation in it of itself - because you have shut out God's light, rejected His law and His claims, and gone down your own way, you are reaping the wages of sin which is death, judgement. You're given up to sin, that's what this means. As man took his own road, made his own choice, God was rejected, God retracted His influence and grace in man's life, and man was given up to his sin. Three times in this passage - verse 24, 26, 28 - God gave them up, why? Because they gave up on God.

Our land has done it. I wonder, my friend, are you doing it? The big question, I hope, that is in your mind tonight, is: is there any hope for a nation or a person who God has given up? Let me say: the answer to that question is yes and no. No, if a person or a nation continues to suppress truth and give up on God, there is no hope. But there is hope if a man, a woman, a boy or a girl, a nation repents of their sin, turns from it, forsaking it, and embraces the Gospel

that is Jesus Christ by faith and faith alone. Yes, the message of Romans 1 is that God is angry against all sin, but praise the Lord it is also that God is gracious towards sinners.

You see, whilst God condemns sin and He judges sin, He loves the sinner. Let me say to you tonight, if you've come into our gathering and you are a homosexual, or you're a lesbian, the Christian is responsible - although to preach the truth - he is also responsible to love you. For Christ loved a world of sinners, and Christ proved it - Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love in that, while we all were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The reason we know that, though God hates sin, He loves the sinner is because He sent His only Son to die for sinners. That's why the prophet Isaiah said: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the punishment of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; but the LORD hath laid on Christ the iniquity of us all'.

That is the good news! The message we have to preach as Christians is not condemnation, it is good news! God's wrath may be revealed from heaven, but praise God He has also revealed His righteousness for sinners in His Son. 'I'm not ashamed of the gospel', Paul says in verse 16, 'for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes'. Man might be very wrong in God's sight, but the Gospel is the message of how the wrong can be made right. That's what I want to tell you tonight, the reason is: Christ has died for sinners, Christ has died - you listen to it - for homosexuals. 'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved'. Christ has suffered once for sinners, the righteous Christ of God for the unrighteousness homosexual, or any other sin you want to name - why? That He might bring us to God!

Don't for one minute perceive that Christians' opposition to homosexuality is to keep everybody like that at arm's length - oh no. It's the same reason Christ came to die: to bring men and women to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. You see, mankind is condemned already because he has chosen the path of his own sin and selfishness, he has given up on God - that's why God has given up on him. But the gospel of Jesus is that there is power to deliver all men, irrespective of their sins. Jesus said, and I love this verse, in Matthew 12:31 that all kinds of sin and blasphemy is forgiven of men. John said in 1 John 1:7 - all in the Bible - 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'. It doesn't say 'every sin except homosexuality', or 'murder', or you put whatever your sin is in it - no! All sin!

Thank God for that! For I wouldn't be here tonight if it wasn't. You say: 'That's all right, but where is the evidence for this?'. Well, let me point you to one book of the Bible - and I'm almost finished - it's the book of Corinthians. Paul wrote two epistles to these people in this great city. Let me fill you in a little bit about Corinth. Corinth was a city that had many gods and goddesses, and one of the famous goddesses was Aphrodite, the goddess of love - and we'll hear all about her in February. On the hill called the Acropolis in the city of Corinth, there stood a temple - historians call it a temple to, I quote: 'a cult dedicated to the glorification of sex'. The old Greek city of Corinth had a thousand prostitutes that served in that temple by day, and at night they swarmed down into the streets and lanes of the city. In addition to that temple, the Acropolis, there was the Temple of Apollo - he was the god of music, song and poetry, and also the ideal of male beauty. In that temple there were nude statues of him everywhere in sensual poses, and that was designed to encourage his devotees to physical displays of devotion with the god's beautiful boys. It was the centre of homosexuality. The term was coined 'to Corinthianise' - and I'm not going to go into it, but it just means to commit sexual immorality.

This was an awful, a depraved city. Charles Swindoll, the Bible teacher, says that it was a sailor's favourite port, a prodigal's paradise, a policeman's nightmare, and a preacher's graveyard - sound familiar? Let me share with you what the apostle said to them in 1 Corinthians 6: 'Do you not know', verses 9 to 11, 'that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God'.

What's he saying? They were forgiven, their lives were transformed, they were changed to become children of God. They repented - who says that there cannot be changed lifestyles through Jesus Christ? There has been since His Gospel was first preached, and there are changed lives today. If the love of Christ can take root in Corinth, it must be powerful anywhere! Now let me say to you a word of warning, and to our nation: God will allow you, like a nation, to go down the road of depravity as far as you desire. He'll not stand in your way. In fact, He will remove His restraint on your life and let you do it - but oh, my prayer tonight is that you would stop, and see your sin, see the Saviour who died and suffered on the cross for your sin. Turn from your sin, and turn to Him by faith.

Richard Halvorsen's Bible studies on Romans were very effective. Among the congregation, as he was going through this book that explains the Gospel, was a doctor. The doctor became a Christian, and this is what he said after the event: 'I don't ever remember reading the Bible, but tonight I have seen myself in Romans 1. Now what do I do about it?'. You may never have read the Bible, my friend. You maybe never have heard it preached like this, but if you have seen yourself in Romans 1 - whatever your sin - what are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about the Saviour who died for your sin, and offers you forgiveness, and cleansing, and life to the full if you will repent of it and trust in Him?

I wonder are you a person here tonight who has given up on God? Though the effect of your action has been a retraction of God's influence in your life, perhaps God has reminded you tonight that He hasn't gone away, He's still there, and He still wants to lavish His grace and forgiveness upon you. You have an opportunity tonight - the danger is, and this is not an idle threat, that again, if you reject the Gospel, that lack of influence in your life of God will be less. It's a knock-on effect - you give up on Him once more, His influence will retract again. But if you open up your heart and your life, He will come in. Say: 'Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins, I'm willing to forsake them if You give me the help to leave them. Lord, I trust You and You alone because You died for me, to be saved and cleansed and delivered from sin, to know eternal life, and one day salvation in heaven'.

Father, we pray tonight that You will do a work in people's lives. Show them that, because of their sin, they are naturally under the condemnation of God already - but in Your love You have expressed the desire to save men and women of every tongue, tribe, people and nation - whatever their sin may be. Thank You, Lord, that the chief of sinners, though I be, Jesus died for even me; died that I might live on high, lives that I might never die. Let none shut themselves out of this salvation message tonight, but may all come in and be saved through Jesus Christ. For our land, Lord, we know that You in Your judgement have given us up to our sin, because we have given up on God and Your law - but, Lord, we pray for a fresh reviving, that Your people may rise again to speak that which is true, to call upon Your name and implore You to turn Your back and give us a blessing. Oh, that revival might come again in our land, across our nation, to the glory of Jesus we pray, Amen.

The Gospel Explained - Chapter 4

"The Moral-Religious Myth"

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We're turning again to Romans, the portion of Scripture that Eddie read to us from, and we want to think this evening about verses 1 to 11 under the title 'The Moral-Religious Myth'. But let us pray before we embark upon an explanation of the Scriptures, and ask the Lord's help again as we want to hear His word, and we want to encounter God Almighty through the preaching of the Scriptures. Do join with me in prayer that that indeed will be our experience tonight.

Let us pray: Father, we thank You for Your holy word. We thank You that it sets forth the revelation of God Himself, and You have declared Yourself through these pages, and chiefly in the record of the incarnation of Your beloved Son. So Lord, as we contemplate the great Gospel of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, we pray that You would give us understanding - but Lord, we want more than mere intellectual reason, we want a Holy Spirit quickening, we want to know the ministry of God's Spirit in our souls, opening us to the spiritual supernatural truths of the Gospel. Lord, no preacher or church can do that, so Lord, we implore You tonight in the Saviour's name to open blinded eyes and melt hardened hearts, and inspire broken and depraved wills to obey the gospel, be converted and repent of their sins and believe. For all of us, even those who profess to be Christians, we pray that the preaching of the word would restore us, revive us, and invigorate us again - knowing the great message that we have believed. Thanking You for everything that has gone before, undertake for us now for what we will receive. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

From time to time on a Sunday evening we revisit Paul's epistle to the Romans under the title of a series which will eventually be brought together as a collection when we finish it - if we ever finish it! - 'The Gospel Explained'. That's chiefly what we have in Paul's letter to the Romans, Romans is an inspired explanation of God's good news, the message that God has given to men whereby we may be saved. To put it as Paul puts it in this book: how a man or a woman can be right with God.

Now in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1 he explains that this is his purpose in writing the book: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein', that is, in the gospel, 'is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith'. Now he develops that truth of how a man can be right with God through the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, chiefly in chapter 3 verse 21 to chapter 5 verse 21, but before he tells us how a man or a woman can be right with God, he explains to us how men and women are wrong in relation to God. Of course, it presupposes that if he's going to teach that men need to be made right with God, that they are currently in a wrong relationship with the Almighty. To need God's righteousness, you must be unrighteous, sinful.

So Paul spends chapter 1 and chapter 2 proving how wrong mankind is in God's sight. In verse 18 we read of it in chapter 1: 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven', God's anger, 'against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness'. Right away there in chapter 1 verse 18, we enter into God's courtroom, and

Paul the apostle, as God's representative, is indicting all mankind as being wrong before God. We begin to face an overwhelming amount of evidence of man's sinfulness. Now the first way he does this in chapter 1, we looked at the last time from verses 18 to 32, is that he presents God's case against the irreligious, the immoral pagans. He's probably speaking of the Gentiles, that is non-Jews. Now he doesn't mention Gentiles, but that's inferred - but though that may be the case, the fact of the matter is: all these descriptions and characteristics apply to everyone, every person born into this world could be described as he describes pagans in verses 18 to 32 of chapter 1.

But now what we are looking at tonight in chapter 2 verses 1 to 11, but right through to chapter 3 and verse 8, he indicts religious mankind - that means those who are outwardly moral as persons. We believe that he's speaking primarily to the Jewish race and religion, though he doesn't mention them, that's what seems to be inferred. He concludes, after having indicted irreligious immoral paganism before God as being unrighteous, he now concludes that those who are religious, those who are moral aren't any different! He just clumps them all together in this final conclusion and declaration that all men alike deserve God's judgement. He goes into great detail in chapter 3 verses 9 to 20 explaining this. But what I want you to note tonight under our title is that what Paul is doing effectively is: he is giving the lie to the moral-religious myth.

'The moral-religious myth - what is that?', you say. Well, the myth is one of betterment, betterment - put simply, those who believe that moral is better than immoral, religious is better than irreligious, good is better than bad, clean is better than dirty or filthy. You see, moral and religious establishments down through all the years of history have effectively created a spiritual class system. The belief is that the higher up the scale you are, the more acceptable you are with the rest of their particular society, and the more acceptable you are ultimately to God. But the great question is: is that right? Is it true? The problem is, for religious and moral people, if it isn't true: they are in great trouble, because this is the code that many people swear by. Many have built their life upon it as a foundation. They reason: 'Well, the better I am, the better I do, God will think the better of me' - but what says the Scriptures?

Paul comes and he exposes this myth that the moral and religious Jew, for instance, was better than the immoral and pagan Gentile. He says to us: 'No, they're no different - all men, whoever they are, pagan, religious, moral, immoral, are concluded under sin, and are the same in the eyes of God, being worthy of judgement'. Now how does he blow this moral-religious myth right out of the water? He does it, I believe, on two fronts that I want to share briefly with you tonight. The first is: he proves, this is the first piece of evidence, that both sin the same sins - both moral and immoral, religious and irreligious, good and bad living people sin the same sins.

Now, you see the Jews had set themselves up as a spiritual hierarchy, an elite, and effectively they made themselves judge, jury and executioner of all the Gentile nations and races round about them. In fact, they despised others who were not Jews as 'Gentile dogs'. They had national and religious pride that caused them to look down their noses on others. They condemned the idolatry that was in other nations and their immorality that out flowed from that religious idolatry - and yet what Paul tells them in these opening verses of chapter 2 is: 'You might be religious, but you are guilty of the same sins as they have committed'. Now, we read of some very gross sins in Romans chapter 1, such as homosexuality and lesbianism, and idolatry, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, and the Jew would have

abhorred those sins as well. But even though they may not have been committing these sins in the flesh, they certainly were committing them in their minds and in their hearts.

As Jesus pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount, even the lust after a woman was, in effect, to commit adultery. To hate your brother was, in effect, to commit the sin of murder. But there are also sins of the spirit mentioned in chapter 1 verse 29 and following. You can be filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, deceitful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. Who of us even here tonight, however long we have professed Christian faith, cannot say that we have at least committed one of those offences. Paul is saying: 'You judge these pagans, these idolaters, but you who set yourselves up as judges are no different, because you commit the same sins as they do'.

You might say: 'Well, how did they think they would get away with such hypocrisy?'. Simply because they thought they were better because they had religion. The moral-religious myth: because they belonged to a religion, they thought that made them superior. Indeed, tradition of their day claimed that Abraham, the father of the faith, sat at the gate of hell to keep all Jews out regardless of their deeds and the sins that they committed. Many Jews believed that they were immune from God's anger and wrath against sin, why? Simply because they were Jews.

Now you might think that's ridiculous, unreasonable - but there are a lot of people on the streets of Belfast tonight, and they think because they're a Protestant, a son of William; or a Roman Catholic, a member of the one true infallible church supposedly, that that is their free ticket into heaven. It's all a myth, whether it's moral or religious. Those even who have not got a particular religion, because they believe they don't do anybody any harm, and they help their neighbour and love every one, they think that if there is a God in the end, God must let them enter into His heaven because of their morality. Yet in effect, these Jews who Paul was speaking to, they used and abused their religion as a cover for sin. They used it as a smokescreen. Just as in verse 18 of chapter 1 Paul condemns the pagans for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness, the Jews had suppressed God's truth with religion, under a religious-moral guise they sinned the same sins as the whole world.

Now we might ask: where did they go wrong? Here's the first way they went wrong, you make sure you don't make the same mistake. One: they failed to see that the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart, and God judges the heart. Do you realise that the problem that you have is not an external one, but an internal one? In 1 Samuel 16:7 we read: 'For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart'. God is concerned more with the internal and external, yet religion is more concerned on the whole with the external than the internal. That is because God knows that the problem is the heart, Jesus in Matthew 15 said as much when He said: 'For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person', speaking to religious Pharisees, 'But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone'. Do you know tonight that the heart of your problem is the problem of the heart, and God judges the heart?

As one said rightly: you can put a pig in a dinner jacket and sit him to the dining table, it will not be long after it starts eating that you'll realise, tuxedo and silver service or not, he's still a pig and has a pig's manners. You can dress up a sinner with external religious garb, but all that will do will hide them under the guise of religion, and will in some way shield their sin -

but deep down in the depths of their soul, their heart is no different to the most pagan idolater in the back end of the darkest jungle. Jeremiah 13:23 says: 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin', the inference is no, 'or the leopard his spots?', no. 'Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil'. The Jews thought that their religion, because it cleaned the outward appearance, was able to save their soul - but it didn't affect the heart.

Here's the second mistake they made. They didn't realise that morals and religion can prove as much a disadvantage as an advantage. Did you hear that? Morals and religion can prove as much a disadvantage as an advantage. These Jews had been given the land of Israel, they had been given the law of God, the Ten Commandments you know them as. They had been given a holy priesthood of sacrifices to bring them to God, and God had sent Messiah, Jesus Christ, to them. They had been taught from their inception as a nation the difference between right and wrong, yet they chose the wrong! The lesson there is: to know something of God, and to know truth more than others know it, makes you more responsible. That's why morals and religion can be as much of a disadvantage as an advantage, because the more you know of the Bible, the more you know of Christianity, the more you know of what is right and what is wrong, the more God holds you responsible!

Religion or morals is not a cloak to allow you to be irresponsible and get away with it, but verse 4 of chapter 2 says we must always beware of despising the riches of God's goodness, His forbearance and long-suffering toward us - because God will be more severe on those who have a knowledge of Himself, and know all about Christ and His death on the cross, and His resurrection, and His ability through faith and repentance to change lives and forgive sins. If you are religious but you sin the same sins, do you realise that your religion and your seeming external morality is a disadvantage? Your knowledge of good and your knowledge of God should lead you, verse 4 says, to repentance. God's goodness to you in giving you that knowledge should cause you to turn from your sin, not turn to it!

I don't want to seem to be sacrilegious in any way this evening, but I have to say that many people in Northern Ireland use God like a religious forgiveness machine. They put a prayer in and they think forgiveness comes out. The more sin you want to sin, the more religion you put in - and the Roman Catholic will go to confessional, and the Protestant thinks: 'Well, I can sin and then go to church, and pray a simple prayer and a little talk with Jesus will make it all right'. My friend, that is not how it works! God's goodness, God's gospel, God's grace must lead you to repentance! Repentant faith is what God requires, for it is faith that turns away from sin and embraces Christ and His Lordship that will change the life.

God's free grace and Christ's precious blood are not to be presumed on to get you a quick fix when the sinful notion takes you. Praise God this evening, 1 John 1 verse 7 tells us, and it is true, that: 'the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'. But let it also be said this evening that that verse, and the truth of the gospel and the blood of Christ, can't be used in a scheming way - it's not to be used like a loophole for immoral living, that 'I can live like I want, and I can sin as I desire, and God will just forgive me in the end because Christ has died for sinners'. No. Paul says the goodness of God, no matter how religious or irreligious you are, God's goodness must lead you to repentance. That means, this is what repentance is: a change of mind about your sin and God, and a change of heart that eventually, through faith in Christ, changes your life.

So that means, if you're religious tonight, you've got to admit your sin, and that you sin the same sins as anyone, even if it's in your heart alone - but if you're immoral tonight, you've got to confess your sins, and admit them also. If God's goodness doesn't lead you to

repentance, what happens then? He tells us in verse 5: your heart becomes harder, and you store up wrath for the day of judgement with God. How much wrath do you think you have totted up on God's books? Religious or irreligious, you sin the same sins, you break the same law, you have the same depraved, wicked heart.

Here's the second and final piece of evidence he produces to expose the moral-religious myth. Not only do both moral and immoral people sin the same sins, but they both face the same judgement. Because the Jew did the same things as the Gentiles did, therefore Paul concludes they both have the same status before God in judgement. In verse 6 we read: 'Who will render to every man according to his deeds'. God is going to judge us according to evil works. Those who are unrepentant and unbelieving will be judged according to the sins they have sinned, their unbelieving impenitent heart. If you are not obedient to the truth, Paul says, look at it, there will be wrath and fury, there will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil. The only difference, Paul says, between the religious and the irreligious in judgement is that the religious will be judged first!

Look at verse 9: 'Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile'. Why is the Jew first in judgement? Because of their privileges! Because they were the first to get the gospel, and because of the failure of the gift of God's goodness to lead them to repentance before God, they will be judged for it! The greater the good, the greater the responsibility. Now I want to ask you tonight: what privileges has God given you? I'll tell you one: God has allowed you to be born in a country where the gospel is freely preached. Christians aren't being locked up for preaching the Gospel yet, and you're here tonight listening, and maybe you've been brought up in a home where the gospel was the environment and atmosphere that you breathed constantly - you were sent to Sunday School, you went along to church, you were taught the Bible stories, you were prayed for, you were witnessed to. Maybe you watched a father or a mother, or a husband or a wife - I'm asking you tonight: have these good things that God has given you led you to repentance and faith? If it hasn't, do you know what that is? It is a storing up of God's wrath for the day of judgement, and it is hardening your heart!

But more importantly than those things, do you know what the greatest good that God has ever given to you is? Jesus Christ. I wonder this evening are you still unmoved when you view the greatest goodness God has ever given? The hymn writer could say:

'When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the young Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride'.

You see religious pride, morality, matters nothing - because Christ died for the same sins that you sin, that everybody else sins. He was judged so that you would not stand before God as a judge, and be judged for those same sins that everybody sins. Were the whole realm of nature yours, that would be an offering far too small - the only thing that God can accept is what He did accept, and that is the blood of His Son as He was punished for your sins. I ask you tonight: that is God's goodness towards you, do you not value the blood of the Son of God? Is it nothing to you what He suffered? How will you ever escape God's judgement, if the death of His Son does not melt your heart and turn you from your evil ways?

Let me tell you tonight, the good news is in verse 11, that God is no respecter of persons. Listen to me: to all who sin the same sins, and incur the same judgement - moral, immoral,

religious, irreligious, good, bad - He offers the same grace, grace for religious sins, and grace for immoral sins. God's goodness is shown tonight in that He offers that grace to you.

It is before you, God's goodness: Jesus hung there between two thieves, God's wrath being poured out upon His soul. We're not talking now about the fists and nails and the thorns, we're talking about hell in His heart for your sin and mine. He was punished for you, my friend, that is God's goodness and it ought to lead you to repentance. If you're religious, you need to know that your morality, and your keeping of commandments, and your sacraments, and your church membership means nothing in God's sight - all that can get you into heaven is that precious blood of Jesus. If you're immoral, you need to know the same: that cleaning yourself up and becoming religious will take you to hell faster than the sin you're dabbling in now. Whoever you are tonight, there's only one way: that is through the Lord Jesus and His cross. What you must do tonight is turn from your sin, at least be willing to turn from it, and believe in the Lord Jesus - that means embrace the gospel. Say, just like this: 'Lord Jesus, I confess I am a sinner, and I thank You that You died for my sins and have purchased my salvation. Save me now, make me Your child as I make You my Lord. Amen'.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - February 2007

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 5

"The Long Arm Of The Law"

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I want you to turn with me to Romans chapter 2, and on and off these Sunday evenings we've been dipping into Paul's epistle to the Romans, which I feel is one of the most important books in the whole of the Bible - because it explains to us what the message is that God wants men and women to know on this earth. So if you want to know if God has anything to say to you tonight, or be it at any time, the book of Romans is an ideal one to dip into. Now it's not always easy to understand, but I'm going to try my best to explain it to you tonight simply. Now the reading we have tonight is quite difficult, but there are great nuggets of truth in it, and I hope to extract those for you in a moment or two.

Let's read the word of God, Romans chapter 2 and verse 11 - the last verse that we looked at the last time we were looking at Romans on a Sunday evening. Paul says in Romans 2:11: *"For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)* In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel", and we end our reading at verse 16.

