



MAN'S NEED OF SALVATION

by
Given O. Blakely

**Translated into Urdu, published and distributed
in Pakistan, 2005**

MAN'S NEED FOR SALVATION

by Given O. Blakely

PREFACE

In this book, I will refer to humanity as “man,” or “mankind.” This is the representation that is provided in the Scriptures. The “first man” was especially created by God, and was given the name “Adam.” The name “Adam” means “man” – a species of creation that differed from all other life, both vegetable and animal.

“Man” was the last thing God created in the beginning – when He created the heavens and the earth. There was a purpose for which “man” was created, a purpose that was greater and more extensive than was involved in all of the other things God created. This book will develop that purpose, showing how wonderful it is.

The entire human race came from Adam – who is called “the first man” (1 Cor 15:45,47). The Bible says it this way: God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). This is why Eve is called “the mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). Notice, the Lord has placed every people in this world in a particular place, and in a specific time. The words, “hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” mean, “He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”

The purpose for this determination is also revealed: “that they should seek the Lord.” That is the proper vocation of every person, and of all people groups. The aim is to find God – and He “is not far from every one of us.” But this is not a mere philosophical search, or an attempt to acquire some academic knowledge about God. Rather, this seeking is in order to find the God who saves. That is what this book is about.

Section One

MAN MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (Genesis 1:26-27)

INTRODUCTION

"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him," queried David (Psa. 8:4). His question was prompted by a consideration of the magnificence of the heavens. They were so large, and man was so small. Noted for their longevity, they stood in stark contrast to man, noted for his brevity. The glory of the heavens is so consistent compared to man's glory, which, like the flower of the grass, fades away (1 Per. 1:24).

How can the great God fasten His attention on apparently insignificant man? David's question is answered throughout the Scriptures, and the answer is satisfying to the soul. Others have pondered humanity, attempting to comprehend its role and significance in the scheme of things. The evolutionist concludes that man resulted from a series of progressions, starting with primeval slime, and randomly progressing to his current state. The politician sees man as someone to be governed-- someone that can be of personal advantage to his quest for power. The hedonist sees humanity as an end in itself, one to be dominated by a quest for pleasure and the gratification of the lower nature.

In the religious realm, the person enslaved to the Law principle sees man as basically wayward--and unchangeably so. He must therefore be governed by coercive and threatening law. The way man is perceived lies at the heart of all religion, true and false. Those in bondage to erroneous doctrines that "drown men in perdition," have fundamental misconceptions of man, and of the God Who made him. A proper view of man opens vast areas of profitable and necessary thought. It also answers many of the dilemmas created by flawed theology.

This is not a trite subject, but one that will yield untold spiritual benefits. Speaking for myself, I have found insight concerning this matter is one of the key elements in the understanding of Scripture. What is the real view of man? the heavenly view? God's view? As may be expected, it differs radically from that of unregenerate man. The Lord's perspective of humanity is prompted by divine purpose, and is the ONLY valid view of it. Eventually, as they stand before His throne, every individual will see people from God's point of view. It is to our eternal advantage to gain this solitary perspective now. The day of judgement will be too late to

obtain this perspective! The provision of salvation was required by the Lord's consideration of humanity. The Psalmist marveled that God considered, or pondered, "man." A casual and passing consideration of creation could never have provoked an inquiry like that. Our Father structured the entire world around His "offspring." Those that duly consider His creation will find the Lord's consideration of humanity compelling. That reflection will eclipse all earthly contemplations.

THE AFFIRMATION

In creation

The crowning work of God was the creation of man. Everything else led up to this wonderful creation. Hear the marvelous words again. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:26-27).

The similarities between man and the brute creation have proved a stumbling block to the evolutionist. Viewing apparent progression in various forms of life, the uninformed scientist concludes man was the result of a natural process. Independently of purpose, and without the involvement of a Creator, man is thought to have evolved over a lengthy period. The seriousness of this opinion has escaped the attention of many. If random evolution is the "mother of us all," then morality, or the judgment of right and wrong, is something to be determined by every individual. Rather than supporting the false postulate that man evolved from a lower form of life, the above condition provides evidence of God anticipating His crowning work, humankind. Scripture declares that the world was created as an arena for mankind. It is a stage upon which the drama of redemption is being enacted.

Although man was made from the dust of the earth, it is not his mother. The earth owes its existence to God's purpose for mankind, and therefore is not an end of itself. The radical ecologist is in serious error in making the earth a primary consideration. From the viewpoint of redemption, "earth day" is nothing less than idolatry. Persuasive arguments may very well be presented concerning our stewardship of the earth, and how it should not be abused. But after all of the eloquence has ceased, and the lofty arguments have been given, we have only heard the opinions of men. Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, our blessed Lord, nor the Apostles ever spoke in this manner. Man has been the focus of divine endeavors throughout history.

The foundation of the world

The phrase "from the foundation of the world," frequently used in the Word of God, conveys this truth. This is a perspective revealed after "the Word became flesh." (Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Lk. 11:50; John 17:24; Eph. 14; Heb. 4:3; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8). The expression, "the foundation of the world," declares that Divine purpose motivated its origin. It was made, we are informed, "to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). The beauty of nature may be breathtaking, but the REASON for its existence is even more arresting! The world is a habitation, not a god. It was founded because of redemption, and has been established as the place where the basis for justification would be accomplished. It is also the place of orientation for the world to come.

First, God thought of man, then He thought of the world. The entire natural order was created because of the redemptive plan. That is the meaning of the phrase, "the foundation of the world." This is why the world was founded, and we must not allow this to be obscured by the ranting of uninformed people. Relating this to our subject, the divine imagery in man prompted the extensive plan to redeem him. No such plan was instituted for the reclamation of the brute creation, or for the vegetable kingdom, although they also were cursed in the fall (Rom. 8:20). The divine summary of the world's creation accentuates mankind. "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created" (Gen 5:1-2). No summation about the sun and the moon! No summation about the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea, or the fowls of the air! The reason for this circumstance is evident: they did not bear the divine image, and humanity did! Scripture alludes to the creation as a time when the angels "shouted for joy." "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7). It was a grand occasion when the determination to display the wisdom of God to heavenly hosts was under way! There had never been an operation like this, and the anticipation of the glory and magnitude of it all produced shouts of acclamation and joy among the heavenly host.

After the flood

Following the flood, humanity received a fresh start. The mandate to replenish the earth was given, as the human enterprise resumed. Had the divine image been destroyed? Indeed, it had not. Capital punishment, for instance, was instituted because of God's image within man. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man" (Gen. 9:6). If it is true that God's image is found in humanity, the effrontery of taking human life is the ultimate rebellion against God. That is why it is not treated lightly. Human life has value because it has come from God in a special way. Men and women are in the similitude of God, and thus must be respected. As seen in this text, the divine image was not destroyed when sin entered the world. Its presence, though marred, became the basis for divine rationality.

The image and glory of God

When dealing with confusion in the church, the Spirit reminded the thoughtless of the divine imagery in man. "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man" (1 Cor. 11:7). Some may balk at this statement, but they must subdue their flesh. This is not meant to denigrate women, else the Spirit would not have said it. It is simply a reflection of the facts in the case--facts that are to affect the way we

conduct ourselves in this world. The woman is the glory of the man because she was made from him. The marvel of this statement is that man is the "glory of God" as well as His image. Here is where God is made known in a unique way. If you were afforded the benefit of seeing and studying an angel, it would be overwhelming. Their might, wisdom, and glory would be staggering. Yet, you would not see as much of God in that angel as enlightened eyes can see in people. Divine qualities are found in humanity that are not found anywhere else. Affinity with God is offered to the race of Adam that has not been afforded angels like Michael and Gabriel. Man is an extension of God himself, capable of transcendent things when forgiven and blessed by God.

The offspring of God

The thought of God having "offspring" is striking. One term describing Adam is "son of God" (Luke 3:38). Paul dealt a devastating blow to idolatry when he reminded the Athenians and Stoics that even certain of their own heathen poets had perceived this. "For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:28-29). It is inexcusable to think of man in isolation from God, and yet we are continually challenged to do so by the world. Sadly, even the professed church joins in this conspiracy of Satan to rob the soul. Forgetting that we are God's offspring constrains men to consider the problems and difficulties of life as though there were no God or relationship to Him. The Spirit well says that it is "God with Whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13), and again, "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (Psa. 14:1; 53:1).

In the similitude of God

The early church soon began to drift from the Lord. It became easy for some to claim identity with God without living by faith. James, the brother of our Lord, wrote to correct this condition. He found believers railing on their fellow man, and quickly brought them to task for it. Because man is in the image of God, James resorted to reason. "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God" (James 3:9). It is true that ordinary people do not think like this; but the people of God are not ordinary people, and must steadfastly resist the temptation to fall into that category. If Satan tempts you to "curse" and rail upon men, remember, they "are made after the similitude of God." This will prove a powerful incentive in keeping your mouth from sinning.

THE MEANING

What does it mean to be in the "image of God?" First, this is not an external image, or bodily form. God "is a Spirit," and does not have a corporal form. The Father is described as "Him that is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). The term "invisible is frequently ascribed to God (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). He is transcendent to the natural order. References to the "eyes of the Lord," the "hand of the Lord," His "feet," and His "face" are accommodations to our frailties. They convey the thought of the Lord beholding, working, going, and having favor toward His offspring. God is "not a man," as is affirmed in (Num. 23:19).

This being the case, the divine imagery is not found in man's appearance. It goes deeper than that. It is a moral image or likeness. Man is like a shadow of God: a personality in which divine qualities, though corrupted by sin, are found. The ability to choose, purpose, deliberate, and create are reflective of God Himself. We must be alert to any religious emphasis that minimizes these aspects of humanity. A religion, for example, which depends upon God overriding our choice is not valid. Without elaborating on this point, there are a phenomenal number of religious approaches that depend upon people emptying their minds, or operating in a spiritual realm that cannot be discerned: a kind of intellectual vacuum. Such dogmas are out of synch with the purpose of God and the nature of man, and are thus to be rejected. Nowhere in all of Scripture did God promise a Savior that would bring people into a state of unconsciousness, uninvolved, and sterile minds. Such views have been spawned by Eastern mysticism, and must be forthrightly rejected by those in Christ. They are contaminated and contaminating!

Affinity with God

In God's kingdom, the reason for likeness is fellowship. Mankind has affinity with God! That is more than the ability to fellowship with God, it is a tendency, or propensity, in that direction. Some theologians have correctly said there is a void in man that only God can fill. This is the affinity of which I speak, and it is marvelous. Men, all men, have the capacity to become one with God. It is true that this cannot be accomplished independently of divine influence. But, this does not diminish the power of this truth. Salvation is the reclamation of the whole person for fellowship with God. We have been "called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). That fellowship is possible because of the affinity we have with Deity.

Resemblance

It is obvious that the brute creation does not have this resemblance: the capacity to think and purpose with objectivity. At the root of resemblance is the fact of man's personality. Light, air, land, sea, sun, moon, stars were all things. Plants, fishes, fowls, animals were living things. Man was a "person." A person capable of moral purity, spiritual power, and divine communication. Duly considered, this will challenge the individual to seek spiritual excellence.

Representation of God

Man was made to have "dominion" over the works of God's hands. This required that he represent God; not merely as a hired slave, but as someone knowing the objectives of God. A representative by choice! Originally, Adam was the visible embodiment of divine qualities--a spectacle to angels. In Christ, the image and restored and enhanced in fallen man. In this world, humanity is the highest representation of God, and in the world to come, it will be accentuated. We are appropriately called "stewards of God" and of the "manifold grace of God" (1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:10).

THE FALL AND THE IMAGE

Opposing views of man

Christian theology, for want of a better term, is divided into two opposing views of humanity. Variant doctrines have been developed around these views, requiring that we have an understanding of them. Some have elected to identify these perspectives with the individuals that championed them: Calvinism and Armenianism. Actually, the views exist independently of these men. They only developed and systematized them. I choose to refer to them as Determinism and Free will. The men that developed these lines of thought attached peculiarities to them that I do not wish to develop at this time. It is only the relation of these views to the image of God that is relevant in this study.

Determinism sees the image of God as totally destroyed in the Adamic fall. The likeness of God was lost when fellowship with God was lost. Calvin called this "total depravity." Briefly stated, the view is that man is incapable of hearing God, or responding to Him. Consequently, the Lord must produce spiritual life in man independently of his involvement, and prior to his response. Thus, the corrupted view of predestination; i.e., God chose some to be saved, then caused it to occur in spite of the will of the chosen ones. This view is slightly modified in the charismatic community. These brethren view the filling of the Spirit as an overpowering of the individual. The ultimate blessing in this case is when he Lord overrides our natural capacities. This notion is absurd, contradicting the very concept of salvation.

