

T H E
F I N I S H E D W O R K
O F C H R I S T



T H E T R U T H O F R O M A N S 1 - 8



F R A N C I S A . S C H A E F F E R

The Finished Work of Christ

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INTRODUCTION

BY UDO W. MIDDELMANN,
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The studies of the first eight chapters of Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome you hold in your hands belong to the earliest systematic studies of Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer. These studies are of special significance because they express most of the essential ideas and truths that are foundational to all of Dr. Schaeffer's works and the content of his later books. As such these studies provide fresh insights into Schaeffer's work, but much more than this, they help us see the timeless significance of God's Word for every new generation.

In a more immediate sense, these studies grew out of Dr. Schaeffer's personal interaction with students and the discussion of the critical ideas of our time. In-depth, give-and-take discussions such as these were typical of Schaeffer's basic method in all that he did. Thus Schaeffer's insights were hammered out in these often lively exchanges, where honest questions—no matter how perplexing—were given honest, compassionate answers based on the unchanging truth of God's Word.

These studies were first given in a student flat in Lausanne, Switzerland in the 1960s. On the same day each week Schaeffer would go down the mountain to take a discussion among university students who met for lunch in the "Café Vieux Lausanne," just a few covered steps below the twelfth-century cathedral.

There, around 1526, the French reformers confronted the views of

the Roman Catholic church with the Bible's teaching. In a famous debate, the citizens of Lausanne listened to both sides and then voted in favor of the reformers' teaching. Their views were based on Scripture, free from the distorted traditions of Rome. Just to the side of the Cathedral lies the old Academy, where those same reformers later would place the University. The University was still there when Schaeffer gave the biblical answers to questions from students nearby in the "Vieux Lausanne."

At night he would teach the Roman class in Sandra Ehrlich's flat before rushing to the station for the last train and bus home in the mountains. Harold, a Dutch economics student, and students from many nationalities joined them for the evening. On the tapes of the original recording one can hear Harro, as he was called, translate for a Swiss student and frequently ask questions himself. Mario from El Salvador, a South African girl, an Italian art student, a Czech, an American, and my wife Deborah were some of the others who spent two hours every week studying the book of Romans verse by verse. Dr. Schaeffer always made the studies interesting as he applied Paul's letter to the intellectual questions of Paul's day, as well as ours, often the very ones discussed earlier in the Café with agnostic and atheist students. For in the fundamentals of the problems of human existence and questions there is little difference from the Greeks to our own twentieth century. As originally given, these lectures were in the "give and take" style of lecture/discussion at which Dr. Schaeffer excelled. This text has been edited to remove repetitions and comments from the audience, while maintaining the style and content of the original tapes.

The Letter to the Romans answers all the basic questions of Man in any age about his origin, the problem of a moral God in an evil world, and the questions about significance and true humanity. In a systematic way Romans addresses the kinds of questions any thinking person has in a world like ours, where problems are often recognized, but the proposed solutions rarely go to the core of the disease.

Schaeffer pointed out that, until recently, Romans was studied in American law schools in order to teach students the art of presenting an argument. A reasoned case is made for a foundational proposition.

Counter statements are considered one by one, and refuted. Romans is not about a leap of faith but presents a comprehensive argument for the central proposition: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: The just shall live by faith” (Rom. 1:16, 17).

Paul, the author, under the direction and inspiration of God’s Spirit, addresses our relationship with God, giving real answers to real questions. What we think we know about the universe, man, meaning, and morals, needs constant nourishment and correction. Without the correction and reproof found in God’s Word, sinful man will inherit foolishness in all the central areas of life. This always begins at the place of what men believe about God.

Schaeffer understood Romans to be a completed sermon of Paul’s, much like other sermons that he presented wherever he preached. After the introduction follows a proposition, then the exposition of that proposition. We see this in Acts 17, where Paul was unable to finish a similar sermon in Athens. He left and went south to Corinth, where he wrote Romans. In each city he visited he taught a whole circle of truth, covering the basics in a complete and integrated way.

Romans is just such a systematic teaching Paul sent to a church he had not seen in person. The church in Rome began in much the same manner as the church in Antioch. Both churches began through the witness of believers who had been present in Jerusalem during the events described in Acts 2, where 3,000 were converted on the day of Pentecost. Cornelius in Acts 10 had become a God-fearer through conversations with believers. In each case, the church was not the result of “professional” teachers but of believers reaching out to others.

Romans differs from all the other letters in the New Testament in one important way. No other New Testament writing gives such a systemization of the doctrine of the gospel. All others are addressed to churches or people who had heard sermons when apostles had visited personally. All the others address specific problems, special needs, or dubious practices. They address believers with specific teachings and

admonitions against the backdrop of what they had already heard in the body of belief.

In Rome, however, no one had ever preached the complete gospel. Therefore, the Roman letter can be said to be a unified statement of what the Old and New Testaments present concerning our situation before God and in the world. The entire truth is summed up in the theme verses in chapter 1, verses 16 and 17. The rest of the letter is an unpacking of these two verses: Why they are true, what is the dilemma, what is the solution, and how to live now. Paul declares that there is no reason to be ashamed of Christianity, neither intellectually nor in the experience of life under God.

Through the years since Dr. Schaeffer delivered these lectures/discussions thousands of students have studied the “Romans” tapes, straining their ears to follow the study from a dismally poor recording. They were glued to it because Dr. Schaeffer applied Paul’s teachings to the basic questions of Man at any age. Schaeffer himself frequently returned to Romans in discussing the intellectual bleakness of modern life.

This is a verse by verse study of the text. Woven into it are pointers to the central problems we face in our generation. Everyone who is concerned about a supposed absence of God, or about the truthfulness of God and His moral rightness, discovers a God in the Bible who grieves over the sins of the creature, but who is not responsible for their sin. We come face to face with the anger of God due to our sin as well as His compassion in providing justice, salvation, and a future restoration through Christ. Each member of the Trinity—far from being merely an item of theological interest—is intimately and powerfully involved in our redemption through history.

Along the way, it is interesting to see how much weight Schaeffer puts on the sinfulness of man, which provokes the wrath of God. Yet never is there a hint that this sinfulness destroys the humanity and rationality of man as created in the image of God. God is not the author of evil, and evil does not diminish the obligation of Man to seek after and choose God. Schaeffer does not fall into the theological trap of extreme Reformed advocates who say that depravity has removed humanity from Man, thereby absolving Man from the responsibility

to repent or to seek after God. Like Paul, Schaeffer pleads with his neighbor to bow before the known God and to accept “the finished work of Christ” for his salvation, for his present battles against sin in the Christian life, as well as for the hope of a final resurrection and righteousness on the Day of the Lord.

Man is fallen, but he is not a zero, he is not worthless. Man has great value as created in the image of God. At the same time, however, all of our being has been tragically affected by the Fall, including our will and intellect.

Here is a God who does battle for us. There is no arbitrary solution or esoteric mystery. Paul does not shy away from tough questions. He answers them from the wholeness of God’s work in history. By inviting people to believe God (not “in God”)—His existence, His being, and His promises about God’s solution to our guilt from sin in the finished work of Jesus Christ—Paul shows God to be the One who is morally just and the One who will justify those who believe.

INTRODUCTION AND THEME

1:1-17



The book of Romans falls into two distinct sections: chapters 1–8 and chapters 9–16. There has been great discourse among Christians through the years as to whether there is a relationship between the two sections. One may find a relationship, but this is not the important point. Both sections are worth studying by themselves. In this study we will deal only with the first section, chapters 1–8.

In several books of the Bible there is a verse or verses that constitute a theme statement, and this is very plainly so in the book of Romans. The key to understanding this first section of Romans is found in 1:16–17:

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.

With that theme statement in mind, we will begin our study of Romans by looking at Paul's introductory remarks in 1:1–15.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God . . . (1:1)

Paul identifies himself as a servant, or slave, of Jesus Christ. He says this specifically and with great care. He is writing to the church at Rome, and Rome knew a great deal about slaves. Slavery was legal in the Roman Empire. The world understood what it meant to be a slave, and Paul begins by declaring himself a slave of Christ.

There was a great distinction, however, between the slavery of the Roman Empire and Paul's slavery to Christ. Slaves in the Roman Empire were slaves not because they wanted to be, but because they had to be. A heavy iron band would be welded around a slave's neck, something he could not possibly remove by himself. This marked him as a slave for as long he remained a slave.

Paul's slave relationship to Jesus Christ, however, is something quite different. He is a slave not because he has to be a slave, but because he wishes to be one. Paul had an iron band around his neck, not because it had to be there but because he held it there by the fingers of his own will. We too must adopt this attitude if we are to be fruitful in the things of God.