Let's bow in a short word of prayer together: Father, we thank You, those of us who can say tonight that our sins are rolled away, they have been put into the tomb where Christ was buried. They have been buried, and Christ has risen, and they have been left behind. We thank You that they are as far as East is from the West. You have put them behind Your back, they are in the depths of the sea of Your forgetfulness, Lord, and we thank You that it's all because of the Lord Jesus. But Lord there are people here tonight, and they have never come to this awareness, so Lord help them, we pray. Thank you for saving Scott, thank You for saving me, each of us here tonight who have been saved thank You for saving us - but Lord, save another tonight for Your glory, and let us all rejoice in the wonder of Your gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

The last time we were studying in the book of Romans, we looked at how Paul in verses 1-11 gives the lie to what I called 'The Moral-Religious Myth' - that is, simply, that many people have believed this moral-religious myth which is that they think moral people are better than immoral people, good people are better than bad people, clean people are better than dirty people, religious people are better than irreligious people, good-living people are better than bad-living people. But Paul blows this perception right out of the water by the truth of God's word, and he does this in verse 3 where he says there is no difference between good-living and bad-living people, religious and irreligious people, Jewish people and Gentile people - who he is speaking to at this time - because both groups sin the same sins. Look at verse 3: 'Thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them', he's speaking to religious people who look down their noses at irreligious folk - 'You do the things that they do, do you think that you will escape the judgement of God?'

You see, religiosity and morality in one sense is a myth, if we think that it will in some way commend us to God, and make us essentially better in God's eyes - because all of us sin the same sins! So none of us have a reason to think that we're better than another. Then the second arrow in his bow is found in verse 6, because he not only tells them, 'Look, you religious people sin the same sins as irreligious people', but 'Both you and irreligious people are going to face the same judgement'. Verse 6: 'Who will', that is God, 'render to every man according to his deeds'. We read in verse 11 tonight that God is no respecter of persons, no one will get off with not being judged - religious or irreligious, good or bad, clean or dirty. Everyone will be judged, and all will face the same judgement. So you can see how clearly and categorically he answered the lie of the moral-religious myth.

Now he comes in our passage this evening to the basis on which God will judge all sinners, irrespective of whether or not they are religious. Just as any judge in our own society here in the United Kingdom, or anywhere in the world, judges according to the letter of the law of that land, that principality and sovereign nation, God will do exactly the same. God will judge all sinners who sin the same sins with the same law. That's what I want to say to you tonight from these verses: both sin the same sins, both will face the same judgement - but here's our point tonight: both will be judged by the same standard. Religious people and irreligious people, moral and immoral, good and bad, clean and dirty will be judged by the law of Almighty God.

Let me pause for a moment there: have you ever thought about the day when you stand before God and He judges you according to His law? What a sobering question. What a quickening thought. This is not pie-in-the-sky, this is God's truth, and Revelation 20 tells us of that event. John was given prophetic gift to see it, and we read his account of what it will be like. John says: 'I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'.

Have you ever stopped in your life one moment to think about the day when you will stand before God and be judged by His law? Amos 4:12: 'Therefore, thus will I do unto thee: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God'. That's what I'm here for tonight, that's what we're conducting this meeting for tonight: so that you might have an opportunity to prepare for that day, the day when you will stand before God and be judged by His law.

What is His law? That's the first question I want to answer for you, that you might be prepared. Well, He declares clearly in His word, Exodus 20. You know it as the Ten Commandments, maybe you didn't know you knew it. They are: 1) Do not have other gods before Him, as the Living God, Jehovah - there is only one God. 2) You are not to make any graven images, no idols, don't worship pieces of wood or stone, don't worship a false god, or a picture, or an icon, because God is invisible, He is spirit, and He is the only true God to be worshipped, and you can't make an image of Him. 3) Do not take the Lord's name in vain, that's not just swearing, that's pretending that you're religious, or that you're Christian and really deep down you're not, and your life betrays that fact. 4) Remember the Sabbath day, there's a rest principle in our lives, and a rest before God. 5) Honour your father and your

mother, and then you'll have a long life, the law says. 6) Don't kill. 7) Don't commit adultery. 8) Don't steal. 9) Don't lie. 10) Don't covet, want something, lust after something that belongs to another.

Well, there it is, simply answered, that's what God's law is - that is the standard by which you will be judged. Now here's the second question that I derive from our passage tonight: what will happen to those who don't have this law? You see, there are places in our world, and they don't have a Bible, they don't have a preacher, they don't have even churches, they don't have missionaries. They have never heard the name of Christ, and they certainly do not know the Ten Commandments - what will happen to them? Then another question related to that is: what about people who do have the Ten Commandments, but don't want them, don't feel inclined to obey them? Can God rightly and fairly judge people who just don't agree with them?

Let's think about the first, first of all: people who may never hear the Ten Commandments or the Gospel. Well, our portion tonight says they will still be judged according to God's law. Now right away you say: 'That's not fair! How can God judge them with something they've never heard about, or don't even know they have to live up to?'. Well, Paul tells us they may not have a Bible, but if you look at verse 14, Paul says that in doing by nature the things required by the law, in other words by not murdering because they know it's wrong to murder, by not stealing because they know it's wrong to steal, by not committing adultery because they know faithfulness is what should be desired, by honouring their parents they reveal that they are - verse 14 - a law for themselves.

Now Paul spells out in verse 15 what he means: the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. They may not have the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20, or reciprocated in other portions of the Bible, but Paul says everyone everywhere has an actual instinct in their heart, which is the requirements of God's law that He has put in our heart. Now, I don't know if you're an atheist here tonight, or an agnostic, but do you know that whatever morality is in your life, that is living proof that there is a God? Huh, never thought of that one, have you? You're looking evidence that someone can present to you that there is a God, or maybe you're just not sure and you want something that's so clear - well here it is! Your desire to do the right thing, to live a right life, even if it's only before men and you don't even believe in God - that is the requirements of God's law that's written on your heart! It's proof that there's a God! So by your occasional conformity to God's law, you are showing that you have an unconscious knowledge of what God demands of men and women! Do you see it? That's how your conscience knows instinctively what is right and what is wrong: your heart knows the requirements of God's law, so your conscience acts correspondingly.

It's the same wherever you go, wherever you go in this world you will find people that have an inner sense of right and wrong, even if it be very warped. They have this inner judge called the conscience, one of the greatest friends you will ever have. You find among all cultures, colours, and creeds a sense of sin, a sense of judgement, a sense of a need to attempt to atone and deal with your sins, and cover them over or appease a God that is angry at you, and you fear because of your sin. There is a human instinct which is the reason for religion across the world, the world is not predominantly atheist or agnostic, it is religious because this instinct in man is as old as man, and no anthropologist or psychologist can explain it away! It's simply because the requirements of God's law have been written on your heart.

What about people who have never had the Bible? There's your answer: they will perish if they have been disobedient to this law, which they have. Now you say: 'But hold on a minute,

what about people who reject God's law?'. Well, I want to say to you: does anyone completely reject the Ten Commandments? Well, you might find one somewhere I suppose, but most people generally adhere in some way to them. Even if you're an atheist in this place tonight, you don't know how religious you are! You go about your daily business every day of your life, unconsciously perhaps, trying to keep God's law. You don't go about killing people, do you? You try your best not to tell lies when you can, not to steal what belongs to others. You try to be faithful with your wife - that's God's requirements written on your heart, and I know you break many of these laws, for we all do; but that is the reason why you will be judged by God's laws, because you have an instinctive capacity to know right from wrong that God has gifted you with, and God will judge you by it.

So nobody can say, as Paul said, 'It's not fair to judge people who don't know the Ten Commandments', or 'It's not fair to judge people who don't feel inclined to keep the Ten Commandments'. So Paul has, in this first chapter of Romans, pleaded with us that God has revealed Himself in creation - do you remember that from chapter 1 and verse 20? 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that all are without excuse'. You see nature, you see creation that comes from a causal, inventive hand of God. But now he's bringing, along with creation in his argument, the commands of God - which are not only written on two tablets of stone by the finger of God, that Moses carried down Mount Sinai, the requirements of that law are written on your heart, and your conscience responds to it.

Can I ask you this evening, as we get personal: what shape is your conscience in? One of the greatest gifts He has given to you, that is God, is your conscience - I wonder do you listen to your conscience or do you silence your conscience? Do you know what silencing your conscience is, when God tells you in your heart that something you're going to do is wrong, and you just silence it and do it anyway? It's like going home tonight and taking the batteries out of your smoke alarm, and then going to sleep with a cigarette in your mouth. That's what it's like - oh, you'll get a good night's sleep, and a wee bit of stress relieved by the drag, but you might wake up in hell in the morning. It's a warning system that God has given to you in order that you might know that you're taking a wrong road.

I heard a story recently about a drunk who was waddling home as he was accustomed to do every night, and as he approached his front door his little dog, his best friend, was sitting there waiting on him as usual. He watched the little dog to see how he would fare, and then he came in through the door and staggered into his bed, and unconsciously fell. In the middle of the night the dog started barking. The man, not wanting to miss his night's sleep, got up and shouted at the dog, lifted a chair and threw it at the dog, and the dog shut up. When the man woke up in the morning, half sober, he saw that his house had been burgled, everything he owned had been taken, and all that was left was a broken chair and a dead dog. His best friend was trying to warn him, but he silenced him, and the silencing of him was tragic.

My friend, God has written the requirements of His law on your heart so that you know what is wrong and what is right. Maybe you have started to lose the perception of what is wrong and what is right, because you don't listen any more! It has been so long since you have listened, that you think: 'I don't do much wrong, I don't do anybody any harm', and you don't realise that you're a lawbreaker, and you're guilty before God, and God's going to judge you!

Here's our final question, which is the converse of these people who don't have God's law, or don't want to listen to God's law, and it's those who try to keep God's law. What will happen

to those who try to keep God's law? Well, these are the people I believe Paul was talking to, the Jews who boasted in the law. They believed they were superior to these pagan Gentiles who were falling down to pieces of wood and stone. Paul is telling them: 'You've missed the point completely! If God finds these Gentiles guilty, who have been deprived from having on the written page the Ten Commandments, the traditions of the religion of Judaism - who have copies of the law that they carry and cherish - how more guilty are you going to be, you privileged people?'

Oh, there is a principle there for us all: privileges bring responsibilities. You could be an atheist living in Northern Ireland, and you have had greater spiritual privileges than some pagan in the back end of the Amazon jungle who has never heard of Christ and never seen a Bible; because you know what a Bible is, you know who Jesus Christ is, you know what the Christian church is with all its faults, you know that there is a hell, you know that there is a heaven - you've heard, yet you still haven't believed. Maybe you have had privileges, like Scott, from an early age - what have you done with them? You know, there are parts of hell that are hotter for the privileged. I wonder will your place in hell be there?

Paul wanted to be clear: 'Look it's not the possession of the law that counts you Jews, it is the practice. Not hearing, but doing!'. Now, what's your conclusion? 'So, you're telling us to go away and get these Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, and keep them all?'. Well, if you do that, you'll do what many people have tried to do, including the Jews. You'll try to practise it, and maybe you'll perfect it outwardly for a while, and fulfil some of the external requirements - and many religious people are trying to do that in our land today. They call themselves Protestants, Roman Catholics, some of the cults, and even other religions are trying to keep their laws and regulations and system of ethics. Now here's the problem, and it's found in verse 16: God judges the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ.

So you can doctor the outside with religion, with rites, practices, sacraments; but Jesus has come to us and He has revealed the complete law of God - what is that? That it's not just about killing someone and committing adultery that in God's eyes is wrong, but Jesus says that if you have a lustful thought in your mind it's adultery, if you have a hateful feeling in your heart it's murder! The whole New Testament tells us that if we only break one of God's laws, it's like breaking the spoke of a wheel, we have broken the whole thing! We're lawbreakers!

When God sees into your heart, what does He see? I don't care how moral you think you are, friend, because I know what's in my heart. I know what's often in my head, and God can see it, and God is going to judge it if you're not forgiven that. The secrets that are hidden in men's hearts, one day those private sins are going to become open scandals! Sometimes when you preach like I'm preaching tonight on the Ten Commandments, people say: 'Are you trying to make me feel guilty, quoting these Ten Commandments?'. You see if that's your reaction, well, I say to you: doesn't the Bible say don't lie, don't steal, don't commit adultery? If you feel guilty when you hear that, why do you think you feel guilty? Only that you lie, you steal, you lust: because you're guilty, that's why you feel guilty!

God's word says in the Psalms: 'If the Lord should mark iniquities', and He does mark our iniquities, 'O Lord, who should stand in Your sight?'. I'll tell you, there's not one of us here, or one of us in Ulster, or one of us here in the world who could stand before God because they had never committed a sin. So what is Paul is saying? There is no difference between you religious people and irreligious people, both of you are lawbreakers, both of you are going to be judged by the same standard, both of you are going to suffer the same penalty. Now you

might say: 'Well then, is God some kind of sadist? Why does He give us this law anyway, if even the religious can't keep it? Well verse 20 of chapter 3 says clearly: 'Through the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight', but here's the key, look at it: 'for by the law is the knowledge of sin'. God never gave the Ten Commandments to justify you before God, He gave the Ten Commandments to magnify your sin, that you might know you need the mercy of God! Do you understand? So, you trying to live up to it is a waste of your time! Whilst it's good not to steal, not to lie, and not to lust; it will never make you just before God.

Do you know what you should be saying here tonight? This is what's missing in meetings like this, you should be saying: 'What hope is there for me now?' - or as they said in the New Testament: 'What will we do now?'. Do you feel like that? If you don't, forget all this church business. There is no hope for you. Forget it now, I'm telling you. If you don't feel: 'What hope have I now? For I have seen God's holy law, and I am guilty, and I am judged! There's nothing I can do to amend my ways that are past. Even if I reform my life in the future, I can't erase the past'. My friend, listen: you will perish without law, the Bible says, and you will perish with law. So if you've never heard it, or you don't want to live up to it, you will perish. If you try to live up to it, you can't live up to it, so you will perish. But listen: 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'.

Judgement is coming. Whether you don't know God's law, it's coming. Whether you don't want to know God's law, it's coming. Whether you try to keep it and can't, it's coming. Do you know what the need is? Sinners need to settle out of court. There is an option tonight, and it's called grace. 'On what grounds can I have forgiveness, can I have pardon?' - it's not on the grounds of law now, it's not on the grounds of how good you can get, it's not on the grounds of anything to do with you or your morality, it's on the grounds of Calvary where Jesus came, God's Son, the perfect Man, and died on the cross, bearing your shame. He was reckoned a lawbreaker, so that lawbreakers might be pardoned! Galatians 3: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree'. He was cursed for you. Oh, that God would give you eyes to see tonight, my friend, a mind to understand, ears to hear, a heart to perceive: Christ died for the broken law. First Peter 3: 'Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit'.

He died for sinners, He died for lawbreakers, He died for mankind. Oh, so often I'm asked this question, maybe you're thinking it: 'How could God send me to hell? You know, I'm not Hitler, I never abused anyone, I'm not a terrorist. I go to church, I do my best, I help my neighbour, I try not to fight with the wife'. The verse that I answer with is what Paul said in Galatians 2:21: 'I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain'. Do you know what that means? You see if you can get to heaven on your morality trip? God wasted the blood of His own Son, for it wasn't really necessary. Now my friend, if that's your viewpoint, you're lost - for without the shedding of Christ's blood, there is no forgiveness of sin, because it is the only way.

If you repent of your sin tonight, and accept it, you will be saved. If you hold on to your sin and your self-righteousness, and reject it, you will be lost. The long arm of the law touches all of us, whoever we are - but may the grace of the God of Calvary envelop every single sinner in this place tonight, that you might be sheltered from the judgement of God and say:

'Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;

In flaming worlds of judgement, if in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand on that great day;
None to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved in these I am'.

Will you embrace Christ tonight, as He is freely offered in this Gospel message?

Father, give grace to repent and believe; for men and even Your own redeemed people have no real perception of what the lawbreaker deserves, and what the lawbreaker will inherit. Lord, may people in this gathering tonight flee from the wrath to come. Search hearts, even those who think they are saved, some of these young people - may they make their calling and election sure - some of the older folk ready to pass into eternity, Lord, grant that they are not resting on a life of morality and religiosity, but life that is resting on Christ alone and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. Oh, hear our prayer, and may none be standing on any other ground than the solid ground of Christ. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2007
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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 6
**"The Certainty Of Salvation: Past,
Present, and Future"**

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Now let's turn in our Bibles again to Romans chapter 5, and as we come to the Scriptures let's bow in a brief word of prayer together: Father, we thank You for those in our gathering tonight who can say, 'Now I know that it is finished'. Father, this is the great Gospel that we have to proclaim, that in Christ mercy has met the anger of God's rod, the penalty of our sinfulness, our awful sinfulness in Your sight, has been paid. Pardon has been bought by Jesus' blood, and so we have a Gospel of pardon and forgiveness, emancipation, liberty to proclaim. Lord, help us as we do it, and as we seek to explain the Gospel and the certainty of our salvation we pray that someone in this place tonight would know what it is for the entrance of God's word to bring light. Would all of us, Lord, we pray, find a fresh joy and exultation in the great Gospel of God's grace. For it is in Christ's name and for His glory that we pray, Amen.

Paul, in Romans chapter 5, sets forth for us the consequences of justification. I'll explain what that means in a moment or two, but we know that from verse 1, the very first word he uses is: 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. What he does for us after verse 1 is, he looks back at what God has done, how God justifies a sinner. Then we find also in this chapter, he looks presently at what God is doing for a person who has been justified. He doesn't leave it there, not only does he look at the past and the present, but he looks forward into the future at what God will do for a believer who has been justified.

Justification, in a very broad sense, is just another term for salvation. It is a forensic word, a legal word that speaks of how God has made a sinner righteous in His sight, so that that sinner can now come into God's presence. It doesn't happen through a work that the sinner does, or any merits in himself, but it's through Christ's death and His death alone, and the sinner's faith in that death, that he can be justified - 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God'. What I want you to see is that what Paul outlines for us in this chapter 5 of Romans is the certainty of salvation - past, present and future. The consequence of justification is that we can be certain and assured that once God justifies us, once God saves us, we are saved in the present and in the future as well.

Someone put it like this - you often hear evangelical Christians talking about being saved - he said: 'I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved'. You see, salvation is something that has happened to the believer, but it's something that is currently going on, and will have a future day of consummation. Now I just wonder that, in the background to this chapter, was there a question implied to the great apostle - simply: how can we be sure that God will make us eternally secure in Christ? If we have faith in Jesus and His sacrifice, His death, His atonement, how can we know for sure that we're always going to be secure? I would have to say that this is something that puzzles people in our world today when they see Christians, and hear what they say - because they are uncertain, if they even believe in salvation and eternal realities, most people are uncertain about their salvation. So when a

born-again Christian, an evangelical believer comes along, often people are sceptical of their Christian security.

But it's not just non-Christians, often people who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are troubled about this issue of assurance. It might be for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most common is that they have failed in some way in their life, they have let the Lord down, and so they ask the question: does that mean I have lost my salvation? There are even churches that teach such a doctrine. But it's specifically to the unbelievers I want to address this message tonight: don't ever misconstrue Christian certainty and assurance as ignorance, arrogance, or a presumption. That's often what unbelievers do. They hear Christians saying: 'I'm saved, and I know I'm saved, and I know I'm going to heaven', and some clever folk will say, 'Oh, you're ignorant of what the Bible really teaches', or 'You're ignorant of the realities of what really is out there in eternity'. Others think it's just pure arrogance: 'How can you be so sure? Is that not self-righteousness to think that you are definitely on your way to heaven? It's presumption! You're presuming something that you cannot be sure of'.

Now let me say to you tonight: on the authority of God's word we can say that the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives absolute assurance. You will see tonight that there is a certain salvation that God offers: past, present and future. Our faith is not in ourselves or what we can do, but as Romans 10:17 says: 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. Our faith is in what God has said, what God has declared! We're going to see it tonight.

Now in one sense Paul, in Romans chapter 5, argues from the lesser to the greater. Let me explain myself: his logic is, if God's love went out to us - as Christians he's speaking to - when we were ungodly enemies of God, the lesser; how much more will He preserve us now that we belong to Him, now that we are His children? He argues from the lesser to the greater - He loved us when we were sinners, do you not think He's going to look after us now that we belong to Him? But in another sense, he doesn't just argue from lesser to greater, but he argues from greater to the lesser - he is saying that it's such a great thing that Christ died for the ungodly when we were still God's enemies, how can we ever doubt that God will do the lesser thing and complete this work of salvation which He began at such a great cost?

It's all arguing that we can be sure that if God justifies us after we have placed our faith in Christ and Christ alone, that He will not only save us concerning what we have done in the past, pardoning us, but He is saving us now, and He will go on saving us until the day that we find ourselves in heaven. So Paul's argument is simply this: if God did that in the past, justified you, sent Christ to die for you when you were ungodly and had no thought of God, if God did that you can be sure that He will do this. In developing this theme, the apostle introduces five 'much mores', and we'll only have time to deal with two of them tonight - 'much more', arguing from the lesser to the greater, what God will do because of what He has done. His whole point is that we can be sure of what God will do for us in the future, because of what He has done in the past and what He is doing in the present for all believers.

Let's deal with each of these - first of all, what great thing did God do? Looking to the past, what great thing did God do? Now look at the verses, it's so explicit: Christ died - that is the great thing that God did! Now the natural question to ask is: for whom? If this is the great thing that God did do the past - Christ died - who did He die for? If you look at verse 6 you see that it's described very graphically for us by the apostle: He died for those who were without strength. Then it says at the end of verse 6 that He died for the ungodly; then it says in verse 8 that He died for sinners; then at the end of verse 8 Paul says He died for us.

Now let's see how Paul forms his argument to describe what great thing God did in the past. Here's the first thing when we look at who Christ died for: it was for those who were without strength. Now listen to this: the greatness of what God did in the past is understood better when we discover for whom He did it. He did it for those without strength, literally it means those who were helpless. It's not speaking of physical weakness, but moral frailty. In other words, people who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ through justification by faith, the Spirit of God does not live in them, they are sinners and the Bible describes them as dead. My friend, I don't wish to offend you unnecessarily, but that's how the Bible describes you if you're not a Christian - spiritually dead. Someone who is dead in a spiritual sense, as in the physical, is incapable of doing anything to help themselves. That's what the Bible teaches, so much so that the power of God is necessary in a man or a woman's life. Jesus Himself said in John 6: 'No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day'.