When sin "entered" the human race, did it lose the capacity to respond to God? Determinism thinks so. The corrupted view of election was developed because of this misconception. Theologically speaking, the term "total depravity" connotes this thought. Being "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) is thus equated with total insensitivity to God. Consequently, the individual is incapable of responding to God.

This is the root that is thought to support the erroneous teaching of being "slain in the Spirit." Here, the individual is overpowered, thereby being forced into a state of involvement with God. Because this is nowhere taught in the Word of God, it contradicts the Word of the Spirit.

When Adam fell from the glory of God, he still heard the voice of the Lord, walking in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). Both Adam and Eve were still able to respond to God, and even reason with Him (Gen. Gen. 3:8-12). Cain, the first murderer, did not become incapable of sensing and hearing God. He was acutely aware of what God said, though clothed with guilt.

In the fall, the divine image was thus retained. Yet guilt kept the sinner from

coming to God. He did not lose the ability to will what is good; he did lose the ability to DO what is good through human effort alone. Being "dead in trespasses and sins" speaks of alienation, not incapacity.

Free will

The term "free will" is not found in Scripture. The idea, properly understood, however, is there. The word "will" assumes this freedom, for where there is no freedom to will, there can be no will. Man is at liberty to choose what he wants: blessing or cursing, heaven or hell, God or Satan. I understand he cannot fully implement his will by his own power, but he can will to do so! Both God and Satan appeal to us through our will. We have been created so that sin and righteousness cannot be coerced. Satan cannot make us sin, any more than he could make Eve sin. Because man is in the image of God, our adversary appeals to our will; he draws us into sin through our own "lust," or desire (James 1:14).

Using the lie and deception, the enemy of mankind strives to make us want what is wrong, and not want what is right. God, on the other hand, also appeals to our wills. The Gospel preeminently, and warnings secondarily, are an appeal to us to prefer and choose the blessing. No one will ever come to the Lord until they want to. Nor, indeed, will anyone choose to embrace the Savior and live for Him until their desires are for Him and Him alone. If you hear the Gospel with an open heart, it will make you want Jesus, forgiveness, and an inheritance in heaven. What is more, this desire will not be casual, but dominating and compelling. This effect of the Gospel upon us confirms that it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The fact that God and Satan make appeals to us corroborates that our wills are free. Although bond slaves to sin (Rom. 6:17), we are still free to choose the blessing God offers, or to remain in the clutches of iniquity. As simplistic as that may appear, you will contend with contradictory thoughts, fiery darts thrown at you by the devil. If Satan can convince you that choice is not important, you will invariably choose the wrong thing.

THE LAW AND THE IMAGE

Introduction to the Law

The law introduced the "knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:19-20). It convinced the sinner of the magnitude of sin, and the extent to which he had fallen. As stated in Scripture, "that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful" (Rom 7:13). These accomplishments could not be achieved were man not in the image of God. That divine imagery enables man to correctly assess his condition under the tutelage of the Law.

The Activity of the Holy Spirit

It is to be understood that the Holy Spirit is active in the above process. Jesus declared the Spirit's indispensable role on conviction. ". . . for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on Me; Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Whatever our position on free will and the involvement of men in redemption, without the work of the Holy Spirit man cannot be convinced of his own sin, the righteousness of Jesus, or the judgment of the devil.

The Law Provided No Resources

The Law provided no means of recovery. It did not bring grace to man, nor did it produce faith (Gal 3:12). It declared what was to be done, but provided no means to do it. It identified what should not be done, yet brought to strength to avoid doing it. Still, the Law made a strong appeal to the divine image in man. It led the individual to think about his sin like God thinks of it. That is not possible where no likeness of God exists. Speaking of this process, Paul wrote, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Rom 7:9).

Appealing to Reason

In my judgment, preaching should have a strong appeal to the divine imagery in humanity. We should not seek to move people by mere emotion alone, or primarily with frightening threats. There must be an appeal to REASON--which is the image of God within man. God Himself said to recalcitrant Israel, "Come, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they as crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). The Law was an appeal to the image of God within man. It enabled the individual to properly diagnose his condition, thereby preparing for Christ. As it is written, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal 3:24). Some will counter that the Law was only for Israel, having no ministry to the rest of the world. This is not true. The Law belonged to Israel as a covenant. However, as regards the assessment of humanity itself, it was

given that "every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19-20).

JESUS, THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF GOD

One of the neglected truths of the Gospel is the incarnation of Christ. The Christian community has allowed the juvenility of contemporary views of "Christmas" to turn their attention from the real intent of Christ entering the world, to the tender scene of an infant in a manger. But this is not the primary view of Christ's birth presented in God's Word. Keep in mind, this is the Person of Whom it was said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was GOD" (John 1:1).

Christ's Identity With The Fallen

In His birth, Jesus identified with the fallen race. Let it be clear, that such identity would not have been possible, if the divine image had disappeared from the race. Jesus became like the ones He came to redeem! Hear the Word of the Lord. "For verily He took not on him the nature of angels; but He took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:16-17).

The Full Image In Christ Jesus

In Jesus, the Divine image is perceived; i.e., made accessible to those that believe the Gospel. The "fullness of the Godhead" dwelt "bodily" in Him, and it "pleased" the Lord for this to be the case (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Here, in Christ, we obtain a proper view of the Living God. This is why the Gospel is so vital in maintaining our grasp of God and the things of God. In the heavenly Kingdom, nothing makes proper sense apart from Christ. Everything is wrapped up in Him, and Him alone. A good understanding of human sciences and languages will never satisfactorily clarify God. God has NOT invested these things with the fulness of His image! The "FULLNESS" of the Godhead is found bodily, or in a perceptible and accessible way, in Jesus Christ. This being the case, the incarnation not only provided a way for sin to be removed and its power destroyed. It also provided the means by which remission can be appropriated by the individual. This would not be possible if man did not bear the image of God. There are several statements in Scripture that affirm this to be true. A brief review of some of them will accentuate the magnitude of our salvation.

The Express Image

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3). The relationship of the "express image" to our redemption is very important. Christ is set forth as possessing and using the cohesive power behind all things. Having been given "all authority in heaven and earth" (Matt. 18:18), Jesus is presently orchestrating all things for God's glory and for the good of His people. There is no aspect of the divine working over which He does not rule and reign. The government has been placed upon His shoulder, and He is reigning in the midst of

His enemies. In this capacity, He is a precise revelation of God Himself. He rules the way God rules. He holds everything together like God does. There is no difference between His administration and that of His Father. What is more, He upholds all things by His Word. He does not do it by coercion, nor does He do it by some form of magic. His Word is the force because of His Person! It is the Word of HIS POWER! That is a revelation of God.

While some would prefer to think of God as upholding everything independently of His Word, He actually upholds all things by means of His powerful Word. "By Himself," the Lord Jesus purged our sins. He removed them from us as far as the East is from the West (Psa. 103:12). He cast them in the depth of the sea (Micah 7:19), putting them behind the back of God (Isa. 38:17). Not even God can see them now, for the Lamb of God has "taken away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Here is a revelation of God; a precise revelation of God. In the capacity of a Savior, Jesus is the "express image of God." This is what God desires for humanity! He desires for their sins to be removed, and thus our Savior came to accomplish the Father's will. If you have ever wondered if your sin can be forgiven, wonder no more! The "express Image of God" purged your sins! His identity with us makes forgiveness possible. The good pleasure of the Father is also seen in the current position of Christ Jesus. He is sitting on the right hand of "the Majesty on high." This is a position of favor and authority. He sits there because God is pleased with Him because of His redemptive work on our behalf. He is there now, executing the will of God!

The Image and the Gospel

The devil is aggressive to blind the minds of men to the Gospel of Christ. He is not omnipotent in this perverse endeavor, praise the Lord! Wherever there is a love for the truth, his power is turned into impotence. He blinds the minds of those who chose to remain in his realm--those whose hearts are hardened against the Lord, who BELIEVE NOT. Scripture puts it this way. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the Image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). Christ is the revelation of God, and the Gospel is the revelation of Christ. For this reason, God is never more clearly seen than when the Gospel is preached and believed. His hatred for sin and wrath against all ungodliness is revealed in the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). There, in the Gospel of Christ, the account of the cursing of the Son is declared (Gal 3:13). Jesus was "made to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). That is a mighty revelation of His hatred of sin.

The Gospel also reveals the marvelous love of God for humanity. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16). Paul confessed the life he lived was lived by faith in the Son of God "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Once the extent to which God has gone to save us, bursts upon our hearts, we will have no reservations about living for Him. No

wonder the Gospel is called "the Gospel of God" (Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet 4:17). It is "the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24), revealing His desire to bless His offspring through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Gospel is called a "glorious Gospel" (1 Tim. 1:11). It is a message that reveals, opening up the secret things of God to the ones bearing His image. Here God is seen in His salvational capacity.

Image of the Invisible God

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col. 1:15). The "invisible God" cannot be perceived, or understood, by the "natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14). The word "invisible" means transcendent to the natural order. A germ is invisible to the naked eye. However, it can be seen if you magnify it. God is not like that. He is beyond the capabilities of nature. That is one of the reasons we required a Savior. Jesus brought God within range of our hearts, and our faith can therefore see and appropriate Him. The Divine imagery in man is confirmed by the impact of the Gospel upon him when it is believed. It has no such impact upon angels, even though they desire to probe into it (1 Pet 1:12). But it has a transforming power upon men because they bear the image of the Author of that Gospel.

SALVATION AND THE IMAGE

In Christ, the image of God is fully restored in humanity. The conformity begins in the realm of time, and will be consummated in eternity. Apart from Christ, humanity cannot reach its appointed objective. The Spirit affirms that the new creation is a renewal of the individual "in knowledge after the Image of Him that created Him" (Col 3:10). Man's cognitive and intuitive powers are brought to their apex in the Lord Jesus Christ. His knowledge is honed to a fine edge as conformity to the XDivine Image progresses. Adam did not attain to the goal determined for him. Nature does not possess sufficient power or resources to bring man where God wants him. How abundantly this was demonstrated in Israel. They were given the land of promise, yet never possessed it in its fullness. They came short of the divine objective. This is a mirror of the condition in which the entire human family is found. Salvation is more than a covering of the past. It is more than recovering what Adam lost. Here is the appointed means of restoring the Image in greater clarity in order that we might advance in the purpose of God. Rescuing the lost is the way to get people on track again, but it is not the totality of the objective, only the beginning of it. Jesus is the "Finisher" as well as the "Author" of our faith (Heb 12:2), the "End" as well as the "Beginning" (Rev 22:13), the "Last" as well as the "First" (Rev 1:17), the "Omega" as well as the "Alpha" (Rev 1:8).

Predestinated to be conformed!

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). No one can disannul this determination! God has purposed that everyone in Christ will become like Christ. There is no salvation apart from this! Those who are in the Son, fighting the good fight of faith, are being conformed to His image. They are becoming more like Jesus in their thoughts, words, and ways. There is less of a distinction between them and Christ Jesus, as well as more enjoyable harmony. The "image of His Son" is a moral image. In the world, this involves knowing to choose the good and refuse the evil, a prophesied trait of Jesus (Isa. 7:15-16). From the eternal perspective, it includes becoming an "heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). How precious the promise that overcomers will "sit" with Jesus in His "throne," reigning with Him (Rev. 3:21). This is nothing less than being conformed to His image. The conformation begins here, but it is consummated in the world to come! Oh, the magnitude of our salvation!

We are being changed into His image

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). This process is gradual, yet effectual. It is by degrees, or in stages--but that does not mean that it is necessarily slow. I am confounded at the number of expressions in the professed Christian community that deny this reality. To hear the average "churchman" talk, you would think salvation had nothing whatsoever to do with transformation. This is not a fair representation of the case. This is a

staggering consideration: becoming more like the Lord! This cannot be accomplished by Law! You will recall that the Law said, "Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy: for I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 20:7). But Law could not accomplish this objective.

A few men throughout pre-Pentecost history fervently desired to be like the Lord. The Psalmist cried, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" (Psa. 27:4). The dominance of sin and death, however, forbade the realization of this desire prior to Christ. Since Jesus "appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26), this objective CAN be realized. As we gaze upon Christ, we are transformed by the vision, much like Moses face was affected by His exposure to the glory of God. Looking into the face of Christ involves a dominating contemplation of His Person and work. You will never be "changed" into the image of Christ by a contemplation of duty--although such contemplations are occasionally necessary.