Just as the slave must "will" the will of his master, our usefulness to Jesus depends on the extent to which we will the will of God. We are not robots. Rather, in love we choose to return to the position of obedient dependence on God in which He created us. This may seem an unpleasant idea to some, but as God's creatures this "slaveness" is the only place of joy and the only place of usefulness.

Paul was human. It hurt him just as much as it would hurt us to be beaten and imprisoned for his faith. It hurt him just as much as it would hurt us to be thrown to the beasts. His shipwreck was just as wet, just as windy, just as uncomfortable as it would be for us. Beheading was surely not pleasant to anticipate. And Paul could have escaped all of this simply by forsaking his servanthood. So when Paul introduces himself in this way, it is not just a pious expression. Rather, it introduces a theme central to Romans: that after accepting Jesus as our Savior, we are to live for Him.

. . . separated unto the gospel of God . . . (1:1b)

As Christ's servant, Paul is "separated unto the gospel." Separation always has two actions: separation from and separation to. Separation from is easy to understand. Many things can keep us away from God, and it is not possible to be separated *to* God unless we are separated from such things. It is a means to the end of being separated to God to preach to the Gentiles. Paul was separated from the normal comforts of life, such as marriage (1 Cor. 7:8). That doesn't mean every Christian will be called to forego marriage, but every Christian should be willing to do so. Nor will every Christian be asked to die for the gospel, but every Christian should be willing so to die. The willingness is the crux of the matter.

Paul calls himself a "servant of Jesus Christ" but then speaks of the "gospel of God." The gospel relates to all three persons of the Trinity. It is the good news of the Trinity to a lost and fallen world. Jesus is the Lord of our redemption; however, the gospel is the good news of the entire Godhead, the Trinity.

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

The phrase is in parentheses, yet there is really no interruption of thought in the first three verses, and verse 2 is important. It expresses the unity of the Old and New Testaments, a theme emphasized constantly throughout the Bible. Paul says God promised the gospel "afore" in the Holy Scriptures. How far back does that go? Romans 16:20 will give us a clue: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Surely this refers to Genesis 3:15, which states that the woman's "seed" is going to bruise the serpent's head. Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman (compare Gen. 3:15 with Gen. 22:18 and Gal. 3:16). He is the one who crushed the serpent's head. Yet, by identification with Jesus, we look forward to the Second Coming and shall also bruise Satan under our feet. The gospel goes back literally as far as we can go. As soon as mankind sinned in the Garden, before twenty-four hours had passed, God promised the Messiah. And it looks forward to the Second Coming on the basis of the finished work of Christ.

People often try to pit the Old and New Testaments against each

other. But the emphasis throughout the New Testament is on its unity with the Old. This was true in Christ's preaching, in the book of Acts, in Paul's epistles, and in all the other epistles. There are not two messages, only one. The Old Testament people of God looked forward to the Messiah revealed fully in the New Testament. Paul knew that the church in Rome included Jews as well as Gentiles, so it was important to remind them that there is just one message.

Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. (1:3–4)

Paul shows both the human and the divine side of the Incarnation. He certainly believed in Christ's deity, but the fact of His being truly divine does not change the fact Christ was also a true man and came down through the natural line of David. Again, Paul probably has his Jewish readers in mind. It is extremely important for them to be reminded that Christ is indeed the son of David, because the Old Testament prophesied specifically that the Messiah would come through Abraham and David.

. . . the seed of David according to the flesh . . . (1:3b)

Obviously, by "flesh" Paul means "human." He does not have in mind the sinful connotation of that word, as he will later in 7:5.

Paul says nothing of Christ descending through David's son Solomon. God's promise to David was absolutely unconditional: He would be the ancestor of the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:16). Solomon wanted an unconditional promise too, but God's promise to Solomon was conditional. In essence, God said, "If you do so and so, then you will carry on the line" (1 Kings 9:4ff.). But Solomon didn't do so and so, and neither did his royal descendants, so God denied him involvement in the fullness of the promise. If one takes the genealogy in Matthew as referring to Joseph and that in Luke as referring to Mary, one finds that Jesus came through David on both sides. He came on Joseph's side through Solomon, establishing a legal continuity with David. But as far as His actual conception by the Holy Spirit through Mary, He came

through Nathan, a son of David other than Solomon. Both the unconditional promise to David and the conditional promise to Solomon were thus fulfilled in exquisite detail.

On the human side then, Christ came through David. But there is more than the human. He was also “declared to be the Son of God with power” (1:4a). “Declared” in this place is better translated “determined.” Determined means it is certain. It is certain that Christ is also the Son of God. Why? Because of a particular “power” (1:4). Christ’s deity, to be believed, must be demonstrable. The thing that demonstrated with certainty that Christ was God was His “resurrection from (or of) the dead” (1:4).

Before considering the resurrection itself, notice that the Resurrection was “according to the spirit of holiness” (1:4). The spirit of holiness can be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit, or as the Holy Spirit Himself. Much is said throughout the New Testament of the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Third Person of the Trinity. That relationship resulted in a holiness of life on Christ’s part. Paul says elsewhere that Christ was “justified in the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16). The writer of Hebrews says that Christ “offered himself without fault to God . . . through the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14) and spoke of Christ, “who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard for his piety, his godly fear. . .” (Heb. 5:7). When He was on earth as a true man, Christ operated through a commitment to the Holy Spirit. Because He did this, God heard Him.

Jesus was declared to be the Son of God “by the resurrection from the dead” (1:4). This can be translated either “from” or “of” the dead. What is the difference? Resurrection “from the dead” would seem to refer solely to Christ’s own resurrection, while resurrection “of” the dead would seem to have in view our future resurrection as well. Either way it would be enough to prove Christ’s deity—He is determined to be, declared to be the Son of God by the marvelous fact that He has been raised physically from the dead and that there shall be the Christian’s future resurrection from the dead.

By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to

the faith among all nations, for his name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ. (1:5–6)

Paul and his colleagues received grace and apostleship for a definite purpose: “for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.” Paul’s mission is not only to Jews, but to “all nations.” He is leading up to 1:7, where he states that he is now writing to Rome, the capital of his known world. He now faces away from himself and the “we” of 1:5 and turns toward those to whom he is writing: “. . . among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ.” These are the Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike, making up the church at Rome. They all have a place “among the nations” that Paul has been called to reach.

To all that be in Rome . . . (1:7a)

We are now brought face to face with the church in Rome, probably meeting in a home, a church perhaps founded by laypeople rather than by an apostle. Paul had not been to Rome, and neither, despite the traditional Roman Catholic view, had Peter. If Peter had been in Rome, it is inconceivable that Paul would not have mentioned him in this letter. Yet the church was there, a united church of Jews and Gentiles in the world capital of Rome. And this should not surprise us, for the church at Antioch of Syria, perhaps the greatest of the early churches, the one that sent out the first missionaries, was also started by laypeople (Acts 11:19–20). It is reasonable to think that the same thing could have happened in Rome. If you go to Rome today you can see the traditional site of Priscilla and Aquila’s home, where a church met. To me this is the ideal. It is the way the church would have continued to function if the Holy Spirit had been allowed to work—wherever Christians go, they proclaim the gospel and little churches spring up.

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called . . . saints. (1:7a)

You will notice that I have left out the words “to be” in the phrase “called to be saints.” The KJV includes these words in italics, but they are not there in the Greek; they were added by translators to make the English flow more smoothly. When we read it as “called saints,” however, we are brought face-to-face with the fact that here in Rome,

in the world capital, there are those who are saints in God sight. As soon as we accept Christ as our Savior, we are saints in God's sight. This is based first upon Jesus' passive work, His passive obedience in taking the punishment for our sins. But it is based also upon His active obedience in perfectly keeping the law for us. Christ's mediatorial work for us began at His baptism, when His public ministry started. From that time on, what He did, He did not only for Himself but for us. When we accept Him as Savior, His active obedience means that we have a positive righteousness with God. We are clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Our guilt is gone on the basis of His finished work on the cross, His passive obedience. But we are also clothed with His perfect righteousness, based on His active obedience. This being so, we, like the Romans, can be called saints right now.

Paul likewise addresses the Ephesian and Philippian Christians as saints (Eph. 5:3; Phil. 1:1). The Ephesians passage is especially intriguing: "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints." This speaks of something quite different than the traditional Roman Catholic view that a saint is someone special. The New Testament teaches that you are a saint as soon as you accept Christ as your Savior. Christ has taken your guilt and you are clothed with His perfection. If a little boy puts on his father's overcoat and buttons it above his head, you see nothing but the overcoat. Likewise, when God looks at us, He sees nothing but the righteousness of Jesus Christ that covers us.