Because a sinner without God is hopeless, Paul says he is helpless, he is incapable of saving himself. In fact, in Ephesians 2, Paul again looks into the past of the believers in Ephesus, he says: 'You who God has quickened, were once dead in trespasses and in sins'. Now my friend this evening, this exposition is in order to help you come to Christ, and the great question is: do you realise that you, as a sinner, are unable to save yourself? Do you know that you're helpless? The Bible goes as far as to say that you are unable to even understand the things of God, and that's perhaps why you're not grasping the Gospel, because you're trying to just reason and rationalise it. Yet Paul, to the Corinthians, who were a clever crowd, said: 'The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned'.

A sinner cannot act on a command of God, let alone understand them. The greatness of God's Gospel and what God has done is that God's love in the past has triumphed over human power and human wisdom that has failed. What man could not do for himself or do for others in mankind, the power of God in the Gospel has triumphed in. This Gospel, what God has accomplished He has accomplished for those who were helpless, those who were without strength - sinners, us. That's what makes what God did in the past great, because He did it when human power, our power, failed.

Here's something else I want you to note in verse 6: 'For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly'. 'In due time', that simply means that at the moment that God had chosen, Christ came and died for sinners. Paul puts it another way in Galatians 4:4: 'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law'. You could translate it: 'At just the right time, when we were without strength, helpless and hopeless, at just the right time Christ died for the ungodly'. Do you know what Paul's thought is? Christ, when He came, did not come too soon, nor did He come too late. At the appropriate time, at God's time, Jesus came.

Now what is he trying to illustrate for us? What God did in the past is great, not only because it is helping the helpless and those for whom human power has failed; but this is a fact, that it was planned for all eternity. What He did in the past is great because it was planned from ever the earth began. Now why do I labour that point? Simply because sometimes we talk to folk and they say: 'Well, why did God wait thousands of years before He sent the Lord Jesus Christ to die? Why did He?'. All that we can say to that is: God knows why He did it, and all we need to know is that we can be sure He didn't do it in a haphazard way - it was at exactly the right time, the most appropriate time, that God sent His Son.

So there are two ways of looking at the time of Christ's death: He died, first of all, when we were still sinners, helpless and hopeless; but also we can look at it, secondly, that it was at the time that was fitted for God's purpose. The atonement, Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, it was no afterthought; but it is the way that God had intended to deal with our sins through all eternity - indeed it was the only way! So the cross, my friend, is not a cruel tragedy, it is not a miscarriage of justice, it was the execution of God's plan at God's chosen time - that's what makes it great!

Its greatness is that God's love triumphed where human power failed. Its greatness of what He did is seen in the fact that it was eternally planned. Here's something else, this wonderful statement at the end of verse 6: 'Christ died for the ungodly'. This is how we know that God's love is unwavering, that God's love will never fail us in the future or indeed the present: because it is not based on how lovable you or I may be, it is based on the constancy of God's character. God will never let us down, because Christ died for the ungodly. God, in this supreme act of love, came to us when we were most undesirable - that's the whole point! This is the great thing that He did in the past. Now Paul is arguing: if God came to us when we were in our most unlovely state as sinners, how could we ever doubt that God is going to keep on saving us today and tomorrow, right into eternity?

Indeed, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, the Lord Jesus uttered those immortal words: 'Ye have heard that it has been said, Love your neighbour as yourself. But I say unto you, Love your enemies'. He goes on to explain that there is no real merit in loving your neighbours and your friends. He illustrates it in this way in Matthew 5:46: 'If you love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans', or the sinners, 'the same?'. That could be an illustration of the very love of God, the wonder of it all, the greatness of it is that it is love for those who are unlovable, those who are undesirable. Can I emphasise this point: the death of Christ was not for good people, but people, Paul says, who were still sinners.

Now that's important - why? Because there's a lot of folk in Ulster and the United Kingdom, right across the world today on Sunday, who will be at church and they are what we could call 'religious moralists', 'Christians' they would call themselves because they follow Christ, they read the Bible, they pray, they're in communion in some of the Christian denominations - but they are religious moralists, because they actually believe that by following a code of conduct and a denominational ethic, that in some way by calling themselves a Christian, going through the sacraments, whatever they may be, and ordinances of the church, trying to be faithful in the religiosity, that God is going to in some way accept that. But Paul is telling us the opposite: Christ did not die for those types of people, in the sense that He died for those who were still sinners - not people who try to doctor themselves up, not people who try to become acceptable with God, but the death of Christ becomes effective to those who really see themselves still as sinners.

Now, is that you my friend? Or have you swallowed the lie of the religious moralists? In verse 7 he illustrates this in perhaps one of the most graphic ways in the New Testament. What great thing did God do? 'For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. What Paul is doing - follow the illustration - is, he's saying: 'Well, an average man, he loves his own life. His life is precious to him and he would never think of discarding it carelessly, throwing it away, especially for someone else who he felt was unworthy'. In other words, would any of you just casually throw away your life for someone that was a terrorist, someone who was an abductor? Would you do it? Paul

says: 'No, people don't do that'. But then he goes a step further, as it were, and he says: 'In fact, most people are reluctant to die for even a righteous man'. Now he's talking about people, not who are righteous in God's eyes, but a better person. So he's implying that people would never die for bad folk, they would never throw their lives away for folk who are unworthy, but you can hardly get anyone to die even for someone who is better than that bad person, or even someone who is good, a good man - people wouldn't even dare to die!

Paul's point is this: we as sinners, all of us, are neither of those people - we are neither righteous or good. Yet the wonder of what God has done for us in the past is that Christ sacrificed Himself for us, even though we were neither righteous nor good. Have you come to terms with the fact that you're neither righteous nor good? A famous Bible teacher quite recently was asked the question, a very popular question indeed today: why do bad things happen to good people? Have you ever asked that question? Do you know what his answer was? 'I don't know any good people'. Why do bad things happen to good people? Now I know there are moral people, there are upstanding people, there are people who are better than others on that human level - but what that teacher was saying is right: all of us are sinners in God's eyes.

Paul, what he's doing is bringing out this unexpected aspect of the death of the Saviour - it's unexpected because no one dies for evil people! Do you see his exclamation? You can hardly find a person to die for a good man, the best of men, but imagine someone dying for the worst of men! If you can imagine that, my friend, you've got the Gospel - that's it! The greatness of what God has done: when human power failed He came to the helpless, this was something eternally planned which makes it great, and the greatest aspect as far as we are concerned is that this offer of salvation is to the most undesirable in all humanity. What great thing God has done!

Secondly, what great thing is God doing. This is in verse 8, and remember what he's pushing towards: he's showing us from the past what great thing God has done, what great thing He's doing in the present, to prove what He's going to do in the future to those who have faith in Him. What is He doing now? Verse 8 says: 'But God commends', or demonstrates, 'his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. Now in verse 8 that word 'commendeth' or 'demonstrates' is in the present tense - what does that mean? It means that now Paul is not simply talking about something that happened 2000 years ago on a hill called Golgotha, but he is now speaking of the fact that God is presently demonstrating His love to sinners in our world today. Though the cross is an event in the past, it keeps on showing the love of God in the present.

What does God demonstrate today? You ask somebody that and they'll say: 'Nothing!'. You've heard folk say, maybe you've even said it yourself: 'Why does God not intervene in the world? Why doesn't He interpose in my circumstances and sort my life out? Where was God when I needed Him? I don't feel God's demonstrating anything to me or to humanity today'. Paul says: 'He is! He is still demonstrating His completely supernatural and other-worldly love, far transcending any human love that you can know'. That's the greatness about it: in the present, He is presently demonstrating that love. Isn't it wonderful? Sometimes even Christians ask the question and say, reminiscing in their imagination: 'I wish I was on the earth when Moses was here. I wish I could have seen the Red Sea part. I wish I had been on the earth when the Lord Jesus walked among men, saw His miracles and heard His mighty words. If I could have seen Him on the cross' - maybe, like Thomas, we're saying 'If I could see the nailprints in His hands, and His feet, and the scar in His side - it would make a difference to my faith, it really would!'. My friend, listen: Paul says 'No!' - apart from the fact

that many people saw that and they didn't follow the Saviour, it didn't give them faith, the point is that this great love at Calvary is still being demonstrated today in the message of the cross, in the message of the Gospel. The big issue is: are you receiving the transmission? God's still communicating it, God is still demonstrating it, but are you receiving it?

This really points to a crucial issue: how you think of God. How do you think of God? Do you think of God as a God of love? Paul is showing us that this God of the New Testament, He is not a remote God, He is not an indifferent God, but He is a God who is full of love - and it is from His love that our salvation proceeds. Notice what he says in verse 8: 'God commends His love, God demonstrates His love' - it's God's love that's demonstrated. Now one might expect him to have said: 'Christ's love is demonstrated for us in that He died for us', but no, he says 'God's love' - why? Because Christ's love is God's love! When you see Christ you're seeing God, you're seeing the heart of God. Many people have a harsh legalistic view of God, they're lopsided in their view of God, He's all a God of wrath who wants to judge you and send you to hell, and that's all He is. Oh my friend, do you see from this verse that it's God's love that is being demonstrated in the death of Christ?

Martin Luther, I mentioned him last week - it's hard to preach from the book of Romans and not mention him, because he was converted through the truths in this book as were many of the reformers - he shares his experience of his lopsided view of God. This is what he says, now listen carefully: 'Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction'. Now listen to this: 'I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the Gospel and also by the Gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged', Luther said, 'and had a troubled conscience'. Eventually through the book of the Romans he saw that it is through faith, faith in Christ alone, faith in Christ's death alone, that the sinner is made righteous in the eyes of God and is accepted - not by any merits of our own, anything we have done, for we have none; but upon Christ's merits, and His only.

My friend, that shows the greatness of what God is doing now. He is presently demonstrating His love, and it is His own divine love that He is demonstrating. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself'. What is your picture of God? How do you see Him? Don't see Him just as a God who is angry with sinners and wants to put you in hell! He is a God of holiness, He is a God of wrath, but it is He who has gone the extra trillion miles in commending His love for us in that, while we were in that sinful, judgment worthy state, He sent His Son in love for us that we might be saved - '...yet sinners, Christ died'. Still sinners! Look at it: God did not wait until we had fulfilled some precondition, and cleaned ourselves up and got right in His sight. He loves us because of what Christ is, not because of what we are - there is nothing in us to call forth the love of God, only one thing can save us: Christ died for us! It's impressive in its simplicity, isn't it? It's succinct. The essence of the Christian message is the greatness that He is presently demonstrating His love, His own divine love is being demonstrated, and at this moment He still requires nothing more of the sinner than to, by faith, claim that Christ died for me - hallelujah! That's it!

The greatness of this salvation in the past is that when human power failed, His grace triumphed. The greatness in the past is that it was eternally planned for us, and it was for the undesirable. The greatness in the present is that it is being demonstrated now through this preaching, and it is God's own divine love being demonstrated. His love does not ask anything

more of us than that we turn from our sin, and put our faith alone in Christ. Thirdly and finally, what great thing will God do? Listen, this is his argument, trying to show us that we can be sure that if we trust Christ we will be saved for time and for eternity - because of the great things God has done in the past, is doing in the present, we can be sure of the great things He will do the future. This is what he says: 'Much more then', verse 9, 'being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him'.

He looks to the future, and quite correctly, notice, he inserts God's wrath - we will be saved from God's wrath. God's wrath is real, but it's not a contradiction of His love. Christ's salvation is effective not only now, it doesn't just blot out our past sins - hallelujah for that - and it doesn't just help us get through life today, but it is something that lies beyond this life and goes forth into eternity. Don't tell me that if you're without Christ you're not fearful of death. Don't tell me that you've never thought of the afterlife. Don't tell me that you've stood around an empty grave and not been caused an iota of contemplation over where you will be on the day of your burial. The wonder of what God is going to do for those who believe in Him in the future is: save them from wrath, because Christ bore the full fury of God's wrath in the believing sinner's place, so that there's no more left for him!

Isaiah 53: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the punishment of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; but the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all'. That's why Paul said to the Thessalonians: 'We wait for the Son of God from heaven, who is raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come'. We shall be saved from wrath. Are you worried about the future, where your soul will be? Can I tell you tonight: the only way to be sheltered from future wrath is to be trusting and resting in the wounds of Jesus Christ.

We shall be saved from wrath, secondly what He will do the future: we shall be saved by His life. When we were God enemies Christ was able, through His death, to reconcile us to God - that's what Paul is saying. So now that we're God's children, the Saviour, is He not going to keep us? Because He's alive by His living power - through death He saved enemies, now that He's alive, is He not going to keep us as His children? Our life is bound up with His life! People say: 'I don't know how I could keep salvation if I trusted Christ' - friend, see that it is your life bound up with Christ. It's got nothing to do with what you keep, He's keeping you!

Thirdly, in the future, we see from verse 11 - and this can be realised in the present also - we exalt in God. This salvation, what God has done, what God is doing for us, what God's going to do in the future - it causes us to exalt and to glory in Jesus, and Jesus alone. That's why Paul could say in Galatians 6:14: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The chief end of man, catechism question number 1, is answered: to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Are you glorifying God, my friend? Are you enjoying God? Old Martin Luther didn't enjoy God, he grew angry with God because he didn't see God in Christ. He wrote a poem, it goes:

'In the devil's dungeon chained I lay;
The pangs of death swept o'er me.
My sins devoured me night and day,
In which my mother bore me.
My anguish ever grew more rife,
I took no pleasure in my life,
And sin had made me crazy.

Then was the Father troubled sore,
 To see me ever languish.
 The everlasting pity swore
 To save me from my anguish.
 He turned to me His Father-heart
 And chose Himself a bitter part,
 His dearest did it cost Him.

Thus spoke the Son, 'Hold thou to me,
 From now on thou will make it.
 I gave my very life for thee,
 And for thee I will stake it.
 For I am thine and thou art mine,
 And where I am our lives entwine,
 And the Old Fiend cannot shake it''.

Luther said, after his conversion: 'If you knocked at my heart's door at any time before my conversion, and had asked, Who dwells in there? I would have answered that no one dwells here but Martin Luther! And if I had opened the door, and you had come in, you would have seen a rough-headed monk, with a shaven crown and a hair shirt, with two tables of stone under my pillow', that is the ten commandments, 'and a knotted scourge hanging beside my bed', that he would have whipped himself with. 'But if you were to knock at the door of my heart tonight, I would answer that Martin Luther no longer lives here; Jesus Christ alone lives here!'

Does He live in your heart? 'God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world'. My friend, are you glorying in God and God's salvation of grace through His Son Jesus Christ? What you must do is to repent of your sin, believe the Gospel, and surrender your life to Christ - and you will know this experience of certain salvation: past, present, and future. Because God did that, you can be sure that He will do this. The long and the short of it is simply that salvation has been purchased, and it is offered freely to all who will by faith come repenting, turning from their sin, and turning to Jesus and Jesus alone. Friend, you can receive eternal life tonight by faith.

Lord, we thank You that we can come and address You as the God of our salvation, the One who planned it from beginning to end. We come in and through the name of our Lord Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. Lord, we know that we are the joy that was set before Him. We thank You, Lord, for ever loving us. We often say why You would have loved us, we do not know - the fact of the matter is, there is no reason why, there cannot be, but Your grace; and Lord, we thank You for it, for without it all of us would be lost. We pray for those who perhaps have never realised it, and never come into the privilege of knowing sins forgiven through Jesus Christ. Lord, tonight take a dealing with them, and for all of us - whatever our spiritual condition may be - may we go away from this place tonight exalting in the Lord Jesus, and the reconciliation that He has brought. Amen.

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 7

"The Victorious Christian Life"

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I believe I have message from the Lord, and I believe we're going to meet with God tonight, and so I want us to pray just now, and all bow our heads and seek the Lord.

Now, while your head is bowed, I want to ask you why you've come tonight. It's good you're here, but why have you come? It's OK to come to meet your friends, that's alright - and it's not a bad thing to come if you're looking for more than a friend! Better coming here and looking for that than looking elsewhere! But you know, I wonder have you come to meet with God? I wonder have you come expecting to meet with God? Would it really surprise you if God spoke to you tonight? Well, I believe He's going to - but I want to challenge you: is your heart open to God saying something to you? As we pray just now, perhaps you would even just say: 'Lord, I open my heart to You, I open my heart to You now to speak to me'? What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of God speaking to you? I hope not. He doesn't want to do you any harm. He only wants to help you and bless you. So why not pray that with me as we come before the Lord now?

Father, we want to thank you for the cross of Jesus, Your Holy Child, Jesus; for that precious blood that flowed down from that cross, that cleanses us from all sin. Lord, hands that should discard us are open, welcoming us to come and it's incredible that we should think if it. Oh God, I pray that just now that, as we meditate upon your Holy Word, that we would hear the voice of Jesus through the cross; that we would know the power of the blood of Jesus through this message - and, Lord, that lives of people gathered here tonight will be liberated, emancipated, set free by the power of Almighty God. Lord we believe You are here. We believe it with all our hearts. We sense Your presence. We sense You so near, Lord, and we ask that You will, to those who to whom You're dead just now, Lord, that You would awaken them by Your Spirit. For Christians who are here, and I know they're here, and they are struggling with sin, and with temptation, and with failure - they're backslidden. Maybe there're some here and they think they're Christians and they are not truly saved. Oh God, I pray that, by Your Spirit, You will come and diagnose each of our conditions, and that You will do the work that needs to be done to bring us to Christ beneath the cross. Lord, I need Your help tonight. I cast myself afresh before You, beneath the cross, and ask for Your infilling of the Holy Spirit and Your enablement - for Christ's sake and for His Glory alone. Amen.

I want you to turn with me, please, to Romans chapter 6. Now, I used to, whenever people got saved, I used to tell them that the best place, perhaps, you could start reading the Bible - you know you're meant to read the Bible whenever you get saved? It's the way God speaks to you - and in any relationship there's got to be dialogue - God speaking to you through His Word and you speaking to Him through prayer. I would often have said that the best place to start, perhaps, is John's Gospel or 1st John - the first epistle of John. But I've changed my mind - you're allowed to change your mind! - and I now would direct people to Romans chapter 6, chapter 7 and chapter 8. We're going to find out why this evening, because in Romans chapters 6, 7 and 8 - we're only looking at chapter 6 - we have the secret (and I don't like that word straight away, because it's not a secret, it's here). It's an open secret, but it's secret in the sense that many people never have discovered it: the secret to the victorious

Christian life. That's what some of you are not living right now, and I know that - because if you were all living it, well, there would be revival probably, and there isn't just yet.

So let's read Romans Chapter 6: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord".

One of the major themes of the book of Romans is how you can be right with God. I don't know whether you've ever thought about it or not, but that's basically the reason for all religion. People want to get right with God - they know, in a sense, that they're not right with God. Now you're here tonight, and I want to ask you that: do you know if you're not right with God? Do you understand what that means?

Well, the first three chapters of the book of Romans tell us how man is wrong before God. What Paul does is he proves - and Paul was a lawyer and it's as if he was in a court of law and he's arguing against the sinner, that the sinner is guilty. The sinner is guilty, having broken the laws of God. Now the laws of God are summed up, really, in the ten commandments. I don't have time to go through them all, but you know them I'm sure: you don't put any gods before the Living God, you don't worship idols, you don't take the name of the Lord God in vain, you don't steal, you don't commit adultery, you don't lust, covet, you don't lie - and that's how we break God's law. God gave us His law to show us that we were sinners. So Paul proves, because all of us have committed at least one of the ten commandments, that that means we are law breakers in the sight of the Holy God and it means that we are all wrong in His sight - but he goes further and explains how we cannot make ourselves right in the eyes of God. He goes on to say how no good works or seemingly righteous acts that we perform

can make us right before God, because it's not just things that we do that make us sinners, it's what we are. We are, by nature, sinners. We have an eternally terminal disease called sin.

The last verse we read was: 'The wages of sin is death'. Now, my friend, I want to ask you, because I'm conscious that there may be people here unsaved: do you understand - listen carefully to what I'm saying - that the wrath of God abides on you because you are a law breaker? God is a Holy God. God is a righteous God, and He has to deal justly with sin. He can't sweep it under the carpet, and neither can you. If you sweep something under the carpet you'll trip over it, and that's what people do with their sin. If they try to ignore it, it grows bigger. God has graciously given us His law to show us, like a magnifying glass, to show us, not just that we are sinners, but how big sinners we are. No matter how much good you do, it can never outweigh the bad, because the Bible says that even our so-called good works are like filthy rags in God's sight - because we contaminate them by our sinful nature that has this disease in it. In other words, we can't really do good things, right things, in the sight of God.

Well, in chapters 4 and 5, after arguing that, Paul tells us how we can be made right with God - and it's wonderful! We've been singing about it already: we are made right with God, not by works, but by faith in Jesus Christ who has accomplished the only work that can save mankind. He, as a perfect Man, died on the cross - but because He was God, He died a death that was of eternal value. When He shed His precious blood, bearing the punishment that we deserve for our sins - in other words, taking our place, standing in our shoes - He was, we heard it, He was made sin for us. He was put to death for our sins, and God put upon Him the judgement that we deserve - and, through faith in that sacrifice, we can be made right with God.

Now you want to know tonight - I hope you do, you should want to, because God's wrath is on you - you should want to be right with God. The way to be right with God is to have Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and put your faith and trust in Him - that means His righteousness is given to us so that we can be accepted with God. It means that His goodness is put into our account, even though we have nothing to offer to God. Jesus Christ is given to us and God, God as the Judge, declares us righteous. The slate is completely cleansed, our sins wiped away. Now, my friend, it's wonderful - and this is not my message tonight, but just in case there's someone who is not saved here this evening: do you know that no matter what you have done, no matter where you've been, no matter what you have become in your sinful lifestyle, God's Son, Jesus Christ, who loved you enough to bleed His precious blood for you and take the filth and shame of your sin, He is able to wipe your soul clean. He'll take your sin away, and He'll do it now if you have faith in Him!

But you know, Jesus didn't just die to take the sin, the guilt of sin, away. What I mean by that is: sort of to wipe the past clean, and all the bad things we've done before, get rid of them - that's the perception a lot of people have. The Lord Jesus died as much to give us victory now, and maybe you're here tonight and you don't know present victory - that means that you're bound by some kind of sin. Now we all have besetting sins - that means things that we tend to give in to rather than other things. They may be peculiar to us as an individual and our personality, and there are temptations that seem to affect some more than others and so on - but many Christians are living in the bondage of an habitually sinful lifestyle. Some people have such a false view of the Gospel that they reason like this: 'Well, if God wipes the slate clean, then in God's eyes I'm forgiven, and then really, well, if I sin I just ask God to forgive me and I say sorry, and He wipes the slate clean!'