Given this situation, those that make the contemplation of Jesus difficult, by distracting us to lesser things, have performed a great disservice to us! Nothing must be allowed to hinder us from due and prolonged consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit adminishes us, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:3). Jesus is compelling! His name is "Wonderful," because that is what He really is. This is another way of saying He attracts those who will consider Him, particularly as He is revealed in the Gospel. That consideration becomes the means through which change is accomplished in our lives. This type of change cannot be accomplished by methodology or routine. The reason for this circumstance is simply this: method and techniques do not require the commitment of your total person.

Renewed in knowledge after His image

Of regenerate life, the Spirit says, "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him" (Col. 3:10). This view of salvation is refreshing. We are putting on the "new man," or new nature, that continues to be developed within us by the Holy Spirit. This development involves the transformation of our thinking, sensitivity, and expression. At the root of this change, experientially speaking, is spiritual knowledge. The new nature is "renewed in knowledge after THE IMAGE of Him that created him."

This is a marvelous metamorphosis! While our bodies are deteriorating, our spirits are becoming more like God--in knowledge! As it is written, "though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor 4:16). Think of the magnitude of this! Ponder the things that we have come to "know." "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness (in the power of the evil one)" (1 John 5:19). We also "know that we have passed from death unto life" (1

John 3:14), and that "it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). Having been brought into the heavenly sanctuary, we now "know that God works all things together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). As we contemplate the decline of our earthly frames, we do not despair. "We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). We now have understanding concerning God's law and our sinful nature. "We know that the Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:14).

These things reflect a remarkable degree of spiritual understanding! It is a degree of understanding available to every person in Christ Jesus. This has not been learned academically. It does not reflect the mere conveyance of information to our minds. This is nothing less than the attainment of God's perspective--"the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). These are things as God sees them, and we have been given to understand them that way, and to do so in our hearts. This understanding has become part of us! Praise the Lord! We are being conformed to God's image, far beyond what Adam enjoyed.

The light of knowledge in Christ's face

God is clear on this point. An understanding of God is irrevocably associated with the spiritual perception of Jesus Christ. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Our transformation into the divine likeness takes place to the degree we see Jesus; i.e., to the degree we comprehend and embrace Him. This is an arresting truth that has not been grasped by the religious multitudes. It must not be so with you! Whatever area of ignorance people allow into their lives, it must include the Son of the Living God! I may choose to ignore vast segments of history, the sciences, and various areas of human experience. But I cannot ignore the Son of God with impunity. I am confounded at how very little is said of Christ these days; how minuscule the amount of effort that is put into expounding Him. Is it any wonder that "church folk" come so far short of the divine image when they hear so very little of their Savior?

An issue-oriented church can never be like Jesus! God has not called us to become embroiled in issues, or even to identify with people in their need. That is a hard saying, yet it is true. He sent His Son to be identified with humanity, and our insightful proclamation of Him is the best and most effectual identity we can develop with lost humanity. Let no person think that this justifies ignoring those in need. Rather, it is the only effective way to address their need! You simply cannot walk with Jesus and be insensitive to suffering humanity. You cannot be experientially reconciled to God and ignore human need. Notwithstanding, that is a secondary level of involvement, not the primary one.

Whatever clouds the face of Jesus retards spiritual transformation!

It is tragic that much of the religion of our day obscures Christ. It is institutional-

centered, not Christ-centered, and thus inhibits spiritual growth. God will not allow His appointed objectives to be realized by humanly-devised schemes! It is not possible to effectively violate this principle. Methods contrived by men will not produce the work of God. In fact, such things retard transformation, if not render it impossible. It is not pleasant to think of a religion that is actually a handicap. Yet, that is precisely the situation with which we are faced. Myriads of people could make significant progress in their spiritual life if they were not handicapped by their "religion." It stands as a hindering barrier to progress in Christ Jesus. The "face of Jesus" is a phrase denoting His priority and sufficiency. Once seen, everything else pales in insignificance. While seen, God and His purpose become clearer. The due consideration of Christ Jesus will convince the individual of the accessibility of God's grace, strength, peace, and power. God's glory--the outshining of His beneficence--is seen in the Person of His Son, Christ Jesus the Lord. The illumination that proceeds from Christ's Person transforms the believer, conforming Him to the Divine likeness.

We shall be like Him!

Salvation begins in this world, but it is NOT consummated here! The fullness of salvation is "ready to be revealed" (1 Pet. 1:5). God's appointment is that we will be like His Son (Rom 8:29), and like Him we shall be. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Our redemption is not yet complete. We are "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). The promise is this: ". . . we look for the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to even to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. 3:20). What a glorious transformation that will be! The one great handicap we now possess is our body--our "vile bodies." It is true, they are the temples of the Holy Spirit. However, they must be brought under subjection because of their bent toward the earth (1 Cor 9:27). Right now, our bodies "are the members of Christ" (1 Cor 6:15), but they are subjugated to that position. It is the prospect of the resurrection that makes our bodies "the "members of Christ." Of our bodies it is said, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50). They have been contaminated by sin, are weak, and subject to death. But it shall not always be so. Now, in heaven, we have another body, or "house," reserved for us.

When we are relieved of this body, we will obtain that one. As it is written, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1). In its fulness, all of this will occur at the resurrection of the dead. It is tragic that much of the eschatology (study of last things) of our time fails to emphasize the resurrection of the dead. That is the time appointed for the final transformation. Think of it, we will bear the image of the heavenly! "And as we have borne the

image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Cor. 15:49). Until that day, we are being oriented for the world to come.

Our spirits are being refined by grace so we will be suitable for our redeemed bodies, and will fit into, so to speak, the world to come. In our spirits, we are becoming more and more like Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). The process of transformation will be brought to its culmination when we are raised "incorruptible" (1 Cor 15:52). The Holy Spirit apprizes us that "every man that hath this hope IN him purifies himself even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). A lack of holiness reveals a lack of hope, profession notwithstanding. There are no exceptions to this statement. Whoever is dominated by the hope of being "like Him" will so order his life as to be ready for Christ's return. Spiritual and moral purity will have priority in such an one (2 Cor 7:1). Where such a priority is absent, there is no dominating anticipation of Christ's return. Live in anticipation of that day, dear child of God. Fight the good fight of faith, and finish the race that has been set before you. It will not be long, and we shall stand before the Lord, wholly holy!

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

The knowledge of God is the hallmark of the new covenant. This is the reason for the remission of our sins. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for [they shall all know me], from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). "And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb 8:11-12).

Involvement With God

To know God is to be involved with Him. This is being "one spirit" with the Lord, the closest of all unions (1 Cor. 6:17). It is having "the mind of Christ," perceiving things as He does (1 Cor. 2:16). It also involves laboring "together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9). All of this presumes likeness between the Lord and His people.

God Desires To Be Known

God has always desired to be known, preferring this above "burnt offerings." "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Above all religious activity, He wants to be known by His offspring; to have spiritual intimacy with them.

Something That Is Shameful

The lack of acquaintance with God is shameful, particularly when it exists in the professed church. The Spirit's word to the Corinthians is certainly in order for this day and time. "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34).

Related to the Warfare

We are engaged in fierce spiritual warfare, and therefore have been provided with weaponry appropriate for the conflict. One aspect of the warfare involves exposing and dethroning erroneous thoughts that suppress knowing God. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Increasing in the Knowledge

Acquaintance with God is something that must grow. We cannot content ourselves to remain in the vestibule of fellowship when we have been invited into the living quarters themselves. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). Your understanding of and fellowship with God is the means through which grace and peace are ministered to you. If you have little acquaintance with God, you will receive little grace and peace. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you

through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Pet. 1:2). Intimacy with God liberates men from the tyranny of sin. You cannot know God and remain defiled by sin! "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. 2:20).

Our knowledge and understanding of God is not academic: it does not come by developing life- disciplines. If God does not give this to us, we will not possess it! For this reason, the Apostle prayed that believers would be so blessed. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him" (Eph. 1:17). How many "things" do you require to safely negotiate through this present evil world to glory? God has given us everything we need. We are deficient in no required area. "All things: necessary for "life and godliness" come to us through our knowledge of God. "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

A KEY TO SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE

The reason we can have spiritual confidence is that we bear the divine image-- particularly so in Jesus Christ. In my opinion, people that lack the "full assurance of faith" do so for at least two reasons. First, they have not comprehended what Jesus has accomplished in their behalf. Second, they are deficient in their perception of their own capacities in Christ. Two words from John will suffice to establish this point. There is no reason why you cannot receive them personally. "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father" (1 John 2:13). "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1 John 2:14).

CONCLUSION

The effect of understanding you bear the image of God is far reaching. It means that you can be sensitive to Him, hear Him, obey Him, and please Him. This is why it is written, "He is not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). It is what prompted the promise, "God is our Refuge . . . a very present Help in the time of trouble" (Psa. 46:1). Now, be encouraged to capitalize on the situation. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all of your ways, acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths!

Section Two

MAN'S SINFUL CONDITION REQUIRES SALVATION

"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one." "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; Destruction and misery are in their ways; And the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:9-20)

INTRODUCTION

Because of the great difficulty involved in convincing men of their need of the righteousness of God, the Spirit argues the point extensively. He has proved that man left to himself cannot become righteous. He has also confirmed that the provision of all external advantages does not enable man to become righteous. Time will not produce a righteous man, not will information from heaven itself.

If men are prone to philosophize on this matter, the Spirit will now show us that there is not a single righteous man upon earth—not a one that sought the Lord, or achieved goodness. This is a Divine assessment of our race. It deals with the root of our problem, which is sin. It confirms that sin has defiled the entirety of the natural man, and the totality of humanity.

Men have chosen to so systematize theology that truth has been robbed of its power. Thus, human expressions like "total depravity" and "free will" are debated among men, and sharp divisions formed between those who have embraced the name of the Lord.

The Spirit does not approach the subject of sinfulness and the need for righteousness in that manner. Rather, He shows us the universal result of sin. He does not speak of man's capability, but of his lack of achievement. The fact of universal guilt is proclaimed, not general ability. The Scripture will show that universal guilt confirms spiritual impotence. Men may affirm that the will is free,

and that man is capable of recovering himself. However, such affirmations are not made by the Lord. He will show that Divine intervention is an absolute requirement. The need of a Savior, grace, and deliverance is declared. A righteousness from God is also set before us as a necessity. There has never been an age or a people that was above these requirements.

From the very moment sin entered into the world, the need for a Redeemer and a righteousness from God also entered. Adam and Eve, having committed a single transgression, needed a Savior just as much as those in our century. It is the nature of sin that demands a Savior and a righteousness from God, not the amount of it.

A NEW GENERATION

The text before us will confirm that everything traced back to Adam is defiled. In fact, the order of Adam has been rejected, totally and without exception. If a Savior is given, He cannot come from Adam's lineage. If an individual is accepted by God, it cannot be in Adam, it must be in another. Because it is contaminated at its source, Adam's, it is necessary that a "Second Man" man appear, from whom a new "generation" can be developed.

Jesus is that "Second Man," and the "Last Adam" as well (1 Cor 15:45,47). In Him, and as regarding acceptance, Adam's lineage is brought to a conclusion. From Adam to Jesus, the lineage was through the flesh (Lk 3:23-38). But Jesus "was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For He was cut off from the land of the living" NIV (Isa 53:8). Abraham had fleshly offspring, but Jesus did not! This was the very Scripture that intrigued the Ethiopian eunuch. "In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:33). The idea is that His life was "taken" before He could have any offspring.

Still, one of the designated names of Jesus is "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). Through Him, God is begetting another race, pure and righteous. From the fleshly point of view, He appears barren-without progeny. But this is not the case at all. He is the One of whom Isaiah prophesied. "Sing, O barren, You who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, You who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate Than the children of the married woman," says the LORD. Enlarge the place of your tent, And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; Do not spare; Lengthen your cords, And strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, And your descendants will inherit the nations, And make the desolate cities inhabited" (Isa 54:1-3). These shout of praise immediately follows the Messianic prophecy of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

This is fundamental doctrine, and will be developed at length in the fifth chapter. It is why the new birth is essential to seeing and entering the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-7). It is the foundation that supports the necessity of becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It is why God has "begotten us again" to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

THE REASON FOR THIS SECTION

This section of Romans is one of the strongest denunciations of humanity that is found in Scripture. Taken from Psalm 14:1-3, and other prophetic expressions, the universal guilt of humanity is firmly established.

