

REAL CIRCUMCISION

"For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." (Rom 2:29)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The matter of receiving a righteousness from God, or being justified, is the most critical concern for men in Scripture. Nothing is more important than this. If God does not recognize us as righteous, there is no chance of being saved, for "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 1:9). The salvation of God makes absolutely no provision for an unrighteous person to be "ever with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). In order to avoid condemnation and gain Divine acceptance, there must come a time when a person is effectively delivered from the category of "unrighteous," and, in truth, is placed in the category of the righteous. This series of devotions has to do with that change.

In his letter to the Romans, and through the inspiration of God, Paul has already declared "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). That is part of the Gospel proclamation. The whole of that thought begins with Romans 1:16, and concludes in Romans 1:18: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For THEREIN [in the Gospel itself] IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN of men, who hold [back] the truth in unrighteousness." There is no possibility of this not taking place.

The Divine nature will eventually break forth in consuming fury against everyone and everything contradictory to it. It is only "the longsuffering" and "goodness of God" that keeps this from occurring now. However, these marvelous qualities will not continue toward those who are ungodly – those who lack the righteousness of God. The salvation of God addresses this issue.

These days a gospel is being preached that conveniently omits these Divinely revealed associations: a powerful Gospel, the revelation of the righteousness of God, and the appointed outbreak of Divine wrath against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness. The

Gospel is a powerful proclamation of Divine provision to escape the wrath of God that will inevitably be revealed against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

There are a number of erroneous doctrines that mitigate the effects of Romans 1:16-18. One such doctrine is that of annihilationism, or the final extinction of the wicked. This doctrine diminishes the view of Divine wrath that is revealed. Those who teach this doctrine have great difficulty seeing God as capable of rendering the kind of judgment that is declared in Scripture: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev 20:10). “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt 25:41). “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name” (Rev 14:10-11).

For some, this is too harsh – too unlike God. They say they want to present a more merciful God, and so they tell their listeners that the fire of God will finally consume the wicked, and their punishment will end.

The very thing such a teaching conceals is the fact that God is first of all righteous, not merciful. His righteousness trumps His love, and does so to such a degree that saving people must be the righteous thing to do, else it cannot be done – loving the world or not. That is the whole reason for Jesus Christ. By laying the sins of the world upon Him, then condemning sin in His flesh (Rom 8:3), the way was cleared for God to be righteous in forgiving men. Therefore it is proclaimed, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:25-26). It is God’s righteousness that actually is at the root of forgiveness. Any doctrine that obscures that truth cannot possibly be true.

Chapter 2

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ESSENTIAL

“But now the righteousness of God has been revealed independently and altogether apart from the Law, although actually it is attested by the Law and the Prophets, Namely, the righteousness of God which comes by believing with personal trust and confident reliance on Jesus Christ (the Messiah). [And it is meant] for all who believe. For there is no distinction, Since all have sinned and are falling short of the honor and glory which God bestows and receives.” (Rom 3:21-23, Amplified Bible)

To further confirm the reality that true circumcision is of the heart, and not in the flesh, the Spirit confronts those who imagine they can develop a righteousness on their own. “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa 64:6). If some protest, saying this only applied to the Jews, and not to everyone, all doubt is decimated by this word. “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is

none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Rom 3:10-12; Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3). Although men argue over this fact, it is actually beyond debate. This is the Divine assessment, and must be addressed if men are to be saved.

Even though the salvation of God is being accomplished with the extensive involvement the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, men are tempted to think little personal involvement is required of men. Satan has succeeded in deluding them into believing God will graciously overlook their situation. Too, they also are convinced a minimal amount of input is required of them – not only initially, but throughout the whole of their lives. To further complicate the matter, the absolute necessity, and even possibility, of a total change in the character of the individual is seriously doubted among many wearing the name of Christ. Even though all “Christians” are admonished, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), it is glaringly obvious that very few professing Christians believe that to be necessary.

The Law confirmed God cannot be served seasonally, or in activities that are an adjunct to life itself. This is precisely how the Israelites worshiped and served the Lord. This was not the heart and soul of their life, but a rather grievous and tedious addition to it. Furthermore, it was a burdensome one to them. They saw no correlation between serving the Lord and life itself. That is why they said, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” (Mal 3:14, NASB).

While we may be tempted to chide the Israelites for their inconsistency, care must be taken NOT to miss the point being made by the Holy Spirit. It is simply this: men without the righteousness of God cannot live acceptably to God, because they are fundamentally unlike Him. The only change that can be made is through faith, which accounts for the unusual men and women prior to Jesus. Their superiority was not due to more hearty effort, or the greater discipline of their mind on their part. It was their faith that made them unique. As it is written, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith” (Heb 11:39).

Chapter 3

THE MINISTRY OF CONDEMNATION

For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” (2 Cor 3:9)

The law was a ministry of condemnation, as compared with the New Covenant, which is “the ministration of righteousness,” or the appointed means of becoming righteous. Yet, those under the Law tended to view it as the means to their justification. The third chapter of Second Corinthians provides a vivid picture of the Law and its relationship to our natural condition. Although “glorious,” it was “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones” (v. 7). It produced death, not life. For this reason, it was called “the ministration of condemnation” (v. 9), because it revealed the alienated condition of men.

Furthermore, the Law has no transforming power. It could not change the human condition, but only identify it. Concerning the forbidden tree, the Lord told Adam, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). Indeed, “by one man sin entered

into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12). A chasm was thus formed between man and God that was too vast to be bridged by human effort – any human effort, regardless of size or longevity. Only God is able to resolve this problem!

The Law was delivered to confirm this was the case. It was not given to remedy the situation, but to clarify, and even compound, it. Thus it is written, “Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound” (Rom 5:20). And again, “But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (Rom 7:13, NKJV). The nature of sin was not changed, or increased by the Law. Rather, its wickedness became more apparent.

If man could recover from sin on his own, the ministry of the Law would not have been necessary. Sin, in such a case, would not have been “exceedingly sinful,” but merely a human weakness that could be addressed by human wisdom.

It is one of the ironies of humanity that in spite of this pointed ministry of the Law, those who choose it as a means to reach God become self-confident. They think nothing of putting their trust in their own abilities. It is no wonder Paul wrote, “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom 7:11).

Because of these circumstances, the Spirit drives the point home of our need for a righteousness that comes from God. He is going to reason with our hearts, showing there is no possible way to remain honest and avoid the conclusion that our own righteousness, under any and every circumstance, is unacceptable to God. In order to do this, HE will focus on the highest and most notable mark of the Old Covenant - circumcision. If there is an independent work that can cause men to be acceptable, it will be circumcision.

Chapter 4

WHEN CIRCUMCISION IS PROFITABLE

“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” (Rom 2:25)

It is tragic that so very little is known of “circumcision” within the modern church. It was a most significant ordinance, acquainting men with tokens of a Divine covenant. In its various forms, the word “circumcise” is mentioned no less than fifty-three times in Scripture (Gen 7:11,12,13,14,23,24,25,26,27; 21:4; 34:15,21,22,24; Ex 4:26; 12:44,48; Lev 12:3; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Josh 5:2,3,4,5,7,8; 7:22,23; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Lk 1:59; 2:21; John 7:22; Acts 7:8; 10:45; 11:2; 15:1,5,24; 21:21; Rom 2:25,26,27,28,29; 3:1,30; 4:9,10,11,12; 15:8; 1 Cor 7:18,19; Gal 2:3,7,8,9,12; 5:2,3,6,11; 6:12,13; Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3,5; Col 2:11; 3:11; 4:11; Tit 1:10).

Because the covenant of circumcision was given before the Law to Abraham (Gen 17:9-14), many early Christians thought it was an ordinance included in the New Covenant, and that a person could not be saved without being circumcised. They obviously overlooked that the New Covenant also applied to women (Acts 2:17-18). Thus some from the church at Jerusalem circulated among Gentile churches teaching, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). At the first, Paul and Barnabas, who were preaching among the Gentiles, “had no small dissension and disputation with them” (Acts 15:2). However, because the issue could not

be settled among them in Antioch, a conference of “the apostles and elders” convened in Jerusalem to search out the truth on this matter (Acts 15:2).

Peter, who first preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, reported his experience at the house of Cornelius, during which those present were “saved,” with God attesting to the fact that they had been accepted. Peter also commanded them to be baptized, not circumcised (Acts 10:47-48). He then concluded by saying, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11). Barnabas and Saul also reported their experience among the Gentiles, reporting that “God had wrought among the Gentiles by them,” even though, even though the recipients of their message had not been circumcised (Acts 15:12).

The conclusion reached at that meeting was that circumcision, as practiced by the Jews, was not related to the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. James concluded that this was in complete agreement with the Scriptures. Letters were then sent to the Gentile churches in which it was affirmed that those teaching the necessity of circumcision were not sent out by the church at Jerusalem, and that their doctrine was not true (Acts 15:13-21). Paul and Barnabas were the ones who carried these letters to the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22-23).

Now, in his letter to the church in Rome, Paul wrote about this matter of circumcision. He states that in order for circumcision to have any profit, the person being circumcised had to have kept the Law. “For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision” (Rom 2:25). In such a case, circumcision would have been the verification of a condition that already existed, not the cause of the condition. As with Abraham, the covenant of circumcision was made AFTER Abraham’s acceptance, and after the promise of God had been vouchsafed to him (Rom 4:10). If a person did not keep the Law, and yet was circumcised in hope of being saved, his circumcision would only attest to his rejection, not his acceptance. This is a high form of reasoning, but it buttresses the fact that salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Chapter 5

ASSOCIATED WITH ABRAHAM

Circumcision is first mentioned in relation to Abraham. When Abram was ninety-nine years of age, after Ishmael was born, the Lord appeared to him. At that time, the Lord said, “And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly” (Gen 17:2). This was in keeping with the Lord’s promise to Abraham approximately three years earlier, and prior to the conception of Ishmael. “On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates; the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites’” (Gen 15:18-21). The only covenant made with men prior to this was made with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17). The covenant with Abraham, however, differed significantly from that with Noah. That covenant established safety for Noah and his family during the flood. It also assured the world would never again be destroyed with a flood.

The covenant with Abraham, however, was one of blessing. At the time God made this covenant, he changed Abram's name to Abraham. "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations" (17:5). Having promised the land of Canaan to Abraham for "an everlasting possession," the Lord said, "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you" (17:10-11). The requirement applied to every male offspring of Abraham, of all generations, and to any foreigner among them as well (v 12).

The requirement was exacting, with no leniency at all. The covenant of God would be ratified in the flesh of Abraham's progeny. "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (v. 13-14).