Now it is true that when a Christian sins, if we confess our sins, He is faithful, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. But if you premeditatedly decide to sin with this idea: 'Well, if I sin I can ask God to forgive me anyway' - you have never truly understood the grace of God, and there might even be a question mark over whether you are saved or not. That's the question that was asked at the beginning here: 'What shall we say then, shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?'. I mean, if God continues to forgive us our sin as Christians, does that mean the more we sin the more the grace comes to forgive us our sin?

Paul says: 'God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer in it?'. Now, in that statement is the secret to victory in the Christian life. That sounds strange, perhaps, but what I mean is this: imagine someone discovered the cure for lung cancer, and you, tragically, had contracted lung cancer. Of course, you received the treatment, whatever it was, gladly - who wouldn't? But then you decided: 'Well, there's a cure for lung cancer, so I'll just carry on being a chain smoker. In fact, I'll do more, I'll smoke more packets a day, as many as I can - because there's a cure for cancer'. Now, what would people think of you? They would think you're misusing and abusing the cure for cancer - and that's why there's been a whole row about people getting liver transplants who are alcoholics. We've seen it in the news, because some people think it's a quick fix - and I'm not entering into that tonight, but the motivation is the same. They're getting a quick cure, and then many of them are just going back to their habitual alcoholism. They're misusing and abusing the gift of life that has been given to them. Now, if you think 'I can just sail along in a life of sin, because God has forgiven me and He's going to keep forgiving me, and I'll end up in heaven one day', you are misusing and abusing the grace of God. You haven't really understood it because, well, it has been given not just to take away your past sins, it has been given to deliver you here and now from your present sins, to give you power! Jesus died so that you might be free, not to go on sinning, but to be free from sin - that's true freedom! Freedom isn't freedom to keep in bondage to a habitual sinful lifestyle, freedom is to be free to live for God and live free of sin!

What God wants to do is called 'sanctification' in your life, and that simply means: God has already worked into you the potential for you to live a holy life, and He imparts Christ's righteousness to your character and to your conduct. In other words, He makes you like Jesus - that is what God wants to do when He saves you.

Now I want to ask you the question: are you living well for God, are you? Or are you struggling? Are there things holding you back from living right for God? The Christian life is like the Grand old Duke of York, when you're up, you're up and when you're down, you're down, and half time you're neither up nor down - you're half way up or down. It's like a rollercoaster experience - up and down, and up and down. You're on the mountain one minute and in the valley the next - on the mountain, in the valley. There isn't that consistency, and you're really struggling. It all seems to be a struggle.

Now listen, one of the reasons why this is often the case in the life of true Christians is: they have never understood that they've got two natures. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying tonight: when you're born you have a sinful nature, OK? The bias in you is toward sin, and to a large extent you can't help it - that's not an excuse for it, it's just the way we're born. But when we get saved, we're given a new nature - and the Bible says it is God's nature, and God lives in us by the Holy Spirit. Now, when we get saved, we get God's nature - but we don't lose our sinful nature. It stays there and it will be there until we get to heaven. Here's the big issue: many Christians don't realise that they struggle because they have got this sinful nature. So often what they do is, they feed the sinful nature rather than feeding God's nature,

and they wonder why the sinful nature is so strong in them - and whenever sin comes along tempting them, they fall time after time again.

It all depends on how you behave towards your sinful nature. Now listen carefully to what I'm saying: victory over the sinful nature doesn't come by trying. It doesn't come by striving. It doesn't come by scheming. It doesn't come by some sort of innovative plan. It comes one way and only one: it comes by dying. Are you with me? The old nature that you have had from birth, it cannot be cured, it cannot be overcome by human strength. The only answer for the old sinful nature in your heart is for it to die.

Now maybe you're in here tonight and you say: 'I wish that part of me could die'. Do you ever feel like that? I wish that part of me that I really struggle with could die. Well, here's the message of God to you tonight - it's good news: if you're a Christian, you are dead. You are dead! You say: 'I don't feel dead' - look at this passage. Verse 2: 'How shall we, that are dead', what did He just say? 'How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?', verse 3, 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into His death?'. Verse 4: 'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death', verse 5, 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death'. Verse 6: 'Knowing this, that our old man' - that's our old sinful nature that causes us all the problems - 'is crucified', has been crucified, 'with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed'. Verse 7: 'For he that is dead is freed from sin'.

Now Paul doesn't teach in this passage that you've got to get to this position of being dead, you've got to put yourself to death, you've got to struggle and really strive - no! He says you are dead! This is the travesty and the ridiculous contradiction of a Christian going on living in sin, because there's no reason for it, because their sinful human nature has been put to death with Christ on the cross.

Now Satan's influence over us is often based on lies that he tells us. He is a liar from the beginning. He tells us: 'Oh, sin is too strong for you boy!'; and that temptation you continually fall down into, 'Oh, you'll never resist that, you've a weakness there' - that's what Satan tells you. He says you'll always be a slave to this, when in fact the truth of God's Word says, 'No! You are dead to that thing, and the power line of sin is cut in our lives, like snapping that wire in the lamp - the lamp goes out. Jesus, when He died on the Cross, He cut the power wire of sin into our lives. It's the devil that wants us to believe that the darkness of sin is still in our life, when Jesus Christ has set us free. It is the truth, Jesus said, that would set us free in this regard.

I remember hearing a story years ago about a particular war in Asia. The war concluded, and one side was victorious and the other side was defeated, and there was this little man who was engaged in guerrilla warfare in the jungle. He was running around with all the magazines, bullets around him, his machine gun and his resources, and he would go down to the stream and fill up his canteen of water to keep himself alive and so on. He was running around hiding, and he was doing this, and he did it for years after the war had ended because no one had told him and the word hadn't come to him that it was over. Here was a man who was behaving, living in fear and in defensiveness, because he thought the battle was still on. He was waiting for the enemy round the corner, and it was very real to him, but the battle was over! That's the way many, many Christians are living: they are living in fear of the devil. They are living in fear of temptation and besetting sins, and they feel constantly defeated because they have never truly accepted, they have never let the truth sink in that sin does not need and sin should not reign, because you are dead to it in the death of Jesus. Paul says

that - verse 12: 'Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Don't yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace'. Do you understand?

First Corinthians 10:13 says 'there is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man', everybody is tempted, 'but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted over what you are able; but will also with the temptation give a way of escape'. So that is God's Word to prove that temptation comes your way - and believe you me, and I can confess it, it's hot and heavy at times - but God's Word says there is no temptation that's too strong for the Christian. There isn't! It's a lie of the devil. Why? Because the power of sin has been put to death with Jesus at the cross. Are you getting it? You're dead!

Not only are you dead, you are alive. Sounds like a bit of a contradiction, but if you look at verse 4, the second half: 'Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life', verse 5, 'For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection'. Verse 8: 'If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him', verse 9, 'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him' - He's alive! Verse 10: 'For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he lives, he lives unto God' - and we live through Him!

Now understand this: if all the cross did for us was put sin to death, we would be in trouble - why? Because we would just be this vacuous being, empty of our sin, but nothing else resident in us. But what God does is, He cuts the power line of sin, it's severed - but He has also now connected us in, plugged us into (wait for it!) the resurrection life of Jesus!

You really look like you're plugged into the resurrection life of Jesus tonight! You probably are, maybe I just don't see it! But that's the power source. In fact, if you're saved, that's a fact - that's a fact! You're not looking, running around in the dark looking for the plug: 'Where is it, till I get connected!' - you are connected! You are dead in the death of Christ, and you are alive, connected to the resurrection life of Christ!

In Ephesians 1 verses 19 and 20 - we'll not look at it - but it says that Paul prayed to God that the Ephesians' eyes would be opened and they would realise that the power that raised Jesus from the dead - the greatest miracle of all time - that that power is working in you. Do you believe that? Do you believe it? Come on now! Do you believe that sin has been made dead to you, and the resurrection power of God that brought Jesus back from the dead is alive in you? I'm not asking do you feel it, did you ever hear me say that? I asked you: do you believe it?

You might say: 'That's all wonderful, but that's not my experience - surely if that was the case I would feel it?'. You're saying: 'Well I'm still a slave to sin'. Well, verse 13 says that if you're truly saved you should not be a slave to sin. You should not be yielding the members of your body to unrighteousness. You should not be serving God. You should not be serving sin, but you should be serving righteousness with the body that God has given you. Now, I would challenge you tonight: make sure you're saved first and foremost. Make sure that you're born again - but if you know you're born again and you have the assurance, here's what you must do if you want to live in the victory of this - the fact that you're dead and the fact that you're alive to God. Here it is: you must reckon yourself, you must consider yourself dead to sin and

alive to God. That's found in verse 11, look: 'likewise', because this is all the case, 'reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord' - that means you've got to reckon it, accept it as a fact, believe it!

The trouble is with some of you, is that you are believing what the devil says quicker than what God says. You're listening to him: 'Ah you'll never have victory over that, there's no way. This guy can preach until his face blows up in heat and rage, you're going to go back again tonight, and again it's going to be a problem'. Isn't that what he's saying? Isn't that what he's saying just now? Even tonight, before tomorrow morning when you're in church, it's going to be a problem again. That is a lie! If you're truly saved, that is a lie from the pit of the devil, and it's up to you to choose to believe God rather than believe the devil - because what you believe affects the way you behave. If you believe that you're always going to struggle, you're always going to fail, you're always going to fall flat on your face, you're never going to make anything as a great Christian of your life, you will never do anything else - because what you believe affects the way that you behave. But if you would only believe God, you'd behave a lot different that's for sure. Most don't believe it, so most don't live it. Most don't believe that the power of sin has been severed in their life. Most don't believe that the power, the resurrection power of God, is disclosed in their life, and so they are not living it. It's very, very simple. So forget about feelings - feelings will come, let me tell you, if you believe this - but it's not about feelings initially, it's about the facts and putting your faith in the facts.

See most people - an old Christian put it like this, and I'm nearly finished - most people, when they become a Christian, are like a man who goes into a book shop to buy two books. The book shop owner, he wraps up the two books in brown paper and he tapes them all up and puts a wee piece of string around them, pushes them over the desk. He takes the payment for them and you lift one of them, turn round and walk out and leave the other on the desk. In other words, both are yours but you leave one behind. Most Christians get saved, and they take the forgiveness of sins and getting to heaven when they die, but they don't know personal victory in their life and they don't know the fullness of the Holy Spirit, they don't know what it is to be alive to God. It's theirs, it has been bought for them with the precious blood of Jesus. It's like someone being left a massive inheritance in a will, but they are satisfied to have it in black and white on a piece of paper rather than actually going and claiming it as their own. It's yours, my friend! Victory in Jesus! Victory over sin! Life in the power of the Spirit! The very resurrection life of Jesus! It's yours and all you've got to do, by faith, is claim it and live in it.

Years ago there was a school in Texas, and it burnt down about the time of World War II and many children were killed in the awful fire. The school decided that they would make sure that would never ever happen again. So the Governors gave the go-ahead to put a state of the art sprinkler system into that school, so that if ever there was even a match struck, almost, in the school, that this would engage and lives, potentially, would be saved. The thing was so technologically advanced for the day and age it was installed that they used to have tours, and other schools would come to see it and people would be intrigued by this wonderful sprinkler system. They would show people around and all the rest. Years later, by mistake - I think it was the janitor - stumbled and saw that the sprinkler system, the state of the art sprinkler system had never ever been connected to the water source. They had everything and yet they had nothing. It was theirs and yet it was not tapped in to the source.

Now my friend tonight, whose slave are you? Whose slave are you? You're the devil's slave, if you're not saved you're the devil's slave. But you could be a Christian tonight and still living, thinking, thinking that you are a slave to sin, when you are a child of God, you're a son or

daughter of the King - yet you're living like a slave to sin. Jesus is saying to you tonight that there's no need for it, there's no need for it because you are free from sin and you are alive to God. Live in it!

'What do I need to do?', you say. Well, let's bow our heads, everyone bow their head. What do you need to do? Well, you need to get to the cross. We sang about it tonight: the cross of Jesus. By faith, you need to come to that place where Jesus was broken, bleeding and dying, enduring the wrath of God for your wickedness, your lawlessness, your filth, your shame. He is perfect, He is the spotless Son of God. You need to come to that cross, and you need to be broken for your sin that was put upon Him. The fact of the matter is that some of you couldn't care less. Listen to what I'm saying tonight, and I don't take any pleasure in it: God will damn your soul for it, and He will be just in doing it because you deserve it and I deserve it. If you reject His broken Son, the Lamb of God, slain for you, you will perish for all eternity. But if you realise the guilt that you have before God, and you allow yourself before God to be broken, and you repent - you change your mind about your sin, and you look to that Lamb hanging there, bleeding and dying, broken, you look to Him for salvation, for you can have salvation in Him alone - you will be saved tonight.

But Christian that is how, that is how you continue, that's the secret! You don't just get up from there. You stay broken before the cross, you don't just get up - and then you realise that three days later He rose from the grave. You allow yourself to be dead with Him, hanging there as if you were hanging there with Him - you were - and you realise that you're dead, but you realise that the new life that He had when He rose from the grave, that that's your life. You rose with Him, so when He died, you died. When He rose, He left you behind in the grave and now He rises to eternal life, and He gives you that life when you believe in Him.

Now listen, if you want to be victorious it's very simple: the cross and the empty tomb, plus your faith, believing in the cross and the empty tomb brings forgiveness - but, Christian, it also brings victory!

'O victory in Jesus,
My Saviour, forever.
He sought me and bought me
With His redeeming blood;
He loved me 'ere I knew Him
And all my love is due Him,
He plunged me to' - what? - 'victory',
Through His redeeming blood'.

I ask you again tonight: are you living in victory? Now as everybody's head is bowed, I believe God has spoken to some of you. I believe God has met with some of you - and I'm fed up with fiddling about at meetings, giving wee messages and Christians saying 'That was great, thank you very much', and they go out unchanged, unaffected, no better - maybe worse. But I want, by the power of God tonight, for you to enter into the life of victory in the power of the risen Christ - that's what, more than I want, that's what God wants for you, that's what the precious blood of Jesus has bought for you. That's what all the suffering that Christ went through at Calvary meant for you, that you might live, free from the power of sin - and you need to enter into it tonight if you never have.

I'm free for you to speak with me tonight, and I'd love to, but you don't need to speak to me, you need to speak to God. You need to get right with God. Christian, you need to enter into

the victory of Jesus tonight and just say: 'Lord, I repent of my sin and I confess to you that I have believed the devil, his lies that sin is too big for me, but I now believe Christ put it to death and I'm alive in the resurrection power of Jesus. I'm claiming Your word and I want You to make it real in my life as I step out in faith, believing that it is true'.

Father, I have preached the truth of Your Word, and I'm asking You to seal it with new victory in the life of Your children. If there's any here that aren't saved and are living under some illusion, and they are continuing on in sin because they have never known the grace of God, Lord, may tonight Your fear fall on them. May it fall on them - not to destroy them, but to drive them to You. Lord, Christians, if there are any misusing or abusing Your grace, as we have done ourselves, oh God, may they see what a danger they're in and how sacrilegious and even blasphemous it is to use grace as a license to sin. Lord, more perhaps is the case that people really want to live right, but feel that they just are struggling, limping along in the Christian experience. Lord, help them to see that the devil has them trapped in a false illusion, in this bubble that he has created for them, that all the freedom and victory of Jesus is available - and may they take it with both hands into their heart tonight, by faith, to the glory of Jesus Christ, for not only victory in their life, but mighty revival in the church of Jesus Christ - whatever churches we belong to - that we will see Christians living in the power of Jesus in this day and generation of ours. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 8

"Three Laws Of Life"

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Let's open our Bibles at Romans chapter 8, and then bow our heads before the Lord in a word of prayer: Lord, we have read from the Scriptures about the Spirit of God, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, who Paul could say 'Has set me free from the law of sin and of death'. Lord, what was Paul's experience we long to be the experience of others, those of us who have experienced new life in Christ want to thank You afresh for all that we have in Him. But Lord, tonight, we're looking to You afresh to send Your Spirit to those who are without Him. Glorify Jesus Christ Your Son tonight, save souls, and stir up the saints with a fresh appreciation of the Gospel of Your grace. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

If you were to look up the average dictionary, the definition of 'law' would be something like this: 'Law is a rule of conduct imposed by authority, or accepted by the community as binding'. Another definition is simpler: 'Law is a controlling influence'. Now, society at large today has preferred licence rather than law, a free for all. The community at large has chosen to have no bounds, no laws, and licence seems to be preferred rather than law. I think the reason and the thinking behind that is, that people in our modern age perceive that law does no longer work, if it ever worked. What I mean by that is simply that they have deciphered that law does not prevent crime, and therefore, if law does not prevent crime, why have any laws at all? Abolish the laws, and by natural effect you'll have less crime.

More and more law enforcement officials are coming to the conclusion that the only way to reduce the crime rate is to make everything legal. There are moves, of course, in our own nation to decriminalise all sorts of classified drugs; and that in itself, if adopted nationwide, proponents at least claim that that decriminalisation would produce a dramatic decline in the number of arrests for illegal drug possession - because it would no longer be illegal to possess those drugs! There's also talk about legalising prostitution and several other vices.

One of the leading advocates of decriminalisation in the United States is an organisation with the initials 'LLLL', which stands for 'Less Lawlessness through Less Law'. One of their spokesmen said this, I quote: 'Hiring more policemen, imposing curfews, building new prisons, enlarging the judiciary - these measures only treat the symptoms of the crime wave. If we're ever going to have a genuine improvement in the situation, we've got to attack the root cause of crime: the laws'. Interesting, isn't it?

Let me say first of all that I think that gentleman is correct in one sense, what is that? Well, he's correct in the fact that law does not prevent crime. We've had laws since man began in his origination, right at the very beginning in the Garden of Eden - yet crime has not been prevented by those laws. So perhaps there is a grain of sympathy we ought to have toward this modern generation that has become disillusioned with laws and restrictions, because they clearly do not work, and we see that all around us. But where these proponents for decriminalisation are wrong, is to say that the root cause of crime are the laws. Whilst the laws do not prevent crime, the laws are not the root cause of crime. The root cause of crime is the fallenness of the human heart - men and women, and boys and girls, are the problem in

society, not the laws! Their lawlessness, naturally, the fact that they cannot keep the law is the problem.

Now, Paul gives to us in the book of Romans similar principles in the spiritual realm. Paul, here in Romans 8, gives us three laws - right throughout the whole book of Romans indeed - laws of life that cannot be avoided. We want to look at them from Romans 8 this evening. The first law that he mentions is the law of Moses; the second is the law of sin; and the third is the law of life. I want to deal with these, each of them in turn.

Let's look first of all at the law of Moses. Now what does the apostle Paul say about the law of Moses? First of all, let me put it in this way: he tells us basically that the law of Moses was right, but the problem was it had no might. The law of Moses was right, but it had no might. Now the law of Moses is encapsulated for us in the ten commandments that we find in Exodus chapter 20. I'm not going to go down through them all, I'm sure you're familiar at least with some of them. None of us here this evening, I hope, would have an argument with the fact that the ten commandments are right, they are correct. Yet in verse 2 of Romans chapter 8 Paul uses this phraseology that: 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death'. Now it is clear from the context of the book of Romans that when Paul is talking about the law of sin and death, he's actually talking about the law of Moses, the ten commandments and the rest of the five books that begin the Bible - Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Now don't misunderstand what Paul is saying. He is not saying that the law in its intrinsic worth is wrong, that the law of God is bad. We've already established that not to lie, not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery etc is good, it is right. The law in itself, as Paul says in another place in Romans, chapter 7 and verse 12, the law is holy, the commandment is holy and just and good. Its intrinsic worth is righteous - but when Paul says that the law of Moses is the law of sin and death to him, he is speaking of the law of Moses' value in bringing us to God as sinners. It has no might to bring us to God. In other words, if we think that by keeping and adhering to the rules and regulations of the ten commandments or the first five books of the Bible, that we'll get to God and eventually achieve heaven, we will be bitterly disappointed. Because, though the law of Moses is right and correct, it has no might to bring us to God.

Now, perhaps you're asking, I hope: 'Why is that?'. Verse 3 gives us the answer: because it was weak in the flesh, weak through the flesh. What that simply means is that we cannot keep the law of Moses in our flesh. Though the law of Moses is right and the commandments are correct, all that they achieve for us is to defeat us. The law of Moses shows up our inability to keep it. Now you might say: 'Well then, what was the purpose of God giving us the law of Moses in the first place?'. The answer is the purpose that has been achieved after God has given us the law: it has shown up our sin. Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, we have missed God's righteous standard which He has revealed helpfully to us in the law. Romans 3:20 says: 'Therefore', because of that, 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin'.

The law was not given to us, the ten commandments were not given to us so that we could tick off a check box beside each of them after keeping them, and say: 'Well, I've kept all ten, or maybe I've got an average, and I'm going to go to heaven now'. That is not the purpose why God gave the ten commandments, in fact the opposite is true: He give us His law to show us our need, to show us that we are sinners, to show us that we are condemned in the

eyes of God. If you like, it's like a magnifying glass - the sins that perhaps we could not have seen before God gave us His law, when He gives us this magnifying glass of the ten commandments, all of a sudden our lawlessness and our sinfulness becomes gigantic. It was never given with the intention of saving us, because it could not, for our flesh is weak to keep it.

Therefore it's obvious that not only the book of Romans, but indeed the whole New Testament, indeed the whole Bible, teaches that you cannot be saved by the works of the law. Whether you're talking about the law of Moses, or any other law of a religion, a law cannot save because we as human beings are law-breakers by nature. So what we see going on in the social realm around us in society, the lawlessness, is reflected in every human heart. We are law-breakers, and law is not working in the spiritual realm because we can't keep it. We're weak in the flesh.

Now, right away here we see why the Gospel is a stumbling block to so many people in Paul's day and in our day today, because there are so many who still believe that they can be saved through adherence to laws. The Jews in Paul's day and Jesus' day believed that through keeping the ten commandments, through keeping the Decalogue, the ten words that Moses gave, through keeping the rituals and rules of the books of Leviticus and so on, that they could achieve righteousness with God - so much so that the Pharisees even added over 600 extra laws that were intricate interpretations of the other laws that God gave, just to make sure that they got it right! Heaven depended on these laws, and there are many religious people in our world today, and you hear them say: 'Well, I go to my church, I go to such-and-such, first and second and third this-that-and-the-other'. You don't have to be religious to be of that mindset, it's not just religious people. Even athiests, who are very moral at times, they don't say 'I go', perhaps they say 'I do' or 'I don't do'. 'I do my best' or 'I don't do any harm to anybody', you've heard those statements before.