But since you are a saint, says Paul in Ephesians, you should live like a saint. Likewise he says elsewhere, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). Be what you are in the sight of God. This is the very antithesis of salvation through works. Everything depends upon the finished work of Jesus Christ. Our calling is to live in keeping with what we already are in God's sight—and as we will be one day in history, at Christ's Second Coming. This is the great lesson of chapter 6, where Paul explains sanctification. There we will learn more about this great truth.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus

Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. (1:7b–8)

News of the little church at Rome and the reputation of their faith had become known throughout the Christian world. It must have been a great encouragement as word came back that in Rome, the capital of the world, there was a faithful church of Jews and Gentiles.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. (1:9–10)

There are three steps in Paul's prayer for the Roman believers: He thanks God for them (1:8), then prays on their behalf (1:9), then makes a specific request regarding them: that he might get to see them soon (1:10).

For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. (1:11–12)

Paul is not distant or aloof from the people he writes to. Rather, he longs to be with them. His desire that they be "established" parallels Luke's desire that his friend Theophilus might "know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4). Paul knows that such maturity will bring sweet and wonderful fellowship between himself and the Romans. He expects to receive a blessing from them as well as giving one to them. This is surely true among Christians always. When the relationship is what it should be, the blessings run in both directions.

Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) . . . (1:13a)

The educated reader should have few problems with the King James translation, but "let" is one such problem. It meant "hindered." Today it means the exact opposite. Its meaning of "hindered" survives only in tennis: When the ball strikes the net we have a "let ball," mean-

ing that the ball was hindered. Paul was “let,” or hindered, in his desire to visit Rome.

. . . that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. (1:13b)

Paul has expressed his desire to impart a spiritual gift to the Romans (1:11), but he expects from them a harvest of spiritual fruit. It is two ways of saying the same thing: The gift is the cause, while the fruit is the effect.

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

Paul considers himself a debtor to both educated and uneducated, the wise and the unwise. This is an entirely different mentality than that of most Christians. Most Christians think they are doing something special when they tell others about the gospel. But Paul understands that such witnessing is not something special, for he is a debtor (1:14) or a “servant” (1:1) of the gospel. We, like Paul, should feel ourselves indebted to preach the gospel to everyone. It is a debt we can never escape. There is no neutrality or convenience in Him, for we are debtors to preach the gospel. At the end of this introduction to Rome, Paul then concludes:

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

He is ready to preach the gospel wherever the Lord takes him, regardless of the cost. There’s no doubt that Paul was eventually killed in Rome, so his desire to preach the gospel there did, indeed, cost him greatly. Yet there is really no other way to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world. As you give your life to the Lord, there will be a cost. “Paul, a servant . . .” (1:1). “I am debtor” (1:14). “So, as much as in me is . . .” (1:15). We are not playing games.

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 re-

vealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (1:16–17)

With these verses we begin the first main section of Romans, chapters 1–8. These chapters are really an exegesis of 1:16–17. You never get beyond these two verses. 1:1–15 is the introduction; 1:16–17 is the theme; then 1:18–8:39 is the exegesis of that theme.

Paul is “not ashamed” of the gospel. Later, he will say that “hope maketh not ashamed” (5:5). He uses basically the same Greek word in both places, but with a slightly different emphasis. After we have accepted Christ as our Savior (in Chapter 5), we experience a hope that will not disappoint us or make us ashamed. But even at the beginning, there is no need to be intellectually ashamed of or disappointed in the gospel as a system. Paul is not speaking to backward or primitive people. He is surrounded by the Greek and Roman world with all its intellectual understanding, yet he is not ashamed of what he is preparing to speak about.

Jesus warned us not to be ashamed of the intellectual content of His teaching (Luke 9:26). As if answering Jesus, Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel.” Paul was not ashamed as he stood on Mars Hill (Acts 17). He was not ashamed when confronting the religious leaders of his day. He was not ashamed to preach while imprisoned in Rome. So also we, surrounded by our intellectual world, should not and need not be ashamed.

It is a very serious thing to be ashamed of Jesus and His teaching (Luke 9:26). In his last letter to Timothy, Paul reminds us that this includes not being ashamed of those who truly stand for Jesus and His word: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8). We should proudly identify with all who identify themselves with Christ. Paul cites the example of Onesiphorus, who “oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains” (2 Tim. 1:16).

Paul tells Timothy of his own suffering for the gospel’s sake, concluding, “Nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). “That day” is the Second Coming of Christ. We should be unashamed of Christ for as

long as we live (2 Tim. 4:1) or until He returns, not just when things are going well, but even when the gospel is in ill repute. And we shall not be ashamed in experience either. That was certainly the case with Paul as he wrote to Timothy from prison.

We should then not be ashamed of the practice of Christianity, but also not of the teaching of it in its intellectual concepts. There is an imperative here, not just a passing thought. It is a lifelong experience not to be ashamed.

For . . . the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation. (1:16)

We often use the word *salvation* as though it were parallel to *justification*. Perhaps we ask, “Are you saved?” when a more accurate question would be, “Are you justified? Is your guilt gone?” There are biblical reasons for using “saved” in this way, yet when Paul is being explicit he uses *justification* for this concept. When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are justified. Justification addresses a legal problem. It means God declares that our guilt is gone on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ. But our salvation is much wider than justification.

Salvation includes three tenses: past, present, and future. Romans 1–8 covers all three tenses of salvation. Chapters 1–4 deal with the past act of salvation for the Christian, which is justification. Romans 5:1 through 8:17 deals with salvation’s present aspect, which is sanctification. Then, in a brief but very striking way, 8:18–39 speaks of the future aspect of salvation, which is glorification.

Salvation includes all of this on the basis of the finished work of Christ.

. . . for it is the power of God unto salvation. (1:16b)

Literally from the Greek, the gospel is God’s *dunamis*, His dynamite by which He brings about salvation, all of it: justification to remove guilt, sanctification in the present life, and at the Second Coming glorification.

. . . the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (1:16b)

Paul's next words make this concept of salvation very large but also very limited. It was very large: ". . . to every one . . . to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." The Jews had thought of salvation as applying only to themselves. Paul emphasizes that this is not so. Salvation, he says, applies to Gentiles as well as Jews. But it would be just as correct for us to say that salvation applies to Jews as well as Gentiles. It is a completely open circle. The whole world, people of all skin colors, people under all flags, the door is open to them all for salvation. The circle of salvation is as big as one can imagine. It includes the world's entire population, throughout all time. It is totally universal. It is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone. Earlier Paul spoke of the Greeks and Barbarians (1:14), meaning the educated and the uneducated. The circle of salvation is as large as us. It's the whole world. The educated, the uneducated, the Jew, the Gentile; wherever you find a lost person, the circle of salvation is as big as that.

Paul says the gospel is "to the Jew first," and of course his practice, as seen throughout Acts, was to preach in the synagogue first and then, when they rejected him, to turn to the Gentiles. Today, unfortunately, we Christians often just leave the Jewish community alone. Even if we don't follow Paul's practice of going to Jews first, we certainly should not leave them till last or ignore them altogether.

The circle of salvation is large, but it is also very small. There is a definite limitation: ". . . to every one that believeth." The circle is as big as the world, but includes only those who believe. Each individual has the choice of either accepting or rejecting the gospel.

The gospel is the power of God for that total salvation to all who believe that to them accrues the active and passive obedience of Christ. But it is limited to those who believe.

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

This carries us along to see that salvation involves more than justification. We are justified by faith, but we are also to live in the present by that same faith—not just concerning finances but in all areas

of life. Martin Luther proclaimed justification by faith alone, and of course that is taught throughout the Bible and is included in what Paul says here. But he goes further: After being justified by faith, we are to live by faith. It is the second aspect of salvation, our sanctification, that Paul will explain in 5:1 through 8:17.

“The just shall live by faith” is a quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in the Old Testament and occurs two other times in the New Testament (Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). As we observed in 1:2, there is a unity in the message of the Old and the New Testaments. There are not two religions in the Bible, not two ways of salvation, only one. Habakkuk says, “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). He is contrasting the person whose soul is “lifted up” on the basis of his or her good works with the person who lives “by faith.” Paul is drawing the same contrast. It isn’t only the contrast of becoming a Christian through faith rather than through moral or religious works; it applies to the present aspect of salvation as well. The person who waits to be saved on the basis of his or her own righteousness will wait forever. Likewise, if we wait to grow spiritually on the basis of our own prideful efforts, there will be no spiritual growth.