The establishment of this truth is necessary to confirm that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God-the righteousness that is announced in the Gospel of

Christ (1:16-17). Technically, the passage is not merely to convince men of sin, but of the condition into which sin has thrust them. Through it, the Spirit will show that God is just in rejecting the totality of Adam's race-"all flesh." It will also accentuate His marvelous grace in providing a new Progenitor in Jesus.

DOES ADVANTAGE MAKE BETTER?

"3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." The Spirit returns to looking at things from a Jewish point of view. He now shows that even though distinct advantages were given to the Jews, yet they actually did not better than the Gentiles. The "we" of this text are the Jews, and the "they" are the Gentiles. He has stated the Jews have received "much" unquestionable advantage "every way" (3:1-2). Their primary benefit was the "oracles of God," placed as a stewardship into their hands. They provided with a precise delineation of sin, and rich promises that should have provided adequate incentive for becoming righteous, were that remotely possible. But their advantages did not cause truth and righteousness to spring up in them. To the contrary, they were found with the same nature and sinful expressions as the Gentiles, who did not receive the "oracles of God."

ADVANTAGES DO NOT MAKE BETTER

There is a fundamental truth to be learned here. Advantages do not, of themselves, make men better-even when they are received from God Almighty. In nature, or in Adam, there are only varying degrees of corruption, not righteousness. Men cannot be changed from the outside. They cannot be renewed by Law, Divine advantages, environment, or self discipline. Being at Sinai and hearing the voice of the Lord does not make sinners better. Receiving the Law at the disposition of angels does not make a person better. If one is provided the details of when and how to approach God, those details do not make the person better. This is, indeed, a most difficult thing for "flesh" to face.

If the Jews were not better for advantages given to them by God Himself, who is the person who will imagine that men are made better today by a religious heritage dating back to the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries? If I have the writings of all of the church fathers, will it give me the advantage? Indeed, if I am not born again, any advantages I may have will yield no fruit. If I am not in Christ Jesus, there is no advantage that can make me better in the eyes of the Lord.

The strength of this argument must not elude us! Remember the remarkable benefits given to the Jews. To them "belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5). God took them unto Himself, devoted His love toward them, and separated them from the rest of the world. He revealed Himself to them alone. His holy Law was given exclusively to them, as well as a revealed procedure by which they could approach Him. His rich and glorious promises were given to them, and the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, belonged to them. Even the Lord Jesus Christ came from them, according to the

flesh.

How is it possible to receive any more external advantage? What is a mere religious movement compared to that? How does an ancient manuscript, or some archaeological discovery compare with those advantages? What of a study discipline or rule of logic? Such things are not worthy of the smallest comparison to the benefits extended to the Jews.

Yet, there are still professed Christians among us to boast of having advantages in their creed, or the movement with which they are identified. Some imagine their expertise in language gives them the real edge, or that their mind is their chief asset. But all of these things are but puffs of smoke in the arena of life. The question is whether or not these things have made them better!

A Brief Digression

While much good has come from various religious movements, they have not managed to change sinners into righteous people. I am affiliated with a movement that possesses many noble advantages. They point to the Scriptures, declaring they are thoroughly adequate. With tenacity, they refuse to bear the names of men, saying the name of Jesus is enough. They declare there is no need for a creed if we have Jesus, and that we should restore things as they were in the "New Testament church." They say they are seeking the unity of all believers in Jesus alone. All of these things are good. Those who adopt such views are surely at an advantage.

But their advantage has not made them any better. They have as many divisions among themselves as others, and even many more. Immorality has not been purged from their ranks, and are not noted for being any more godly than others. Their youth go astray like others. They are plagued with a "form of godliness that denies the power thereof." As a group, their position has not transformed them. It has not liberated them from the dominion of sin, nor has it brought to their generally ranks a hunger and a thirst for righteousness.

This movement holds no uniqueness in this regard. The same may be said of any religious movement, however hallowed it may be. Whatever advantages are found in such things, they have not wrought a transformation in the people. They still need a righteousness from God like everyone else.

Do not view me too harshly for saying these things, for this is precisely the point being made in this passage! God looks at results, not positions. It makes no difference what position is held, or what advantage is given, if the person is not made righteous, it is of no avail at all.

ARE WE BETTER THAN THEY?

Let the Jews speak for everyone who has an advantage. Did their advantage make them better? "No, in no wise," or "Not at all!" If you were to judge the matter externally, you might come to a different conclusion. At certain times, idolatry was not in the ranks of Jewry. They did have the Temple, God-ordained sacrifices, and a revealed approach to God. They appeared to live on a more acceptable level than many of the heathen. But that was only appearance, and we are not to judge according to appearance (John 7:24).

In their hearts, or at the core of their being, they were no better! Law did not make them better. Worship did not make them better. Sacrifice did not make them better. Observing the feasts did not make them better. Circumcision did not make them better!

Beyond all question, this is one of the most difficult lessons to be learned by humanity. Men continue to think they are made "better" by external experiences and privileges. However, it is only when the "stony heart" is removed, and we receive a "heart of flesh," that we become "better" (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

This is not to deny the validity or reality of external experiences and privileges. It is to affirm that they do not change the character of man, or bring the righteousness of God to him.

THEY ARE ALL UNDER SIN

" . . . for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." The expression "under sin" means under the power and guilt of sin-dominated by sin. No part of man is excluded from this domination. The sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men. As it is written, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Rom 5:18).

The proof of reference is found in the first chapters of Romans. There we are summoned into the Divine courtroom. The charge leveled against all humanity is that all are guilty of sin, and stand in need of a righteousness from God. With powerful proofs, the Spirit has convinced us that no person is excluded from the charge. Not only is humanity under sin, they are "held" there until the Lord releases them. It is the Law that held us in that state. As it is written, "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were HELD BY" (Rom 7:4a).

It will be helpful to briefly rehearse the strong arguments that have been given to prove men are all under sin.

God has shown Him eternal power and Deity to men in the creation. In that creation, these things are "clearly seen." Yet men did not glorify Him as

God, neither were thankful (1:19-21).

In the very midst of the creation, evidently made by an all powerful God, men began to degenerate, becoming vain in their imaginations (1:22-23).

Men became idolaters, changing the glory of God into images made like men birds, beasts, and creeping things (1:23).

When delivered over to their own hearts, men rapidly degenerated into corruption, dishonoring their own bodies (1:24).

Men changed the truth of God into a lie, worshiping what was made rather than the One who made it (1:25).

When God gave them over to their own desires, both men and women resorted to unnatural conduct, becoming sodomites (1:26-27).

Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God delivered them to their own appetites. As a result, men were "filled with all unrighteousness" (1:29-31).

Even though they experienced the judgment of God, men continued to prefer sin, and the company of those who also sinned (1:32).

The Jews, having received the holy Law of God, did "the same" things as the Gentiles which received not the Law (2:1-5).

The Gentiles unanimously violated their own conscience, excusing their sin (2:14-15).

The Jews knew the will of God, and approved of the Law, acknowledging it was right, yet continued to sin, just as the Gentiles (2:17-25).

The Gentiles received every possible advantage apart from direct revelation. (1) The testimony of nature, and (2) The testimony of their conscience. Yet they continued to sin.

The Jews received all the advantages the Gentiles had, plus the Law and circumcision. They too continued to sin.

The Divine assessment: "they are ALL under sin!" The human will was not able to correct the situation. No amount of intelligence, creativity, or productivity could turn the heart away from sin, or cause it to hate iniquity. The situation was universal. It was not isolated to a section of the world or to a certain people.

There is resounding proof that men need a righteousness from God! No one is acceptable in Adam, or in nature. Nature, of flesh, is a totally "evil" or corrupt tree. It is not capable of bring forth good fruit to God. How appropriate are the words of Jesus. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt 12:33). He further elaborated, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt 7:16-19).

The Spirit has shown us an unbecoming display of "evil fruit." The list is impressive and unquestionable wicked (1:19-2:24).

01. Unthankful.
02. Vain imaginations.
03. Changed the glory of God.
04. Dishonored their own bodies.
05. Changed the truth of God into a lie.
06. Sodomy.
07. Reprobate mind.
08. Fornication.
09. Wickedness.
10. Covetousness.
11. Maliciousness.
12. Full of envy.
13. Murder.
14. Debate.
15. Deceit.

16. Malignity.
17. Whisperers.
18. Backbiters
19. Haters of God.
20. Despiteful.
21. Proud.
22. Boasters.
23. Inventors of evil things.
24. Disobedient to parents
25. Without understanding.
26. Covenantbreakers.
27. Without natural affection.
28. Implacable.
29. Unmerciful.
30. Finding pleasure in sinners.
31. Glorifying in being called a "Jew."
32. Trusting in the Law.
33. Causing blasphemy of God's name.

How is it that the presence of such things were universally found? Because the tree was corrupt! Human nature was defiled! Men may argue about whether or not the corruption was total, but Jesus will shout at our hearts that a good tree cannot produce such results. Only a bad tree can do that.

What is more, only God can "make the tree good." The Lord has already revealed that "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" NKJV (Matt 7:19). Men do need a righteousness from God! None are excluded from this need, for "all have sinned and come short" of God's glory.

THERE IS NONE!

"10 As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.'"

Because of the importance of this matter, the Spirit now appeals to the Scripture to support everything that has been said. He does this to confirm that we are not dealing with a unique circumstance. The universality of sin is not something that has occurred in recent centuries. It has existed from the very moment Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree. Observation and reasoning are valid in determining the truth of sin's dominion over mankind. However, understanding must ultimately be anchored in the Word of God by which we live (Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4). God has spoken concerning the centrality of His Word. "For You have magnified Your word above all Your name" NKJV (Psa 138:2). It is fitting, therefore, that the reality of man's sinfulness be confirmed by Scripture.

NONE RIGHTEOUS

"There is none righteous, no, not one." The Spirit gives the sense of the Scripture rather than a direct quotation. This is a summation of what will follow. The state of unrighteousness is pronounced upon humanity in the fourteenth Psalm. "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa 14:2-3). Solomon also said, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl 7:20).

In the following verses, the lack of righteousness will be expounded. The traits that are enumerated are fruits or effects of unrighteousness. There are no exceptions to the declaration, "no, not one." The Lord "looked from heaven," and did not find a single person who had not been defiled, or who was not sinning.

"Righteousness" is a condition enabling the individual to stand before God faultless and uncondemned. It is a state of "no condemnation," where the person is approved by God. After searching the entirety of Adam's race, the Lord could find no such person-"no not one." Men need a righteousness from God!

NONE WHO UNDERSTAND

"There is none who understands." The understanding that is lacking is "spiritual understanding," or the knowledge of God. The fourteenth Psalm declares that God looked "to see if there were any that did understand," concluding that there was none (14:2). The fifty-third Psalm gives the same conclusion (53:2). Of the most privileged people in the world, the Lord said, "For My people are foolish, They have not known Me. They are silly children, And they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, But to do good they have no knowledge" (Jer 4:22). This lack of knowledge is what brings destruction upon the people (Hos 4:6). There can be no spiritual apart from this knowledge.

From another viewpoint, those who lack "understanding" are characterized by a fundamental ignorance of God. Although this is not generally considered to be a serious condition, the lack of the knowledge of God constitutes a state of lostness and alienation. This it is written, "This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4:17-18). Alienation from God is, then, caused by an ignorance of Him-or by having "no understanding." The gravity of such a condition can scarcely be overstated. Describing the condition in another way, Colossians 1:21 reads, "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled." In this text, "wicked works" are seen as the result of not knowing God-not understanding Him.

The lack of understanding, or knowing God, is a condition from which men must be saved. The nations that are without God are said to not know Him (1 Thess 4:5). What is more, when the Lord Jesus comes again, He will come "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God" (2 Thess 1:8). Men need a righteousness from God!

God Wants to be Understood

Behind this declaration is the truth that God WANTS to be known and understood. He has structured the entire universe to make portions of His Person known (Rom 1:19-20). He has determined when and where all peoples are placed in order that they might seek and find Him (Acts 17:26-27).

This aspect of God was revealed through Jeremiah in a most wonderful way. "Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, THAT HE UNDERSTANDS AND KNOWS ME, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD" NKJV (Jer 9:23-24). Not only in irreligious men,

but in religious ones, there is an undeniable tendency to glory in human wisdom, might, and riches. All of this is vanity. Only those who understand and know the Lord have grounds for boasting-and then, it is not of themselves (Eph 2:8).

Knowing God IS Eternal Life

The importance of knowing and understanding the Lord is confirmed by its association with eternal life. Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" NKJV (John 17:2-3).