The covenant was further defined as being through Isaac's lineage, and not that of Ishmael. When Abraham suggested that the covenant might be fulfilled through Ishmael, the Lord said, "No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him . . . But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year" (17:19,21).

In faith, Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord. "Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him" (Gen 21:4). Stephen referred to this occasion in his eloquent defense of the faith. "Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day" (Acts 7:8).

You may recall that Joseph and Mary also honored this covenant, circumcising Jesus when He was eight days old. "And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (Lk 2:21). That took place about 2,000 years after the circumcision of Isaac.

As time progressed, God would unveil the real circumcision of which that given to Abraham was an introductory type. In Abraham, the concept of circumcision was introduced and developed.

Chapter 6

A SIGN AND SEAL OF THE COVENANT

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." (Rom 4:11)

In delineating the truth of justification by faith, Paul brings up Abrahamic circumcision. A few words concerning this are in order. In Genesis, the Lord said circumcision was the covenant of God "in your flesh." Referring to the same truth, Paul wrote, "And he

received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11). That sign was the proof of the covenant. It was known to the possessor, but was hidden from the view of others.

JUDAISTIC TROUBLERS

The early church was troubled with legalistic judaizers. There were those who insisted that circumcision was still incumbent upon all in covenant with God – even those in Jesus Christ. On one occasion “certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). To the unspiritual mind, it all seemed to make sense. After all, Jesus had given no indication that circumcision would be abrogated. The few words He said about it did not seem to indicate the ordinance would ever end (John 7:22-23).

These law-binders could point to chapter and verse to confirm their insistence that all males be circumcised. There was no question about the wording of these texts. “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:11).

The Galatians confronted false teachers who “compelled” them “to be circumcised” (Gal 6:12). These teachers, besides having corrupt hearts, did not know the nature of the new covenant.

Four hundred and fifty years after Abraham, Moses spoke of the necessity of a higher form of circumcision. “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut 10:16). Realizing they were incapable of doing this, he also foretold of the time when God would accomplish the circumcision of the heart. “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). A “better covenant,” “established upon better promises” was needed if men were to become truly righteous (Heb 8:6).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

I have taken the time to briefly review the background of circumcision because of the general ignorance concerning it. Also, considerable is made of circumcision in the epistle to the Romans (Rom 2:25-29; 3:1,30; 4:9-12; 15:8). It therefore behooves us to have a working knowledge of it. Briefly stated, it was an external sign of a Divine covenant.

Chapter 7

A BREAKER OF THE LAW

The Spirit now confronts the legalist with an arresting consideration. “For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision” (Rom 2:25).

Those who imagine that possessing the sign and the seal was all there was to it are simply wrong. Conforming to outward requirements was never intended to be a basis of confidence before God – not even in Abraham. It is never right to put faith in “the sign and the seal” rather than in the God of the covenant.

Even under the First Covenant, circumcision brought no personal advantage apart from obedience to the law. “For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law.”

Remember, the subject of discussion is being righteous before God. Under the Law, Divine acceptance was granted upon the basis of DOING what the Law commanded, not being circumcised. Thus it was written, “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who DOES those things shall live by them’” (Rom 10:5). Note, righteousness is here equated with life. This is spiritual life, or being recognized by, and in fellowship, with the Lord.

Men – religious men – continue to have trouble with this declaration. Because of Satanic delusion, men tend to trust in what they have done, or what they have experienced, instead of having faith in God Himself. I come from a background where men tended to trust in the fact that they had been baptized. However, baptism, though absolutely essential, is not intended to be the object of our faith. Others I have known, trusted in what they perceived to be the baptism of the Holy Spirit – an experience that, in some circles, supercedes faith itself.

Speaking to those who had a penchant for Law, and were deceived into thinking that salvation was by works, Paul refers to “a breaker of the law.” Other versions read, “transgressor of the Law” (NASB), “go against the Law” (BBE), and “don’t obey God’s laws” (NLT).

Breaking the Law meant breaking any part of it. In this view, the Law was like a ten-link chain on which the sinner was clinging. As long as that chain was not broken, the person was safe. However, if just one link broke, the chain was no longer effective, and the person was lost. Paul likens such a person to an “uncircumcised” person, who had no covenant with God at all – a Gentile.

The point Paul is making is this: If you are going to trust in what you do, you have to do it all! Every single commandment must be perfectly kept at all times, with not so much as a single offence being allowed. That is what it means to be saved by works, as compared to being saved by grace through faith.

When it comes to the matter of faith, there is no “God’s part”/“your part” equation. In another discussion of this matter, Paul made this statement: “But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:). Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)” (Rom 10:6-7). The point here is that if the effectiveness of your salvation is owing to what you do, then you must personally go up into heaven and bring Christ down so He can die for the sins of the world. Then you must go down into the region of the dead and bring Him up, raising Him from the dead. These are things that must be done, and if your salvation really hinges on what you do, then you must do them both.

The novice-thinker will imagine that this means the person is not obligated to do anything – but that it is disgraceful to think in such a juvenile manner. What it does mean is that our faith must not be in what we do – like the Jew could not trust in his circumcision, even though he did have to be circumcised.

Allow me to state this same truth in a manner that touches upon the current religion scene. If a person who is baptized continues to live in sin, dominated by it, his baptism is made a source of condemnation to him. In such a case, God will treat the individual as

one who has not been baptized at all. (Rom 6:1-16).

Chapter 8

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE LAW

Righteousness, or spiritual life, was not promised because men were circumcised, but ONLY if they did precisely what the Law said. Hear it again from the words of Moses. “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: WHICH IF A MAN DO, he shall live in them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). Permit me to call Nehemiah to the witness stand. “. . . yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (WHICH IF A MAN DO, he shall live in them)” (Neh 9:29). Hear Ezekiel the prophet affirm the same thing. “And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, WHICH IF A MAN DO, he shall even live in them” (Ezek 20:11). Hear the Lord Jesus Himself as He spoke to a man inquiring what he should DO to inherit eternal life. After telling him to keep the commandments, Jesus “said unto him, Thou hast answered right: THIS DO, and thou shalt live” (Lk 10:28). Paul reminded the brethren in Rome, “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Rom 2:13). Again, the Spirit says to the Galatians, who were retrogressing to Law for justification, “And the law is not of faith: but, THE MAN THAT DOETH THEM shall live in them” (Gal 3:12).

CIRCUMCISION DID NOT NEGATE THE REQUIREMENT FOR PERFECT OBEDIENCE

Circumcision did not take the place of DOING to obtain life, or righteousness. Remember, the Old Covenant offered righteousness, or life, strictly upon the basis of perfect compliance with its demands (Ex 15:26; Lev 18:5; Deut 30:16; Ezek 18:21). Under it circumcision was a sign that the individual was within that covenant. If, however, that Law was broken, circumcision was invalidated.

The books of Moses are filled with the names of those who were severely punished, and even died, because they broke the law. Their circumcision was not sufficient to exempt them from Divine judgment. Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-3), Korah and his cohorts (Num 16:19-32), and over 600,000 who refused to obey, and thus fell in the wilderness (Num 14:26-34). Who can forget Saul being stripped of his kingship (1 Sam 16:1,14), or Samson losing his strength (Judges 16:20). All of these people were circumcised, but it was of no avail when they became obstinate and disobeyed the Lord.

When it came to the matter of righteousness (which is the subject of discussion), the Jew’s disobedience invalidated their circumcision.

Inclusion in the Old Covenant, which was confirmed by circumcision, required complete obedience to the Law. Where this did not occur, no confidence could be placed in circumcision. Life and acceptance were not offered because the people had been circumcised. Rather, they were circumcised because they were chosen and blessed by God. To boast, therefore, in the “sign and the seal” brought no glory to God.

WHY BRING THIS UP?

This is not a mere discourse on circumcision. The Spirit is addressing the Jews who thought themselves worthy to judge others simply because they were a chosen people. They trusted in their possession of the Law, and boasted in the ordained seal of

circumcision.

To state it more succinctly, they were trusting in what they had been given, rather than in the Giver. The Spirit is taking this boast away from them. He is confirming that our acceptance is strictly based upon faith, and that it alone can appropriate the righteousness of God.

Chapter 9

WHEN ORDAINED SIGNS ARE NEGATED

The Jews were not the last persons to rely on signs for confidence. Many still imagine they can take the place of faith, which alone can appropriate the righteousness of God (Rom 3:22,26; 4:5; Phil 3:9). It is vital to understand the principle proclaimed in this text.

There is extensive teaching on this matter in the Apostolic writings. Yet, it is generally ignored by the masses, in favor of some external and visible evidence of imagined Divine approval.

NOT OF WORKS

When it comes to the appropriation of righteousness, the cause is not human achievement. Strict adherence to the Law, for example, will NEVER result in justification. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). The “deeds” demanded by the Law had to be perfect, with not the slightest deviation from the Divine requirement.

The appropriation of grace is absolutely essential. Yet, works cannot take hold of grace. Only faith can seize the grace of God. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

The salvation and calling of God were not induced by our works, but by His own determined objective. They were driven by His grace, not our accomplishments. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim, 1:9).

Our experience of the kindness and tender love of God was not His response to our own works. Salvation came through MERCY, not recognition of our attainments. “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:4-5, NKJV).

Men will remonstrate at this declaration, saying we are not saved by faith alone, but by works (James 2:24). But James is not speaking of obtaining justification, or righteousness, but of confirming its presence. Faith works, and consistently so – but it is never the result of work. When we become “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), that nature works within us “both to will and to do” (Phil 2:13). But it is not conferred upon us because of our works. Men are not righteous because they live for God, but live for God because they are righteous.

Allow me to be even more simplistic. Men are not born again because they are good, but are good because they are born again – and only good men can do good works. To put it

in the words of our blessed Lord, “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).

The reason for this arrangement should be obvious. A religion that places confidence in human achievement or benefits conferred by God Himself, has no need for Christ. In such a case, there is really no need for an Intercessor in heaven, or a powerful Holy Spirit within. The point in all such religion is what men can and ought to do, NOT what the Lord has done.

The Old Covenant was precisely that kind of covenant. It relied upon the people, promising life to those who DID what the Law demanded. Such a covenant was “weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3), not bringing righteousness to men. The New Covenant is certainly not another covenant of the same order. It is a different kind of covenant, with a superior foundation and better promises.