Maybe you're here tonight, and you're a person, maybe not admitting it, but deep down in your heart you think in some way that adhering to a certain list of rules and regulations will achieve merit with God, and eventually hopefully keep the door of heaven ajar for you. Now listen very carefully to what I'm saying tonight: on the authority of God's word, it is impossible to be saved by works - impossible! The apostle James in his epistle, who labours much on the importance of works after salvation, tells us clearly in chapter 2 and verse 10: 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all'. That means if you live 50 years of your life and kept all the ten commandments, and all of a sudden near the end of your days you slipped up and coveted something, or told a lie, or took the Lord's name in vain, you've broken them all.

Of course, we all know that from childhood we've been breaking all of the ten commandments right until now. You can't keep the law, because the law is a package. If you fail in one little point, all of the law is shattered. It's like the spokes of a wheel, and when you break one spoke the whole wheel collapses. You cannot keep God's law! You've heard people say in the context of commerce: 'The customer's always right'. I heard about a policeman who said to a shopkeeper who was robbed by a criminal: 'In my job the customer is always wrong'. That's the way it is with God's law, the customer is always wrong, you're always failing, you're always falling short. The Bible makes it clear: religious rules, rituals, regulations, rites, they are all impotent to save man's soul!

Martin Luther was a German monk, and he immersed himself in works in an attempt to save his own soul. He thought that through meritorious works he could be in favour with God, and

he gave his testimony revealing the extent of the attempts that he would go to to save himself through works. This is what he said: 'Over a thousand times I have vowed to God to live righteously and have never kept my vows. Now I make no more promises, for I know I cannot keep them. If God will not show me mercy for the sake of Christ, I shall never stand before Him. If you want to be converted do not be eager to learn about all this self-denial and discipline and all these tortures, love Him who first loved you'. In a sermon that he preached in Brent, Luther tells how he came to the knowledge of the truth of how his soul could be saved. He said: 'My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my character would satisfy Him. Night and day I pondered until I saw the meaning of the words of the Bible 'the just shall live by faith'. Then I grasped that the justice of God is the righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy He justifies us through faith. Immediately', he says, 'I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through the open doors into paradise'.

He grasped it! After trying to earn his salvation and earn heaven through works, he was able to see through the Scriptures that it's not something that can be earned, but it's the gift of God that must be received by faith alone - Ephesians 2:8-9: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast'. Indeed Paul, in chapter 4 of this epistle and verse 5 says: 'And to the one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted unto righteousness'. God saves those who do not work for salvation, but who believe in the One who justifies the ungodly.

The law of Moses will do you no good, my friend. I'm not saying it's not good, of course it's good - it's good not to steal, it's good not to blaspheme, it's good not to covet, it's good not to commit adultery - that is God's holy law, but you know as well as I do that you can't keep it. It is right, but it has no might. The second law Paul talks about in Romans is the law of sin that was in his body. This law of sin has might, it is very strong to the point of almost being irresistible, but it is not right. This is where theology, if you like, becomes very personal. This is the human side that we face when we attempt to keep the law of Moses, we face the law of sin that is in our members, the struggle that we have with the flesh and all the temptations that come with it.

Paul talked of this in Romans 7 and verse 23, listen to what he says: 'But I see another law in my members', in my body, 'warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members'. What a struggle! This law of sin in his soul and in his very body. He says in the same chapter 7 and verse 21 that this law of sin reigns: 'I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me'. Do you ever experience that? You try to do your best, maybe it's in keeping the law, maybe it's just in being moral, maybe it's in kicking some kind of habit that you're embarrassed about. Whilst your mind would like to do it, you have a law within you that is driving you, compelling you irresistibly to sin in that particular way. It reigns, that's what the Bible says, it is the result of the fall of man in the garden of Eden. Adam gave over the jurisdiction of this universe to Satan, and sin came upon all men; and now sin reigns in our universe, but sin reigns in our bodies.

Not only does it reign, Paul says, but it wrecks. In Romans 7:24 he says: 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of death?'. I wonder is there someone listening to my voice tonight, and you have been wrecked, ruined by the reign of the law of sin in your life. It could manifest itself in alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, prostitution, gambling, theft, lying, coveting, adultery, divorce, suicide, drug abuse, vandalism, racism,

fascism, sectarianism. All of these things are symptomatic of the reign and the wreckage that sin brings into personal lives. This is so near to you tonight, this is something that is so relevant to you - right out of God's word it's coming into your personal circumstances. Have you ever wondered why you have never been able to eradicate this law of sin in your body? Why society has never been able to eradicate the scourge of humanity? This is why: there is a law of sin in our bodies!

Science has not tamed it, though it has sold us the lie of evolution to tell us everything is getting better - things aren't getting better! It's obvious things are getting worse! Politics has not the answer, no matter what party you adhere to. Whether you think that Plato's Republic can be brought to bear on any society, it has never ever brought peace and righteousness to reign. Religion has failed too. Many a church in Christendom has failed to turn the tidal effects of this law of sin - why? Because it's in us, and it has might, it is strong - but it is not right! It overcomes us, it reigns in us, and it wrecks our lives and the lives of those around us and in society at large.

I want to leave with you tonight the third law, which is the law of the Spirit. We've looked at the law of Moses - it was right, but it had no might. As far as we are concerned, we're weak in the flesh to keep it. The law of sin is in us which adds to the problem - it is not right, but it has much might. It leads us all astray. But this law of the Spirit that Paul talks about is right, and it has might! It is from God, and gives with the gift of the Spirit of God the ability to keep God's commands. The word 'Spirit' is found 20 times in Romans chapter 8, and it speaks of the third person of the Trinity, but in the sense that He is the life-giving power. It's not a theory or a theology that gives you might to do what is right, it's not an ethic, it is not a philosophy, it is a Person, it is the Holy Spirit of the Living God.

When you hear people talking about being born again, this is what they speak of: God's Spirit coming into your life to cause you to live aright. When this law is instrumental in your life, verse 1 says there will be no condemnation. You will be set free from the law of sin and death. The law of Moses will be cast out, you'll not try and keep all that because you've something better, you've the Spirit of God in you to live the very life of Christ before others! The law of sin will be put to death, because it was crucified with Christ. You will be freed, emancipated to live the life of Christ in you.

Now you might say: 'How is this possible?' - and I perceive that this is often what people say when we talk about being born again, evangelical language of the slate being wiped clean, just repent of your sins and put faith in Christ, and everything will be a fresh start. People find that very difficult to swallow, 'It's too good to be true! How can it be? If you're right in saying that we cannot keep these laws of Moses, the ten commandments, we cannot be righteous and moral to satisfy God. If you're telling us that the negative of that is that there is a law working against all those things in our members, how can you just say all of a sudden that being born again will make us right?'. Well, here's the answer in verse 3, look at it: 'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God' - God! - 'sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh'.

Now listen to this tonight: if you were to put the Gospel in a nutshell, the Gospel of God's grace is all of God, God did it. What Moses' law cannot do for us, what you cannot do in your own flesh - not only because it is weak and sinful, but there's this law working through it - God did! That's what the Bible says! If you have believed any other Gospel, other than the one that says there's nothing that you can do, you are hopeless, you are helpless, you are a sinner, even your very righteousness and good works are nothing in God's sight, filthy rags;

but you must come and accept, by a gift of grace through faith, salvation - that's the only thing you can do - if you've accepted any Gospel that is contrary to that you've been sold a bill of goods. If it's not the Gospel that God did, it's not the Gospel.

Romans 1 tells us that the Gospel is the Gospel of God that has been revealed from heaven. It's not man-made, it's not concocted, it's of God! How did He do it? 'What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son', verse 3 - Christ came! God did through Christ coming, His own Son in His likeness - but He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. His Son, He came as sinless man - if He didn't come as sinless man, He would have needed a Saviour Himself, but He came as perfect man into this world to save mankind on their behalf. He also came as the Son of God, deity, because only God can save, only God could do this great work of salvation. Note that it doesn't say He came in sinful flesh, He was not a sinner! Neither does it say that He came in the likeness of flesh, He wasn't some ghost, He was a real flesh and blood and bone human being like you, born of the Virgin Mary. He had to be, because He had to shed that blood to die. He was perfect, and He was real, and here's how salvation is accomplished: God sent this Son...and then it says that as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh. Not only did Christ come, that's how God did it, but Christ was condemned as an offering for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh. What that simply means is that what Jesus did in His flesh condemned sin. Sin that condemns you before a holy God, sin that is working in your members and reigning and wrecking in your life, what Jesus did in His flesh has condemned sin - sin is condemned! That sin is in us, and because that sin is in us we are condemned - but because Jesus condemned sin in His own flesh, we can be free: that is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. That's the Gospel, my friend. Paul puts it in other place like this: 'God hath made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him'. Again he says: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree'. In this book in chapter 6 he says: 'Knowing this, that our old man', that old sinful nature, 'is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin'. Peter said: 'He', Christ, 'in His own body bore our sins, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes we are healed'.

Jesus' death on the cross is the answer to the problem of not being able to keep the law of Moses, which is right but has no might. It's the answer to the law of sin that reigns and wrecks our lives, that is so strong with might but is not right. This death of Christ on the cross is our substitute, taking our sin, bearing our shame, exhausting our judgment on our behalf. It causes God to be able to say: 'Well, if He took your sin, and if you embrace Him by faith, I will give you My righteousness. When I look on you I'll no longer see your sin, but I'll see Jesus'.

Can I tell you something? This doctrine changed the course of history not only in the New Testament, but in Europe during the period of the Reformation. This was the intrinsic crux of the message that shook the church of Rome and that whole empire at that particular time, and the whole of the continent of Europe and the world. Martin Luther we've mentioned, another called John Calvin - he was defining on one occasion the central truths of the Reformation, in other words the difference between Roman Catholicism and the Gospel of the Bible, and it's simply this: Roman Catholicism, and many other religions, teaches that we can achieve righteousness with God by working - but the Bible tells us 'No!', as we've seen tonight, it is a gift of grace that we must receive by faith.

Calvin, defining the centre of the Gospel, said this: 'As all mankind are, in the sight of God, lost sinners, we hold that Christ is their only righteousness, since, by His obedience, He has wiped off all our transgressions; by His sacrifice, He has appeased the divine anger; by His blood, He has washed away our stains; by His cross, borne our curse; and by His death, made satisfaction for us. We maintain that in this way man is reconciled in Christ to God the Father by no merit of his own, by no value of works, but by gratuitous mercy' - nothing of me, all of Christ! That's the Gospel!

Let me illustrate it to you like this, I heard this story just today of two brothers who lived in an oriental city. One was a wild prodigal son character, the other was a man who had been saved by the grace of God and was seeking to live for God and Christ. One day, suddenly, the wild brother ran into the home covered from head to toe in blood - he had murdered a man. The strong arm of the law was nearby, the police were closing in on him. His converted brother decided that he would offer to change his clothes with his brother's bloody clothes. His brother consented, and when the police came in the converted brother was arrested, and eventually through the judicial process sentenced to death. He wrote a letter to his prodigal brother the day before he was executed. This is what the letter said, listen very carefully: 'This is the Gospel in a nutshell. Tomorrow, clothed in your garments, I die in your stead. You, clothed in my clothes, will, in remembrance of me, henceforth live justly and holy. That is why Jesus died - clothed in your garments He died in your stead, with your guilt upon Him, that you might live righteously, justly and holy with His clothes on you'. There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, there is the opposite of condemnation which is justification - the act of God whereby a sinner is declared righteous in His sight because of Christ! Romans 5:1: 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God' - not of works! You can't work for your salvation, you can't work against the law of sin in you. All you can do, my friend, is throw down your hands and say: 'No works of mine, no merits of mine, but I plead Jesus and the merits of His blood, that alone can save me, Father!'.

As the old Scottish catechism puts it: 'Realise there is nothing in you, but embrace Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel, and you will be saved'.

Lord, we thank You for sending Your Son. We thank You that He was made an offering for sin for us, He became our sacrifice - what love! We cannot comprehend it, and yet Lord we have great joy and peace in accepting it, and embracing the grace of God that is in Christ Jesus - that though we are afar off, though we have nothing to commend ourselves in Your sight, You have mercy on sinners like us and make us sons and daughters of God by grace. Lord, would You lavish Your grace on some soul tonight, would You revive Your own people with the might of Your grace as we thank You for the One who has made it all possible: Christ alone. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - August 2006

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 9

"Israel and the Sovereign Justice of God"

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by David Legge

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Well, good morning to you all. I usually start by saying it's a pleasure to be at Scrabo, but the subject matter today and next week and the week after - well, let's just say it's been challenging for me, but as I said to someone at the cup of tea earlier: it's all behind me, it's all ahead of you! You've got to listen to it - but no, I do count it a pleasure and privilege to be with you, and to minister God's word to you. It has been rewarding for myself to dig into it, and I hope that something that I share will be a help to you.

We're turning in the scriptures, please, to Romans chapter 9 - as has been announced - and we're looking at verses 1 through 29, and we're going to leave it there this morning and then take up from verse 30 into chapter 10 next week. Romans chapter 9, and we're beginning to read at verse 1, and I'm reading from the New King James Version. Paul is writing to the church in Rome, and he says: *"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called'. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son'. And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger'. As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion'. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth'. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'. But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, 'Why have you made me like this?'. Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As He says also in Hosea: 'I will call them My*

people, who were not My people, And her beloved, who was not beloved'. 'And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people', There they shall be called sons of the living God'. Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, Because the LORD will make a short work upon the earth'. And as Isaiah said before: 'Unless the LORD of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, And we would have been made like Gomorrah'. What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'".

Let us pray please: Abba Father, You have taught us to come as children with our needs. We come now to the Throne of Grace at this time of need, for grace and mercy to help. Lord, we need Your help, for we are finite creatures, and our minds, Lord, can only take in certain things. These issues that we are dealing with this morning are mysterious, they are eternal, and if truth be told they are beyond us in many respects. Yet the things that are revealed are for us and for our children, and we pray that You will help us by the Holy Spirit, who has inspired these pages, to understand what You're saying to us through the scriptures. Lord, help us to have the humility to stop where the Scripture stops, and help us also to have the humility to bow in things that we do not understand and yet believe, for faith is the evidence of things not seen. Lord, I need Your help today. I pray for power to be demonstrated in weakness, I pray for the treasure in earthen vessel to shine forth, and for Your grace to be sufficient for every need. For each here Lord we pray, whatever their needs might be, that the entrance of Your word and the explanation of it might bring light, and that all Your people would be helped. Lord, we pray these things alone for Jesus' glory, and alone pleading His name, Amen.

Now, if you were looking a title for the message this morning, it would be: 'Israel and the Sovereign Justice of God', that's really what chapter 9 is all about. But chapters 9, 10 and 11 of the book of Romans are among the most disputed scriptures in the whole of the Bible. Two areas in particular around which controversy rages are the issue of Israel, and the issue of sovereignty. Specifically related to Israel: has God finished dealing with the nation of Israel as His special covenant people? Though it has been a heavy load for me - and I'm sure for you - to deal with Romans 9, 10 and 11 and all the covenants in six sessions over three weeks; it is, in a sense, good, because both of the themes are intertwined - and we will see that self-evidently. But, has God finished dealing with Israel as His covenant people of old? Then related to sovereignty, the question hangs: how are we to understand the sovereignty of God? This chapter, Romans 9, and indeed Romans 10 and 11, have something to say about both of those controversial subjects. Let me say: it's impossible to do justice to these chapters whilst attempting to avoid these great issues. The two are here mingled together. The theme is: God's sovereign dealings with Israel in the plan of world redemption - so we can't avoid the hot potatoes, and I will not be avoiding the questions, though you may differ with my conclusions (and I already know that some of you will), I just ask that you don't fall out with me over it!

I have to say that I do welcome the opportunity to address this subject particularly this morning, because I believe that Romans chapter 9, the verses are among some of the most misunderstood and abused verses in the whole of Holy Scripture. Now, before we delve into

them, let me lay somewhat of a foundation - and I want to give you two principles of interpretation, biblical interpretation, to keep at the forefront of your mind as we proceed, not just now, but any time that you're studying Scripture these must be kept in mind. First of all: context is king, context is king. The old adage remains true: 'A text taken out of context becomes a pretext'. Let me explain that: 'context' is simply the circumstances and the settings of an event or a statement in the word of God. In other words, 'context' is the background, or even the surrounding passage of a particular verse. A 'pretext' is an excuse to do something or to teach something. Sometimes you hear people say: 'You can make the Bible say whatever you like', and there's a sense in which that is true - if you take scriptures out of context and use them as pretexts, excuses to say or to do something.

So let me repeat the adage: 'A text taken out of context becomes a pretext'. We are not interested in pretexts, we want to find out what the context of these scriptures is, and therefore find out what God is saying to us. So context is king. A second principle of interpretation that I want you to remember is that we must engage in exegesis. Now don't get perturbed with terminology, it is easily explained. Exegesis is simply the science of drawing out of Scripture what God has put in the text, drawing out what is there, breaking up the words and finding out the meaning. The opposite of exegesis is isogesis, and isogesis is reading back into the text some theological or spiritual preconceived idea. In other words, you're transposing on the text something that's not really there, but that you understand - maybe even from other scriptures legitimately - but you're reading it into the text and it's not actually there.

So context is king, we don't want to make pretexts for pet doctrines, we want to find out what the context actually says. Equally so we must engage in exegesis, drawing out what God has put in; rather than isogesis, bringing our preconceived ideas to the text.

Well, let's look at the context. The context of the book of Romans - and I think I shared this with you the last time I was here, and you were in Romans at the beginning, I think, then - it is commonly thought that the book of Romans is a treatise on salvation, how to understand God's great salvation. Well, that's partly what the book of Romans is, but I want to give you what I feel is a better definition of what the book of Romans is all about: the book of Romans is specifically an apologetic, that means a defence, of why Christian believers should take the gospel message to the four corners of the world. Right from the start, as you read Romans, you will see that Paul is arguing like a lawyer: why we should take this message to the masses, why the gospel should be preached to the whole world.

Now that's important, because initially when you read chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans, you might pause and say: 'What on earth was Paul thinking?'. He's been talking about an explanation of salvation that applies to us all, and then all of a sudden he takes a diversion and he starts talking about the nation of Israel, and goes into all these details about covenants and so on. Why does he do this? Well, it seems to be a digression if you understand Romans merely as an exercise in teaching us about salvation, but when you understand that God's sovereign dealing with the nation of Israel is central to the plan of salvation being taken to the four corners of the globe, then you understand the context of the book.

Now, hold that thought and I'll explain it later on. Israel as a nation, as God's chosen covenant people, are central to the means whereby God sovereignly is going to bring the gospel to the whole globe. So Israel is at the heart of the matter. Now, let's look specifically at the context of chapter 9, and 10 and 11 for that matter. Now we believe that, in the church

of Rome, there was a Jew-Gentile issue raging. It surfaces right throughout the book, and I could give you examples of that - I'm not going to, time doesn't permit - but if you read right through, you will note how many times Jew and Gentile are mentioned. It is probable that the original core of the church of Rome consisted mainly of Jews and proselytes, those who had turned from being Gentile to Judaism, and most of those were probably converted on the day of Pentecost. They may well have been added to from Paul's two missionary journeys, and people who migrated to Rome, but largely the church in Rome originally was Jewish, or proselyte.

However, Claudius Caesar, the Emperor, expelled Jews from Rome - and we read about that in Acts chapter 18. Because all Jews were expelled from Rome, the church in Rome went from being predominantly Jewish to being totally Gentile. Now stay with me: eventually the Jews drifted back to Rome under the reign of the new emperor, Nero. We know that Priscilla and Aquila, as Romans 16 tells us, returned to Rome during that period. As these Jews returned to what was their original church, the Hebrew Christians found themselves no longer running the church, and probably felt marginalised and as second-class citizens. So, do you understand the process now? The church in Rome, the core originally Jewish. All Jews are deported from Rome, then under Nero they eventually come back - but the church has been taken over, if you like, by Gentile believers.

Now, this gives us an idea into the psyche of the Jews, particularly those who came to Christ. There was this feeling of inferiority as God starts to move in His sovereign dealings away from the nation of Israel, and starts raising up a New Testament Church made up of Jews and Gentiles. Jews who were God's people, and saw themselves as superior in that sense to other Gentile nations, now they have to come behind, as it were, Gentile believers - and they feel denigrated. You can imagine the thoughts that were coursing through many of their minds: 'Are we not God's chosen people any more, as He said to us in the Old Testament? Are we not God's choice people?'. Then they may have heard Paul calling himself 'The Apostle to the Gentiles', and they must have felt like Paul had in some way abandoned his own people Israel. These people who, for thousands of years, had had the promises of God to them - and they are asking themselves: 'Has God's Word been nullified? Has God abandoned, has He finally rejected His ancient people, Israel?'

Now, this was not just a narrow application to Jewish people, but there is a broader relevance of this to Gentiles - because you will have recently, I imagine, been in chapter 8 of Romans, where Paul is telling us of the believer's security in the Lord Jesus Christ. Some might have questioned what Paul has just taught by saying: 'Well the Jews, we thought we were secure in our God and in His promises of covenant - God chose us. Yet, Paul, you're saying, and the New Testament Church is portraying, that God has set aside Israel periodically and is now building a church from both Jews and Gentiles combined. So how can we believe, as you say in chapter 8, that all believers are secure in Christ if Israel is not secure in its original election as God intended?'

So we see Paul addressing these issues in Romans 9, 10 and 11. Chiefly what he is doing is, he is giving us a vindication of God's righteous dealings in setting Israel aside momentarily in favour of the New Testament Church. Now, we're only going to look at verses 1 to 29 of chapter 9 this morning, where he talks about God's sovereign justice in His dealings with the nation. Then we will look, God willing, next Lord's day morning at verse 30 of chapter 9 through to verse 15 of chapter 10, where Paul focuses on the proclamation of the righteousness of God by faith to all mankind. Then, in the last week, we will look at verse 16 of chapter 10 through to the end of chapter 11, where Paul shows how God foreknew and

used Israel's fall for world salvation and, in a day that is yet to be, He will restore them again.

Now let's look at verses 1 to 3, then, of chapter 9. Remember: it is probable that some Jewish believers felt Paul had abandoned them and his Judaism. So Paul is at pains now, in verses 1 to 3, to share his burden for the salvation of the Jews. Very graphic language: 'I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh'. I could say a lot on that, and I won't, except to say this: our burden for souls, or our lack of a burden for souls, speaks volumes about us - and that's why Paul was at pains to say that his heart broke for his kinsmen in Judaism.