Through John the beloved, the Spirit declares this to be one of the primary ministries of the Lord Jesus: i.e., coming to know and understand God. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

There would be no need to give us such an understanding if there was any way for us to possess it on our own. But we did NOT have such understanding, as our text states. In fact, it took the ministry of the Lord from heaven for us to obtain it.

I want to emphasize that a universal Savior postulates a universal need. If there was a solitary individual in the world who knew God through natural abilities, Christ would not have come. Apart from His coming into the world, offering a satisfactory atonement, and ascending to the right hand of God to be the Author and Finisher of our faith, there was simply no possible way of coming to know or understand God. Sin created a gulf between God and man that man himself could not span.

If Adam, with only a signal transgression, could not remain in the presence of God, what of his progeny, whose imaginations are ONLY evil from their youth? God is greatly to be praised for not leaving us in this situation. It is His desire for us to know Him that has driven the completion of a great salvation.

NONE WHO SEEKS GOD

"There is none who seeks after God." Although I have already stated this, it bears repetition. God has ordered the affairs of men in a most precise way, in order that they might "seek the Lord." "From one single principle [man] He not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but He decreed the times and limits of their habitation. And He did this so that they might seek the Deity and, by feeling their way towards Him, succeed in finding Him; and indeed He is not far from any of us" New Jerusalem Bible (Acts 17:26-27).

In addition to strategically placing all peoples in both time and area, He placed them in His own creation, which declared His glory in every corner of the earth (Psa 19:1-4; Rom 1:19-20). If any vestige of moral ability remained in man, these advantages should have compelled him to seek the Lord UNTIL he found Him. After all, He "is not far from every one of us." However, even given all of these advantages, "none" could be found that sought after God.

Such notables as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David were all visited by the Lord PRIOR to an effective quest for Him. Our text is precise in every sense of the word, and perfectly describes the entire race of Adam apart from Christ. Men need a righteousness from God!

ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE

"They have all turned aside." With absolute consistency, apart from Divine intervention, "ALL" men turned aside from the revelation was given to them, whether from nature, conscience, or Law. Every aspect of man's nature was defiled by sin. He became ungodlike-"none unrighteous." His mind was corrupted-"none that understands." The will was polluted-"none who seeks after God." Now we see the contamination of his works-"all turned aside."

Just as Adam and Eve turned from the commandment given to them, so all men, by nature, have turned from every common appeal. The KJV reads, "They have all gone out of the way," emphasizing that the departure has ALREADY taken place. By nature, they have elected the "broad road" that leads to destruction. They have heard the harmonious voice of nature, and have "turned aside." They have felt the stinging goad of the conscience, and have "gone out of the way." They have heard the thundering words of the Law and "have turned every one to his own way" (Isa 53:6). This is not a mere liability, but is a cosmopolitan condition!

The Psalmist said of this situation, "Every one of them is gone back" (Psa 53:3). Other versions read "fallen away" RSV, NRSV This involves more than leaving an appointed path. It includes the idea of retrogression, or going backward. Apart from Jesus Christ, the entire human race is in a state of regression, plummeting downward, further and further from God. That is the meaning of the phrase, "all

have sinned and COME SHORT of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

By nature, men have "turned away" from God's appointment for them, which is to "seek the Lord." Even in their religion, they have "come short," settling for idolatry or other forms of lifeless religion. Settle it in your heart that this is not a description of the worst of our race, but of the whole of it.

Nowhere is the corruption of men more clearly seen than in their will! Turning aside was a choice-a deliberate choice. Men willed to NOT seek the Lord. They willed to choose their own way. While I do not wish to make a big issue out of this here, it is interesting that men have chosen to vaunt the human will. This is done in spite of the fact that it is the very thing that has placed man at a distance from God. It was so in the Garden, and it is so today. Men need a righteousness from God!

ALL HAVE BECOME UNPROFITABLE

"They have together become unprofitable." The NASB reads, "They have become USELESS." The NIV and NRSV read, "They have become WORTHLESS." For whatever it is worth, the Greek word used here is *hvreiw,qhsan*, which means totally wrong, depraved, and morally worthless. Barclay-Newman Greek Dictionary Strong's Dictionary defines it as unprofitable, useless, and unserviceable. The Basic Bible English version reads, "there is no profit in any of them." John Gill, an insightful preacher who lived in the 1700's, said this of the passage before us: ". . . for so men being corrupted by sin, are of no use, service, and advantage to God, to men, or to themselves, but on the contrary, nauseous to God . . . and hurtful to themselves and others." Gill's Commentary on Romans In his commentary, Barnes says of this verse, "This word in Hebrew means to become 'putrid' and 'offensive,' like fruit that is spoiled. In Arabic, it is applied to 'milk' that becomes sour. Applied to moral subjects, it means to become corrupt and useless. They are of no value in regard to works of righteousness."

While I do not ordinarily share the writings of others on these texts, I did want to show students of Scripture have been consistent in their perception of this passage. I am not espousing something that is strange, or newly developed. While my own view was not formed by these men, I have found general agreement among those of honest heart on this matter.

Sin has rendered humanity useless to God. The whole of the Adamic order has been rejected by Him, thereby necessitating the new birth. That is something that can ONLY be effected by God. He begets us through the Gospel because of Christ's sufficient death, "once for all." In our new birth, we become qualified to receive God's righteousness. Then, and only then, can we be profitably used by God and live in anticipation of the glory to come.

If sin has made "all unprofitable," then all need a righteousness from God!

NONE WHO DOES GOOD

"There is none who does good, no, not one." The blistering assessment of humanity continues, gaining strength. The Spirit is considering men apart from Christ, unforgiven and unregenerated. In that state, there is no one that "does good, no, not one." By "good," the Spirit means "good" in the eyes of the Lord, which is the only real "good." Because the natural man is not good, nothing that he does is good. All of his works are tainted with his defiled nature, rendering them unacceptable to God. Rather than doing good, the Lord says of fallen man, "They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good" NKJV (Psa 53:1). By nature, all of man's "righteousnesses are as filthy rags," to be discarded because they are defiled (Isa 64:6). As it is written, ". . . but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled" (Tit 1:15).

To "do good" is to conduct ourselves in harmony with God, who alone is good. As Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God" (Matt 19:17). In this statement, Jesus was not saying He Himself was not good. He is altogether good. However, the young man who asked concerning eternal life did not see Jesus as the Son of God, but only as a "teacher."

NONE RIGHTEOUS! NOT ONE!

Thus, the Divine assessment of humanity is being confirmed. There really is "none righteous, no not one." Apart from identity with Jesus, no one, to a person, understands God or is seeking after Him. Everyone is in a state of regression, having chosen to turn away from the Lord. Of themselves, no one is useful to God, as they all have become worthless. As God counts things, no one is doing good.

If that seems too strong, it is only because of spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. This is a matter of revelation, and it is to be received. It confirms that God was right in providing a righteousness for man, for man had none of his own. It also substantiates the absolute need for that righteousness, and the worthiness of condemnation to all who reject it.

One of the appalling effects of cold theology is that it robs the heart of these things, leading people to imagine there is some vestige of good in man, even though God says there is not. Man does not do good because he is NOT good. He does not seek God because he does not want God. He does not understand, because he is alienated in his mind. He is unprofitable because sin has utterly defiled him.

As though this were not enough, the Spirit will take the matter even further. He will confirm to us that our defilement is not a surface matter, but reaches into every aspect of our persons. Regardless what aspect of man who consider, he is corrupt from beginning to end.

INCAPABLE OF GOOD EXPRESSION

"13 'Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit'; 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 14 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.'" Again, an appeal is made to the Scriptures. Sin has not made men lazy, it has made them corrupt. Their expressions reflect their condition. While there are varying degrees of wicked expressions, they all possess the same characteristics. Apart from regeneration, there is an abnoxiousness about all human expression. Although it may not appear to be the case to mortals, that is the way it really is. Remember, this is God's assessment of men who do not have His righteousness-all of them.

THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN TOMB

The quotation is taken from Psalm 5:9. What a vivid picture! An open tomb is one in which a rotting corpse lies. It emits a noxious odor that repels all who are near to it. Knowing this is the case, tombs and graves are always covered well in order to hide the corruption within them. But men do not do the same with their corrupt natures. Their throats become a passage for the expression of spiritual death-dead views. The odor of alienation is upon them, and they are tainted with aloofness from God.

A sensitive heart detects this condition and is offended by it. Some of these defiling expressions come in the name of scholarship, social interests, and psychological profiles. But they all have this in common. They are emitting from the tomb of nature, defiling everything they touch. When men attempt to dignify them by assigning sincerity to the speakers, they are trying to throw a new suit of clothes upon a dead corpse.

THEIR TONGUES PRACTICE DECEIT

The tongue of the unregenerate conflicts with the Word of the Lord, and this is said to "practice deceit." When it comes to actual utterance, anything and everything spoken in contradiction of the truth of God is a lie. The Word of the Lord is, "let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom 3:4).

Through Jeremiah, the Lord indicted His people for speaking corruptly. "And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbor will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbor, and will not speak the truth: they

have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity" (Jer 9:3-4).

Sin has made man basically self-centered. Therefore, he speaks with his own interests being primary. When that occurs-and it always does in the natural man-the tongue practices deceit, clouding the truth, and turning attention to human opinion. There are differing measures of this tendency, but they all come under the canopy of "deceit." Deceit seeks to substantiate human views and justify men in their conduct. It is the opposite of having speech "alway with grace, seasoned with salt," that it might edify and minister grace to the hearer (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29).

Let it be clear, if men do not receive a righteous from God, this is the kind of speaking that will come from them. It may be socially cultured and politically correct, but it will be deceitful!

POISON UNDER THEIR LIPS

The reference is to an expression found in Psalm 140:3. "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips." The idea is that their lips are harmful and infectious, spewing forth poison and contamination among the sons of men. Such were the words of Hymenaeus and Philetus, which "spread like cancer" (NKJV (2 Tim 2:17)). These were also the kind of words the unbelieving spies spoke to Israel, convincing them they could not possess the promised land as God commanded them. It is said of their words, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night" (Num 13:31-14:1). The poison of asps was under their lips, infecting the minds of the people.

Very little time will pass until the truth of this text is confirmed to your heart. You will be subjected to poisonous words that must be expelled from your mind, lest your own thoughts become corrupt. Men sorely stand in need of a righteousness from God.

MOUTHS FILLED WITH CURSING AND BITTERNESS

Again, an appeal is made to the Word of the Lord. "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity" (Psa 10:7). Again, it is written, "For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak" (Psa 59:12). James said of believers who were following the "old man" instead of the "new man," "Out

of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing" (James 3:10).

The cursing of reference is the cursing of God: blaspheming His holy name, and speaking against His judgments. In the mind of the speaker, such diatribes may not be considered to be against God, but they are. It is much like Israel murmuring against Moses. "And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" (Ex 15:24). "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Ex 16:2). "And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" (Ex 17:3).

None of this was innocent. That is why the people were judged for speaking as they did. Their mouths were "filled with cursing and bitterness" because they did not perceive their condition as being advantageous. In our day, such speaking is dignified by people saying they are angry with God, and God is able to deal with such anger. But this is a foolish imagination. There is not so much as a spec of truth in it. Solemnly we are told, "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Cor 10:10). Outbursts of cursing and bitterness are signs of depravity, not mere misunderstanding.

EXPRESSIONS OF THE FLESH

Because of the elevation of human knowledge and rights, even religious men have come to believe they have a right to express their opinion about the truth of God. In recent months, I have heard serious misrepresentations of the truth of God dignified by saying every one has a right to their opinion. Let it be clear to all of us. When God has spoken, the only right man has to believe and heartily embrace that truth.

What we are reading about is the nature of "the flesh," or "the natural man." There is nothing good or salvageable about the flesh. In it, there is "no good thing" (Rom 7:18). Jesus said, "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). If those in Christ give heed to their flesh, rather than crucifying it, it will react precisely as our text has indicated. You should be sufficiently acquainted with your own nature to know this is the case. The part of us that is traced back to Adam is called our "members that are upon the earth." They are to be "mortified," or put to death, not given expression (Col 3:5). In fact, "those who are Christ's HAVE crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" NKJV (Gal 5:24).

Fleshly Religion

A religion that allows for the expression of the flesh kills the soul. If human nature is fallen, it must not be given respect or ascendancy among the people of God. Fleshly credentials are not to be honored as though they came from God. Natural abilities are not to be viewed as though they were the superior ones. Our acquaintance with one another is not to be "after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16). Worldly views, fads, and preferences, are to have no place among the people of God.