Chapter 10

TRUSTING IN EVIDENCES

There is a proneness in men to base their faith on evidence, rather than in the Living God, as revealed through His Word, not nature. In some circles, this is even thought to be commendable. But it is not. You may recall that Thomas once said, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Eight days later, when Jesus again appeared to His disciples, Thomas was also present. Confronted with the evidence of a real risen Savior, Thomas cried out, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus then pronounced a blessing – BUT NOT UPON THOMAS. “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: BLESSED are they that have NOT seen, and YET HAVE BELIEVED” (John 20:25-29).

Lest we miss the point, circumcision was the evidence – the SIGN of the covenant, and not the covenant itself. It could not gain access to God for those who had transgressed the covenant, of which it was the sign and the seal (Rom 4:11). Disobedience reduced the circumcised person to the same condemnation leveled against the Gentiles.

TRUSTING IN EXTERNAL; EVIDENCE

It is not uncommon to hear of some scientist finding evidence that a person mentioned in the Bible actually did live, or that an event recorded in Scripture really took place. Some take this as the crowning evidence of the truth of the Word of God. The penchant for this kind of reasoning has been embodied in the modern concept of apologetics. It is truest form, however, apologetics is not presenting proofs, but bearing testimony to one’s faith. Paul, for example, delivered an apologetic to Agrippa (Acts 26:1-28). He presented the case for why he was a “Christian,” and the testimony had a significant impact on the king. That was an apologetic.

But today, this is not what the term “apologetics” denotes. It is rather an approach to proving the existence of God, or the truth of Scripture, by means of external evidence. By modern definition “apologetics” means, “systematic argumentative discourse in defense (as of a doctrine), a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity” (Random House Webster’s Dictionary). That such evidence exists cannot be denied. That it is to be trusted, is emphatically denied. If a person does

not believe what God has said, there is simply no other way of persuading that person that he ought to believe. Jesus refused to provide external evidence for those who did not believe, yet wanted to see a sign so, they alleged, they would believe. To such unbelievers Jesus said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:39-40) – and there was not a person on earth who actually saw Jesus rise from the dead. Jesus did appear to especially chosen people, confirming that He was alive from the dead (Acts 10:41). Even then, the appearance was not merely to convince them, but to qualify them as witnesses of His Person and power – “witnesses chosen before of God” (Acts 10:41).

For others, there is a temptation to trust in what they have experienced rather than in the God who causes the experience. Chief among these people are those who preach a sectarian view of being baptized in the Holy Spirit, carefully adding, “with the evidence of speaking in tongues” – a phrase that is nowhere found in the Word of God. That view represents a human conclusion, not a Divine affirmation. On the day of Pentecost, for example, when 3,000 were convicted by what Peter said, He was not speaking in tongues to them. That was a phenomenon that had just happened before Peter commenced speaking to them. The hearers had not been astounded by the mere phenomenon of Galileans speaking in tongues, but by what they heard them saying in their own native languages – “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). At the house of Cornelius a similar thing occurred that convinced Peter of the acceptance of the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit “fell on them,” Peter observed, “as on us at the beginning.” While Peter heard the people there speaking in other languages, it is noted that they were “magnifying God” (Acts 10:47) – not by saying something that could not be understood, but by speaking something that could be understood. I would not doubt that those in Cornelius’ house magnified God in Hebrew. At any rate, as at Pentecost, it is what the people said that impressed the hearers.

Believing, or trusting, must be based upon a word, not an act or an experience. Faith comes “by hearing” (Rom 10:17), not by experiencing or substantiating the Word with tangible evidence.

Chapter 11

TRUSTING IN ORDINANCES, #1

Just as the Jews, under the First Covenant, were prone to trust in ordinances, particularly circumcision, so those in Christ are tempted to trust in the ordinances delivered to them. The Jews, you may recall, made an idol out of the brazen serpent, burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4). The brazen serpent was given by God, and was the means through which healing was brought to disobedient Israelites. Yet, it was never intended to take the place of God. So it is with blessed ordinances that have been given through Christ to us. They are from God, and are not to be despised or rejected. Yet, they are not intended to take the place of the Lord, or become the objects of faith and confidence.

BAPTISM INTO CHRIST

Our baptism into Christ is one of the great occasions of life. It is the point at which we are identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3-6). This is the

one thing Peter “commanded” the household of Cornelius to do (Acts 10:48). There is never a question about the necessity or benefits of baptism in Scripture. Like Jewish circumcision, it is, of itself, always viewed in a favorable manner, and never in an unfavorable manner, or a way that could be considered condescending.

For example, no one in Scripture ever said anything like, “Baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with salvation,” or “Baptism is into the church, not into Christ.” These, and other similar sayings, are the reflection of a corrupted mind, and reveal an ignorance, and possibly the disdain, of the Word of God. When such statements as “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3-40, and, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27), have been written as inspired by “the inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16), what would compel someone to say that baptism has nothing to do with salvation? Only a fool would say being affiliated with Christ’s death, or putting on Christ, has nothing to do with salvation. Add to that the fact that Christ, in what men call “the great commission,” commanded that disciples be baptized (Matt 28:18), and was specific in associating it with blessing “saved” (Mark 16:16). That is not to mention that the remission of sins and receiving the Holy Spirit are also associated with baptism (Acts 2:38). The Ethiopian eunuch, after hearing Philip preach Christ, concluded that he ought to be baptized – in water (Acts 8:36).

What has caused men to even raise the question concerning whether or not they should be baptized? What spirit has moved men to say baptism is unrelated to salvation? It certainly is not anything Jesus said, or His commissioned apostles said or wrote. They have been compelled to make such a statement by the doctrines of men, and systems of theology that have had their genesis with men. Because of this, their knowledge is confirmed to be deficient, and their sincerity is questionable. Red faces and blustering arguments cannot change those realities.

However, having said all of that, our baptism is neither the objective or foundation of our faith. As indispensable as it is, it cannot make up for a lack of faith. The commandment is, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Unless it is coupled with faith, baptism brings no advantage whatsoever to the individual – and faith is not in baptism, but in Jesus.

Let it be clear, God does not, nor do we, recognize any individual who refuses to be baptized as being “saved,” or even being a “disciple” of Jesus. We refuse to make a final determination concerning their destiny. That is in the hands of God. However, we cannot pretend as though not being baptized into Christ leaves a person in an acceptable state. If the Pharisees were judged for not submitting to John’s baptism (Lk 7:30), what can be said of those who do not submit to one ordained by Jesus?

But woe be to the person who trusts in his baptism rather than in the Christ into whom he was baptized! Baptism is the means, not the objective, even as with all other acts of obedience. It is not to be despised, nor is it to be vaunted to the most prominent place. Having come from a background where great numbers of unholy and disinterested people were convinced they were alright with God because they had been baptized, this is a sensitive subject with me.

TRUSTING IN ORDINANCES, #2

PARTAKING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

“When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.” (1 Cor 11:20)

The church in Corinth was one of, if not the most, spiritually fractured church in Scripture. There were divisions among them, even at the Lord's Table (1 Cor 11:18). Paul took them to task for this. It apparently was their custom to accompany the Lord's Table with a meal, supposing that this was the manner in which they should observe this ordinance. At that meal, however, they practiced division. Some of the people who were “better off,” so to speak, brought a lavish meal, and served it up to themselves. Others, who were poor, had little or nothing to bring, and the rest of the church was pleased to have them remain that way. Here, at the Table of the Lord, those divisive Corinthians were serving their own interests, feeding their own appetites, and forgetting about members of God's household.

Paul chided them, reminding them that the people of God did not come together to feed their bellies. “What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not” (1 Cor 11:22). It is during this corrective teaching that our text for this devotion was written: “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper” (1 Cor 11:20). Other versions read, “So when you gather for your meetings, it is not the supper instituted by the Lord that you eat” (Amplified), and “When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat” (ESV). In other words, the division they practiced at this table voided their participation in the Lord's Table. Their division was the result of eating at the devil's table, and it is not possible to eat at the Lord's Table while that is being done (1 Cor 10:21). So far as their gatherings were concerned, in the record books of heaven they had not come to partake of the Lord's Table, and they really did not do so – no matter what they said. Paul further elaborated on the matter by saying, “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Cor 11:27-29).

I come from a religious heritage where much stress was placed upon baptism and the Lord's Table. Coincidentally, that heritage was not known for holiness or the profound remembrance of Christ – things characterizing those who have really been baptized (Romans 6). In fact, people that held to such a stress (as opposed to emphasizing Christ Himself), tended to depend on that their supposed observance of the Lord's Table. It was not unusual to have a host of people leave the meeting after the Lord's Table had been supposedly observed, in the preference for other family activities. The feeling of many of the people was this: “I have been baptized, and I observe the Lord's Table. Therefore, I am all right.”

Here is another ordinance put into place by the Lord Jesus Himself. Like baptism, it relates to His vicarious death, and is to be held in the highest regard. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19). “ALL” of His disciples are to partake of it (Matt

26:27). His disciples are to examine themselves and “eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor 11:28). This is not, therefore, an ordinance to be trifled with, as though it were inconsequential. Neither, indeed, is it to be the object of our faith and trust.

The Corinthian’s failure to properly partake of this supper led to the visitation of Divine judgment upon them (1 Cor 11:27-31).

Let no person imagine that eating at the Lord’s Table exempts one from the necessity of having the righteousness of God. There is no magic in this table which allows corruption to remain in the hearts of those partaking of it. A church that faithfully claims to partake of this table is not necessarily commended of God, as seen in the case of Corinth. Nor, indeed, is it to be treated as though it could be forgotten or approached with casualness. Participation in it, however, is not to be the source of our confidence.

Chapter 13

TRUSTING IN ORDINANCES, #3

ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

Early in the history of the church, people began to develop a “manner” of forsaking the assembling of the saints. Thus the admonition is given, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb 10:25). Assemblies should increase, and the exhortations to not forsake them, “so much more,” as we see the day approaching. “The day” has been viewed in a variety of ways, and all of them have some merit. Among them is the day our Lord returns, the time of judgment upon Jerusalem, the day of judgment, and the first day of the week itself. However you may choose to view it, gathering together is not to be despised. In my judgment the first day of the week is the only time that is clearly “seen” as approaching.

However, if men rely upon the attendance of the assembly to take the place of personal righteousness, they have sinned, just as surely as those who relied upon circumcision. There is nothing about the assembly of the righteous that compensates for a lack of faith, or a failure to appropriate the righteousness of God. Gathering together, singing together, listening together – none of that offsets a lack of faith, a slothful spiritual life, or a fundamentally ungodly disposition.

None of this diminishes the importance of the ordinances mentioned – any more than our text lessened the place of circumcision under the Old Covenant. Under the Law, it was not possible to have a more significant seal in the flesh than circumcision. It was so vital that those accepted by God were called “the circumcision,” and those who were not were called “the uncircumcision” (Rom 3:30; 4:9; 15:8; Eph 2:11).