“The just shall *live* by faith.” Beginning in 4:17 and especially in chapter 5 and on, *life* and *death* will become key words. Paul will constantly contrast being dead and being alive. And though he doesn’t really begin to develop that theme till then, it is at the very heart of what he is teaching in these introductory verses. Already we have seen the phrase, “the resurrection from the dead” (1:4). If, as we suggested, this is translated “the resurrection *of* the dead,” then Paul is already thinking in terms of our complete salvation—the total life that is ours in Jesus Christ. We are to “live by faith” now. In chapters 5 and 6 Paul will develop this into a call to fullness of life on the basis of the blood of Christ, by faith, now. It isn’t just being justified, it is something much more than that.

PART ONE

JUSTIFICATION

1:18-4:25



THE PERSON WITHOUT THE BIBLE: GUILTY

1:18-2:16



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

When Paul says that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (1:16), the unsaved person may well ask, “Why do I need salvation?” Luther pointed out that the gospel really includes both gospel and law: There is no use telling men that they must be saved (the *gospel*) until they feel a need for salvation (a need that the *law* reveals). Christianity in the Old and New Testament teaching is unique in emphasizing the need for salvation. Other religions stress that you need a guide or some other kind of help to teach you how to live or how to die. But these other religions do not emphasize the need for salvation from guilt. Our problem is not metaphysical, but moral.

In 1:18 Paul begins explaining why all people need a Savior. He explains the need for salvation first as it applies to Gentiles (1:18–2:16), then as it applies to Jews (2:17–3:8), then as it applies to all humanity, Jew and Gentile alike (3:9–20). I like to describe it this way: Paul speaks first to the person who does not have the Bible, then to the person who does have the Bible. That, after all, was the main difference between the Jews and Gentiles of Paul’s day, and those two categories will certainly help us apply Paul’s teachings to our world today. Why does everyone in the world need a Savior?

To the Gentile (the person without the Bible) who asks, “Why do I need salvation?” Paul says, with finality (v. 18), Because “the wrath of

God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness!” You are under the wrath of God—that’s why you need salvation. Mankind needs a real salvation. We don’t need a spiritual guide or the inspiring example of a martyr. We need a real Savior because we are under God’s very real wrath. In mentioning God’s wrath, Paul introduces the first key word of the Christian vocabulary: *guilt*. He discusses guilt in 1:18–3:20. Then, in 3:21–4:25, he will discuss the second key Christian word: *substitution*, that is, Christ’s substitutionary death for our sins. People of other religions have no concept whatsoever of the Christian significance of these two words.

We need salvation because we are under the wrath of God. We need a real salvation because we are guilty. That wrath of God will come to fruition at the judgment at the Second Coming of Jesus (2:5). The Second Coming in the future is our focus point in the same way as we look back to the day of Jesus’ death. This is parallel to the Lord’s Supper with its emphasis on the death of Christ in the past and the looking forward to the day He will come again.

There is another question that the unsaved person without the Bible asks. It has been asked in every generation, though perhaps never shouted louder than in our own generation: If God made me, why am I now under His wrath? If God made me as I am, how can He consider me guilty? Is He not unjust in doing so? Where does evil come from? God is unjust if He made us this way and holds us guilty. This takes us right back to the words of the Bible’s teaching of a historic Fall. If you remove the record of a historic Fall in Genesis we will lose all contact with the Christian message. Without that answer to the origin of evil, the book of Romans would have no meaning, the death of Christ would have no meaning. Why should God hold us under His wrath if He made us the way we are? If He had made us all four feet tall, would He judge us for not being six feet tall?

Paul answers that question:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them [those without a Bible]; for God hath shown it unto them. (1:19)

That which is known of God is obvious, even to the person without the Bible—for God has shown it to them. He has shown it, first of

all, through their conscience, as Paul explains later: “Which show 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” (2:15). Everyone has a conscience. Paul will speak later of the fall of Adam and Eve, but he begins by dealing with the individual non-Christian and non-Jewish reader, the lost man or woman. He is dealing with individual man as significant. He is dealing with the individual man or woman standing before him in the Roman world, or with the individual man or woman reading his words in the twentieth century. And he says to that person, “You ask why you are under God’s wrath, but look at you! Don’t you have a conscience? Don’t you know very well that you are not the person you should be?” Paul doesn’t allow the distraction of endless arguments. He keeps it on the level of the individual, a significant man.

He says to the Gentile nonbeliever, “Even though you have never seen a Bible, you have a conscience and you know that you have violated it. You’re not a machine. You’re not a robot. You’re not an animal. You can’t excuse yourself by animal psychology. You know you have a conscience and you know that you have violated it.”

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. (1:20)

Not only does the nonbeliever have a conscience, he should know there is a God simply by observing the amazing creation all around him. He is not living in a dark cave. He can see creation all around him and surely he must wonder where it all came from. And yet, men would rather believe a gigantic lie that they are really nothing than believe the reality that there is a God. The Bible emphasizes many times that creation is a testimony to God. Even those who do not have the Bible should be able to conclude from creation that there is a God. As the psalmist says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge” (Psalm 19:1–2). Notice it is *knowledge* that creation reveals. As Paul shows, creation reveals knowledge to the rational person—who can’t escape his rationality

even though he is a rebel. “There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:3). There is one voice that is heard wherever humans live, with or without the Bible. It is the voice of creation. And creation is not speaking to the sticks and the stones, it is not speaking to the animals, it is not speaking to machines; creation is speaking to the rational creature who is a rebel against the Creator, even while he is still a rational creature.

In its original language Psalm 19:3 reads, “There is no speech nor language without their voice heard.” It doesn’t make smooth English, but the thought is that you can just feel it. It comes like a great weight against you. “There is no speech nor language without their voice heard.”

Paul quotes from this Psalm in Romans 10:18 and expressed similar thoughts about creation’s witness to God when speaking at Lystra: “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Here Paul focuses not so much on creation as a past event, but on creation as the present good providence of God. Jesus likewise speaks of the rain falling on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). Paul is challenging nonbelievers, not just on the basis of the creation’s witness as a past event, but also on the basis of the witness of a creation that bathes them with sun and bathes their fields with rain and dew. So often Christians argue intellectually for the existence of God, using arguments such as the need for a first cause, and this has value; but the truth is much deeper than this. It isn’t just that our world had a first cause, but that we are surrounded with the good things of God. He fills our every human need, and this should be ample testimony to His existence.

Paul clearly states that even though mankind is fallen, man is still a moral and rational being. He is not dehumanized. He still has a conscience (1:19), and he can still appreciate the wonder of creation all around him (1:20). He hasn’t become a machine, even though he may choose to think of himself as a machine rather than acknowledge the Creator. A book on the Dutch painter van Gogh points out that from the time he arrived in Paris till the time of his suicide, his self-portraits grew less and less human. But the Fall didn’t stop van Gogh or anyone else from being human. Each human is still an image-bearer of God,

and we can speak to him or her of the gospel. He is still a person, though he dehumanizes himself. If the Fall of mankind had resulted in men and women being nothing but machines, they would not be guilty before God. Yet whether in this life or in hell, man continues to be a rational, moral creature. He never becomes a machine.

We marvel at the wonderful things fallen humans can do—in the arts, in creativity, in technology—even while rebelling against God. And yet because they are still human and still rational, they stand condemned under the wrath of God. They could draw a conclusion from the world around them and they don't. That is their condemnation. They are not simply under the *displeasure* of God. There isn't just a fog separating them from God. Rather, they are subject to God's wrath because they are guilty. In the twentieth century our whole concept is that people are estranged from God . . . if there is a God. But Paul's viewpoint is quite different: Because people are guilty, God holds them under His wrath. Therefore, what man needs is a Savior.

Paul will go to great lengths—from 1:18 to 3:20—to explain to the Greeks and Romans, and then to Jews, and then to mankind in general that they are under God's wrath and need to be saved; then he will take just a few verses to tell them how to be saved (3:21–30). After a person knows he needs a Savior, it doesn't take many words to tell him that there *is* a Savior. The problem is for fallen humans, each at the center of his or her own universe, to acknowledge that they need a Savior. They will quickly acknowledge that they need a guide, that they need help, that they need greater technical expertise. But Paul wants them to see that they need a Savior.

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. (1:21)

The person without the Bible might then ask, "If all this is true, why are we in the mess we're in? What happened?" From 1:21 to 1:31, Paul explains what happened. He will later speak explicitly of the historical Fall of Adam and Eve (5:12–21), but throughout this section he has in view that first and historic Fall as well as the many

“falls” that happen over and over in history, in the lives of individual men and women in every age.