In Christ, we die to the fleshly order, and are therefore urged to separate from it. The Colossians were exhorted on this very matter. "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh" (Col 2:20-23). The absolute corruption of the flesh forbids the formation of religion around it. The truest form of religion is not found in external disciplines and the regimentation of the body. Rather, it is found in "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). These are spiritual expressions, not fleshly ones.

THE ULTIMATE FLESHLY EXPRESSIONS

Flesh becomes more prominent as it is exposed to the glory of God. This is seen in the reaction of the world to Jesus. In particular, in the reaction of the Jews. If we doubt the depravity of the flesh, let us behold how it conducts itself toward God

"manifest in the flesh."

The passage we have just reviewed speaks of speech, words, or verbal expressions. Ponder how those in the flesh spoke to Jesus. "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him" NKJV (Lk 16:14). "Then the Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?'" (John 8:48). "And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, 'This Man blasphemes!'" (Matt 9:3). "And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.'" The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself'" (Lk 23:35-37). "They answered and said to him (Pilate), 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you'" (John 18:30).

What constrained these people to speak so derisively of the Lord of glory? Their throats were certainly an open tomb, and the poison of asps was under their lips. They spoke in the energy of the flesh. That is the manner in which flesh speaks. In the presence of the Lord, their flesh erupted because it could not abide the Savior. It spoke heartlessly, and with defamation, insult, and injury.

Not Merely A Law

The incentive for avoiding the dominancy of the flesh is not mere Law. It is rather a matter of survival. It is clearly stated, and is to be heartily embraced, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). Take that word seriously, for your soul is in the balance. If we follow the dictates of the flesh, we will find it erupting in our manners, just as described in our text. Such conduct is evidence of spiritual death, and is to be resolved with swift dispatch.

SELF SEEKING

"15 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 Destruction and misery are in their ways; 17 And the way of peace they have not known.'" Once again, I want to emphasize that the Spirit is describing the nature of the flesh. While its expressions may take various forms, and be characterized by differing levels of wickedness, yet they all proceed from the same defiled well. Because people imagine these things are not in them by nature, is no proof they are absent. They are resident in the flesh, and will remain so. Scripture says it this way, "Mortify therefore YOUR MEMBERS which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col 3:5-9).

It is not possible to "put off" something you do not possess. The things that are mentioned are said to be in our "members". The NIV reads, "whatever belongs to your earthly nature." The NASB reads, "members of your earthly body." All of these things are resident in the part of us that is traced back to Adam. The potential to express them is resident in every person remaining in the body. The fact that we are in Christ has not removed them from our earthly nature. They were not washed away when we were baptized into Christ. Even when we are "risen with Christ," they seek for expression. Therefore, they are to be "put off," "mortified," and "denied."

When this truth registers upon the conscience, a major thrust forward has taken place.

In the first part of this passage, the sins of the heart are emphasized: "None that understand," "none that seeks God," going "out of the way," and becoming "unprofitable." The second part deals with sins of the mouth. The throat is an "open tomb," tongues "use deceit," "poison" is "under the lips," and the mouth is "full of cursing and bitterness."

Now we come to sins of action, when men will go to any means to justify themselves and gratify their own desires. Again, this is the unchangeable nature of the flesh.

FEET SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD

The reference is to Proverbs 1:16. "For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood." The sixth chapter of Proverbs lists seven things that God hates, which are an abomination to Him. Among them is "An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief" (v 18). Isaiah speaks even more directly to the matter. "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood" (Isa 59:7). Again, this is the manner of the flesh. It will go to any length to justify itself-even to the shedding of blood.

Here the taking of innocent life is done creatively and with dispatch. Their "feet run to evil" swiftly, and "make haste to shed blood." Given enough liberty, this IS what the flesh will do! Isaiah's reference to this trait was given during the reign of Manasseh, which so much innocent blood was shed.

How frequently this tendency has surfaced in our race. Cain's feet was swift to shed blood when his brother's sacrifice was accepted by God, and his own was not (Gen 4:8). Lamech lamented that he had killed a man because he was wounded by him (Gen 4:23). In an outbreak of rage, Simeon and Levi killed men who had defiled their sister (Gen 34:25). Heartlessly, Pharaoh ordered the death of newborn Jewish males because thought they were becoming too numerous (Ex 1:16). Ahab and Jezebel had Naboth killed because they wanted his vineyard (1 Kgs 21:7-10). Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah, had all the royal heirs killed (2 Kgs 11:1). Herod commanded that "all the children" under two years of age be killed, because he was threatened by the birth of Jesus (Matt 2:16).

There is no extent to which flesh will go to seek its own gain. The ultimate murder, of course, was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well did Stephen say of the corrupt religious leaders of his day, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). Their feet were "swift to shed blood."

And what can be said of our own time, when more than a million abortions occur annually in our own country? And for what reason? For self interests! See, this is the nature of flesh. Those who choose to live in the flesh are descending into a moral arena that is a bottomless pit! The senseless mass killings that have erupted in the last few years are nothing more that fleshly eruptions. Those who committed these dastardly crimes refused the truth and salvation of God. Because of this, their flesh soon gained dominancy over them.

DESTRUCTION AND MISERY IN THEIR WAYS

This is also taken from Isaiah 59:7. This describes a dreadful tendency in the flesh that leaves a path of destruction. Given expression, the flesh tears down what is good, and leaves misery in its wake. Whether it is holocaust of Pharaoh, Herod, or Hitler, those dominated by nature think nothing of making others miserable, whether by insults, plundering, or physical harm.

It is a glad day when a person comes into Christ and experiences the circumcision of the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11-12). The words of the prophet Isaiah are then fulfilled. "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise." (Isa 60:18). While flesh tears down, the renewed spirit builds up and edifies.

When believers are among the unregenerate, there are a certain destruction and misery that are experienced. The spirit is eroded and often torn down as the flesh sets itself against the redeemed soul. It is no marvel that Jesus "ofttimes resorted" to Gethsemane with His disciples for spiritual renewal (John 18:2).

THE WAY OF PEACE NOT KNOWN

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, but is completely unknown by the flesh. As the Lord has said, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:21). Specifically, the reference is to Isaiah 59:8. "The way of peace they know not."

If men are to find peace, it must come in and through Jesus Christ. It cannot come through the flesh, or from Adam's resources. When the "Dayspring from on high" visited us, it was in order to "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1:79).

Notice, the text says "THE WAY of peace they have not known." By nature, men do not know HOW to obtain or come into peace. This is particularly true of "peace with God," which is realized in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:1). This "way of peace" is beyond the reach of flesh. It cannot be discovered through mental disciplines or much study.

Those outside of Christ-all of them-have no peace of mind, and do not know how to obtain it. Their conscience is not at peace, and no amount of religious activity can procure it for them. Sin has robbed all men! Although peace is aggressively sought by men, outside of Christ they always come short of it. They do not know "the way of peace," and thus stumble in moral and spiritual darkness.

There should be no doubt of the need for a righteousness from God. All of the things that have been mentioned are the direct result of LACKING the righteousness of God. They are the consequence of transgression.

NO FEAR

"18 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'" On one occasion, sensitive Abraham observed of the realm of Abimelech, "Surely the fear of God is not in this place" (Gen 20:11). Indeed, there are places where such an absence is very apparent. However, our text says that in a state of nature, this condition is ALWAYS present. The quotation is taken from Psalm 36:1, where David observed of the wicked, "There is no fear of God before his eyes." This is the kind of fear that is wholesome, provoking men to "to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth" (Prov 8:13). Such fear compels those possessing it to "depart from evil" (Prov 16:6).

But such fear is not in men by nature, confirming they do need a righteousness from God. If you are ever prone to wonder why men continue in their sin and rebellion, not turning to the Lord, here is the answer. "There is no fear of God before their eyes." It is not that they DO NOT think of their ways in association with God. Rather, it is because they do not WILL to think in this manner. It is not in them to do so.

By saying the fear of God is "not before their eyes," the Spirit means it is not evident to them, and is not perceived as necessary. Like Balaam, they stumble on in their own ways, oblivious to the destruction that looms before them.

One might ponder, "How, then, can we 'save with fear' those who are out of the way (Jude 23)? First, we do not do so by appealing to earthly reasoning. We already know their minds do not think in this manner. Telling them of the natural consequences of sin, like disease and sorrow, will have no lasting effect. Flesh not only does not think in that way, it cannot do so. Because fear is not "before their eyes," we must place it before them with strong spiritual arguments and solid Scriptural statements. In so doing, we call for the Holy Spirit to come in convicting power. Working through the "sword of the Spirit," He has been commissioned to "convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8-11). If it were not true that "there is no fear of God before their eyes," the ministry of conviction would not be necessary.

Some have taken upon themselves teach men to fear God through various forms of thought. The Word of God points out the futility of such an effort. Of wayward Israel He said, "Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men" (Isa 29:13). The utter uselessness of such an approach is found in the capacity of the fallen, or fleshly, nature. It has no capacity to fear God. That is why it does not do so. By nature, men do NOT think of God, or consider His ways. That is why His fear is not before their eyes, or the focus of their attention. That is why they do not seek Him, and why they continue to sin.

THE MINISTRY OF THE LAW

"19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

Having proved that all men stand in need of a righteousness from God, the Spirit now turns to the Divinely appointed means of persuaded men of that truth. He particularly addresses this to the Jews, although not exclusively to them, because they made their boast in possessing the Law. However, there is a strong tendency in the flesh to trust in Law. It has no objection to following a rigorous routine, just as long as death to the desires of the flesh is not required.

The truth of the matter is that all men are far worse by nature than they think. The extent of the fall of humanity is far greater than flesh thinks, or wants to think. A disposition remains in man that leads him to think more highly of himself than he ought to think. The Lord has made provision to convince him of the depth of his sin.

We will now address things that cannot be learned from nature. While the things that are made testify to the "eternal power and Deity" of God, they cannot convince the soul of sin. That is a work reserved for a more proficient minister.

WHAT IS "THE LAW"?

The word "Law" does not refer to any law of nature, or of civil authorities. This is "the Law" that was "given by Moses" (John 1:17). It is summarized in the Ten Commandments, which were "the words of the covenant" given to Israel (Ex 34:28). "The Law" also included the elaborations of the Ten Commandments, together with its blessings and curses.

Although the Law was given to Israel as a covenant (Rom 9:4), its ministry was not limited to them, as this text will affirm. It served a higher purpose than that of a covenant to Israel.

There is a strain of theology that affirms the Law has been totally abrogated-much like being erased. This particular persuasion presents God as repromulgating certain of the ten commandments, which are perceived as relevant to life in Christ. Our text will show this is not the case. The Law has been terminated as a means to righteousness, as taught in Romans 10:4. It has not, however, been obliterated.

THE LAW DOES SPEAK

Here the Law is pictured as though it were a person, speaking to humanity. There is a message that it is delivering-an essential message. There is a certain tone to the Law that can be discerned by the sensitive heart. It speaks, and to certain people.

If the Law had been abrogated, or annulled, it would speak no longer. There are, however, certain people who still need to hear the testimony of the Law.

THOSE UNDER THE LAW

Whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under its dominion, and are responsible to it. While this was primarily the Jews, it was not only the Jews. One particular reason for this dissertation was the tendency of the Jews to apply the Law to everyone but themselves.

What follows is common knowledge-something that is evident: "we know." The Law is not speculative, nor does it deal with vain philosophies. It brings an essential message.

The Galatian brethren were Gentiles, and yet the Law is said to be their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ (Gal 3:24-25). Before they were in Christ, they were responsible to the Law, even though it was not given as a covenant to them.

Notice, the text does not say "whatever the Law SAID," but "whatever the Law SAYS." Its ministry is still going on. In the strictest sense of the Word, those "under the Law" are those whose conduct is wayward-who must be held in check because of the dominance of sin. From this vantage point the Spirit says, "Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Tim 1:9-11). Unless lawless people only existed among the Jews, therefore, the work of the Law was not confined to them.

Notice that this perspective of the Law is "according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." More precisely, the passage reads, "and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." NIV The idea is that the Law speaks to those whose lives contradict the truth of the Gospel, which came 1,500 years after the Law was given. The Law, therefore, is still at work.

EVERY MOUTH STOPPED

The assignment given to the Law is to silence the boastful and alibiing mouths of

of all men. It is to convince them that they are guilty before God and without excuse. When this occurs, men will emulate Job, who said, "Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4). The Law speaks with strong tones to all men, "Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth" (Judges 18:19).

God has decreed that "no flesh will glory in His presence" (1 Cor 1:29). That will ultimately be the case when we all "appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10). At that time, every mouth will be silenced before the Lord of glory. Like the man with no wedding garment, transgressors will be "speechless" (Matt 22:12).