But when it comes to the matter of ultimate Divine acceptance, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor 7:19). At some point, the individual must be brought into harmony with the Law of God, not being at variance with it. As it is written, “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: That the righteousness of the law MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4). This occurs when men are given the righteousness of God. We will now see that this is directly

related to being born again, or receiving a new nature. The argument is weighty, showing that a person's nature, or character, is the real point with God.

That takes precedence over the "sign" of the covenant, although it does not obviate the "sign" or "seal" of any given covenant. The possession of righteousness is the fundamental thing. Without it, nothing else is of value.

Chapter 14

WHEN THE SIGN IS VOIDED

Because of the strength of this text, I must reaffirm it. For the Jew, when God's law was broken, circumcision lost its significance. To state it another way, when men do not have the righteousness of God, it makes no difference what ordained "seal" they possess, they are NOT, in the ultimate sense, accepted by God. If one cites the Jews as a people being accepted by God, in the sense of being favored above other people (Ex 19:15; Deut 7:6,14; 10:15), it must be remembered that they were accepted upon the basis of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – not on the basis of their own merits (Rom 11:28; Lev 26:40-42; Deut 4:31; 7:7-8; 8:18; 9:5; 10:15; Psa 105:8-11).

DOES THIS NOT PRODUCE HOPELESSNESS?

The sophist will object that this removes hope from all people. How can we account for the acceptance of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David? The Spirit shouts back to us that they were accepted because of their "FAITH." In fact, that is the point of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The word "circumcision" is not mentioned a single time in that text, even though most of those cited were Jews.

Apart from faith, all is hopeless. That is the point of our text, for faith alone can appropriate the righteousness of God. That is why Paul pressed forward "to 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" (Phil 3:9).

Some object, saying "works" are part of salvation. Indeed, they are – but not the foundational part. They are not what supports the tree, nor are they the primary evidence of Divine grace. Works – valid works – are the fruit, and not the root. They are what we are re-created for, not the reason we were re-created. As it is written, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus UNTO good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10)! They are the evidence of righteousness, and not the cause of it.

With apostolic precision John writes, "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness IS righteous, even as He is righteous" (1 John 3:7). Again, John reasons, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness IS born of him" (1 John 2:29). In the case of holy works, righteousness is the cause, not the effect. Further more, the means through which righteousness is conferred is faith. This sharply contrasts with the Law, which conferred righteousness upon the basis of doing.

Chapter 15

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE POINT, NOT THE SIGN

"Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his

uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?" (Rom 2:26). Other versions read, "So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be credited to him as [equivalent to] circumcision?" (AMPLIFIED); "if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?" (ESV), AND "And if the Gentiles obey God's law, won't God declare them to be his own people?" (NLT).

Admittedly, this verse represents a form of thinking that is unacceptable to many. Yet, it is something that has been revealed from heaven, and men have no right to be confused by it. In this verse, the Spirit tears down two walls that have plagued the church.

SECTARIANISM

The first is sectarianism. This has led people to trust in positions, creeds, and ordinances, thereby removing their faith in God. By "sectarianism" I refer to what Scripture calls "heresies" (1 Cor 11:19; Gal 5:20; 2 Pet 2:1). Other versions read "factions" (NKJV), and "factions or parties" (AMPLIFIED).

The Scriptural word "heresy" means: "1) act of taking, capture: e.g. storming a city 2) choosing, choice 3) that which is chosen 4) a body of men following their own tenets (sect or party) 4a) of the Sadducees 4b) of the Pharisees 4c) of the Christians 5) dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims" (STRONG'S); "that which is chosen, a chosen course of thought and action; hence one's chosen opinion, tenet; according to the context, an opinion varying from the true exposition of the Christian faith" (THAYER). In other words, "heresies" are DIVISIONS CAUSED BY VARIANT AND CONTRADICTING TEACHING OR DOCTRINE.

In the early church there were divisions a over the matter of circumcision (Gal 2:7-12; Tit 1:10). The Pharisees and Sadducees were divided over the matter of the resurrection (Acts 23:8-21). The apostles warned of false doctrines because of their divisive effects (Col 2:22; 1 Tim 4:1; Heb 13:9).

The differing denominations of our time (and there are thousands of them) are divided because of what they teach. One of the common divisions of our time relates to baptism, which is a parallel to circumcision (Col 2:11-12). Speaking more precisely, churches are not divided over baptism itself, but WHAT MEN TEACH ABOUT BAPTISM. Those divisions, by Scriptural definition, are "heresies," which, in turn, are a work of the flesh, ranked along with "idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, HERESIES, envyings, murders, drunkenness, ravelings, and such like" (Gal 5:20-21).

As a result, men have sat in judgment upon their peers who have not subscribed to their traditions. Though the fierceness of the opposition caused by these heresies is largely polemical in our times, historically they caused fierce bloodshed, beatings, and imprisonment.

SELF CONFIDENCE

The second wall is self confidence. When men trust in signs and evidences, according to their heretical teaching, it leads to the individual relying on surface evidences, while lacking the real righteousness of God. Such a confidence is self-confidence – that is, it did not come from God. Remember, the Spirit is establishing our need for the

righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that can only be experienced by faith. Therefore, it escapes the sectarian and the self confident.

Chapter 16

CIRCUMCISION INFERIOR TO THE LAW ITSELF

Under the First Covenant, or the Law, the Law itself was the point, not its attending ordinances. Do not imagine this means the ordinances were inconsequential or of no significance. God forbid!

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

To confirm that the Spirit is not demeaning circumcision under the Law, but rather refusing to allow men to trust in it, let us consider Moses. There is a very brief account given of this great man of God that confirms the importance of circumcision. The Lord had just told Moses to go to obstinate Pharaoh and give him a most grievous message. "So I said to you, 'Let My son go, that he may serve Me'; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born" (NASB). On the way, the Lord met Moses, and "sought to kill him." The reason for this intent, we find, was that Moses had failed to circumcise the son he had through Zipporah, daughter of "the priest of Midian." It appeared as though Moses was totally insensitive of the situation, but his wife was not. The record reads, "Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.' So He let him alone. At that time she said, 'You are a bridegroom of blood'-- because of the circumcision" (Ex 4:24-26, NASB).

I give this example to remove any temptation to think of circumcision as optional among the Jews.

STIPULATIONS OF THE LAW

The Law also spoke clearly on this matter, making circumcision incumbent for every man child in any Jewish house, be he bond or free. "And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it" (Ex 12:48).

JOSHUA CIRCUMCISES THE MEN

To further show the importance of circumcision, Joshua addressed the matter when the children of Israel arrived at Jericho. BEFORE they took the city, there was something that had to be done. The record speaks for itself. "At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised" (Josh 5:2-7). The Lord's response to their action is noteworthy. "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Josh 5:9). Circumcision was certainly not an optional or insignificant ordinance!

THE LAW WAS SUPERIOR

Our text confirms the superiority of the Law to circumcision. “If those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?” (NIV)

I understand this to be a hypothetical statement. The Spirit is reasoning with us, showing that the Law was superior to circumcision, and was the reason for its existence. Although circumcision was strictly required by the Law, keeping the Law had greater weight than being circumcised. A Gentile who kept the Law, even though uncircumcised, was far superior to the Jew who was circumcised, yet disobeyed the Law. That was a hard pill for the Judaizers to swallow!

The point is that keeping the Law was the intent of making a covenant with Israel, not a mere fleshly distinction. They were brought into covenant with God in order that they might walk in His statutes and judgments. If, then, an uncircumcised Gentile was found walking in those judgments, the objective of God was being served in him, even though he did not have the sign and seal of the covenant in his flesh.

Let me emphasize that this is a spiritual form of reasoning. The Spirit is not suggesting that such a person exists, for he has already declared the Gentile world guilty of sin. He is showing us the Divine manner of thinking. God does NOT look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. As it is written, “for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). Faith reckons on God’s consideration, ignoring that of man.

Let there be no mistake about this, God prefers, and will ONLY accept, the individual who is righteous. That is why the Gospel reveals “the righteousness of God.” There is no other way to be received by Him.

Chapter 17

THE EXAMPLE OF CORNELIUS

Although not a thorough example of our text, the Gentile Cornelius reveals the truth of it. He was not a Jew, but was a Gentile military man, “a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.” It is said of this man, “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly”(Acts 10:1-2, NIV). The angel of the Lord appeared to him announcing, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4, NKJV). He then directed Cornelius to send for Simon Peter, who would tell him “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14).

How is it that God honored this man’s gifts and prayers? He was not a Jew – not among the covenanted people. Later, when with Cornelius, Peter confessed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him” (Acts 10:34-35). His acceptance did not obviate the need for Christ, or “words” instructing him in the matter of salvation. However, God did honor him by opening the door of salvation to him.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

For many years I have noticed that many, classed as “sectarians” by my some of brethren,

have more godly traits than their critics. While in the grip of a sectarian manner of thought, I considered myself to have embraced the true New Testament way. It was not due to any unwavering faith I possessed, or a strong hope or full assurance. I had none of those things. I rested in a church pattern, a proceduralized approach to salvation, and the observance of God-ordained ordinances. The matters in which I rested were not wrong. In fact, they were right, and fully supported by the Word of God. However, they were not intended to be objects of trust.

Yet, I was repeatedly confronted with a most disconcerting circumstance. When my heart was hungry for the things of God, or I yearned for deep spiritual fellowship, I could NOT find it among my brethren. In any of the churches where I preached or had any regular fellowship, a devoted and godly person was not common. For the mass of the people, their respect for and knowledge of the Word were seriously deficient. The full assurance of faith and a strong hope could hardly be found among them. The good things that were historically proclaimed among the people had nearly passed into oblivion.

I found myself attracted to people who had an obvious love for the truth, yet who lacked a fuller understanding of the Word. These people seemed to have a heart for the things of God. They practiced things with which I was not comfortable, yet I was endeared to their spirit. They were more holy than the people with whom I was identified. They seemed more acquainted with the spirit of the Scripture, and were easier to instruct.

For many years this was a source of confusion to me. I felt I was doing wrong in extending the right hand of fellowship to those who were seriously wrong in some of their perceptions. But my heart and conscience would not let me forget the tenderness of their hearts, their love for the truth, and their fervency to serve the Lord. Some of these people opened new vistas of thought to me. Others were sources of great encouragement in the good fight of faith.