Actually, you can think of the Fall in three different ways. First there was the original Fall of mankind, which ultimately explains why so many people here and abroad do not know the true God. You can also think of the Fall in terms of nations throughout history knowing the truth but then turning from it. If you had stood in Trafalgar Square or Columbus Circle sixty years ago and asked a thousand people what the gospel is, most of them could have told you. Maybe they wouldn't have accepted it, but they could have told you what it is. However, if you stood today in Trafalgar Square, in Columbus Circle, or between the lions in front of the Art Institute in Chicago, and asked a thousand people what the gospel is, you would find very few who could answer. There was a much greater knowledge of Christianity in past generations. We are living in a post-Christian world today.

Thirdly, it is possible for individuals to go through this cycle—to know the truth and then deliberately turn away from it. I'm always amazed at the number of famous people who have come out of missionary or ministerial homes, who have known the gospel, and yet later have deliberately turned away.

So the individual can fall away from the truth. Back of that we see whole cultures falling away. At the beginning stands the original Fall. Paul has all three of these in mind.

So why are we in such a mess? What happened? Paul begins his answer by speaking of a time when mankind “knew God.” This was of course absolutely true in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve knew God and had communion with Him. Similarly, there was a time when our European and American culture knew God. Applying it to the individual, there are many nonbelievers who were taught about God as children. So when the person without the Bible asks, “Why am I under the wrath of God? How did this happen?” Paul begins by pointing out that either they or someone in their past knew God. Unbelievers are not just a lot of stones scattered out across the world. They all came from someone who knew God and then deliberately turned away—even if in their case that someone was Adam. You don't begin with

ignorance. You may find ignorance finally, but you don't begin with ignorance. You begin with men and women who knew God.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful . . . (1:21a)

However, these people who knew God—Adam and Eve, or our closer ancestors, or ourselves—chose not to glorify Him as God, and not to give Him thanks. Non-Christian philosophies don't become popular because of their intellectual appeal, but because people have chosen to rebel against God. They rebel and refuse to glorify and thank God as Creator. Only then do they search for a rationale for their rebellion in the mysteries or promises of other religions.

. . . but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (1:21b)

When people refused to thank God and give Him the glory, their hearts and imaginations became dark and vain. This is not the vanity of a girl spending two hours in front of the mirror combing her hair. It is the vanity of the creature not willing to be the creature, but wanting rather to be the creator at the center of the universe. This vanity causes people to “become fools” (1:22). They become total fools, understanding neither themselves nor the universe they live in. That's why we see so many in the twentieth century who cannot seem to differentiate themselves from machines. They profess to be wise (1:22) in the sense of seeing themselves at the center. This is not the real wisdom of the scientist, the skill of the artist, but a vanity of the fool in the wrong place.

The psalmist says, “The fool has said in his heart there is no God” (Psalm 14:1). This is true in two senses: You would be a fool to say that there is no God; but once you have said such a thing, you become a total fool. The Fall of mankind wasn't just a matter of falling off a curb or something. Humans are in the mess they are in because they have chosen to rebel against God and as a result have become total fools.

On the positive side, we also read in the Psalms of what happens when people choose to *return* to God: “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. . . . A seed shall serve him; it shall be

accounted to the LORD for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born” (Psalm 22:27, 30–31). Those who return to God become those who are not fools. They become the humanity of God. They return to the place for which mankind was made in the first place.

Paul touches on the same theme in Ephesians 4:17–18: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness [hardness] of their heart.” When we accept Christ as our Savior, we return as the seed of God. And here Paul turns to the Christian and says, “Look, you were in this vanity” (the same term he used in Romans), “but now you have become the redeemed portion of humanity, the humanity that is returning to the purpose of its creation. Therefore, don’t walk in vanity—don’t return to the world’s way of looking at things. Don’t put yourself again at the center of the universe. Rather, keep God at the center of *His* universe in your thinking and in your life, and find your meaning in reference to Him.” You are the “seed” of God on the basis of the finished work of Christ and no longer “fools” about God, the universe itself, or your own purpose.

As those saved from the vanity of this rebellion against God, we have a message for those still in rebellion: “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:21–25). When the world knew of the true and the living God, they deliberately turned aside and became totally vain—the total vanity of being willing to consider themselves as animals, as machines, as a zero rather than acknowledge the Creator, be thankful, and give Him glory.

How do we reach this lost world? Paul warns us that they will in their vanity consider our message foolish. Yet he calls us to take this “foolishness” into their midst. We must stand amid the twentieth cen-

tury world, with all its pressure, with the total weight of its opposition to the Christian faith, and proclaim the gospel. There is truth to the universe. Man deliberately turned away from it. He is still rational, moral, and has a conscience. We must give him the same message Paul is giving in the first eight chapters of Romans. And while our message may seem foolish to the world that believes that there is no meaning, yet God will use it to speak to some of them. It is the content of that gospel that needs to be given.

Proclaiming this gospel to rebellious mankind can, of course, seem foolish at times. We can be overwhelmed by the difficulty and the size of the task. Yet, thankfully, God has given us only three things to do and then our responsibility is closed. The first is to preach the gospel as clearly as possible, answering all questions as clearly as we can to present the truth about the universe, man, and our dilemma. The second is to pray for each individual who hears it. And the third is, by the grace of God, through faith in the finished work of Christ, to live a life that in some poor fashion will commend the gospel we have preached. When we have done these three things with compassion, amid this world that has turned away from God and is totally dark and vain, some of them will respond.

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. (1:22)

Deliberately turning away from God and therefore understanding neither themselves nor the universe, men and women have become absolute fools. They are trying to live in a universe that isn't there in the way they see it—without God, without human beings. And that is total folly. The Bible is drawing the blackness of the world that fallen mankind, in his rebellion, has deliberately chosen. This is what Adam did earlier. He walked away from life and chose death. It is the world our forefathers in the last few generations of northern European and American culture have chosen. This tragic choice is perhaps most clear in the United States, for it has occurred there most recently after about 1890. There are some still living who have witnessed the entire process. It is a blackness of a world man does not understand.

In Deuteronomy, Moses speaks of how God's people can maintain godly wisdom in a world that has rejected God and has therefore

become foolish. Speaking of God's laws, Moses charges Israel to "Keep therefore and do [the laws]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations" (Deut. 4:6). Several centuries later Jeremiah speaks to an Israel that has forsaken God's law, with the sad result that "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?" (Jer. 8:9).

When we reject God's revelation, "what wisdom is in [us]"? What do we know? On what basis do we know anything at all? It is intriguing that this question of how we know plays such a key role in modern philosophy. Having rejected divine revelation, modern philosophers are preoccupied with the study of epistemology, the study of how we know the things we know. And here in the Bible God is asking, "What is your epistemological base, after you have given away my Word?"

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

A profound emphasis is found in the word "image." Having been made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), men and women rebel and, wanting to be the center of their universe, they deliberately reverse the process and make God in their image! They were made in God's image—rational, moral, and with significance. But because they have refused to acknowledge themselves as creatures, they have found it necessary to make God in their own image.

Scholars today will talk about people making God in their own image and will think they are rather clever to have made this observation. But Paul observed this in the first century. There is nothing new! It is the same basic problem. Either God exists and made man in His image, or man came out of the fog and made himself a god in his image. The Bible says God was there. The infinite, personal God was there with all His wonderful attributes, and man deliberately exchanged this and made God the corruptible image of mankind or birds or beasts. He exchanged the infinite for the finite. He exchanged great wealth and truth for poverty, for sorrow, and for ignorance.

Remember that Paul is answering the person who asks, "Why are

we in the mess we're in?" Paul says this is the reason: Mankind knew the truth but deliberately turned away. Mankind would rather have his ignorance and be at the center of the universe than have the answer and acknowledge God as Creator and himself as creature.

Paul, living in the first century, had the same answer we must give today. There is no difference in the basic questions and answers.

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

Notice the logical sequence: Mankind needs salvation because he is under the wrath of God (1:18). He is under the wrath of God because, in spite of his conscience and in spite of being surrounded by God's wonderful creation, he deliberately sins and turns away from God (1:19–23).

Our situation then is not the result of a mistake but of a real rebellion. The result is sadness, breakdown, man living against his fellow man. Man does not merely need a change of direction, but he is guilty. This understanding lies at the basis of a very different view of sociology, of psychology, and of education for Christians.