His statement in verse 3 is reminiscent of the patriarch Moses when he said in Exodus 32: 'Yet now, if You will forgive their sin', that is, the sin of the Israelites concerning the golden calf, 'but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written'. He was willing, and you see the thought is to exchange places - Moses was willing to take the judgement upon the Israelites upon himself for their idolatry, and Paul here likewise is willing to take the place of his unconverted Jewish kinsmen in order that they should be saved. Now that idea of trading places is very important, and we're going to return in a moment or two to Exodus 32. But in the context here Paul is wanting to communicate: 'I do love the Jews, I have not forsaken the Jews'.

Then in verses 4 and 5 he assures us of the Jews' privileged position. They are elected by God: 'who are Israelites', verse 4, 'to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen'. What Paul is saying is that the Israelites were elected by God as the vehicle to bring Messiah to the world, to bring world redemption. But the great tragedy, of course, as we know from the Gospels, is that when Messiah came, the Jewish Messiah came, they did not recognise Him and they rejected Him and ultimately crucified Him.

Now, this is the great question, the white elephant that is there before this group of Roman believers: does this mean, now that Israel has rejected Messiah, does this mean that all these promises take no effect? That's what verse 6 is basically asking: 'But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect'. The inference is that some were thinking that now that the Jews had rejected Messiah, these promises, these covenants had taken none effect. The Greek word there for 'take no effect' pictures a ship going off course. Has God's elected, sovereign purpose for Israel gone off course by the Jews rejecting the Messiah? The answer that all this chapter, indeed these three chapters, says is a categorical 'No!'. God's sovereign and eternal plan has not gone off course, and therefore Paul in verses 6 through to 13 shows this, starting by proving that physical descent, being a fleshly Jew, never guaranteed being in the chosen line of God. That's what verse 6 means at the end: 'For they are not all Israel who are of Israel'.

Now, that may confuse you a little bit, but what Paul is saying is simply that there are many who can trace their lineage back to father Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are not true Jews. As he says in verse 7 and verse 8: 'They are not the children of promise'. Now maybe you're struggling with that: how can you be related to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and not be a child of promise? Well, he gives us two examples to explain this. The first is, he speaks how the lineage of the promise would be through Isaac and not Ishmael. Verse 7: 'Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called'. That

is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed'. The lineage would be through Isaac, not Ishmael.

Now, let me pause for a moment - and this is important that you note this. Paul says nothing about Ishmael's salvation. Indeed, if you read the book of Genesis, chapter 16 and chapter 21, you will see that God blessed Ishmael, and it says that: 'He was with the lad'. Now the focus here, and the focus indeed right throughout Romans 9, is upon the lineage of the nation of Israel, not the salvation of individuals. Now, probably some of you will disagree with that, but I want you to keep that in mind as we exegete the passage. The covenant that God made with Abraham that we will look at tonight in detail, and reaffirmed to Isaac and to Jacob, did not include Ishmael - but it did not exclude Ishmael, and Ishmael's descendants, concerning personal salvation. Rather, the covenant and the promises were of the chosen lineage through whom Messiah would come to bless the world.

Now the reason why I'm emphasising that - and that might mean nothing to any of you, but I know it will mean something to some of you - it's because some people use this text, and indeed this chapter, to teach that God sovereignly elected Isaac to salvation and Ishmael was elected to hell. Now that is not what this portion of Scripture teaches. The choice of Isaac over Ishmael had nothing to do with their personal salvation. It is significant that there are probably more Arab descendants of Ishmael today who are believers in Christ in the New Testament Church than there are Hebrew Christians. If that doesn't prove it, I don't know what does. What Paul is proving is that just because you're a son of Abraham, as Ishmael was, it doesn't mean that you're in the line of promise - because the line of promise was not through Ishmael, it was through Isaac. But the line of promise had not to do with Isaac nor Ishmael's personal salvation, but had to do with Israel as being the elected nation through whom Messiah would come and salvation to the world.

The second example of this he gives is the choice of Jacob over Esau for the promised lineage of the nation. He quotes part of what God said to Rebekah before the birth of these twins. Now, it's important to note the whole quote, the quote here, verse 9: 'At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son'. And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived', verse 10, 'by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her', this is God's statement to Rebekah, "The older shall serve the younger". Now that's important, but what is equally important is the context of that quotation that Paul gives, and I want you to go to Genesis 25 please and read the whole quote.

Genesis 25 and verse 23: 'The LORD said to her', to Rebekah, "Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, and", here's the quotation that Paul uses, 'the older shall serve the younger'. Now note the whole of the quotation, the context is: two nations, two peoples, one people. Now it is obvious that when Paul takes this in its context and uses it in Romans 9 that he's not talking about individuals, he's talking about the separation of national Israel from the sons of Esau - that is, the Edomites - that Israel would be the vehicle to bring Messiah to the world, and not the Edomites, the sons of Esau.

Now that is evident when you consider that, though God said the older shall serve the younger, Esau as an individual never served Jacob. Esau as the older never served the younger Jacob, indeed the opposite is true: Jacob served Esau. You remember he served him pottage in exchange for his birthright, and later we read in the story that Jacob paid

obedience to Esau when they met on his return from Paddan-aram. So that's not what this is teaching concerning individuals, it's talking about the nations. Paul then confirms this in emphasis by quoting another Old Testament prophet, the prophet Malachi in verse 13 of Romans 9: 'As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated''. Now that quotation was made originally by Malachi about 1500 years later, after what was said to Rebekah. It's about God's judgement upon the descendants of Esau, that is the Edomites, and God's continuing love for Israel. It's expanded in the Old Testament prophet of Obadiah - but is it not obvious, by Paul's two quotations here, that Jacob and Esau are being used as euphemisms for the nations? That Israel was God's chosen nation and vehicle, they were chosen but Edom was rejected.

Now it is true what verse 11 says, that this choice, Jacob's election over Esau, was not because of his works past or future, it is all of grace. We say Amen to that, but it is equally true to say that the election of one nation, Israel, over another here was to bring Messiah to the world - it has got nothing to do in this context with the individual salvation of souls. Now look at verse 14 please, because Paul begins to answer a hypothetical accusation. It may have been literal, we don't know, but in the light of what he has just said he perceives that this question might be raised: 'What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness', or injustice, 'with God? Certainly not!'. The context is: God has moved away from Israel, this people who He chose as elect to bring Messiah, who did give birth to Messiah - but now in Romans He is turning away from them, and He's turning to the world, and He's turning to Gentiles - is there injustice, unrighteousness with God, that God could leave them and now turn to the rest of the world?

Paul gives four examples of God's sovereign justice in dealing with the nation of Israel. We're going to look at them in the time we have left. The first example he gives is Moses' intercession when Israel worshipped the golden calf. We've already looked at that. The second example is God's hardening of the heart of Pharaoh for judgement. The third example is Jeremiah's account of the potter's wheel, and the fourth are prophetic passages that he quotes at the end of chapter 9 from Hosea and Isaiah.

Now let's look at them one by one as quickly as we can, and I grant you that there's an awful lot to take in this morning, so it might be good if you got the recording and followed it in your leisure. Verses 15 and 16 are where the example of Moses is given. The children of Israel, as Moses comes down from Sinai after receiving the covenant of God in the Commandments, he finds the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf. Now in Exodus chapter 32 we read that God said He was going to, there and then, destroy Israel and make a new nation now of Moses. Moses, we read, interceded for Israel, and God heard Him - and that's where we get the quote where Moses said: 'Blot me out of Your book if you will save this people'. He cries to God to forgive them, and God forgives them.

But even in Exodus 33, God still expresses reluctance to continue His presence in the midst of Israel, and again Moses prays and intercedes, praying to God to show him His ways. Then God does a wonderful thing for Moses: He allows Moses to view His presence in a remarkable way. Now the portion Paul quotes is connected with this, it's connected with Exodus 33 and verse 19 - turn back to it please. Exodus 33 and verse 19, and this is the context of the quotation Paul uses, Exodus 33 verse 19: 'Then He said', God says to Moses, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion". Now remember, what is the context here originally in Exodus? It is God is going to wipe out the people of Israel as His chosen vessel to bring Messiah, He's going to bring a

new people out of Moses - but Moses intercedes for Israel. God says again: 'I will bless them, and I will forgive them, and I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion'. The issue here is the continuance of God's gracious favour upon the nation of Israel as His elect vehicle to bring Messiah to the world. It is in that connection, if you go back to Romans 9 and verse 16, it is in that connection that Paul then says, having quoted that very verse in verse 15, he then says: 'So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy'. In other words, the Israelites did not deserve to still be God's people, His elect chosen vessel - but it's not about him who wills, nor him who runs, but God who shows mercy!

He still had compassion on them. So it is in connection with this in Exodus, it has nothing to do with an individual's election to personal salvation, and neither for that matter does Romans. Rather it is about - and this is the crux - it is about God's right to show compassion upon Israel if He will, irrespective of what they do, that's the context. It never ceases to amaze me that this is a positive passage of Scripture that Paul is quoting, and yet so many expositors of Scripture take it and use it in a negative way. Here's one, and you cannot prove it from the scriptures, and it's the doctrine of reprobation - and if you don't know what that is, bless your heart that you don't! It is this false belief that God, from eternity past, has elected certain individuals to go to hell. Now you can believe that if you like, you're free to, but you can't prove it from this passage of Scripture.

The first example was Moses and the issue of the golden calf. The second is in verses 17 and 18 of Romans 9: 'For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth'. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens'. Now, what's the context of this quotation? Well, Pharaoh, the King of Egypt was the god-king, he was respected as a god, and therefore he was the head of an idolatrous religious nation - and God decides, as is His prerogative, to harden him for judgement. The ten judgements that you're familiar with, I'm sure, were ten judgements specifically upon the gods of this Egyptian religion. So what you're having here is a judgement upon an idolatrous nation, a judgement upon their religion and the head of their religion, who was also a god to them.

What you're having here is an example of a principle that Paul has already enshrined at the very beginning of Romans. Turn with me to Romans 1 verse 24: 'Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves', God is giving a nation up, verse 24, verse 26, 'For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature', verse 28, God again, 'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting'. What Paul is stating there in chapter 1 of Romans - and it applies to the Roman Empire that Paul is writing to and from - is that God judgementally gives the most hardened hearts of sinners over to a depraved mind. God does this, and He's still doing it.

The sequence of events that we have in Exodus concerning this issue is first of all in Exodus 7, if you care to turn to it. Exodus 7 - do you no harm! - Exodus 7, God does state in verse 1: 'So the LORD said to Moses: 'See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet'. He begins to state in verse 3: 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt'. So God states His sovereign intention to Moses, but then we have seven clear references to Pharaoh's heart as being characteristically hard. He was a hardened sinner in his own rebellion, and we read of that in Exodus 7 - we don't have time to look at them - in Exodus 8, and in Exodus 9, seven times. Even in Exodus 8 we read of Pharaoh 'hardening his own heart', twice we read of that in

Exodus chapter 8. So that is the progression: his heart was characteristically hard, he hardened it himself, and all of that is stated before God steps in and then hardens his heart even further judgementally. We start reading of that in Exodus 9 verse 12, then it's repeated in Exodus 10, in Exodus 11, in Exodus 14. Now that is the background to the words God spoke to Pharaoh in Exodus 9 verse 16, which Paul quotes in Romans 9 and verse 17. Let me read it to you: 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth'.

Now it helps to read the rest of the statement in Exodus to understand the original context. It's in Exodus 9:17, the rest of the statement, in verse 17 God says: 'As yet you exalt yourself against My people in that you will not let them go' - there is the context again. It is clearly God's sovereign purpose to bring Israel out of Egypt, so that He might bring Messiah to the world. Again it's got to do with God's ordination, God's election of Israel to be a missionary nation to the world and deliver Messiah to them.

So let's recap: God chose to make an example of Pharaoh. He chose to make an example of his false prophets, and that was in order to deliver Israel as His elected vehicle for Messiah out of Egypt, and also to set a precedent for what will happen if men and women reject the truth and harden themselves wilfully against God - God judgementally may harden them further. Let me tell you this, in 2 Timothy chapter 3 Paul actually takes two of the magicians of Pharaoh, Jannes and Jambres, as examples of false teachers and false prophets, and he speaks there of how God made their folly manifest to all - and He will do so with any false teacher! Do you see what God is doing here? This as an example of how God is rightfully entitled to do what He wills in this area, but please be clear - look at the end of verse 18: 'Therefore', and this is his comment on this whole issue, 'God has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens' - and that's been a great chestnut for many years, and I'm sure I'll not solve it for many of you here this morning. But let me say this: that is not referring to some arbitrary reprobation in eternity past, of people yet unborn, God choosing hell for them - it is definitely not. It is speaking of one of the archenemies of God, who was the head of an idolatrous nation and religion, and it's speaking in the context of both Exodus and Romans of how God judicially and righteously gave him over to a depraved mind that He might judge him as an example.

You can't go any further than that, and you ought not to. The third example is found in verses 19 through to 24, and it comes in answer to a question Paul poses in verse 19: 'You will say to me then, 'Why does God still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'. What this is is a fatalistic objector, it could be literal or hypothetical. Someone is asking: 'Come on now, if everything you say is true, how can Israel be blamed if it was God who set them aside to make way for the church and Gentiles to be saved? How can Jews resist God's will then? It's not their fault if they're in unbelief, if this is God's sovereign will'. Now Paul didn't quote Jeremiah directly, but his answer is taken from Jeremiah 18. Paul really is alluding to the story of the potter and the clay. Quickly, Jeremiah saw a vessel being formed on the potter's wheel from clay, but it got marred in the potter's hand, and then the potter remade, remoulded the clay.

Now, if you turn to Jeremiah 18 please, Jeremiah 18 verse 6, here is God's conclusion on the matter - what the analogy is all about. Jeremiah 18 verse 6: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?' says the LORD. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand', then down to verse 11, 'Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good''. Now Paul will show later in Romans 9 at the end, and Romans

10 and 11, that God judged Israel because of their unbelief, and that brought swift judgement upon them. But the emphasis here in Jeremiah is their need for repentance and their need of faithfulness to God, and so in chapter 9 of Romans verse 22 Paul speaks of God's patience toward Israel in their unbelief. Look at the verse: 'What if God', and it's in connection with this potter's wheel and the marred clay, 'What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction'.

What if God should be patient with an unbelieving Israel in order that He should declare His wrath? But more than that, he goes into verse 23 and says that He's patient with Israel so that, 'He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory'. It's talking about God's patience with Israel, even though they had been so disobedient. Now this is a problem phrase at the end of verse 22, he describes Israel as 'the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction', fitted, or prepared, or created for destruction. Now all I can say to you on that verse is that Greek experts of grammar suggest that that statement is in the middle voice, that simply means it could be translated like this: 'these vessels of wrath, having prepared themselves for destruction'. Now that squares with the onus of Jeremiah, the potter and the vessel. They were exhorted to repent, the onus was on them, or God would bring a devastating judgement on them.

What Paul is saying here in that context in verse 22 is that they have prepared themselves for destruction, but God has allowed all this and been patient with them that He may reveal the mystery that He has planned from before the ages, that He was going to birth a church, a vessel for His mercy. Later Paul explains this in Romans, that the falling away of Israel and their judgement and blindness and unbelief for a season, was to bring Gentiles to the faith in Christ.

Now, I know that's all complicated - but whatever Paul's point was, this is definitely his point: God has a sovereign right as the Potter to use Israel for 2000 years, and then set them aside momentarily in favour of the church. Later in Romans 11 he will show His justice in that decision, and how a remnant of Jews are still believing, and how blessing is going to come to the whole world through the unbelief of Israel. I could go on and on, but I know you can't take much more. Let me just say this: these verses - and it is my opinion, but I believe it is founded on the context and exegesis of this passage - these verses have got to do with God's choice of Israel as His ambassador and vehicle to bring Messiah to bless the world. It has nothing to do with the individual choice of people for either heaven or hell before the world began. I haven't got time to tell you what I believe - I do believe in a sovereign God, I believe in a God who is instrumental in our salvation by the Holy Spirit, I do believe in those things - but I don't believe this passage teaches it, and it certainly doesn't teach what many teach regarding it.

Now, I haven't got time to go into the two quotations at the end of chapter 9, we must leave that - except to say: Paul is proving that a people who have not been called a people of God, can be called the people of God. From Hosea he proves that, and from Isaiah he also equally proves that God will preserve a remnant.

Let me bring you some conclusions from all of this, and these will be simple. Though God has elected Israel and made specific promises and covenants with them which He will honour, this portion is teaching that He has a right to show mercy on the Gentile world if He wills. Now what is the application of Romans 9? It's the same as the application of the whole of the book of Romans: therefore we have a right, and we ought to preach the gospel to the world! That is Paul's argument! The tragedy is: some have misinterpreted this Scripture, this passage in particular, in a way that actually dampens or even deadens evangelistic zeal! Nothing could be

further from the intention of the apostle and, I believe, the Holy Ghost who inspired it. I know they do it unintentionally, but nevertheless that is the result of certain expositions of this portion.

A second conclusion: this Scripture broadens God's mercy, it does not narrow it. It is surely not in the spirit of this Scripture to use it to limit God's mercy, which so many have done. Thirdly and finally, and most wonderfully of all is what Romans 9 reveals about the heart of God. Now listen to this: the heart of God is to use His sovereignty to save men, not damn them. So sovereignty is rescued from the theologs who would only use it to drive a wedge between God and the sinner, and rather we see afresh that even His fearful sovereignty is used by His heart of grace to show - as F.W. Faber put it:

'There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.
There is welcome for the sinner,
And more graces for the good;
There is mercy with the Saviour;
There is healing in His blood'.

As he says in the last verse of that great hymn:

'For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
We would take Him at His word;
And our life would be thanksgiving
For the goodness' - that's what this portion is about - 'the goodness of the Lord'.

Let us pray, and as you bow your head, I trust you will bow your heart too before the Lord. I know that you may well disagree with what I have said and, as you know, it has not been my intention to come here and annoy you - I was given this portion of Scripture by you. All I would say to you is, I do not have a monopoly of knowledge, and I'm not going to settle the raging battles with theologians through the ages, but I will say this - don't fall out with me, and make sure of this much: that whatever your theology is, that it comes directly from the text, and that it does not warp the character of the Living God.

Father, we just ask for grace, and we ask for Your favour, that if we have said anything from prejudice or error, that You will forgive us and enlighten us. Lord, we ask that all of us will have the charity to accept one another - but most of all that we will have the industry and the devotion to seek after our God until we know Him. Lord, we want to see into Your heart, we want to understand You in all Your greatness, Your sovereignty, Your majesty, Your mercy, Your long-suffering and Your grace. Lord, let us not be lopsided Christians, and let us not be lopsided in our knowledge of the Eternal One. Certainly, Lord, do not let us misrepresent You or misinterpret Your heart, for we ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2010

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 10

"The God Within Reach Of All Of Us"

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Well, good morning to you all, and it's a delight to be back with you in Scrabo again. Welcome back to those who were on holiday, and some of you maybe felt you needed a holiday after last Sunday morning! Sorry to those who were meant to be on holiday, and haven't gotten away - but if you needed a better illustration of the sovereignty of God than that, well then, maybe you do need to get the CD of last Sunday morning, I don't know!

Let's turn together to Romans chapter 9, we did leave a number of verses that we didn't deal with - and then we're looking primarily at chapter 10 of Romans. We'll read Romans 9, beginning at verse 30 please - and if you want a title of what I have to share with you from these portions of Scripture, it would be: 'The God Within Reach Of All Of Us'.

Romans chapter 9, then, and verse 30: *"What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them'. But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God",* and we'll end our reading at verse 17.

Now, if you were here last week, you will remember that context is king when we are interpreting the scriptures. We touched upon the fact that the context of the book of Romans has often been understood as a treatise on salvation, how we understand how we as individuals can be made right with God, how we can be saved and delivered from our sins. But I suggested to you last week, and I think it's in keeping with the subject matter of the book of Romans, that the theme is much more than that - it is more like an apologetic, or a defence, of why Christians should preach this message of good news, the gospel, how men can be right with God. It's a defence of why Christians should take this message to the masses, why they should preach the gospel worldwide. That's the reason why chapters 9, 10 and 11 are in the book. If you just read it as a treatise on salvation, you might wonder why Paul all of a sudden is turning to the subject of the nation of Israel, their election, their present blindness because of unbelief in Christ, and their future restoration. You might say: 'Well, what relevance has that?'. But when you understand that God's sovereign dealings with Israel have always been central to the plan of worldwide redemption, you see how it all fits together.

We saw last week in chapter 9 that first the Lord chose Israel as a nation, as a vehicle to bring Messiah to the world. But now He is temporarily setting them aside in order to call Gentiles into faith in Christ, as well as some remnant Jews of course. We saw specifically last week in verses 1 to 29 of chapter 9 that, really, Paul was giving a vindication of God's sovereign justice in His dealings with Israel as a nation: why God has the right, having elected Israel to do this, to set them aside temporarily. This week we're going to look at verse 30 of chapter 9 through to verse 17, but to verse 15 of chapter 10 Paul focuses upon the proclamation of righteousness to all mankind: why this message must be taken to the four corners of the world. Next week, God willing, we'll finish chapter 10 and go into chapter 11, right to the end, where Paul shows there how God foreknew Israel, and used Israel's fall for world salvation - their unbelief and their blindness to bring this message of good news to the whole globe - and how He eventually will restore them again according to His promise and election of them.

Now, having explained in chapter 9 that God was righteous and God was just in sovereignly setting Israel aside, Paul anticipates another possible objection from his hearers, or readers we should say. Verse 30: 'What shall we say then to these things aforementioned? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith'. Now, let me paraphrase what Paul is saying there in this anticipated objection, he's really saying: 'This just doesn't seem fair, does it? That Gentiles, who didn't care about righteousness at all, that they should get it; and the Jews, who lived their history and spend every fibre of their beings in pursuing righteousness, should miss it'. This is his anticipated objection, and you can see it makes sense - it doesn't seem fair! Gentiles didn't care about salvation or being right with God, and yet they seem to get it; and Jews, who existed for the purpose of pleasing God, and they pursue this righteousness actively, they miss it!