However, the law begins that ministry now, in this world. With powerful arguments, it convinces men they have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It removes their excuses and explanations from their minds, proving they have willingly and repeatedly broken God's Law.

Paul provides a vivid portrayal of the Law's ministry. In the seven chapter of Romans, he recounts his former persuasion that he was righteous of himself. Before being in Christ, the "motions of sin," or "sinful passions" were at work "in our members, to bring forth death" (Rom 7:5). That was the fact of the case, yet Paul acknowledges this knowledge had escaped him. Outwardly, Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was impeccably righteous. According to his own testimony, "concerning the righteousness which is in the law," he was "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Even when he was persecuting the church, he thought was doing what was right. Living in all good conscience, he said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 23:1; 26:9).

Now the Law enters. It comes to "stop" Paul's mouth. Here is his testimony. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (Rom 7:7-11). Once it came home to Paul's heart that sin was an inward matter, "sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead." NIV The sinful nature was there all along, but was hidden under the facade of religious flesh. But when the commandment broke through to his conscience, his flesh rose up in rebellion, filling his mind with "coveting of every kind."NASB

The Law was not wicked in doing this, but brought out that wickedness was in Saul of Tarsus. Effectively, it stopped his mouth, and brought him to Jesus for cleansing,

renewal, and commissioning. That is the ministry of the Law.

ALL THE WORLD BECOMES GUILTY

Here the Spirit devastates the notion that the Law was ONLY for the Jew. The text reads, "and all the world may become guilty before God." The NASB, NIV, NRSV, and RSV read "become," or "held accountable to God." In my judgment, this is a very weak rendering of the text. The word translated "guilty" comes from u`po,dikoj, which means liable to punishment. In this case "accountable" carries the idea of "condemned already," and not that of a trial set forth to establish guilt.

The guilt is "before God," not merely in the conscience. Such a sentence requires the need of a Savior, and of a just acquittal upon the basis of another.

Let it be clear that the "guilt" of reference did not begin when the Law came home in power. The Law convinces the sinner that he is already guilty, and that his guilt was a matter of corrupted choice. Thus, the soul is prepared for a Redeemer, having been convinced of its need for One. What a marvelous work has been assigned to the Law.

KNOWLEDGE OF SIN, NOT JUSTIFICATION

"20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." With spiritual skill, and under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle has shown the absolute need of a righteousness from God. He has left no stone unturned, devastating every argument against the need for righteousness. His words are like those mentioned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 12:11. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd." Indeed they are! Who has not felt the weight of these powerful arguments. Have they not confirmed our need of a Savior and the righteousness of God? Now, the Spirit will draw some further conclusions, showing us that we cannot seek justification by the Law. It was given to make all the world "guilty before God," not to enable them to become righteous by keeping a set of commandments. In fact, men had no propensity or ability to keep God's commandments, until they were reconciled by the death of God's Son.

THE DEEDS OF THE LAW

Precisely what are "the deeds of the Law?" The "deeds of the law" and the "works of the Law" are the same thing. They are the "deeds prescribed by the law." NRSV The NIV reads, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law." And why is this so? Is not the Law good, and holy, and just? Is it not right to do the law? To fulfill the demands of the Law? Did not the Law promise life to those who kept it? As it is written, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:5; Lev 18:5; Gal 3:12)? How is it, then, that man cannot be justified, or made righteous, by fulfilling the deeds of the Law?

The key here is the word "Therefore." The previous verses (1:19-3:18) has declared and proved that all are guilty of sin. Human nature has been so corrupted, that it cannot do what God requires in the Law. Therefore, rather than applauding men for their good deeds, the Law condemns them for their sin. The demands of the law upon a sinner are much like the demands of a marathon race upon a person in the intensive care unit of a hospital. They extend beyond the ability of fallen man. Blessed day when that truth comes home to the heart.

Jesus revealed another aspect of this to His disciples. He posed a hypothetical situation, confirming how far men had fallen from the glory of God. "But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink'? He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done'" (Lk 17:7-20).

The Lord knows that no mortal has ever done everything God commanded to be done. Yet, He poses this situation to make a point. There is no merit before God for simply doing what you have been told to do. That is an obligation for which no reward is due—particularly eternal life. Thus, should we imagine that we have actually done "ALL the things which were commanded" us, we would still be required to say, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done." By the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified. The Law deals ONLY with obligations. It does not address men as those who have been freed to move into the presence of the Lord, but as those who are enslaved to sin, requiring sacrifices and offerings for sin.

NOT JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT

While men may tend to overstate their own accomplishments in this world, they will not be able to stand before God and boast. No person will be "justified in the sight of God" because of what they have done! If the Lord Jesus were removed from the scenario, there would not be a solitary soul inducted into the tabernacle of the Most High.

Later in Romans, the Spirit takes up this argument again, pointing to Abraham, who is the "father of us all" (Rom 4:16). "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; BUT NOT BEFORE GOD. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom 4:1-3).

There is a solid reason for this situation. Men have been universally convicted of sin. There is no one who is righteous, understands, seeks God, or does good. That is the Divine assessment, and is beyond all controversy. In that context, the very notion of being justified by the deeds of the Law becomes absurd. These two things-To be justified by the works of the Law, and to be guilty of sin-cannot be blended together. They are an admixture. If man is guilty, as our text affirms, then he CANNOT be justified by his own doing. It is his doing that condemns him, and therefore it cannot justify him. That is the argument of our text.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN

One might suppose that, given this situation, the Law is useless. God forbid! Rather than being impractical and without value, it brings "the knowledge of sin." Those who view the Scriptures as a manual of conduct do well to consider this verse. This passage has taught us that human conduct is not the issue. That is because every man is convinced of unacceptable conduct-"all have sinned." The issue is being righteous before God, and the Spirit has shown us that, by nature, every mortal without that righteousness. "There is none righteous, no not one."

The Law puts a handle, so to speak, upon sin. It identifies it for us, so we can perceive it and be persuaded of its dominance over us by nature. Its primary work is not to show us what sin is so that we can avoid it, but to convince us we have committed it! It identifies deviate demeanor.

In identifying sin, the Law strips man of any hope of saving himself. It powerfully convinced the individual the heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). Thanks be unto God for deliverance from the condemning Law!

The Law stopped our mouths, not allowing us to boast before God. But the Savior of mankind has stopped the mouth of the Law, not allowing it to condemn those who have died and been raised with Him. Blessed, indeed, is the soul who knows these things! "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy." (Psa 107:2). After you have let the Law do its work, then let the comforting Spirit do His work in you as well!

CONCLUSION

There are few areas of thought that bare as productive as the one with which we are dealing. As a rule, the people of God have been deprived of the type of reasoning that has been presented in these chapters. The universal need for righteousness, when seen, is a great equalizer among the sons of men. It removes boasting, and uncovers a well of thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus Christ.

For some time, I have sensed the general dulness of professed Christians concerning these things. There appears to be a preoccupation with religious organization, career building, and other things related to these twin monsters. Associated with these conditions is an unacceptable level of spiritual understanding and a deplorable lack of confidence toward God. The Lord Jesus is somewhere in the background of religious thought, and the power of godliness is denied more than any of wish to admit. There is also an alarming level of immortality and spiritual ignorance in the professed church. Scriptural illiteracy is also at a totally unacceptable level.

What is the cause of these things? I am going to lay the responsibility of these condition at the feet of church leaders. The very things that are so strongly espoused in the book of Romans are hardly known by the masses. They are not being declared, but have been supplanted by other matters deemed more practical. The results have been devastating. Far too many believers are admittedly not ready to meet the Lord.

The answer to this situation is a return to the powerful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. In is the righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith," which is why it is "the power of God unto salvation." Let there also be a return to the strong presentation of the universal need for the righteousness of God. Such preaching will move men away from reliance in the flesh.

Section Three

THE WORD BECAME FLESH!

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1,14, KJV).

INTRODUCTION

Like the womb of the morning, some Scriptural texts are especially pregnant with glory and light. These are texts in which are found Divine expressions that unlock great bodies of truth. In the revelation of God's truth, such texts are like Jachin and Boaz, the two pillars in the porch of Solomon's temple. It is as though the weight of truth was suspended upon them. The text before us is such a text. The Word of God is first of all about a Person, and second about an "eternal purpose." God's Word delineates, or expounds both that Person, and His purpose. Upon these two pillars, the entirety of Scripture is suspended. Apart from them, no word of the Bible has any eternal relevance. Every aspect of truth is integrated into these two things. The Person is God as revealed in Christ Jesus. Through His Son, God's "eternal purpose", determined before the foundation of the world, and toward which all things are moving, is revealed and expounded. Whatever is unrelated to Christ Jesus and God's eternal purpose is unworthy of emphasis, and will ultimately pass away. Concerning the Person of Scriptural emphasis, Jesus said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). God's "purpose" is declared to be the reason for our calling (Rom 8:28), the driving cause behind the obtaining of an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11), and the eternal objective that is fulfilled in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:11). Peter affirms that both the Person of Christ and the purpose of God were the focus of the prophets. "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet 1:10-11). Christ Jesus was the Substance of the prophesies of old. These realities will be the locus around which our consideration of this text will center.

IN THE BEGINNING

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This is more than the affirmation of a historical fact. It is not a mere point of sound theology. This is the beginning point of flawless spiritual reasoning. It is where we collect our bearings, and gather our perspective. We do not begin with a problem, but with our God! We do not begin with a crisis, but with our God. "The Word," in this case, is the pre-incarnate Savior. The Spirit does not move us into the realm of eternity, but back to "the beginning," when our domain was formed, and the human enterprise was initiated. It is the same "beginning" of which Moses spoke: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1:1). We are informed that the Person of Christ existed at that time, though as a spirit. He was not "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5) "in the beginning." He was "THE WORD." First, this affirms that the Word was no part of the creation itself. Before creation, the Word "WAS." He is, therefore, "eternal," which is the declaration of this verse. It was "the Word" that gave being to all things, for "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3). This again affirms His eternity, for that One who gives beginning to all things cannot have a derived beginning. The term "Word" is unique, and is intended to establish that the pre-incarnate Christ was the Source of all things--the Means through which God created all things. He is the Expression of God, the revelation of His purpose, and the Initiator of his work. The "Word," however, was not subordinate to God, but was Himself God. Though a separate Person, He was a co-equal, as it were, with Jehovah God. Apart from unique Personhood, Jehovah and the Word were not divisible in any sense. They were Oneness in perfection. The Spirit has summoned us into a high realm, where frivolity and shallowness have no place. He has taken us back to "the beginning" to show us the source and effectiveness of our salvation. The fountain of eternal life has its origin in eternity. It is not a response to the human condition, but an immutable and eternal purpose, conceived before the foundation of the world, and made known in the fulness of time. Both the purpose and the Person initiating the purpose came from eternity.

THE EXTENT OF HIS HUMILIATION

As if entering into the world deprived of Divine prerogatives, assuming the form of a servant, and being found in the likeness of man, were not enough, His obedience is declared. "And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." While in a humbled state, He debased Himself even more by submitting to death, even the death of the cross. He received a commandment from His Father, and He was intent upon carrying it out. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:18). He would not die an ordinary death, like Jacob, who "drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (Gen 49:33). He would not enjoy a gracious death like Moses, who breathed his last on the border of the promised land, while still in vigorous health, and was buried by God Himself (Deut 34:5-6). His death would be the most grievous of all! It would be "even the death of the cross." He would not only be rejected by men, but by God. Hoisted between heaven and earth, He would endure indignities that were a reproach to any man. He would become, as it were, "a worm, and no man" (Psa 22:6). The repulsive and defiling sins of the world would be laid upon Him, and He would bear them "in His body, on the tree" (Isa 53:6; 1 Pet 2:24). There, upon that cross, God would make "Him who knew no sin to be sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21). The death of the cross was a death of cursing--Divine cursing. As it is written, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Gal 3:13). There is no human language capable of adequately describing the humiliation involved in Christ's substitutionary death. The extent of Christ's humiliation confirms the eagerness of God to save! It declares the magnitude of our sin, and the requirement for Divine intervention. It should melt every heart, and compel us to deny ourselves, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. It was in Christ's flesh, that the sin of the world was condemned. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). The NIV is seriously wrong in translating the latter part of this verse "And so he condemned sin in sinful man." Our sin was condemned in Christ's flesh--in His body, if you please! O, the greatness of Divine purpose! The magnitude of Divine condescension! THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH! The reason Jesus came into the world was in order that He might DIE! Thus it is written, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death" (Heb 2:9). This is the primary reason for Him being made like unto us! In the world, men are generally noted for their life. Jesus is noted for His death. As ordinarily perceived, children are born to live. Jesus was born to die! His entrance into the world was for the solitary purpose of retrieving humanity from the fall. "THE WORD BECAME FLESH!"