And now we see God's response to mankind's rebellion against Him (1:24). He "gave them up." We could picture mankind as a bad dog. He has rebelled and has established his direction. He wants to get away from God, his master. Therefore, God simply lets go of the leash. I remember seeing the Swiss train dogs for border patrols in the mountains. They give these dogs a fearsome, awful character, and when they are unleashed that character determines their direction, and it is a horrible thing to see. This is the picture Paul paints of mankind. It is what happened in our country. People chose to give up the truth, and God gave them up.

Paul restates this awful truth in 1:28: "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 [becoming]." Mankind had chosen his direction by refusing to acknowledge God. Therefore, God "gave them over"—He let go of the leash—and allowed them to go their own rebellious and immoral way. This is not just a dialectic, but a deliberate rebellion.

God gave mankind up, and they followed their desires into all sorts

of immoral behavior. All sins and all human problems flow from our choice not to put God at the center of His universe. As Christians, we should never minimize the efforts of sociologists or criminologists to address social ills. But we must understand that most such efforts are only treating the results, not the disease. There is much legitimate concern today over moral and cultural breakdown, and we are piling on all kinds of supposed cures. These things may help, but don't expect them to cure. They are like powders, salves, cover-ups. If a girl has a bad eruption on her face from eating too many sweets, she may cover it up with powder or she may put on a salve that makes it a little better, but the only cure is quitting the sweets. If the problem with mankind is his rebellion against God, then no amount of treating the result is going to bring any real cure. One must treat the malady directly, which is the rebellion against God. No cosmetic covers will provide the necessary cure.

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

Having discussed the cause of mankind's rebellion (1:19–23) and then briefly discussing its results (1:24), Paul now reminds us of the link between the cause (1:25) and the logical results (1:26–31). Mankind “changed the truth of God into a lie.” In so doing he lost not only the truth about God's existence, but also the truth about the universe and about himself. When man rebels and steps out of his primary reference to God, a proper relationship to God, everything becomes a lie. Mankind doesn't know who he is. The truth is gone. Not only does he question the existence of God. He questions his own existence as well and everything that flows from the existence of God.

If the rebel against God were totally logical, he would deny all his human aspirations—his aspirations to find truth and all his other aspirations as well. Jeremiah 10:10, in the original Hebrew, says, “The LORD is the God of truth.” Mankind has “changed the truth of God into a lie,” but “the LORD is the God of truth.” There is no other truth or understanding in the universe. When people throw away the God of truth, all truth is gone. All that is left are sets of opinions, and personal gods and pleasures.

. . . and served the creature more than the Creator . . . (1:25b)

The Greek actually says they served the creature “rather than” the Creator—not just more than, but rather than. They turned it all around. Perhaps this was easier to see in Paul’s day because they served actual idols, making Venus like a woman and Hercules like a strong man. But nothing has really changed; this creature worship is just more subtle in our own day. Mankind has put himself at the center.

When nonbelievers use the word *God* today, they are usually making their own god in the image of man just as thoroughly as the Greeks did. There are two ways to make a god in the image of man: One is to chisel something out of stone or create something with paint. Another is to sink into your armchair and simply project yourself, the creature, a bit further and say, “This is what God is like!” One doesn’t need stone or paint to make a god.

Indeed many of us worship the very creature we know best—ourselves! In Isaiah we read about the tragic results of idolatry, including self-worship. The idolater, says Isaiah, “feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa. 44:20). The people who couldn’t recognize a lie in Isaiah’s day were the same as the people of Paul’s day who had changed God’s truth into a lie. And what was the result? They were “feeding on ashes.” Likewise today, when we worship and idolize ourselves, we end up feeding on ashes. Mankind says, “I will put myself at the center of the universe,” but he ends up feeding on ashes, for that is all that is left: ashes in the realm of morality, ashes in the realm of beauty, ashes in the realm of love, ashes in the realm of meaning.

What is the solution? Isaiah gives it: “Remember this, and show yourselves men” (Isa. 46:8). In other words, “Be rational!” And if you are rational, then you must turn back to God. God has made you rational and moral. If you follow true rationality and true morality so that you are truly human, you will turn back to God. Isaiah’s advice is quite the contrary to what people tell us in the twentieth century. They say that faith means taking a jump in the dark. But Isaiah and Paul tell us that a rational pursuit of truth will lead us to God. It would be a turn-around from being man discovering the truth of the universe to knowing God. True rationality will point out that man and God are not dead!

Jeremiah foresees a day when many nonbelievers will, indeed, forsake the lies of idolatry and make a rational choice for God: “O LORD . . . the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold, . . . I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD” (Jer. 16:19–21). Jeremiah, like Paul, speaks of the “lies” of idolatry. Jeremiah, like Paul, emphasizes that these lies are “inherited” from one generation to the next. Fallen men and women reject the truth, but they are still significant human beings and they influence those who follow them. And yet, says Jeremiah, God is always calling people back to Himself.

What has our own generation inherited from our forefathers? They have inherited lies. A young man sat in my class one day and said, “Well, everybody today thinks that there is no God.” He just said it flatly. He didn’t think about it. He simply repeated the lie he had inherited. He was quite amazed when I suggested that his statement was really an assumption that he needed to examine. Hosea adds (13:2), “They add sin to sin, making idols in their own image.” We make them in our verbal distinction about how God is or is not. This is not a variety of religious feeling but a real act of rebellion.

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. (1:26)

At this place we can consider the results of mankind’s rebellion against God. Paul will speak of homosexuality in 1:27, and that may be the meaning in 1:26 as well, but I think he may be speaking of something else here. Isaiah speaks of women who “are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet” (Isa. 3:16). The Hebrew for “wanton eyes” is actually “deceiving with their eyes.” Isaiah seems to be describing women who use their womanliness to deceive, and I think that is what Paul is saying as well. The woman has used what she is as a woman, not as God intended, but to deceive.

The lie that mankind has believed (1:25) is such a total lie that everything in life, the most beautiful things of life, are twisted. The things that should give the deepest contact of personality with personality on the human level are destroyed. We have lost contact with the primary reference point, a personal God. When we do this, the next level of contact, of human personality, which should be so beautiful and so wonderful, is also turned into something unwholesome. Man and woman, standing in the presence of God, should be able to relate, personality with personality, in a deep way. But because of mankind's rebellion, that relationship has become a commodity to be traded upon.

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 recompense of their error which was meet. (1:27)

With a realism we see throughout the Bible, Paul addresses the issue of male homosexuality. Religious people don't always like to deal with the reality of such things, but the Bible never covers up reality. It deals with humanity just as it is. Paul speaks of the "recompense," the automatic result, of such a way of living. If you minister among people such as this—homosexuals, or women who have made their womanhood a commodity—you will see people who have become absolutely miserable after an initially deceptive attraction. While giving satisfaction on some level of relationship, homosexuality is a total denial of the real world. It creates no continuity and contradicts the identity of the person as a child of a father and a mother. Sad lives end with a handful of ashes strewn to the wind. Of course, sin brings misery at any level, right down the line, but Paul points out here its awful results in these particular areas.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind . . . (1:28a)

"Did not like to retain God in their knowledge" might better be translated, "did not deem it worthy of approval to acknowledge God." Again Paul emphasizes the importance of the intellectual content of what we believe. Because they did not elect to acknowledge God in the realm of knowledge, God gave them over to a "reprobate" mind—

a mind void of judgment—in every realm of life. As soon as you turn away from the living God and put something else in the center of the universe, you immediately throw the door open to a mind void of judgment in every area of life. Twentieth-century man has walked this path. Because of it he looks at everything differently. Morality looks different. Marriage looks different. The parent-child relationship looks different. No area of life has been untouched by this mind void of judgment.

God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient. (1:28b)

In more modern language, “to do those things that are not becoming.” These rebels did not deem it worthy of approval to acknowledge God. Therefore, God gave them over to a mind void of judgment. And therefore, as a result, they behave in unbecoming ways. Paul enumerates some of those unbecoming behaviors:

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful. (1:29–31)

Having put himself in God’s place at the center of the universe, this is where twentieth-century man is going—and he doesn’t know why. America says, “What in the world has happened to our young people? We have given them everything—and look at them!” Crime is spreading throughout all society, not just in situations where we could explain it on the basis of social conditions, but among those who are prosperous and educated. Younger and younger people are choosing this kind of life, and their parents are saying, “What’s wrong? What can we do?” But they can’t find the cure—the cure that Paul already prescribed in 1:16—because they don’t know the nature of the disease.