Now, we have to say, it would seem unfair if you didn't recognise that the Jews were, themselves, responsible for missing this righteousness. This is where the emphasis is in Romans chapter 9: the responsibility of the Jews for having missed Messiah and not believed on Him. Now, in the context of what we talked about last week and what we will touch upon this week, we see both the sovereignty of God in chapter 9 and responsibility of man in chapter 10. That's a bit simplistic, but generally speaking that's where the emphasis lies. Marrying those two ideas together, as we sought to do last week, I'm reminded of a statement made by Duncan Campbell, who was used in revivals here in the British Isles in the

1940s, who said, I believe quoting an old divine from Scotland as well: 'We do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility'. Let me repeat that: we do not believe in any form of God's sovereignty that nullifies man's responsibility. What we have before us is man's responsibility concerning Israel.

Now, just in passing, let me remark this in the light of what we touched on last week: the sovereign laying aside of corporate Israel does not stop individual Jews being saved. You can see that, in chapter 9 we see God laid them aside as His vehicle for bringing Messiah to the world, that being accomplished, He has laid them aside as a missionary people, as a witness to the world, momentarily - but that does not stop individual Jews being saved. Of course, many did believe and followed the Lord Jesus, and the first apostles, of course, were all Jews. What it does is: it suspends God's use of them for blessing the world. Therefore we are seeing again, as we saw last week, that the election - in this context that least - has got to do with God's purposes and service, not individual salvation of Jews or Gentiles. We see this in the emphasis of how the Jews were responsible to believe, as Gentiles are now too.

How are they responsible? Verse 30: Gentiles attained this righteousness by faith, 'but', verse 31, 'Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness'. Gentiles attained the righteousness of God, rightness with God, by faith; but Israel sought it by law - verse 31 - hence Israel missed it. 'Why?', verse 32, 'Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone'. Why did Israel miss this righteousness? Simply because it is a righteousness by faith, not by works. They sought it by works, and so they stumbled at the stumbling stone and the rock of offence.

Now, as we heard at the Breaking of Bread this morning if you were here, that Rock at which Israel stumbled was the Lord Jesus - but that is not the whole truth in this context. The Jews primarily stumbled at the stumbling stone and rock of offence, not just of Christ, but faith in Christ. Of course, Paul, to the Corinthians, emphasises this when he says: 'It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached', the message of Christ, 'to save those who believe...but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness'. The Jews who sought the righteousness of God sought it by the works of the law, but the Gentiles who never sought it in their history, they gained it because they sought it by faith - and this was the great stumbling stone that the Jews fell at: faith in Christ.

Now the major theme of the book of Romans, of course, is God's gospel, the message to the masses that we are to preach: faith in Christ. That is how men are made right with God, faith in Christ - and if you turn back to chapter 1 you will see the key verses to this book, verse 16 of chapter 1: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith''. As the NIV translates it: 'For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last'. Faith, in other words, is the core of the gospel message, because it is faith that appropriates God's gracious offer of salvation. So, if you have some kind of systematic concept of salvation and faith is not at the core of it, there is something systemically wrong with your system. I'm tempted to say something now, but I'll not - it's got to do with five points, and not one of them mentions faith.

Faith is that which appropriates the grace that God offers. Now let me show this to you, it's central to the whole epistle to the Romans, and indeed the gospel. Chapter 5 verse 1: 'Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus

Christ'. So it's through faith that we are justified and get God's peace and peace with God: 'through whom', verse 2, 'also we have access by faith into this grace' - that could be translated, I believe, 'through whom also we are introduced by faith into this grace in which we stand'. So faith introduces us to God's grace, faith introduces us to God's grace - there must be faith. There is a responsibility of the sinner to believe in God and Christ, it must be of faith for God's grace to get the glory, it must be. If it is of works, who gets the glory? We get the glory, and we can strut around heaven, if we get there, like a peacock, proud in the fact that we more or less got ourselves there! But if that salvation is by grace, therefore it must be of faith, that God gets the glory - and that's what Paul says in chapter 4, if you go back to it, and verse 16: 'Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace'. It is of faith that it might be according to grace.

Now this doctrine was not a novelty of Paul's, as some modern scholars would try to tell us, because many of the Jews of Jesus' day made the same mistake of buying into a supposed works-based salvation. Some of them, one day, followed the Lord Jesus across Galilee and asked Him the question: 'What shall we do that we may work the works of God?'. Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent'. This is the work of God! If you could paraphrase how the Lord Jesus answered them, it might go like this: 'If you works-orientated legalists want to do something to be saved, just believe in Him whom God has sent'. Faith is the biblical means whereby we enter into the grace that God gives us in salvation - and let me say this: faith is, in the Bible, always set in contradistinction from works, always. You cannot say faith is a work, it's always set in contradistinction to it. Over 150 times in the New Testament, repentant faith is stipulated as the only condition of salvation. Repentance simply means - 'metanoia' - a change of mind, a change of attitude, changing your mind about your sin, changing your attitude about yourself, changing your attitude about Christ and God, and putting faith in Christ.

Now in chapter 10, Paul expands on the reason for Israel's rejection. Why were they rejected? Unbelief! No faith in Christ! They have sought to establish their own righteousness by the works of the law, rather than receiving God's righteousness by faith in Christ. He now, in chapter 10, shows the great difference between the two: seeking righteousness by faith, and seeking righteousness by the works of the law. But before doing so, Paul, in verse 1, again affirms his love for Israel: 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved'. He states, note, their need to be saved. I don't know whether you've got The God Channel or not, I don't, but I know that there are certain preachers on it, or at least on satellite television - Christian TV, so-called - who are espousing a new doctrine that Israel does not need to be saved, that Israelites do not need to be born again because they're in the covenant. We're looking at covenants tonight, the old covenant this evening, but this is false: just because they are Jews in the flesh and the covenants pertain to them - Paul says here that they need to be saved, 'My heart's desire for Israel is that they be saved'.

Interestingly, just to cast back to last week, were they elect? Were they? Israel was elect, and yet they still needed to be saved. You'd need to think about that one over your dinner! The reason for this is: this election is corporate, it is not individual or personal to salvation - but equally so, God is sovereign in laying Israel aside, and yet Paul still prays for their salvation. Can I just say this in passing: any understanding of God's sovereignty that dampens your prayer life, particularly your praying for the lost, has got to be a deficient understanding of salvation; because here Paul is praying for elect people who have been set aside, that they might believe. If I could just hammer that one home briefly: in 1 Timothy chapter 2, Paul says, 'Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet

and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved' - pray for all men, because God desires all men to be saved - 'and to come to the knowledge of the truth'. He gives the basis of this, verse 6, 'For Christ gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time'.

Let us leave that and look at verse 2, showing the difference between righteousness sought through law and righteousness given by faith, he commends, in a roundabout way, the Israelites, the Jews, because they have a zeal, great zeal - yet it is without knowledge: 'I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge'. Now this deals the death blow to the idea that sincerity is enough to be saved. There are a lot of people, maybe you're one of them and you're here today, and you have this idea that as long as you believe in God, and as long as in your heart you're trying to please God, and be charitable, and be a good upstanding citizen in your community, that you're sincere, you're genuine - and you would love to go to heaven: 'Well, surely God will not shut the door on someone who is sincere?'. The Jews were sincere, of course they were, and they certainly had a lot going for them - not only in their zeal, their sincerity, but in their knowledge. No one knew the scriptures like the Jews did, and Paul is a case in point before his conversion: full of zeal, persecuting the church, and his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures was probably second to none of any in his day.

Yet the Jews who are zealous and full of much knowledge were without knowledge in a certain area, which was most essential, crucial knowledge. Look at verse 3: 'For they being ignorant of God's righteousness' - they were ignorant of God's righteousness and how to get it. So here are two sides to this business: sincerity is not enough, and ignorance is no excuse! So you might be zealous like the Jews were, that's not enough, Paul says. They were zealous. You might be filled with knowledge, even biblical knowledge, concerning the Bible - but if you do not have this crucial, essential knowledge of righteousness of God and how to get it, you're ignorant, and ignorance is no excuse.

In the opening chapters of the book of Romans, Paul had gone to great lengths already to demonstrate that by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight. But Israel's problem not only was one of intellect, Israel had a problem with their will. This is highlighted at the end of verse 3: they are ignorant of God's righteousness, seeking to establish their own righteousness, and they have not submitted - that word is key - submitted to the righteousness of God. Israel's problem was not just theological, about who Messiah was and how to be saved by Him, it was a problem of their will: they would not submit to the righteousness of God.

Now, I touched last week on the fact that doubt is not the same as unbelief. Let me elaborate a little bit about that: doubt is a problem of the mind, and it can theoretically be answered if you get the answers to your problems. But unbelief is a problem of the will, you refuse to believe, and usually it's not a mental problem alone - it is a moral problem, there is a reason that you refuse to believe, and it is that your unbelief, in fact, is a camouflage for a moral sin, a problem in your life that you don't want to let go of. The Jews could not let go of their adventure and their search for righteousness by the law, they couldn't let go of that and admit and submit to the fact that the righteousness of God cannot be achieved by keeping laws, it must be achieved by having faith in Christ alone.

Now, can I ask you - you might be someone here who argues till you're blue in the face about this matter of how to be saved, and you put up red herrings, intellectual problems, supposed ones, as to why you have not trusted in Christ - can I challenge you this morning as to

whether in fact you have a problem in the mind, or a problem with your morals. Many great atheists have lain on their death beds, and I could quote them to you, and admitted that their philosophy of belief was only in order to excuse the behaviour of their life. Make sure you don't make the same mistake.

In verse 4 through to verse 8, Paul contrasts between God's righteousness and our attempts at righteousness. In verse 4 he says: 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' - now what does that mean? It does not mean that the law of God is no longer reflecting God's holy standards. God's law in the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, the first five books of the Bible, do reflect God's holy standard - and we'll look at that in detail tonight. Nor does it mean that God's law is no longer useful in showing us our sin, it does - it amplifies, magnifies our sin, and it's so helpful in showing that we need a Saviour, and we are sinful. But what Paul is saying here, 'Christ is the end of the law', is that obedience to the law no longer is the basis for man's relationship with God. You see, law could only work if men could keep it - but verse 5 tells us: 'Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them''. Which simply means: if you want to get life from the law, you must obey it perfectly and completely!

So there's nothing wrong with the law, the problem is with us. There is a defect in our system that prohibits our perfect keeping of the law. Paul said that - I'm sure you touched on it, I hope you did - in chapter 8 verse 3. Chapter 8 verse 3: 'For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh', the problem was not with the law, the problem was with us. We are weak in the flesh, and so we cannot live up to the law - and what the law couldn't do in that regard, 'God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh'.

Now look at verse 6 of chapter 10, the contrast between the righteousness of the law which cannot be achieved because of our weak inherent sinfulness and bias towards sin, but 'the righteousness of faith', in verse 6, 'speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)'. The righteousness of faith is based on Christ. We don't have to work to get it! It is not that we have to ascend into heaven, or descend into the abyss to gain Jesus - we simply believe and receive! So what Paul is saying when he talks about 'descending into heaven', it's not to imply that we need to climb into heaven - to insinuate that is to suggest that Jesus didn't come down from heaven, that He didn't condescend, that He didn't take this huge immeasurable journey from heaven to earth to be our Saviour. Or to suggest that we need to descend into the abyss to gain Jesus, is to insinuate that He didn't rise from the grave. What Paul is really saying is that all that needed to be done has been done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus - it is finished! So why on earth would you try to do it all over again? Ascend to heaven, or descend into the abyss? To bring Christ down, to bring Christ up? That's the way people who live, and try to achieve righteousness by law, that's how they exist: a constant attempt to attain by ascending or descending - but what is required of us is to simply believe that He came down from heaven to earth, and He went under the Earth and rose again from the grave.

What does this righteousness of faith say? Verse 8, what does it say? Here's what it says: 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach)'. Instead, Paul says, of having to go to great lengths ascending to heaven, or descending to the abyss, to achieve the righteousness that is by law, we can immediately receive the righteousness of God by faith in Christ. 'The word is near you', that is the word of the gospel, that is the word of this good news that is to be preached to all the world! We get

God's righteousness by simply trusting in what God has said! Have you done that? This God that we preach, that Jesus Christ incarnated before us, is the God who is in reach of all of us, if you only believe.

Now in verses 9 through to 13 he explains in more detail how God's righteousness is gained by faith. It is not gained by works, but by faith articulated in confessing - confessing and believing in the Person and work of Jesus is the way that we respond to the word of God that is near us. We don't have to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down, we don't have to go into the abyss to bring Him up, as it were, from the grave; the word that is preached to you just now - that Jesus died for your sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, that if you believe in Him you might have life - if you can receive that, and confess Jesus as Lord, and believe Him in your heart, you will be saved.

Now what does this word 'confess' mean? Verse 9: 'That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus'. Well, the idea of this word 'confess' is 'to agree with'. We agree with what God has said, with what God has said about Jesus, with what God has testified through Jesus, and what Jesus said of Himself - and, incidentally, what God and Jesus say about you. Hmmm, that's where the problem lies with many. They'll say: 'Oh, it's not a stumbling block to me, what God said about Jesus, that He is the Son of God. I'm not like the Jews that have a problem with this. I don't even have a problem with the fact that He died and rose again' - but your problem, perhaps, is what God and Jesus say about you.

I'm reminded of the story of the man driving his brand-new Rolls-Royce through the Alps. As he was going along merrily, a spring broke, and the next day a company rep travelled all that distance to replace the spring. When the gentleman who owned the Rolls arrived home, there was no bill to pick up. So he called Rolls-Royce, and they ran a check on their computers, and minutes later a Rolls-Royce manager rang through to him and said: 'Sir, there must be some mistake, there is no such a thing as a broken spring on a Rolls-Royce'. That's often the way the sinner behaves when God's Word tells them, and Jesus speaks, and God comes very personally and says: 'You're a sinner, you're broken, you can't keep the law, you can't achieve righteousness that is satisfying to God through your own efforts. You've got a broken spring!'. The response comes back from those who believe that they can achieve righteousness by the law: 'There must be some mistake! I can't be a sinner! I can't be inherently broken, morally and spiritually!'. So to confess with your mouth has this idea, at least, inherent in it: that you're confessing your need, for only sinners who are in need need a Saviour. That's why Jesus said: 'I came not to call righteous people', that is, people who think they're righteous and don't need a Saviour, 'I came to call sinners, those who know their great need'.

Do you know your need of a Saviour? You need to confess not only your need, but that He is the Messiah, the Promised One of God, that He is the only Saviour of the world, that He is God come in flesh, that He died on a cross for your sins and rose again the third day. But why does it have to be with your mouth? 'Confess with your mouth'. Well, in the Roman Empire you were expected, if you were a citizen, to confess 'Caesar is Lord'. So, to say 'Jesus Christ is Lord', would rank Jesus with the Emperor, and indeed with God, for the Emperor was worshipped as a god. Only a Roman who had repented of Emperor worship and idolatry could say: 'Jesus is Lord'. For the Jew, the Greek word for 'Lord' is 'Kurios', and it's the word the Jews who spoke Greek often used for 'God', 'LORD'. So, for the Jew to confess Jesus as Lord, 'Kurios', was to confess Jesus as God. So for either the Roman or the Jew, it was to confess that Jesus was supreme!

It's not that verbal confession is a condition of salvation, rather it's inevitable that if you believe in your heart all these things about what you are as a sinner, and how you need a Saviour, and who the Saviour is, and what the Saviour has done for you, it will of necessity be expressed verbally in your words! But not only must you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, but Paul says in verse 9 that you must believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. Now that implies that He died for our sins, was buried, and rose again - it's the whole cross work and resurrection of Jesus. You must believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, because the resurrection is proof of who Jesus is. It is the validation of God upon the ministry, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that He is who He said He was. That's what Romans 1 - we haven't got time to look at it - verse 4 says, that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.

You see, the resurrection is central to Christian belief. You've not only to confess Jesus as Lord with your mouth, but that is a reflection of the belief that Jesus is who He said He was, and God proved it by raising Him from the dead - and that is the uniqueness of Christianity! During the French Revolution, that not only wanted to depose a monarchy but to depose God, someone said to an Archbishop: 'The Christian religion, what is it? It would be easy to start a religion like that'. 'Oh yes', replied the Archbishop, 'one would only have to get crucified and rise again the third day'. Christianity is unique, for Christ is unique. The empty tomb says to science and philosophy: explain this event. It says to history: repeat this event. It says to you: believe this event! Do you?

It must not simply be an intellectual belief, Paul clarifies this: 'believe in your heart' - and this is a great fear that I have for the subculture of conservative evangelicalism that we have in Ulster. Many young people in particular grow up having an intellectual belief, which is different than the heart belief that Paul speaks of here. The heart belief insinuates the whole of the man is involved in this. There is a mental aspect, which is an understanding in your mind of what of what the gospel is. You don't have to understand an awful lot of it, but you do have to understand that you're a sinner, and Christ is your Saviour, and He died for your sins and is able to save you. To know what to believe, you have to know what to believe in. There's a mental aspect, there is an emotional aspect, where you embrace the truthfulness, the facts of who Jesus is and what He has done; and you sorrow over your sin and realise your need of a Saviour, and with joy you embrace God's mercy and grace. But not only is there a mental aspect and an emotional aspect, but there is a volitional - there is the will - where you subject your will to Christ, and that simply means, as far as the gospel is concerned, you trust Him alone implicitly for the hope of your salvation. You make the choice to depend on Him, not on yourself.

So I like the rendering - how accurate it is I'm not sure - but I like the rendering of 'believing on Jesus', not just 'believing in'. We have this idea that 'believing in' is like 'believing in fairies', or whatever. It's 'believing on'! There was a tract written many years ago called 'Missing Heaven By 18 Inches'. The idea was that you could miss heaven by missing the journey that is 18 inches from your head to your heart, where you have a merely intellectual belief about the facts of the gospel story, but you've never appropriated that by faith from your heart and acted by your will in resting on Christ, depending on Christ, laying your whole weight on Christ. There is not only the belief that Jesus is who He said He was, and Jesus did what He said He would do, and did rise from the grave, there is also within this whole faith in the heart the belief that He will save you, that your eternity is secure, that He will do what He said He would do! There is, with this faith in the heart, a confidence of belief. Do you have that? I wonder how many dear people who are gathered in places such as this this very morning have only an intellectual belief?

Paul goes on in verses 11 and 12: salvation is not a matter of ethnicity, it doesn't matter what blood is flowing through your veins, or what tribe you're born into - even in Ulster! It's a matter of faith in Christ, verse 11: 'For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame'', verse 12, 'For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him'. As I've said: He is the God who is within reach of all of us. It's profoundly simple, verse 13: 'For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved''. The responsibility is firmly and squarely with you, my friend, to believe in Jesus.

'Whoever calls', there are 110 references to the gospel being offered to the 'whosoever will', to the 'whoever will call', without restriction. The apostolic preaching, the preaching of the apostles, proved that unambiguously. Peter, when he stood on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, he quoted this very quotation from Joel's prophecy: 'Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. When he was in Cornelius' house in Acts chapter 10, he said the same to him: 'To Christ all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him' - whoever believes in Him - 'will receive remission of sins'. That was Peter, Paul, when he was in Antioch in Acts 13, he preached: 'By Him', by Christ, 'everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses' - believe in Him. John, at the very end of his Revelation, what does he say? 'Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely'. This is the God who is within reach of all of us!

Now, yes, there must be conviction of the Spirit that prepares the heart for faith, and I believe that very strongly. The Lord Jesus taught it in John 14, 15 and 16 - it's a greatly neglected subject, by the way, by both camps in apparent arguments: the convicting work of the Holy Spirit of God. But though it is the Spirit of God who convicts, it is man who must exercise faith, it is man who must engage with God in a persuaded trust - that's what Paul means when he says: 'Call'. Have you ever called on the Lord to be saved?

But there is not only a human response to the gospel, Paul tells us in chapter 10 there is human instrumentality in how the Spirit of God draws men through the gospel to God. Verse 14: 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?'. Now Paul is returning to his apologetic, to his defence for preaching the gospel to everyone everywhere. How will they hear without a preacher? How will they call if they don't hear? Preachers must be sent. Now, I don't know about you, but I get the perception these days at home here, that fewer and fewer people are being sent. Now, I know the church does the sending in one regard, but I think there is an idea that God is sending preachers to preach this message across the four corners of the globe. Now here's a question for you to consider: has God stop sending? I don't think so. I think we have stopped listening.

What Paul is saying here is: not only is there human instrumentality in belief - that's why Israel has been passed over momentarily, they would not believe in Messiah, and the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles. Now it was foreknown and foreordained by God, but nevertheless they were responsible in unbelief - but we as believers are also responsible that this God might still be the God within reach of all of us. How shall they call on one whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? Conceivably, God could have worked directly in men's hearts without any preachers or human instrumentality, and I'm not saying He never ever does that - but generally that is not His way of working. Equally so, God could have sent an angel, and I believe He is sending angels - even to people in the Muslim

world where there are no preachers - but that is generally not His way of working. God's norm is preaching through human instrumentality.

In verse 15, this is God's heart about preaching: 'As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'. Preachers are beautiful to God and those who believe, because preachers are preaching a message of peace - not a message of obedience to a law that no one can achieve, but a message of grace that is simply free for the taking if we will take by faith, because of what Jesus has done. Now I challenge you again this morning as I close: have you believed? Simply believed? Verse 16 - not all have believed the gospel: 'Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?' - we'll look at that next week in the context of the Jews, but how does God inspire faith in the human heart? Verse 17: 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God'. This is what we preach, for this is what inspires faith in the hearts of sinners: the word of God is clearly the means of producing faith in the heart of sinners!

D.L. Moody wrote: 'I used to think that faith would strike me like a lightning bolt, but then somebody showed me Romans 10:17, 'Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God'; and I turned to the word of God and faith came, and has been growing ever since'. There is the human responsibility to believe, to receive - have you believed in your heart? There is the human instrumentality of preaching this message to those who have never heard - and some of them around the corner! William Gurnall, the puritan, said: 'Faith has two hands. With one it pulls off its own righteousness and throws it away, and with the other it puts on Christ' - that's it in a nutshell. Is there someone here today, and in response to God's Word you will pull off your own perceived attempts at being right with God and throw it away, and put on Christ?

Let us pray. If God has spoken to you - isn't it wonderful, isn't it wonderful that God is within the reach of all of us? The word of God is near you now, and if you will just confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, there's no doubt about it: you will be saved.

Father, we thank You for the simplicity, and yet the profundity of it all: that You have made this so for us, we who are Gentiles, that we should call on the name of the Lord and be saved because of who Jesus is and what He has done in His death and His resurrection. Lord, may someone believe, and even someone who has had only an intellectual ticking of the boxes - Lord, may they know what it is for God to come and live in their heart as, by faith, they are introduced to God's grace. Amen.