Since those struggles associated with my early years in Christ, I have found a great liberty in the belief of the truth. I still am not able to condone error, nor do I want to become able to do so. But I can acknowledge the superiority of an individual who has an appetite for the truth, yet lacks knowledge of it, over a person who spouts pious platitudes about the truth, yet has no obvious yearning for it.

Chapter 18

MAN'S PROPENSITY TO TRUST IN EXTERNALS

There is a strong propensity in religious men to trust in external things. By its very nature "flesh" seeks to ignore "the righteous requirements of the law," settling only for "an appearance of wisdom" (Col 2:23), or a "form of godliness" (2 Tim 3:5). This was the plight of the church in Laodicea who said, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." Yet, in the Divine assessment, that church was "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). The church at Sardis was also in this predicament. Jesus said to that church, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev 3:1). These were not the last churches who were not what they appeared to be.

The Word of God warns us about glorying in appearance – religious appearance. We read of those who "boast in appearance and not in heart" (2 Cor 5:12). The Galatians were warned of teachers who "desire to make a fair show in the flesh" (Gal 6:12). Jesus

Himself commanded, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

When this view of values according to appearance is brought into the church, great damage is done. If the Jews, who had ordained appearances, were forbidden to glory in them, what may be said of the fabricated appearances concocted by the Gentile church?

The things that commend men to God are not seen as commendable by the world – even the religious world. A single example will suffice. “But in all things APPROVING OURSELVES as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

That is a vivid description of righteousness, or spiritual life, and how it appears in the world. Let me remind you that righteousness is, in our text, being equated with spiritual life. That life, which is the only like approved by God, is reflected in outward manners, but not created or defined by them. The church of our time needs faithful ministers who will boldly and consistently declare what God requires from His people. Those who refuse to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, when that dreadful condition is confirmed, must not be allowed to remain identified with the church. As is clearly defined in Second Corinthians 6:16-18, such people are not recognized by God as His children. When the described condition is confirmed, that is also how His people, must feel about them.

Chapter 19

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

“Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law . . .” Modern translations read “the righteous requirements of the law” (NKJV, NASB, NRSV). The idea is that the ordinances of the Law defined righteousness. Those living up to them were, therefore, righteous. It made no difference whether they were Jew or Gentile.

The “righteousness of the law” is consistently contrasted with the righteousness that comes from God by faith. Again, 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 10:6). There is a slight difference in the meanings of Romans 2:26 and 10:5. In the first, “the requirements of the law” are depicted as the means through which men become righteous. In the latter, “righteousness” is the condition pronounced by the law upon the perfectly obedient person.

While the Law was a covenant made with Israel, it was indiscriminating in its offer. If “the man” who did what the Law demanded was not a Jew, the promise still applied to him. If he did not, the condemnation of the law also applied.

The Jews, therefore, had no right to boast in their possession of the Law, or the sign and seal of circumcision. Neither the “words of the covenant” nor the “sign of the covenant”

had altered their unrighteous state. They too stood in need of a righteousness from God. It is ever true, “the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate” (1 Tim 1:9). The fact that a person was required to keep the Law proved he was unrighteous, for the Law was made for the unrighteous, not the righteous. The boastful Jew was oblivious to this because of hardness of heart.

Alas, this is infinitely more than a history lesson! It unveils a human tendency that is to be mortified.

Chapter 20

EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS DO NOT EXCLUDE THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?” (Rom 2:27, NASB)

With convincing relentlessness, the Holy Spirit continues to drive home to our hearts that external advantages are not spiritual ones. They do not bring the people closer to God, or give them the edge when judged by God. This type of reasoning is particularly to those who trust in forms, patterns of worship, and a procedurally-driven religion.

This particular line of reasoning is not suggesting that those with no revelation had actually measured up to Divine requirements. It is a hypothetical argument, looking at the matter as though the Jews were actually right in boasting of their superiority. The outcome of such thinking is devastating.

HYPOTHETICAL REASONING

This kind of reasoning (hypothetical) concedes an assumption for the sake of argument. This form of reasoning tests the validity of a pattern of thought that is actually false. One such case is also found in the parable of the pounds. One recipient took what was given to him, and over which he was an appointed steward, and “put it away in a napkin,” or handkerchief. When confronted by the master, he excused his slothfulness by saying he was afraid of the owner. “For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow” (Lk 19:21-22). The owner soundly rebuked the man saying, “Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?” (Lk 19:22-23).

The “wicked servant” sought to justify his slothfulness by appealing to his totally wrong perception of the master. The master was NOT “austere” or harsh. Neither, indeed, did he reap where he had not sown. In fact, he had sown a “pound” to this very servant. However, judgment was meted out just as though what the man said was the truth, i.e., “Out of your own mouth I will judge you.” If the wicked servant’s assessment of the Master was right, he should have worked harder than the others.

Here is a fulfillment of Christ’s solemn warning. “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matt 7:1). In regard to our text, the Spirit is showing that people judged to be inferior by those holding only external benefits may

very well be involved in the judgment their critics.

Those not favored with unusual benefits, yet whose faith and works exceeded their peers, will have a part in judging those who had special favors, yet lived no better than others. This consideration is worthy of some exploration. The Scriptures do have considerable to say about this condition.

Chapter 21

JUDGED BY PEOPLE WITH INFERIOR BENEFITS

“Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?” (Rom 2:27)

There are several instances in Scripture where the subject of our text is confirmed.

NINEVEH

Nineveh was an unusually wicked city, yet repented when told destruction was on the way. The message to which these people were exposed was straightforward: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). There is no record of a summons to repentance, or a single word of hope that was held out. The message delivered to them by the word of the Lord would be considered by some to be a negative one.

The response of the people of Nineveh is one of the great occasions of history. “So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5). A decree came from the king that was honored by the entire city. “Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?” (Jonah 3:7-9). There have been few such occurrences in history, and none so significant as the repentance of Nineveh itself. It was not a Jewish city, and had no resident prophet or law from God.

Of this city, Jesus said, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here” (Matt 12:41). They did not have the Law, yet turned from their wicked ways. Thus, as our text proclaims, Jesus declared they would rise up with the generation that heard Jesus, and soundly condemn it. And why so? Because they received less, yet did more! They repented at the declaration of a curse. What will be done to those who have not repented at the hearing of the Gospel of Christ, God’s power unto salvation? This is a message for America!

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

There is another remarkable incident in Scripture that serves to open this text to us. It is that of the Queen of Sheba, from the southern tip of Arabia. It is written, “Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions” (NKJV). She came to Jerusalem “with a very great caravan--with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones--she

came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind” (NIV). She was not disappointed, for “Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her” (NKJV) – Matthew 12:42-45.

The response of the Queen is one of the most articulate and perceptive responses ever uttered by a Gentile. “It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness” (1 Kgs 10:1-7, NKJV). A matchless response, indeed!

Jesus spoke of this Queen, who came from a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Like the men of Nineveh, she also would play a prominent role in the day of judgment. “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42).

And what is the wisdom of Solomon to compare with that of Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). She will verily stand up and condemn those blessed with far more that she had, yet who did comparatively nothing with it.

SOME OTHERS

There are others worthy of mention, concerning which time allows but a few remarks. RAHAB THE HARLOT, Gentile occupant of Jericho, believed the report concerning the Jews and their God, and hid the spies. She was blessed by being spared and found her place in the very genealogy of Jesus (Josh 2:1-2; 6:23-25; Matt 1:5).

RUTH OF THE MOABITES, who were forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:3), chose the people of God over her own. The result, she became one of the great women of Scripture, was the grandmother of David, and was also in Christ’s genealogy (Ruth 4:13-17; Matt 1:5).

There was also THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN, a Greek, who besought Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter. Even though the Lord appeared to ignore her, and even discourage her by saying it was not proper to give the children’s bread to dogs, yet she pressed in for the blessing. “Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.” To my knowledge, she is the only one to whom, these words were said. “For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter” (Mark 7:26-29).

There was also A CENTURION who besought Jesus to come and heal his dear servant, who was at the point of death. When Jesus said “I will come and heal him,” the centurion’s faith rose up. “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.” And what will be the response of our Lord to this Gentile? Here is the only recorded occasion where Jesus marveled at someone’s faith. “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall

sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour” (Matt 8:5-13).

In all of these cases, those with fewer benefits excelled those who had received much more. They proved to be better stewards of the less, that others were of the more. But their excellence was not the end of the matter. As our text says, “And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?” (NASB). Those who have received much, yet done little with it, will face those who did much with less.

Every person needs a righteousness from God. There is no theological persuasion that pushes one beyond this need. There is no Divine ordinance that removes this necessity. From the first to the last of our lives, the righteousness of God is needed. Those who have sensed this, seeking to please the Lord, and yet were ignorant of the Word that so states this need, will judge those who, with Bible in hand, go about to establish their own righteousness.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this text too much. We are living in a day, and among a people, where this is scarcely proclaimed or known.

Chapter 22

JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.” (Rom 2:28)

Here the Spirit comes to grips with the real nature of human identity with God. It is not in the flesh, but in the [human] spirit. He is going to take the ultimate external evidence and show that it is not sufficient proof of Divine acceptance. In Christ, the religion of the flesh has been exchanged for the religion of the spirit.

This text is not saying there are no longer “Jews,” or that such an external distinction no longer exists. The absurdity of such a postulate is seen throughout this book. He is speaking to Jews (Rom 2:17). Paul carried a great burden for these people, his kinsmen according to the flesh (9:1-3). He categorically states God has not cast away His people Israel (11:1). The Spirit affirms there is yet a remnant among them, according to the election of grace (11:5). Only “some of the branches” were broken off, leaving the tree and the root still in tact (11:17-21). His covenant to take away their sins is still in place (11:26-27). They are still “beloved for the father’s (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) sake (11:28). The prospect of them receiving mercy remains (11:31). To say there are no longer such a thing as a Jew is foolish beyond description. The word to believers is, “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32).

THE OUTWARD JEW

What IS being affirmed here is that God’s acceptance of the individual has never been based upon the flesh, or external matters. Faith has ALWAYS been the criterion by which Divine acceptance was realized. Those approved by God were always people of faith

(Heb 11:2,6,39). At this point, we must resist the temptation to launch out upon the sea of speculation, seeking to determine who was saved and who was lost under the Old Covenant. That is not the purpose of this text, and it must not be ours.

In the Divine economy, there was a race within a race – true Jews within the Jewish people. This is developed at length in the eleventh chapter of Romans. The point here is that earthly lineage does not equate to spiritual lineage. Even though men could trace their roots back to Abraham himself, that did not make them true children of Abraham. Appearance is not the vehicle of Divine intent.