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. Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man,

whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. (1:32–2:1)

Though this passage includes a chapter break, it really begins a new section. Paul now addresses the reader directly. One can read 1:18–31 with an academic frame of mind, not feeling personally touched by Paul’s words. But God never allows doctrinal truths to remain abstractions. They are always brought down to the level of the individual. The truth is always driven home to the individual person. To the person without the Bible who wonders, “How can God hold *me* guilty for the mess the world is in?” or, “Why do I need salvation?” Paul says, “You know that these things are wrong and yet you consent with those who do them . . . and even do them yourself!”

God is just in judging people without the Bible because they, having a conscience (1:19), and being surrounded by the wonders of creation that clearly reveal God (1:20), have rejected God and His moral law. And yet, they judge those who transgress God’s law, even while doing the same things themselves (1:32–2:1). We would wonder why God would judge those who have not accepted Christ, if they have never heard of Him, for that judgment would be unjust. But failure to accept Christ is not the basis on which such people will be judged. They have rejected God and the Bible earlier on and inherited lies. Therefore they will be judged on the basis of violating their own conscience.

When those without the Bible appear before God, He will ask them one thing: “Have you kept the moral standards you have used to judge others?” It is as if each of us were born with a small tape recorder around our neck, and that tape recorder records all our moral judgments against others—“he is wrong . . . she is wrong . . . he is wrong . . .”—throughout our whole life. Then, at the final judgment, God simply plays the tape back and we hear in our own voice the moral judgments we have made and God asks, “Have you kept those standards yourself?” Obviously, we would all have to answer no. There have been ample occasions in each of our lives when we have deliberately chosen to do something we knew to be wrong. Even if God erased from the tape all the situations where we could offer a

logical excuse for our actions, He would still be justified in judging us for the times we have deliberately done wrong.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? (2:1–3)

When God says, “You are inexcusable,” many people will offer one of two objections. They might say, “I may be a sinner, but at least I’m better than most other people.” Or they might say, “I may be a sinner, but I’m good enough to get by. Surely God wouldn’t condemn me.”

Once, while staying at a hotel on the Italian Riviera, I had several conversations about the Lord with two English businessmen, both of whom were atheists. The first insisted that the second had been unfair in his business. One evening he said, “Well, if there is a God He must accept me, because I’m better than others.” I said, “What do you mean?” And he said, “Well, look at that man over there. He’s just a nasty, dirty businessman. I’m better than he.”

About five minutes later I happened to be talking with the other businessman, and he said, “If there is a God, I will be all right.” I asked why, and he said, “Well, I’m better than others. I have two sick sisters and I’ve given my life to taking care of them.”

When you talk with nonbelievers about spiritual things, they will often say just this: “I’m better than other people, so I’ll get by.”

Paul answers these two objections in 2:1–6. God says, “You *won’t* get by”; you won’t “escape the judgment of God” (2:3). We won’t get by because God judges on a standard of perfection. We couldn’t get by even by our imperfect human standards, because as we judge others we condemn ourselves, having done “the same things” ourselves. The businessman who accused the other businessman of unfairness had surely made some shady deals of his own.

Each human being has a moral imperative within. Each human being “knows the judgment of God” (1:32). As soon as a child feels

the pang of conscience, struggles against it, and sins, he has acknowledged that there is a meaningful moral law in the universe. As soon as he says, "I ought to do this" but then does the opposite instead, he acknowledges a moral law. Numerous modern thinkers—psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists—have tried to explain away this moral imperative. And yet all of them have felt the twinge of their own conscience. Just like a pinched nerve, their conscience has warned them not to do many of the things they have done.

Based on this innate sense of right and wrong, people without the Bible judge others (2:1), and in the process judge themselves as well, because they "do the same things" (2:1). God's judgment against them is totally just, for it is based not on things they don't know but on standards of right and wrong that they know well and that they use to judge others. Parallel to this, in Matthew 12:20 we are also condemned by our spoken words. Revelation 20:12 speaks of the unbelievers' judgment. They will be judged according to their works. The judgment of God is a judgment against the standards of the spoken words. Therefore, it is a judgment on the basis of what a person knows, not on the basis of what he does not know. There is nothing arbitrary.

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds. (2:4–6)

The nonbeliever, when feeling convicted of sin, might say, "I'll get by. I'll make it. After all, I've made it okay so far." But the Lord, with great gentleness, replies, "It is only by My kindness that you have gotten by so far. And yet you despise even that very kindness." While visiting a home for crippled children, I looked at their poor twisted bodies and thought, this is the human race. This is a far more honest view of the human race than the beautiful woman going to the opera, or the athlete in the Olympic stadium. But mankind turns away from such warnings and says, "I'll get by."

It is mankind's nature to deny the sure approach of judgment, as

Peter shows in his second letter (2 Pet. 3:3–4): “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Just as these latter-day scoffers look at the predictability of nature and refuse to believe that God would ever upset that uniformity of natural causes and bring judgment, so also the man Paul speaks of sees God’s kindness all around him and assumes that judgment will never come. God’s kindness is meant to lead such people to repentance, but because of their refusal to respond, it will have the opposite result.

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God . . . (2:5)

What God meant for their good—such things as the witness of creation and the witness of conscience—serves only to deepen these rebels in their rebellion.

This brings us back to 1:16–18. The gospel is God’s “power . . . unto salvation” (1:16). Why do we need salvation? Because we are under “the wrath of God” (1:18), and those who despise or take advantage of God’s patience are only “treasuring up to themselves” more of His wrath (2:5). Christ speaks of “laying up treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19–20). Those who despise God’s patience are likewise laying up treasures—the treasures of God’s wrath. Both believers and nonbelievers need to realize that everything they do has eternal consequences. Our lives do not just last from our physical birth to our physical death. In everything we say and do, we are making deposits—for good or ill—in the bank of eternity. A young girl may focus forward to the day of her marriage and see nothing beyond that great event. But if she realizes how much her character qualities will affect her marriage, then it will change the way she lives her teenage years. Believers and nonbelievers alike need to be more aware of the supernatural and eternal consequences of their actions. Life does not end when we die. We are either “laying up” good treasures in heaven, or “treasuring up” the horrible treasure of God’s wrath.

. . . who will render to every man according to his deeds. (2:6)

This is not talking about salvation by works. Rather, Paul is saying that we will be judged, not on the basis of what we profess to believe, but on the basis of a man's actions. We are dealing with a God who is truly there. Nice little professions of faith don't count with Him. What matters is what we really say and what we really do. We are dealing with a God who is really there and who responds to what we believe in fact.

To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath . . . (2:7-8)

Here is the word "wrath" again. It is God's wrath against people who all have a conscience, who see creation, who are rational beings, who understand moral principles, and yet who still disbelieve and disobey the truth. As Christians, we should be deeply concerned that the unsaved world is under the wrath of a holy God. We should not be able to think about this without some emotional reaction. Let's get it in our heads: People are lost. If we think of the unsaved world being under the wrath of God merely as an intellectual concept, remaining unstirred emotionally, we have already entered the door of dead orthodoxy. These people are my fellow humans, and they are under the wrath of God.

Try for a moment to think of yourself as a nonbeliever, hearing this for the first time. The Holy Spirit is striving within you and suddenly you realize that you are under the wrath of God. Think how you would be on tip-toe, to see if God was going to do anything about it. Paul's great message, of course, is that God *has* done something about it. It is the theme he began back in 1:16: Mankind is under God's wrath, but there is salvation from that wrath. We'll learn about that salvation beginning in 3:21.

We all need to realize that we are under God's wrath. We all need to listen expectantly to know whether there is an answer to our desperate situation. And we must never forget the wonder of learning that there is an answer. One time someone asked an old evangelist in America, "Why are you so energetic in your preaching?" And he said,

“Well, bless your heart, Son, I never forget the wonder of it.” May God have mercy on us if our faith ever becomes a cold, orthodox thing and we forget the wonder of it. Don’t forget the wonder of when you individually heard of Christ and believed in Him.

At the same time, however, don’t forget that the human race is lost. Even while feeling the wonder of your own salvation, remember that, like Paul, you are a “debtor” to those who are still lost (1:14). May God touch our hearts as Paul continues describing their desperate situation.

. . . tribulation and anguish upon every man that doeth evil; of the Jew first and also of the Gentile. But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good; to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: for there is no respect of persons with God. (2:9–11)

God makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile, between barbarian and Greek. All people, equally, must stand up and be counted in the presence of 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. (2:12)

All people stand condemned before God on the basis of what they do know. The man without the Bible is condemned on the basis of his moral judgments of others. As we saw in 2:1, he has known and spoken about these moral standards but then has failed to live up to those standards himself.

The man with the Bible, on the other hand, stands condemned on the basis of the Bible he possesses. He “shall be judged by the law” and its moral standards.