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The Gospel Explained - Chapter 11

"What Future For Israel?"

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Well, good morning to you, it's good to be back with you again in Scrabo. We're turning in our New Testament to Romans chapter 10 please, and we are looking mainly at Romans 11, but we left a few verses of chapter 10 still to read. Romans 10, please, verse 16:

"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world'. But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: 'I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation'. But Isaiah is very bold and says: 'I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me'. But to Israel he says: 'All day long I have stretched out My hands To a disobedient and contrary people'. I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life'? But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal'. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day'. And David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always'. I say then, have they stumbled", that is, Isarel, "that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in'. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of

the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'. Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?'. 'Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?'. For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen".

Now I would guess a great deal of you didn't understand a word of that reading, and it is one of the most difficult portions of Scripture. Even the apostle Peter said about certain things that Paul taught, that they were very difficult to understand. So we're going to try our best, as this is the portion that has been given to us today to consider, to understand what Paul is teaching. We have come a long way these last two weeks, looking at chapters 9 and 10. If you want a title that would sum up, really, what Paul is getting at in all these verses, it is this: 'What Future For Israel?'. What future is there for the nation of Israel?

Now Romans 9, 10 and 11, generally speaking, teach about God's sovereign dealings with Israel which are central to the plan of worldwide redemption. As we have journeyed through chapters 9 and 10, we have learned how - in chapter 9 in particular - God sovereignly chose the nation of Israel as a missionary nation to the world. His desire was that they should witness His goodness and glory to all of the globe, but also that they should be a vehicle for delivering Messiah, Saviour - and that's how the nation of Israel would chiefly be a blessing to the world. They would be the ones from whom Messiah would come and be Saviour.

Now, Paul has spent much of his time arguing that God acted justly and righteously when He chose to set aside Israel temporarily because they did not believe in the Messiah who came from them. The reason why they were set aside, as far as their responsibility is concerned, we saw last week in chapter 10, is because of their unbelief, their lack of faith. They missed the way of faith, and thought that God's righteousness could be achieved through their own righteous works. Because of their unbelief God has turned away temporarily from His chosen people, Israel, and is now turning to the Gentiles with a universal message of faith. Now, if you were here two weeks ago, let me cast your mind back to remember some of the context of the book of Romans, certainly as far as chapters 9, 10 and 11 are concerned. There was a Jew-Gentile issue in Rome. We'll not going into all the details of that, but just to say that many of the Jewish believers who were in the church in Rome were finding this difficult - what difficult? This transition from God working exclusively with the elect nation of Israel, to now broadening His dealings out to the whole world. They find it difficult to grasp, and there were many questions that were arising in their hearts - and it didn't help that Paul was now calling himself 'the apostle to the Gentiles'.

So the question that is inferred throughout all these chapters, coming from the heart and mind of Jewish believers in the church of Rome, was: has God abandoned His covenant, elect,

Old Testament people, Israel? Now they have learned already, as we've seen in chapters 9 and 10, that God has set Israel aside temporarily. So now there is a fresh question arising from their heart: 'Well then, is God finished with Israel for good?'. Chapter 11 verse 1 gives us the answer: 'I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not!'. You can't get much plainer than that! 'Certainly not!'. There is a two-pronged argument now coming from Paul as to why He has not cast away His ancient people, Israel. The first is: Israel's rejection is not total, verses 1 to 10 of chapter 11. Then his second prong is: Israel's rejection is not final. It is not total and it is not final!

Now let's deal with these one at a time. So not only did God foreknow Israel - that means He knew them beforehand - and He not only foreknew that they would fail Him, and be supplanted by other Gentile peoples, but He had Moses (the law) and Isaiah (the prophets) explicitly predict this. We read this at the end of verse 10, two prophecies from the law of Moses and the prophet Isaiah. God foreknew these things - and let me just pause here for a moment to say that nothing takes God unawares. There are no unforeseen circumstances as far as God is concerned, and especially none that disrupt His sovereign purpose and plan. So by quoting the prophets here, Paul is telling us that this is something that God foresaw - His programme is not disrupted. We read, and I hope you studied, in chapter 8 that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. God had foreseen all this, and prophesied through the law and the prophets.

Israel's rejection is not total, this has not taken God unawares. Paul cites two pieces of evidence why Israel have not been cast away. The first is himself, Paul personally, in verse 1 we read this: 'For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin'. He's saying: 'Israel's rejection is not total, because there are Israelites being saved - and I am one of them, of the tribe of Benjamin!'. So Paul's argument is personal, he has been saved - but there is not only his personal argument, there is a principle of remnant that he uses as evidence that Israel is not rejected totally. What is this principle of remnant? Well, it's simply this: though the majority of Jews are in unbelief, they have not accepted Messiah, they are in blindness, God - right throughout Jewish history for that matter - has often worked through a faithful remnant. The example of this that Paul gives in verses 2 to 5 is how God works through a remnant in Elijah's day, Elijah the prophet. Verse 2: 'God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 'LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life'? But what does the divine response say to him? 'I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal'. Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace'.

Now it may have been that Paul felt a bit of an affinity with Elijah. Elijah was praying against God's people, and Paul, at times, felt himself praying against what his own people, the Israelites, wanted - at times his own death. I'm sure Paul felt alone, like Elijah did. Yet, as God said to Elijah, Paul is saying to believing Jews: there is a remnant, there is a remnant, those who have not bowed the knee to Baal, those who have believed in Messiah, Jews who have been saved. Now, it's not that the number is of importance in this remnant, how many they are; but the fact that God has been faithful to His covenant promises in keeping a remnant of His own elect people, the Jews. Now Paul uses this illustration from Elijah's day, and here is the application in verse 5: 'Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace'. Again, as I have said in previous weeks, election here is corporate. It's speaking of a group of people, and what Paul is saying in verse 5 is: 'God, likewise as in Elijah's day, has graciously chosen that a group of Jews, a remnant, should

remain'.

Of course, this remnant is of grace, not of works - and that's revisiting where we were. Let me just repeat that for the benefit of anybody that's here and is not a Christian: this salvation that Paul espouses through the whole book of Romans is a salvation that is a free gift, offered by God, upon the sacrifice of His own Son, and it's got nothing to do with what you can do for God, or have done for God, or will do for God. It's all of grace, you must take it by faith, it is a free gift.

Now in verse 7 Paul tells us how each person in this elect remnant of the Jews have obtained this status: 'What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded'. How did this remnant obtain righteousness with God? Well, we have already learnt this in previous verses: it is by faith, and the rest have been hardened or blinded in their unbelief - chapter 9 has taught it, chapter 10, and now chapter 11. In verse 8 now, and through to verse 10, Paul now quotes Isaiah 29 and David from Psalm 69 to show that God has the right to judicially blind those who refuse to believe. You see, if you follow the gospel writings, you will find that the Jews among whom the Lord Jesus was ministering, performing His miracles, speaking His marvellous words, they would not believe - but there came a moment in the gospel record when it changed from them not believing by will, to not being able to believe, and we read: 'They could not believe', not 'They would not', but 'They could not believe'. God reserves the right to judicially blind those who refuse to believe. In verse 8 there's a wonderful illustration of this: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor', and the spirit of stupor is simply an attitude of deadness toward spiritual things.

Now, if you're here today and you have an attitude of deadness toward spiritual things, beware! Especially if you're a religious person, verse 9 speaks of that: 'David says: 'Let their table become a snare and a trap''. The idea is that their table was their self-acclaimed security, all they owned as Jewish religious people - but that table became a snare, it was their downfall, because they rested in an assurance of what they were as Jews and how they practised their law, but they did not have faith in Messiah and they missed the righteousness of God. Now you beware if that's the case with you today. Are you in a stupor as far as religious, spiritual matters are concerned? Beware! Certainly beware if your security is found in your own self-righteousness, that was the Jews' mistake. But the main point of these verses is: Israel's rejection is not total. Paul in himself is an example of an Israelite who has been saved, but there is also a remnant according to the election of grace, by faith. There is a remnant of Jews even today coming to faith in Messiah.

That's the first part of his argument, Israel's rejection is not total. But the second is: Israel's rejection is not final - we find that in verse 11 through to the end of the chapter. Look first of all at verses 11 through to 14, for therein Paul argues that the purpose of Israel's stumbling, their unbelief in Messiah, was not that God could rubbish them and dispose of them, but rather for two reasons: God allowed them to fall into unbelief first that salvation would go out to the rest of the world, the Gentiles; but secondly he argues that Gentile salvation, these Gentile nations coming to Christ, would actually provoke the Jews into eventual faith in their Messiah that they missed. Verse 11 speaks of that, if you look at it please: 'I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?', that means utterly fall, be rejected forever, 'Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy', to provoke Jews to jealousy, 'salvation has come to the Gentiles'.

Now let's deal with these one at a time. The first reason that God has allowed Israel to fall into unbelief is that salvation should go out to the Gentile world. In many instances, we read

that the gospel only went out to Gentiles after Jews rejected it. I could give you many examples for that: Acts 13, 18 and 28. First the gospel comes to the Jew, they reject it, and the apostles go and preach to the Gentiles. So the Jews' unbelief has enabled the gospel to go out to Gentile nations, but secondly: this happened in order to provoke the Jews to a kind of jealousy, so that they might eventually believe in Messiah. Now this is a matter of profound regret, that through church history - rather than making Jews envious of the truth of the New Testament - the Christian church has often provoked Jews to opposition of Christ by persecution of Jews and hatred for Jews, and even anti-Semitism. Now think about it: we coming to faith, in Gentile nations, was meant to provoke Jews to faith in Jesus - is that what the church has done throughout her history? Or have we provoked the Jews to opposition? Equally tragic is the fact that Israel's fall, that Paul says in verse 12 has brought riches to the Gentiles, has only resulted in further rejection of Messiah among the Gentiles! Isn't that tragic? Now that the gospel has gone out to the whole world because of the fall and unbelief of Israel, what an awful tragedy that, just as Israel rejected Messiah, now the Gentile nations are rejecting Him as well!

Now let me bring it very personally to you: are you rejecting Him? If you are, I want you to consider the lengths that God has gone to in order that you should embrace His Son as your personal Saviour. He has allowed His own elect people to be blind in unbelief so that the gospel could come to you in Ulster. I know many people in Ulster think the gospel originated here, but it didn't! The reason that you have got it today, you're hearing it today, is because of this fall - as Paul puts it - into unbelief of the Jews.

Now Paul in verse 15 turns the tables somewhat, and he says, stay with me: if the Jews' rejection of Jesus has brought blessings to the Gentile nations, just think what worldwide blessings there will be when the Jews accept Jesus. Look at verse 15: 'If their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?'. Now we'll revisit that in a moment or two, but first Paul illustrates how Gentiles have been blessed through the nation of Israel. In verse 17 he uses an analogy: 'If some of the branches were broken off, and you', Gentiles, 'being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches'. Now it's very simple, although it sounds complicated. The Gentile nations are described here as 'a wild olive tree', Christian Gentiles who have believed in Messiah, but the olive tree, the natural olive tree in the analogy refers to Israel - those who have inherited all the promises of God and the covenant of promise. Now some of the branches of this natural olive tree have been broken off, that is: unbelieving Jews have been taken away out of the promises by unbelief, but they have been taken away - Paul says - so that some of the branches of a wild olive tree, Gentile branches who believe in Messiah, should be grafted in.

Now verse 18, look at it: 'If you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you'. Gentile believers should not despise the Jews, because Israel and her promises are the root that supports the Gentile branches. Jesus on one occasion was talking to a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4, and He uttered this statement, and it sums up everything I've just said: 'Salvation is of the Jews'. What that simply means is: Israel were God's elect people to bless the whole world, a nation that came into existence to be a missionary nation to the world, and also the vehicle to deliver Messiah to be the Saviour of the world - and that's what Jesus meant when He said, 'Salvation is of the Jews'. If we are to be saved as Gentiles, we are engrafted into the natural olive tree in place of the branches of unbelieving Jews who have been broken off.

I hope you're with me. Now Paul points out a warning in verses 19 to 22, read it carefully:

'You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in'. Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off'. Now Paul is saying unbelief is the reason why Israel was broken off, those branches were broken off and cast away. Now he's turning the tables to the Gentiles, and he's saying: 'You've been engrafted in in place of the Israelites who have not believed, but beware, because for the same reason of unbelief you can be cut off as Gentiles'.

Now, let us pause for a moment, because some teachers use this to espouse a doctrine of 'saved and lost', that one moment you can be saved if you believe, but you have to continue to believe, and at the moment you cease to believe you will be one of these broken branches that will be cast away. That is not what is being spoken of here, it is not 'saved and lost' - but rather it's got to do with God's programme, remember we're speaking corporately now of Jews and Gentiles - God's talking about nations, He's not talking about individual salvation. Here's one reason why we know this: when you go back to Romans chapter 1, as I directed you back there, I think, two weeks ago, you will see that Paul addresses nations, and he says that if nations continually harden themselves against God and suppress the knowledge that they have of God, what will God do to them? He will cut them off, He will give them up, He will give them up, He will give them over. So this is a principle that Paul has already espoused at the very beginning of the book, and he's saying: 'Gentiles beware! You have received the gospel because of the fall of Israel, but beware - if you do not believe in the gospel as Gentile nations, you too will be cut off!'.

Have you got it? Beware of hardening your heart. Is there someone here - and I know this is complicated, but if you can grasp this much, do so: beware of hardening your heart against God. Beware. Verses 23 and 24 speak of how unbelief cut the Jews off, but now Paul says if they could believe, if they should believe, they will be grafted in again - they will be grafted in again! Now this is obviously speaking nationally here, it's not speaking of individuals. The reason why we know that is: there are Jews today who are believing, Paul was an example in his day of Jews believing, so was the remnant, there are Jews believing today, there are Jews who are benefiting from all the blessings of salvation - but this is speaking of how, nationally, if the Jews embrace their Messiah, they will be engrafted in again. But note: this is not conjecture that Paul speaks about, you know, 'If a Jew believes, well then he'll get the blessings'. Look at the verses please, let's read them, verses 23 and 24: 'And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief', if they believe, 'will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again'. You say, 'Well, that's not definite'. 'For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?' - but it's not certain, is it? Verse 25: 'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved'.

This is not simply conjecture about what could happen in all possibility if Jews believed in their Messiah, but rather this is prophetic. What Paul gives us here in verses 25 and 26 is the promise of restoration to Israel, and therefore Paul exhorts the Gentiles: 'Don't gloat over the fact that Israel have fallen in unbelief, and you are believing in the Gentile nations. Nor, for that matter, should you proudly assert that they are cut off from God forever'. 'No!', Paul says, 'Here I'm going to reveal to you a mystery', a mystery is simply, in the Bible, a truth

that has been previously obscured or hidden. The church is a truth like that, it's a mystery. It was never known in the Old Testament, but it's revealed through the apostles and through the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. 'Here's another one', Paul says, 'Israel's blindness in part, their unbelief now, is only until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in'. That simply means that when the number of believing Gentiles is complete, then Israel's eyes will be opened - and verse 26 says: 'And all Israel will be saved'.

Now, we'll look at that in more detail tonight, because it's based on the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31. But the reason why Paul shares this mystery is because he says that the chances are, if Gentiles misunderstand this mystery, they will be haughty, they will boast over their gain and the Jews loss. It's interesting that some people interpret this passage of Scripture, and indeed all New Testament portions generally to do with Israel, as 'spiritual Israel'. It was John Calvin who believed that Israel, in this portion in particular, signified all the redeemed the Jews and Gentiles together. This idea first came into vogue in the teachings of Augustine, the early church father, in his book 'The City of God'. He basically said this, that 'the spiritual church of the New Testament replaces the carnal nation of Israel'. Of course, in Reformed Theology this has led to the error of 'Replacement Teaching', and it simply is this: that the church is the continuation of the old nation of Israel, but in a spiritual sense. Therefore, what happens is, all the promises to ancient Israel are spiritualised and applied to the church. Now that's very common in Christianity, but the problem is: Israel has not once - that term 'Israel' - has not once been used of Gentiles in Romans 9, 10 and 11 - and indeed I go further, and you might want to question me on this afterwards, Paul never uses the term 'Israel' of Gentiles in any of his writings. When he speaks of 'Israel', he's either speaking of the whole nation of Israel, or the believing remnant among Israel today. The only 'spiritual Israel' is the believing remnant existing now.

F.F. Bruce put it: 'It is impossible to entertain an exegesis which understands Israel here in a different sense from Israel in verse 25'. Look at it, verse 25, Israel is spoken of as a nation in blindness, and in verse 26 it speaks of them as 'all being saved'. But Paul is saying ignorance of this mystery has led to pride and a haughty spirit toward Israel - all Israel will be saved! Verse 26, it's remarkable: 'All Israel will be saved'. Is Israel rejected for good? No! Just as now the nation as a whole, generally as a whole, has rejected Messiah apart from this one faithful group of believers among the Jews, a remnant according to the election of grace, so then in a future day the nation as a whole will accept their Messiah. Of course, that shouldn't be a surprise - because, if you know your Bible, you will know that Scripture elsewhere teaches that the Lord Jesus will not return again to this earth until Israel responds to God through His Messiah, Christ. If you want to read about that, read Zechariah 12, and even the Lord Jesus in Matthew 23 says: 'I say unto you', Israel, 'you shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!''.

So Paul quotes now in verses 26 and 27 from Isaiah, and shows that God still has a plan for Israel. He still has a plan, He has not cast them off, He foreknew everything about them, He had His prophets predict it - and one certain thing: God will never dishonour His word! His word is at stake, verses 28 and 29: 'Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers', the patriarchs to whom the covenants were made, 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'. When God promises something unconditionally, He is duty bound and obliged to fulfil it. He foreknew Israel, and He gave His promises. If Israel has been condemned to extinction and no future, God has dishonoured His word.

Now we will look more at that tonight, but let me just leave you with this consideration this

morning: if Israel is condemned to extinction and has no future, how do you account for the supernatural survival of the Jewish people since the establishment of the church at Pentecost? I mean, if the church replaces the old nation of Israel, why are the Jews still among us - against all the odds, it has to be said? Furthermore, how do you account for Israel's resurgence among the nations of the world as an independent state? How do you account for it? Less than ten years after Hitler boasted that he would build his Nazi empire on the graveyard of Israel, on May 14, 1948 Israel became a nation state. They have been victorious in several wars, not least their War of Independence in 1948 in which they were outnumbered 80 to 1. As soon as Israel declared her independence as a state, roughly half a million Jews in Israel were surrounded by 40 million Arabs that were determined to push them into the sea! Think of the significance of this: from A.D. 70 to 1967, and some of you can remember that year, from A.D. 70 to 1967 Palestine was ruled by forty different Gentile nations - but today it is under Israeli control! How do you account for that?

During the hearing of the British Royal Commission on Palestine in 1937, David Ben-Gurion, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, accounted for Jewish nationhood now, last century, in these words: 'The Bible is our mandate'. Chapter 9 of Romans teaches us Israel's past election, chapter 10 teaches us their present rejection through unbelief, and Chapter 11 teaches us their future restoration. Israel is the only nation in the world with a complete history - past, present and future! Why? Verse 29, because 'the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'. The covenants that were made with the patriarchs, God has not changed His mind concerning them. Can I say to you this morning that Israel is a sign to all the nations of the world, and if you want to know that God is for Israel - and I'm not saying everything they do is right politically or militarily, far from it - but if you want to know God is for them, all you need to see is their existence today and their nationhood which is most likely a fulfilment of prophecy to the day when they will, as a nation, embrace Christ and Jesus will come.

Now, do you know what that means, unbelieving friend here today? The coming of the Lord surely draws near. It's time you believed in this Saviour - but to those of you who do believe: remember that this 9, 10 and 11 of Romans follows on from Romans 8, where believers of all of hue, Jew and Gentile, were asking 'Well, if God has not honoured His promises to Israel, how can we know that He's honoured His promises to us? You say we're secure in Christ, but how can we know?'. What Paul is saying here is: 'He is true to all who believe, Jew or Gentile, for God must keep His word!'. Verse 30: 'For as you were once disobedient', do you remember what you were as Gentiles, where you came from? Marvel at God's grace that, through mercy shown to you, they also may obtain mercy. They may be provoked to jealousy, 'For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all'.

Who only God? I ask you, I know it's complicated, but God is not a simpleton - who else but God could have engineered such a plan as this? That His own elect people should fall into unbelief, that the gospel should go out to the nations, in order to make them jealous again that they might believe and embrace Messiah, and He comes to the world and reigns through all the nations. That God who foreknew Israel should use their fall for world redemption and, in the light of that, the obvious response of Paul and us should be wonder, love and praise. Verse 33: 'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?'. God is the source, the means and the end of all things. He is the Creator, the Sustainer, and the goal of everything - and He should be praised forever!

Verse 36 simply reads: 'For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen'. Someone has said: 'All these words are monosyllables, a child just learning to read could easily spell them out - but who shall exhaust their meaning: 'For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen''. Praise is to be our response, but it's not our only response. If I may digress, chapter 12 verse 1: 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God', what mercies of God? These mercies! These mercies that have already been mentioned - the cost of our salvation. Not just Christ's death and resurrection, but what it has cost the elect people of the Jews. The blessing that has gone out to us - what does that require of us? 'That we present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service', our rational service - our duty!

Do you praise Him? Have you given yourself to Him? Let us pray. Now, I know this subject matter is very difficult, but it may be that you're here - a believer or an unbeliever - and you have at least grasped something, and the Spirit of God has touched something, well, respond. You have a responsibility to respond. What is the response? Well, for both unbeliever and believer alike, it is to embrace Christ by faith, and give your all to Him for He is worthy - and God has planned it so.

Father, truly our minds cannot take in these deep truths in all their great capacity. Yet Lord, we are left, in a sense, dumbfounded - and all we can do, even though it is imperfect, is to worship. The fact that we who are not a people, should be called the people of God, and should know Yahweh, the covenant God, as our God - but what it cost to Israel. O Lord, we pray that we ourselves as the church, collectively, would be a provocation to Jewish people, that they would see Christ in us, and that we would not provoke them to hatred but to faith in Christ, Messiah. Lord, most of all, help us, every one, to believe God, to believe You in Your promises. You have set Your word above Your name, and You will not fail. Though we are faithless and unbelieving, You remain faithful for You cannot deny Yourself. May all here believe and have faith in God. Amen.

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