THE EXAMPLE OF ISHMAEL

Take the example of Ishmael. Abraham was his father, and he was circumcised (Gen 17:23). Yet, he was not a child of promise, or a true Jew. It is written, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him that was born after the Spirit (Isaac), even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:28-31). The promise of God came through Isaac, not Ishmael, though both were offsprings of Abraham (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18).

THE EXAMPLE OF ESAU

Here is a case even more pronounced than that of Ishmael. Ishmael did have a different mother than Isaac, although they had the same father. But notice the case with Esau. He and his brother were twins, with the same mother and the same father. Both could trace their family roots back to Abraham, but both were not true children of Abraham, or real Jews. As it is written, “And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom 9:10-13). In this case, Jacob was a Jew within the Jews, and Esau was not.

Remember, the only flesh-and-blood nation God has ever recognized as a whole is the one He created. Yet, even within that nation, only those who believed were truly His.

The real Jew is the one whose inner man is in fellowship with God, who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It is the person who is in Christ, who sprang from that nation, yet became the progenitor of a new race.

Chapter 23

CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH

As Valuable as circumcision in the flesh may appear, it is no longer the mark of distinction with God. It was a type of real circumcision, but was not itself that real circumcision. It belonged to the order of flesh and blood, which cannot, in any form, enter into the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). The flesh is the weakest part of our constitution, and therefore cannot be the place of spiritual identity. As one has said, “The true mark of distinction is not in the weak body, soon to be laid in the grave”(Joseph

Beet).

WHY IS THIS POINT MADE

The Spirit is making this point because of the proneness of men to trust in the flesh and external manifestations. This tendency did not end with the Jews, but continues in the Gentile church. The Spirit does not take up every instance or possibility of men trusting in the flesh, but goes to the ultimate fleshly distinction – the Jewish people and the sign of circumcision. Just as the Law was the ultimate moral code, so Jewish distinctions were the ultimate in fleshly glory. They stand for all glory in flesh.

When the Spirit declares the ultimate fleshly people, and the ultimate external mark, did not make people accepted with God, He denounces all fleshly distinctions before God, or having to do with “pure religion” (James 1:27).

Satan has been aggressive to distort the understanding of men on this point. It further appears that he has been unusually successful in his efforts. Countless professing Christians trust in their religious heritage just as the Jews trusted in theirs. From Catholic to Protestant men boast of their religious roots, thinking that is what makes them acceptable to God. They hold to the correct doctrines like Ephesus, but they are not holding to the Lord of glory by faith. Some of the outward things that men trust in include: baptism, taking the Lord’s Supper, the name of the church, the organization of the church, the community activities of the church, etc. This by no means suggests the things just mentioned are wrong, or that they are not sanctioned by God. It does mean that our faith cannot be based on them. We cannot trust those things to make us acceptable to God. That is the kind of thing Paul is dealing with in our text.

Neither is this to be construed to mean that doctrine is inconsequential, or that no good things can be found in religious heritage. It IS to be understood, however, that our faith and confidence are not to be placed in these things. Such misplaced trust will cost men their souls.

Still others find their confidence in experiences in the flesh. These cover such things as viewing baptism as a mere outward sign, with no regard to its accompanying inner birth. Again, the sophist will see this as a denigration of baptism – but this is not at all the case. The value of our baptism is directly related to our faith. It is, after all, the one who “believes and is baptized” that will be saved (Mk 16:16).

An additional corruption of faith is found in those who place great confidence in evidences that accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit. They equate external evidences with the Spirit Himself, imagining they could never be fabricated or falsified. They trust in them, and vaunt them above faith and even Christ Himself. This is encapsulated in the unscriptural phrase, “the baptism of the Holy Ghost with th evidence of speaking in tongues.” This is not to be taken as a rejection of all external evidences. Rather, our faith is not to lie in such things. If the ultimate sign in the flesh, circumcision, did not prove a person was of God, you may rest assured no fleshly sensation or experience can do so.

Chapter 24

THE FLESH IS NOT THE REALM OF CONFIRMATION

The flesh, because of its rejection by God, is not, and cannot be, the area of Divine

confirmation. If flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God, and He has rejected all fleshly distinctions, how is it that men imagine great spiritual confirmations are made in the flesh? If “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:8), why would God place the sign of Divine acceptance there? Would that not pull people back into the flesh from which grace delivered them?

Jesus said, “The flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63). But this is not true if that is the place where Divine acceptance is confirmed. Paul confessed, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18). Again, this could not be true if the superior blessings of God were realized in and confirmed by fleshly experiences.

I am careful to say that this is not a diatribe against all experiences in the body – such as deliverance, healing, etc. That such things do exist, and that many of them are legitimate, cannot be denied. But they are NOT what makes us the children of God, nor are the proof that we are the sons of God. They are tangential, and are not to be placed in the same category as faith. Experience is the tributary, not the river.

Men, particularly religious men, tend to treat experiences in extreme manners. Either they make them primary, or assign no value to them at all. Both approaches are wrong. It is never right to exalt something that occurs in the body to the place of prominence. Neither, indeed, is it appropriate to lead people to believe there are no outward benefits in salvation.

The Gospel helps us to place the exclamation point after the promises, and receive the benefits with which God loads us “daily” (Psa 68:19). However, grace will not allow us to trust in the benefits, or rely upon them to identify our acceptance with God. Honest hearts know such things can be removed from us. They are not guaranteed to us during our brief tenure in this world.

Chapter 25

REAL IDENTITY

“ . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.” (Rom 2:29)

Here is one of the most definitive texts of scripture. It lays the axe to the root of the tree of flesh, and unveils the true nature of life in Christ. Remember, this is a delineation of the need for, and characteristics of, the righteousness of God. It is a view of salvation, being in Christ, or being born again. This text will confirm that the essential change made in men is within. The character is changed, motives transformed, and everything becomes new. This is a view of the “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). It is this inward change that leads to an outward change in behavior and manners.

The distinction that is now proclaimed is not found in nature, or the natural state of men. It cannot be traced back to Adam, or a state experienced in natural birth. The Spirit has already confirmed that both Jew and Gentile stand in need of a righteousness from God. Neither of them are righteous by nature, and both are sinners by choice.

It is axiomatic that inward change can only be initiated by God. Under the old covenant, the Lord issues a challenge. The purpose of this challenge was to confirm men can only be changed by God. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked . . . Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your

heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4,14; Ezek 18:31). How succinctly God stated the case through Jeremiah. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jer 13:23).

Men may philosophize about the freedom of the human will, and the inherent ability of men to better themselves. Such thoughts are all vain and pointless. If man was able to extricate himself from sin and create a new heart for himself, there would have been no need for Christ Jesus.

God placed man in His creation, and made him in His own likeness. The creation continually testifies of the eternal power and Divinity of God (Rom 1:20). Man's conscience prodded him, excusing and accusing him (Rom 2:15). A precise and holy law was given to him, defining sin, and providing remarkable incentives to be holy (Rom 3:20; Deut 27:14-28:68). However, sin dominated the race anyway, and did so consistently and without a solitary exception, saving for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. MORAL AND ESSENTIAL CHANGE MUST COME FROM OF, OR IT WILL NOT COME!

This principle is stated in Scripture. "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa 127:1). The new birth is totally the work of the Lord. We are "begotten" by God (1 Pet 1:3; James 1:18). The birth is accomplished "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). This does not mean men are not involved, but it is not in a causative or initiatory way. Their role is ancillary, not central.

Man can only change the outer man, and even then, he is severely limited. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Matt 6:27). There is a challenge for the "worker."

Chapter 26

INWARD IDENTITY

"But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit." (Rom 2:29)

True identity is found within, not in the flesh, bloodline, or lineage. For this reason, God does not look upon the appearance, but "on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). He alone "knows the hearts of all the children of men" (1 Kgs 8:39). When the Jews affirmed "We are Abraham's descendants," Jesus acknowledged they were that in the flesh. "I know that you are Abraham's descendants." Yet, when they rejoined "Abraham is our father," Jesus replied, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this" (John 8:33-40, NASB). They were NOT Jews INWARDLY.

When the Scriptures say "inwardly," they speak of the spiritual part of man, where the Divine imagery is found. This is the "hidden man of the heart" (1 Pet 3:4), or the "inward parts" (Psa 51:6; Jer 31:33). If the individual is not identified with the Lord in

that section, there is no saving identity with God at all.

To put it another way, if men are estranged from God in their thoughts, they are altogether estranged from Him. Even though they may honor Him with their “lips,” if their heart is “far from Him,” all of their worship is vain, and their religion pointless. When Jesus walked among men, He said of that generation, “This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:8-9). They were not Jews inwardly.

WHY DOES HE USE THE WORD “JEW?”

Why does the Spirit refer to a true “Jew?” why not a Christian? That would seem more appropriate to many, some of which hold disdain for the word “Jew.” It is because He is contrasting appearance with reality, and the Jew is the only fleshly appearance God has ever honored. No other fleshly lineage has ever been held forth as superior. Even a physical people chosen and ordained by God hold no eternal advantage if they are not inwardly the people of God.

GOD’S VIEW IS THE ONLY VALID VIEW

This is the Lord’s assessment of the situation, and no other view is valid. It makes little difference how illustrious the historical heritage may be, if the individual is not reconciled to God and being conformed to the image of His Son, all claims to godliness are only pretentious.

The religious climate of our day should confirm to your heart what a serious matter is being unveiled in this text. It is exceedingly difficult to find a people possessing a preference for God and a living hope. Sectarian walls have been erected that have obscured the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2), constraining people to trust in their denominational names and doctrines like the Israelites did in the name “Jew,” and in their possession of the Law of God.

But if God will not allow men to trust in a distinction HE made, you may be sure He will condemn trust in distinctions He has NOT made.

Our association with God is “inwardly.” Our thoughts, meditations, preferences, hates, and loves are the context in which Divine fellowship is realized. When God is not “in all their thoughts,” it is because men are wicked, walk in pride, and seek not after God (Psa 10:4). Men are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18).

Many of us have lamented over the lack of spiritual appetite in our generation. Churches are known for their concessions to the flesh. While the business, entertainment, and athletic world’s increase their demands upon the time of people, the church is reducing its demands. In the professed church brevity and shallowness are in vogue more than ever, and entertainment and sundry distractions have filled the church-calendars. Vast bodies of people are quite content to spend less time hearing the Word of God than they in eating breakfast or lunch.

Is it all innocent, and no matter of concern? Indeed, it is not. It evidences that we are living in a time when the church will accept people who are not Jews “inwardly.” However, God does not accept such people as His, and the time they spend in simulated

worship is vain and pointless. Unless they acquire a spiritual appetite, there is not a shred of hope held out to them in the Word of God.