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

What good does it do anyone to have a Bible if they don’t believe it? When I was a pastor and would visit people in their homes, I would always read the Bible before I left, and would ask, “Do you have a Bible?” Often they would reply, “Yes, we have a Bible,” and then they would start trying to find it. They would look all over their bookshelf and reach

around behind it. If there had been a snake hiding there it would have bitten them! Yes, they had a Bible—to record their children’s names and press flowers in. But why bother? If they never even read their Bible, why not record their children’s names in some other book! There’s nothing magic in just owning a Bible if you don’t believe and obey it.

(. . . 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 show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences 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. (2:14–16)

Paul is moving to the next stage of his presentation of God’s plan of salvation. He has talked about the non-Jew, the Gentile, the man without the Bible. Now he is preparing to talk about the man who is a Jew—the man with the Bible. Remember again what he said about the Gentiles: “For the wrath of God is revealed . . .” (1:18). And the Gentile listener asks, “Why am I under the wrath of God?” And Paul replies that it is because “that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shown it unto them” (1:19). Even the man without the Bible has a conscience. This is the first thing that condemns him. Man is still a moral being.

Now Paul says the same thing about the Jews, or, in today’s equivalent, about people who have the Bible. They have the Bible (just like the Gentiles, or people without the Bible, still have a conscience), but they don’t live up to it. In fact, says Paul, you find many Gentiles (people without the Bible) who live better lives than those who have the Bible. He’s not saying these nonbelievers live perfect lives. No human lives a perfect life. All he is saying is that the relatively good example of these nonbelievers condemns those who have the Bible.

Of course, this doesn’t excuse the man without the Bible. He is not fully living up to the standard he knows. But it is an additional condemnation of the Jew, the man with the Bible. Paul is simply cutting away every foundation other than grace. You can just feel it. He is cutting away all the arguments people have used down through the ages

to say, “I don’t need a Savior.” You can feel it all being demolished. Someone will say, “Look, here are these heathens over here and they live better lives than people who have the Bible.” But as Paul has said, those people’s good lives won’t save them, because they aren’t fully living up to their own standards either.

(. . . their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;). (2:15)

This is the experience of all people. We all go through it, like the swing of a pendulum. We excuse ourselves, saying, “I’ll get by, I’m better than others,” and then, whoosh, we do something really bad and we are plunged into the blackness of self-condemnation and begin “accusing” ourselves. Then, perhaps we take a breath of fresh air or have a good cup of espresso or see someone who seems worse than us, and the pendulum swings back and we begin excusing ourselves again: “I’m not as bad as I thought I was. I’m doing pretty well.” Then, all of a sudden, again, into the black. All people experience this swinging of the pendulum—excusing . . . accusing . . . excusing . . . accusing . . . We face our conscience and feel accused; then we explain it away and feel excused.

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel. (2:16)

We are face to face with the fact that there is a day coming in history when the judgment is going to take place. We already saw this in 2:5: “. . . against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” Paul doesn’t allow his message to remain abstract; he brings it down to the most concrete, practical form; and the concrete, unavoidable fact is that there is coming a very real day in space and time, in history, when God is going to judge the world. “In the day”—not necessarily a twenty-four-hour day—“when God shall judge the secrets of men.”

“Secrets” should be a fearsome word to us. God will judge not just the open things but the secret things. The man without the Bible says, “That woman is immoral . . . that man is immoral,” and then he does the same thing, often in secret. Isn’t that the way people think and live? They aren’t really trying to be moral, they’re just trying to keep

things in balance; they point their finger at the person who goes to extremes, even though they are doing the same things in secret. They condemn others for the more open things, the thing that makes the newspaper. But in their own secret lives they are living the same way.

God will judge, not just the things that come out in the newspaper, but all these secret things. All the nice people. All the people who throw the stones. All the people who write the editorials.

Once again, remember the context: People say, "Why am I under the wrath of God? Is God justified in condemning me?" And God says, "Isn't there a good reason for your being under my wrath?" "O, man" (2:1), look for yourself. Isn't it just (2:2-16)?

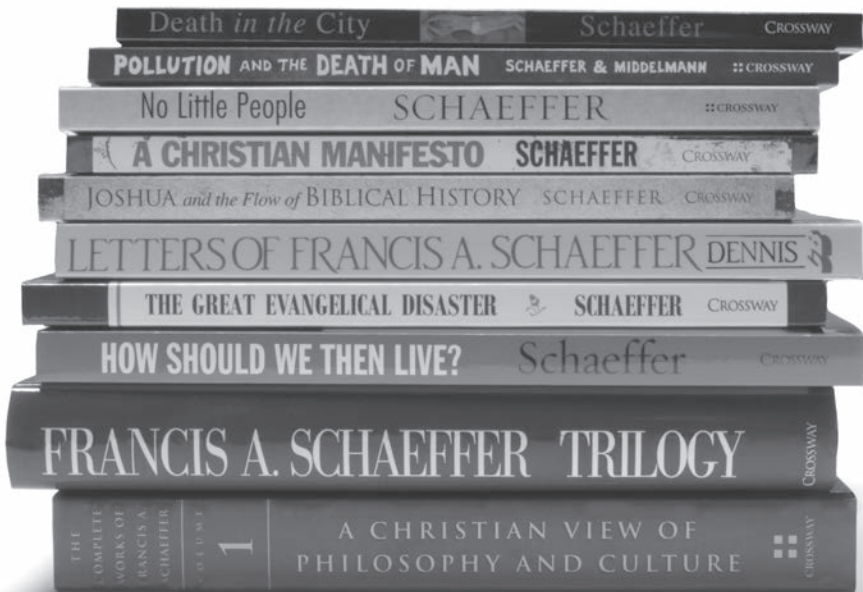
The judgment will be by God, but it will also be "by Jesus Christ" (2:16). Paul has not mentioned Christ since 1:16 because he has been discussing the problem of sin. But now he mentions Him again, as the Judge of mankind. That may come as a surprise. You have surely encountered people, Jewish and Gentile alike, who say, "I believe in God, I just don't believe in Jesus Christ." But the terrible truth is, when unsaved men and women stand before God for judgment and look Him in the face, they will see only one person of the Trinity as judge, and that will be Jesus Christ. One of the most sobering phrases in the whole Bible is "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16). In Romans Paul talks of the wrath of God, but in Revelation John talks of the wrath of the Lamb. The person of the Trinity who came and suffered so much so that people would not have to be judged, will be their judge. The person who tries to come to God without coming through Jesus Christ, will, at the judgment, come face to face with Jesus Christ. Certainly Jesus was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15); so He understands temptation and He understands our humanity. Yet that does not lessen the awful truth that He will judge us. Jesus, the Savior of the world, will also be its judge. "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ," says Paul. But now he adds, Christ is also the judge. Not only is there no way to come to God except through Jesus Christ, as Christ Himself declares (John 14:6), but when one tries to jump this barrier, one cannot, for Jesus Christ stands there as judge. Jesus says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

But when someone says, “I’ll have nothing to do with you; I’ll come to God directly for myself without the mediator, without the suffering Messiah,” it is as if he is trying to plow right into heaven, getting by this Jesus Christ. But he can’t, because there stands Jesus Christ the judge. No one who ever lived can avoid a relationship with Jesus Christ. It will be one of two possible relationships: It will be the relationship of salvation that Paul describes in 1:16, or else it will be the relationship he describes in 2:16—the relationship of a condemned person to a judge.

The prophet Micah said, “I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him” (Mic. 7:9). Jesus bore the indignation of our sin on the cross. But if we fail to accept this, there is only the other side of the equation—we must bear the indignation of the Lord for ourselves.

Paul has spoken of Gentiles being under God’s wrath (1:18–2:16), and in these last few verses he has begun speaking of Jews being under God’s wrath as well (2:9–16). As he prepares now to focus on God’s wrath against the Jews (2:17–3:8), we should recall a passage from Zephaniah: “Then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain” (3:11). God, through Zephaniah, told Israel that a day would come when they would no longer be proud simply because His holy mountain, Jerusalem, was in their midst. Those who rejoice for such reasons will be judged, just like everyone else. But this warning doesn’t apply just to the Jews or to people in Bible times. Thinking again of our modern-day equivalents—people who have the Bible and people who don’t have the Bible—those who have the Bible and the church shouldn’t be haughty and look down on those who don’t have these things. Even people today who boast that they don’t believe in anything may look down on certain other groups and condemn them. But Paul is showing us that sin is universal. We all stand condemned before God. None of us can be haughty because of any “holy mountain” we might claim. Anything that might cause us to be proud is only a reason for greater judgment.

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