HE DWELT AMONG US

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." Though veiled, it was "the Word" that dwelt among us. With Divine prerogatives left in escrow, as it were, "the Word" tabernacled among "the people who walked in darkness" (Isa 9:2; Matt 4:16). He was not born in an isolated area, but in a city at the time of taxation, when public registration was taking place. Neither, indeed, was He raised in the wilderness, but in a city teeming with activity. It was not a wholesome city, but one out of which good was not expected to come (John 1:46). Prior to His public ministry, He was known as "the carpenter," one Who interfaced with people (Mark 6:3). Throughout His ministry, He was among the people, ministering in cities, countrysides, homes, the temple, and synagogues. He attended wedding feasts, sat with publicans, and engaged in dialog with religious leaders. He "dwelt among us," a visible, active, and accessible figure. One translation says, "He set His tabernacle in our midst." Here was the ultimate fulfillment of Leviticus 26:11; "I will set My tabernacle among you." This was a time when, as Ezekiel put it, "My sanctuary is in their midst" (Ezek 37:28). Jesus was the ambulatory Temple of God, set up among men. By "dwelt among us," more is meant than merely being where we are. It was here that the enfleshed Word "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). He confronted the devil for extended periods, facing focused and powerful temptation (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 22:40-44). He experienced weariness (John 4:6), hunger (Matt 4:2), rejection (Isa 53:5), sorrow (Matt 26:37), inner groaning (John 11:33,38), and weeping (Luke 19:41; John 11:35). The attacks of men, Satan, and the power of darkness fell upon Him. He was identified with us in human experience, particularly as it relates to maintaining identify with God. He faced the Tempter as One stripped of Divine entitlements, and in a weakened state. He felt the downward pull of the flesh, and extended effort to resist the urge to sin. He thus triumphed over the wicked one, displaying his inferiority. Just as He was born to die, He dwelt among us for a high purpose. That purpose relates to His intercessory work. He is our appointed High Priest, sitting at the right hand of God in our behalf. His presence there is focused in objective. He is not merely keeping the wrath of God from coming upon our heads. As our High Priest, He is ministering required resources to His people. He is mediating the New Covenant, bringing the benefits of it to those who have "received Him" (John 1:12). What is more, He is accomplishing this work as one Who is able to "be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15). His heart is in His indispensable work, because "He dwelt among us." His entrance into the arena of warfare enabled Him to be a "merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). To be an effective High Priest "for men," Jesus had to be "taken from among men" (Heb 5:1). That is one of the fundamental reasons He "dwelt among us." Our present spiritual sustenance and upholding is owing to Him being a "merciful and faithful High Priest." It was His tenure among us that so wonderfully suited Him for this ministry. He now ministers to us as One familiar with our situation. He not only has

what we need, but desires to give it.

WE BEHELD HIS GLORY

"And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." There have been times when the presence of Deity was undetected. When Jacob wrestled with an angel through the night, he awakened to say, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen 28:16). Earlier in this very Gospel, John affirmed, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him" (John 1:10). Prior to baptizing Jesus, John the Baptist confessed, "I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water" (John 1:31,33). Christ's true identity was generally hidden from men during his term in the flesh. As Isaiah prophesied, "And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa 53:2). When Jesus was among men, He was not perceived with the clarity now possible. One time, however, Peter caught a glimpse of the Son of God. Because the Father revealed it to him, Peter saw Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). There were times when the disciples "marveled" at His power (Matt 21:20; Mark 6:51; Luke 8:25; Luke 24:41). But after Christ was exalted, they beheld Him in a fuller and more productive way. Toward the very end of Christ's ministry, the disciples still did not have a clear view of Christ. Even after His resurrection, it is said of the chiefest of them, "For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). The testimony of the disciples concerning the glory of Christ did not come until AFTER His resurrection. Even though they were subjected to remarkable evidence, their hearts were not yet able to receive it. Our text, however, speaks of beholding His "GLORY." The "beholding" of which he speaks is a discerning look. Even though there was a time when His true Person was not recognized, the text speaks of the occasion of its clarity--when they saw Him in a different and invigorating manner. There are at least two ways in which His glory was "beheld," or discerned.

They Saw His Glory In The Transfiguration

Three of the Apostles were granted the privilege of beholding the glory of Christ prior to His death. He took them apart for prayer, into "an high mountain apart." There, the Spirit apprizes us, "As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening" (Luke 9:29). We are told "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light" (Matt 17:2). His inner Person burst through the shell of His body, affecting even His clothing. It was like a miniature resurrection! In that state, He was more harmonious with the unseen world than with the seen one. We know this, because of what occurred while He was in the transfigured state. From the unseen world two spiritual giants (Moses and Elijah) from centuries before, "appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). Years after Jesus had ascended into glory, and shortly before His own death, Peter recalled this event. Hear his marvelous testimony. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain" (2 Pet 1:16- 8). Compare this to Peter's response during the actual event. "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (Matt 17:4). What is the difference between the two responses? On the mountain, Peter had beheld the glory of the Word becoming flesh, but did not comprehend it. When he wrote his epistle, the magnitude of that glory had burst upon his soul. Like Jacob, he appreciated the vision AFTER it had occurred more than during it.

They Saw His Glory In Recollection

His glory was seen in retrospect. As the Apostles reflected upon their time with Christ, He was revealed to them in the fullest sense. Think of John's wonderful recollection of the enfleshed Word. "That which was from the beginning, which we have HEARD, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life; the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us" (1 John 1:1-2). This was an enlightened view! What did they see "with their eyes?" It was "That which was from the beginning"--the Word made flesh! Mark it well, GOD WAS BROUGHT WITHIN THE RANGE OF THEIR SENSES! The God Whose judgments are "unsearchable" and ways "past finding out" (Rom 11:33), became apparent to them! They "looked upon Him" Who by nature is "invisible." This was not a mere apparition. It was not a mirage, or an imagination. Their hands "handled" Him! They saw Him as "that eternal life which was with the Father." Reflecting upon their time with Him, they saw a pattern of the Divine Nature in a body, in this world! They walked with Him, talked with Him, were taught by Him, and became acquainted with Him. They "beheld His glory!" They witnessed Divine initiative and response, Holy action and impulse! But they beheld His glory in a unique way: as "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Not a mere teacher! Not a mere worker of miracles! Not as One who could stop the mouths of His critics, command a fig tree to dry up by the roots, and even calm a raging storm. That is not how they beheld Him! They did not perceive Him as having power over all disease, the world of demons, and death itself--even though undeniable evidence of this power was presented to them during His ministry. They did not see His glory as one Who could multiply bread and fish, straighten a woman bowed over for eighteen years, or restore a withered hand. Think about what I am saying! When beholding His glory, their minds were not drawn to His power to stop a twelve year old issue of blood, raise the feverish mother-in-law of Peter, or walking on a raging sea. They did not recall how He healed the deaf, the dumb, the blind, and the lame. When they beheld His glory, they perceived Him as "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In Christ, they caught a glimpse of God the Father Himself! GOD WAS BROUGHT

WITHIN THE RANGE OF THEIR SENSES! Here was the "fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9). This was not coincidence, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Col 1:19). Here, in the Son of God, was the most precise expression of God. Moses articulated the Law of God. The holy Prophets declared the purpose of God. John the Baptist declaring the coming of the Lamb of God. The Apostles articulated God's great salvation. But the Son of God articulated God Himself. HE IS THE APPOINTED EXPOSITOR OF GOD! In a most remarkable affirmation, Jesus declared, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). If ever men are to be brought to God, it will be through God's "only Begotten" (John 14:6). In fact, He has been appointed to "bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). If He is not perceived, men will not come! "The only Begotten of the Father" not only is the Expositor of God, He has a desire to expound the Father to those who will come to Him. While He tabernacled among us, He revealed this aspect of His nature and ministry. The Holy Spirit moved Matthew to record this for our encouragement. Again, He affirmed, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt 11:27). Were this all we knew about the matter, it could prove discouraging! It certainly does expose the poverty of the world's wisdom and mere human efforts to know God. Is it possible to know the one to whom Jesus wants to reveal the Father? Jesus did not leave the matter here. Remember, He is the "fulness of the Godhead bodily," and thus will reveal to us the heart of God. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30). Hear His plea! "COME TO ME!" And why so? Why should we come to Him? Because He has a desire to show the Father to us--to reveal Him to us! He knows that alone will satisfy the laborer, and relieve the heaven burdens of life. In the knowledge of God, you will find "rest for your souls." Knowing Him gives you the advantage!

FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH

You cannot improve upon this expression: "full of grace and truth." Every major translation reads this way: "full of grace and truth" (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, Websters, Darby, Young's Literal, etc.). It is rare, indeed, to find such unanimity among translators! The word "full" means more than simply filled up with. This comes from the word *patroj*, which means complete or full grown. The idea is that the full scope of both grace and truth are found in Christ Jesus--in both His Person and accomplishments. Here are two qualities that came in their fulness in the Person and ministry of Jesus Christ. As it is written, "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). These were among the Divine qualities revealed to Moses: "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth . . ." (Ex 34:6). The "sweet Psalmist of Israel" also spoke of these magnificent traits in the fortieth Psalm. "I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth From the great assembly. Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me" (Psa 40:10-11). Again, he wrote, "He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!" (Psa 61:7). And again, "All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies" (Psa 25:10). What is "grace and truth," the glorious attributes with which Jesus was filled? Here is the compendium of Divine power, required to meet human need. Grace to cover the past, obtain righteousness, and walk in Divine favor. Truth to uphold, illuminate, and provide a basis for fellowship. Both of these are necessary for our salvation. We must walk in the smile of God, favored and preferred by Him. Yet, we must also be in strict harmony with the truth, allowing no aspect of the Divine nature to be obscured or minimized. Until "the Word became flesh," this was NOT possible. Apart from the promise of God, there was not the faintest glimmering of hope. Man could not measure up to the Law, and God could not forget it. But in Jesus, the Son of God, grace and truth were brought together in an union that was not dissolvable. In Him, the Scripture is fulfilled, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa 85:10). This fulness is not an end of itself, but the Divinely appointed means to an end. In Christ, both grace and truth became accessible to humanity. He brought them within our reach, so to speak. Whatever is demanded to be delivered from sin is found in Jesus--and in abundance. He is "FULL of grace and truth." Things required to successfully resist the devil are plentiful in Christ Jesus. He is "full of grace and truth." Resources necessary to successfully negotiate the straits from earth to glory are found in rich supply in Christ Jesus. He is "full of grace and truth." Hopelessness has taken flight, as the eagle of hope has taken the place of dominance--and it is all because "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." He did not cohabit with us as a spectator, but as a concrete demonstration of Divine intent. He tasted of the dregs of human experience, in order that the supply of grace

and truth, resident in His person, might flow freely to those who embrace Him. As surely as He IS, so surely His grace and truth are accessible.

CONCLUSION

In this world, there are a variety of things with which we can become preoccupied. Under the administration of the "old serpent," men and women are being distracted to lesser things, inferior considerations. They appear noble on the surface, but they are not worthy of the place of preeminence. It is good that we be concerned for them, but they must not be allowed to sit upon the throne of our hearts. Some are preoccupied with people, others with government, and some with self advancement. Still others are enamored of the church, while some are preoccupied with sinners. Such pursuits are fraught with sorrow and emotional ups and downs. The reason for this is quite simple. The pursuits I have mentioned all center in mankind. The wisest among us will acknowledge men are, by nature, erratic, inconsistent, and unstable. A house built around them will crumble to the ground! I have become preoccupied with Jesus. My single quest is to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. The loss of all things is a small price to pay for His fellowship. I call you to a deeper consideration of the Son of God. I summon you to make Him your quest. There is no more noble pursuit, no more venerable goal, no more rewarding enterprise. You can possess the same driving compulsion Paul had. Hear his own words, and take them into your heart. "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:7-11). But it will require all of your effort. As seasoned as you may be, you have not yet attained to the goal. Hear the Apostle once again on this matter. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12-14). The greatness of Christ demands a wholehearted effort. If He humbled Himself, coming so far to save me, He will surely give me power to come to Him, experience grace and truth from Him, and at last dwell forever with Him! The upward call CAN be fulfilled because of the Word, Who, in the beginning, came down!