Chapter 27

A CHANGE OF HEART

“ . . . and circumcision is that of the heart . . . ” (Rom 2:29)

The heart is the inmost part of man, just as the body is the outmost part. It is here, in the heart, where the essential change must be made. The prophets spoke of a time when men would receive a “new heart.” “A NEW HEART also will I give you . . . and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). This is something for which David longed, yet it was not available for his generation. David prayed for a benefit that would come years after he had passed from this world: “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psa 51:10). A “clean heart” is a “new heart” – a special creation of God. Like other saints prior to the enthronement of Jesus, David was “not made perfect without us” (Heb 11:40).

THE STONY HEART REMOVED

Note, there is a two fold action fulfilled in this promise. First, the stony heart is removed, and second a heart of flesh is given. Thus, obstinance and rebellion are removed, and submission and sensitivity are granted in their place. The removal of the stony heart commences when the Lord opens the heart so men can give heed, or respond, to the Word of God (Acts 16:14).

Where stony hearts remain, a most serious condition exists. The presence of a “stony heart” negates any profession of identity with Christ. While we must take care not to be quick to judge men in this matter, we must not allow ourselves to excuse hard hearts that will not yield to the word of the Lord. Again, unless that condition is corrected, there is no hope for the person.

DOMINATED BY SIN

The picture presented here is that of a heart that has been overgrown with sin. That mass of sin is called “the body of the sins of the flesh,” or “the body of the flesh” (Col 2:11). It is a condition that renders the heart insensitive and calloused to God. Stephen described the state as being “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51). Speaking through Moses, God charged that generation with having “uncircumcised hearts” (Lev 26:41). Jeremiah spoke of those who were “circumcised with the uncircumcised” – “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised.” That is, although they were circumcised in the flesh, their hearts remained unchanged. Ezekiel spoke of those who were “uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh” (Ezek 44:7,9).

This is a state that finds the individual dominated by sin. It is the ONLY alternative to being received in Christ Jesus. Without this circumcision of heart, profession counts for nothing, works are but filthy rags to be discarded, and the individual is an enemy of God. It is when the sinful nature rules the whole person, shutting out the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and riveting the person hopelessly to a condemned world. It is appropriately described as being “being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision

of your flesh,” or sinful nature [NIV] (Col 2:13).

Let there be no ambiguity on this matter, as though there were any hope at all for the person enslaved to sin and dominated by the flesh. Before coming into Christ, we were “the servants of sin” (Rom 6:16). Also, in that state, we possessed no righteousness at all, much less the righteousness of God. As it is written, “For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness” (Rom 6:20). Men live in sin because they are enslaved to it. As Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34).

In order to be saved, or receive a righteousness from God, the flesh must be cut away from the heart – “THE CIRCUMCISION OF Christ” (Col 2:11-12). This brings sensitivity to God and a love for the truth, which is the secret to overcoming sin. This procedure is what constitutes a “new heart.” It is a Divine operation in which the “flesh,” or sinful nature, is separated from our essential persons.

A contemporary recovery program for Christians teaches its adherents to say, “My life is out of control.” A series of steps is then offered to ensure they can bring their lives under their control. The whole program ignores the circumcision of Christ, the new creation, the removal of the stony heart, and the creation of a new heart.

Chapter 28

PERFORMED BY CHRIST

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.” (Col 2:8-12)

This marvelous work is accomplished by Jesus Christ, and is associated with our baptism into Him. It is called “the circumcision of Christ.” Baptism itself is not the circumcision, but the occasion during which it is performed. Our text for this devotion declares this truth with great beauty and power. “In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, but in a [spiritual] circumcision [performed by] Christ by stripping off the body of the flesh (the whole corrupt, carnal nature with its passions and lusts). [Thus you were circumcised when] you were buried with Him in [your] baptism, in which you were also raised with Him [to a new life] through [your] faith in the working of God [as displayed] when He raised Him up from the dead.” (AMPLIFIED)

In separating “the body of the sins of the flesh,” Christ removes the power and dominion of “the flesh”. This results in the remission of sins, or the removal of personal guilt. It also clarifies our vision of, and sensitivity to, the Lord, produces a great love for His Word, and brings righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

In this circumcision the principle of sin, is not obliterated, but separated from the part of us that is born again. The sixth chapter of Romans states it this way. “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of

His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom 6:5-7).

Let me emphasize that “done away with,” or “destroyed” (KJV), does not mean the principle of sin is no longer existent, but that it is no longer part of our real persons. It has been “destroyed” in the same sense as Satan has been “destroyed” by Christ, through His death (Heb 2:14). That is why we are exhorted, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). It has been cut away from us, even though remains in our earthen vessels. The seventh chapter of Romans deals with the fierce war between the new heart and the circumcised flesh.

The new heart has a love for the truth and a hatred for sin. It longs for the courts of the Lord, and admits to being a stranger in the world. Unless these conditions exist, the person has not been born again, and is under the control of sin. In saying this, I do not mean to oversimplify the situation. There are numbers of God’s people who, because of faulty teaching, are not aware of the circumcision of the heart, or a new heart. They therefore interpret their struggle with sin as evidence they are not of God. However, when this truth is taught in power, those whom God has received in Christ will recognize the truth of the matter. They will see that their longing for purity and discontent with failures are evidence of a new heart. They are Jews indeed, and have received “the circumcision of Christ.”

Chapter 29

A CHANGE OF SPIRIT

“ . . . and circumcision is . . . in the spirit, and not in the letter . . . ” (Rom 2:29). Other versions read, “by the Spirit, not by the letter” (NASB), “is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit” (NLT), and “a spiritual and not a literal [matter]” (AMPLIFIED).

The expression “in the spirit” is both objective and subjective. Subjectively, or from the standpoint of experience, it refers to the human spirit, or the essential and expressive part of man. Objectively, or from the view of its Source, it is the Holy Spirit who actually accomplishes the change. This is involved in being “born of the Spirit,” as Jesus said, “ . . . that which is born of the Spirit is spirit . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:6,8). The Amplified Bible is incorrect in comparing “spiritual” with “literal.” The opposite of “literal” is “figurative,” not “spiritual.”

Those circumcised in their spirit have a new disposition. It is described in second Corinthians in this way. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (5:17). In this marvelous new creation the objective of God is realized. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). The word “literal” means “its most basic sense . . . something that is true” (Collins Dictionary). Actually everything that is “spiritual” is literal, basic, and true.

In describing the activity of the human spirit functioning within the realm of the Holy Spirit, those with new hearts and spirits are said to worship God out of a sense of

preference, and not because of the demands of the Law. Thus those in Christ are described in this manner. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3).

Because of the atoning death of our Lord Jesus, God is able to fulfill His promise, “I will put a new spirit within you . . . a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). The blessed Holy Spirit, working from within the believer, transforms the human spirit, changing it from one increasing stage of glory to another. As it is written, “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 (‘from one degree of glory to another’ [ERV], even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). It is from that changed human spirit that we truthfully and heartily worship God (Phil 3:3). The circumcision of Christ occurs in the human spirit – the unseen, yet essential part of man. That is, Jesus causes men to be fundamentally different than they were before. That change is elsewhere called being “transformed” (Rom 12:2), “regeneration” (Tit 3:5), and being “born again” (1 Pet 1:23). There is not such a thing as a “Christian” in which this essential change has not taken place. Further, that change is made known by increasing evidence.

Chapter 30

NOT IN THE LETTER

“ . . . and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” (Rom 2:29, NASB)

The “letter” is the written Word without a corresponding writing in the heart. It involves directing basically wayward people with rules and regulations. Until the Word of God is found within the heart of man, it remains in the “letter,” and is powerless for the individual’s good.

A religion of the “letter” not only does not contribute to spiritual life, it actually kills those attempting to serve God in that manner. The Old Covenant was a word of the letter, alienating its constituents from God because they had no heart for what the law said. In a marvelous explanation of this circumstance, the Spirit says, “ . . . who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious . . . For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory” (2 Cor 3:6-9).

When a good and holy Law comes from God, it condemns all whose nature is in conflict with that Law. Thus it becomes a letter that kills, a ministry of death, and a ministry of condemnation. The Law does not permit a person to try and be better, for all such efforts are vain. The heart and spirit of fallen men are so corrupt they cannot be salvaged. A new heart and a new spirit must be given. In Christ Jesus, praise the Lord, that is precisely what takes place.

This is an aspect of spiritual life that is not commonly known. The ignorance of this fact has spawned all sorts of erroneous doctrines and views. Legion is the name of those imagining their fundamental disagreement with God will be overlooked by Him. It will not. That is why He has provided such a full and glorious salvation. Because it was necessary for Him to remain just, as well as be the Justifier of the believer, He had to provide a way that would allow “the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17) to be given to

men. Upon the basis of Christ's vicarious offering, God could remove the heart of stone and grant a malleable heart of flesh to those believing on His Son. He could justly give them a new heart and a new spirit, thereby making their nature harmonious with His own. What a marvelous transaction!

Chapter 31

THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT

I cannot fail to mention the nature of the New Covenant, and how significantly it differs from the Old one. In the New Covenant, truth is internalized, becoming a part of the believer himself. The Spirit refers to this process in Jeremiah, and confirms it to be the covenant now being administered by Jesus in the book of Hebrews. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them" (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

Ponder the magnitude of what is here stated. This is a statement that identifies the New Covenant, spelling out what is accomplished within its boundaries. God Himself puts His laws into the hearts of the constituents, and writes them on their hearts. This means that God has access to our hearts and minds. The word "hearts" is more than a parallel for the human heart. It speaks of the heart, or centrality, of the person. This is the part of the human constitution that makes man what they are. It is the fountain of motivation, preference, and love. It is what makes a person compatible with the Living God. McClintok & Strong's Cyclopaedia says of the word "heart," "So, also, is the heart the center of spiritual activity; for all spiritual aims, whether belonging to the intellectual, moral, or pathological spheres, are elaborated in the heart, and again carried out by the heart. In fact, the whole life of the soul, in the lower and sensual, as well as in the higher spheres, has its origin in the heart (Proverbs 4:23, For out of it are the issues of life)".

The putting of God's Laws into the heart, and the writing of them upon the mind does not mean the person suddenly has Bible knowledge without exposing his mind to the words of Scripture. Rather this is speaking of the creation of a nature that is not at variance with the Laws of God, like the hearts of the Israelites were. The individual who has been the recipient of this work has, in fact, received the "love of the truth" (2 Thess 2:10-12). The Word of God does not chaff against their spirit. They can say with David, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psa 119:97).

The "laws" of God are the summation of human duty. Those duties are summed up in the Ten Commandments, which are a moral image of the Living God Himself. When these laws are written upon the heart the person has a certain attraction to them, and compelling desire to fulfill them. There is a total agreement with them, and a strong love for them. This is a revelation that there is no longer enmity between the individual and God. It causes the heart to be "new," so that it is no longer "desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). When the person who experiences this Divine "putting" and "writing" hears the Word of God, it sounds good, is preferred, and makes sense. Experientially, it is as though the person has known those words all of their life. This is because the person's nature has been changed, and is in agreement with the Word of his Maker.

Admittedly, this is not a common experience in the nominal church – but that is only because such a church is really no church at all.

Here is a work that can only be accomplished by Deity. It cannot be achieved by the individual so blessed. It cannot be wrought by one of your peers. It is not the result of a methodology, system of study, or some other human discipline. It is not something that simply happens after a long period of time.

Try as you may, you cannot trace these incredible accomplishments to men. They are a Divine work, and are therefore effective to accomplish His purpose. Faith enables us to be the recipient of this grand work, but the doing of it belongs to the Lord. As it is written, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness THE IMPLANTED WORD, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21, NKJV). Let it be clear that the Word of God is not able to save the soul as long as it is not engrafted, or implanted in the inward man – put into the mind, and written upon the heart. But when it is joined to the human spirit by being put into the mind and written upon the heart, it obtains such a Divine power as is necessary to be loosed from the dominion of sin, and receive the righteousness of God by faith.

Chapter 32

PRAISE FROM GOD

“ . . . whose praise is not from men but from God.” (Rom 2:29)

The word “whose” refers to the true Jew, whose heart has been circumcised by the Lord. Such, should they continue in the faith, grounded and settled (Col 1:23), will receive “praise from God.” God will honor those who have availed themselves of His grace, believed the record He has given of His Son, received His righteousness, and conducted their lives to please Him (2 Tim 2:4).

Here again is a facet of redemptive truth that is not commonly known – at least not to any measurable degree. Religion that is nothing more than a “form of godliness” that “denies the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5), knows nothing of receiving praise from God. It rather covets the praise of men, and is willing to make significant concessions to get it. If anyone is tempted to think in this manner, it is good to remember this word from the Apostle Paul; “for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). And then there is the arresting word of James: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever WISHES to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4 ESV). As powerful as the grace and love of God are, they cannot move God to receive those who prefer the world’s approval to His. Those who have shaped a new and corrupt theology have so taught the people, that this is neither known nor accepted in the nominal church.

HONOR FROM GOD

Those who seek honor from men CANNOT believe in Christ. It is impossible for them to do so! Such a quest depletes the soul, blinds the eyes, and hardens the heart. That is why Jesus said, “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). That question needs to be put to all professing Christians. They must be moved to think about this now, or face the eternal consequences for failing to do so.

In sharp contrast with those benighted souls, Jesus said of Himself, “I do not receive honor from men” (John 5:41). That was not His objective, and He did not alter a single

word or work in order to receive such passing admiration. However, what will be the portion of those who fervently sought for the honor only God can give? How will they appear in the great day of judgment. There is no need for conjecture on this matter. The Lord has spoken. “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and HONOR and immortality, eternal life” (Rom 2:7). And how is it with you, dear reader? Are you seeking for “glory and honor and immortality?” I trust this does not sound strange to you, as though such quests were not required by the Living God.

It is God alone who can give “glory, and honor, and immortality.” It is not only in order to seek such benefits, it is incumbent upon men to do so. Jesus Himself said, “If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor” (John 12:26). Paul said of faithful servants, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor 4:5). There is nothing – no human benefit or experience – that can compensate for a failure to receive honor and praise from God. Now, there is something to think about!

Chapter 33

LOVING THE PRAISE OF MEN

While Jesus walked among us, His presence was so powerful “many” of the “chief rulers” believed on Him. Notwithstanding, they had too high of a regard for the religious dignities of their day, and therefore did not confess Christ publicly. The comment of the Spirit on this occasion is arresting. It interprets similar incidents that arise in our day, when people are exposed to more truth than they are willing to publically admit. “. . . among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; FOR THEY LOVED THE PRAISE OF MEN MORE THAN THE PRAISE OF GOD” (John 12:42-43). Other versions read, “they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (ESV), “For they loved human praise more than the praise of God” (NLT), and “They loved the approval and the praise and the glory that come from men [instead of and] more than the glory that comes from God. [They valued their credit with men more than their credit with God]” (AMPLIFIED).

A similar response was found in the parents of a certain blind man that Jesus healed. When the opponents of Jesus, seeing the man had been healed, asked his parents, “Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?”, “His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself. These words spake his parents, BECAUSE THEY FEARED THE JEWS: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him” (John 9:19-23).

I am sure that those “chief rulers,” together with the parents of the former blind man, would not have conceded that they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God – or that the Pharisees and the Jews actually shaped how they openly responded to Jesus. Yet, this was the truth of the matter, for the Lord knows the hearts of men.

There is still a body of people who inwardly are attracted to the Gospel of Christ, and privately acknowledge their preference for the truth of the Gospel. Yet, their religious associations impact on their open acknowledgment of this preference. They enjoy their membership in a “church” that has inferior preaching and teaching – yes, sometimes outright false preaching and teaching. They have friends there who are even stronger in their alliance with such a church than themselves, and it is important to them to maintain that friendship. Some, who seek to be leaders in the church, consent to obtain their education where fundamentally unsound doctrine is embraced. They feel that a diploma from such an institution will give them the advantage in the church-world.

Such poor souls not only conceal their preference for the things of God, they are very discreet about maintaining any close friendship with those they feel are true followers of Christ. They are willing to applaud such followers privately, although they do so with great care. They might even seek contact with such disciples at rare times when they are feeling the effects of a flawed and weak religion. However, like those “chief rulers,” they will not publically identify with the true Jesus. They will not be found among those whom they are persuaded are unquestionably following the King

To be sure, those Pharisees and Jews will be held accountable for hindering others. As Jesus said to them, “for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in” (Matt 23:13, NKJV). But those who choose to be applauded by men rather than God will not be excused either. In my judgment, there is too much of this “spirit of fear” in the churches. I do not pretend to know the eternal destiny of such souls. However, I am sure that I do not want to be identified with them. Speaking for myself, the approval and praise of God offsets any and all rejection by men. Where do you stand? How public are you in your acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus?

Chapter 34

THE FATHER WILL HONOR THOSE WHO SERVE JESUS

Jesus promised that those who served Him would be honored by the Father Himself. Herein is a glorious promise, and it needs to be heard frequently by those fighting the good fight of faith. ‘If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor.’ (John 12:26).

And what does it mean to “serve” Christ Jesus? Jesus said it means to follow Him – to be where He is, as compared to Him being where you are. If, for example, Jesus is where two or more are gathered together in His name (Matt 18:20), that is where you should be. Being where Jesus is means the servant is available for use – Divine employment in the matter of the will of God being executed. Wherever Jesus is, He stated, His servant can also be found. Note, He does not say that is where the servant ought to be, but where the servant IS. The means of getting where Jesus is, is also established. The servant does not get where Jesus is by asking where Jesus is located, but by following Him.

How the hearts of those in Christ yearn for the “Well done” of their Father! There is nothing that can take the place of that – nothing that can compensate for the failure to receive that “honor.” And, for those who truly are where Jesus is, and are serving Him, it will surely come to pass.

As used here, the word “honor” means “to attribute high status to someone by honoring – to honor, to respect” (Louw-Nida); “to revere, venerate” (Thayer). The world has its

own idea of who should be honored. Special athletes receive honor. Successful business men receive special honors. The most wealthy people are honored. Even in religion, there are men who receive special honors owing to their distinction in some religious area. However, there is no honor that can compare with the honor that comes from God. Jesus referred to this “honor” as “the honor that cometh from God ONLY” (John 5:44). This honor cannot be obtained from anyone else.

If it were not important for us to know of the honor, or praise of God, Jesus would not have spoken so clearly of it. Ponder what He said of those who had a profound concern about what men thought of them: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). Jesus Himself was motivated by the joy held out to Him, the extent of which we are incapable of knowing. As it is written, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

HOLD OUT FOR THE PRAISE AND HONOR OF GOD

The Spirit holds out the praise of God as an incentive for endurance and faithfulness. He knows that the opposition and lack of appreciation of men tend to wear upon the soul, causing discouragement. Further, Satan uses such occasions to tempt us to compromise, quit, or even deny the Lord. For this reason, a strong exhortation is issued to all who are laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God” (1 Cor 4:5, NKJV). You do well to take that word seriously.

Chapter 35

ALL NEEDS ARE MET IN THE NEW CREATION

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” (Rom 2:29)

Thus all true needs are met in the “new creation.” The needs of men are addressed, as well as those of God. Men needed a new nature so they could please the Lord. God needed man to be new so He could bless him. The blessing could NOT come through Adam. It had to come through Christ and a new creation. By saying it could not come from Adam, I mean from what Adam was by nature, or from anyone among his progeny – the human race. The needed resources had to be brought from heaven to earth, and delivered by a Man – the ultimate “Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). Nothing, absolutely nothing, that is an essential need can come from any other source. This is why it is written, “. . . Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (Col 2:8-10). Candidly, there is too much being offered as a necessity in the Christian world that contradicts this affirmation.

None of man's essential needs could be met by the Law, or any other external means. Even when God chose a people, blessed them with unparalleled benefits, and provided them with marvelous incentives, yet they remained obstinate and disobedient. Never before nor since that ancient nation has there been a fleshly people so blessed of the Lord.

Hear the Lord as He cries out to that nation, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). They were “a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). Yet, that status could not effect a change within them.

Of those very people it is written, “Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, And those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, And they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; But they rebelled in their counsel, And were brought low for their iniquity” (Psa 106:40-43).

Righteousness could not be brought to men by external benefits, special fleshly status, and a unique covenantal “sign” in the flesh. If flesh could ever offer an advantage, it would have done so for those people – the Jews. But it did not! “The flesh profiteth nothing,” even when blessed, pampered, and exalted above other flesh.

Let it stand as it is written: “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). And why is this so? Because Jesus has satisfied God in His death, and is pleasing Him in His intercession (Isa 53:11-12). He has made it right and holy for God to confer His own righteousness upon the person who believes the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Indeed, we do have “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3). See to it that you do not “neglect it,” or be pulled into the broken cistern of trusting in the flesh. “Have faith in God!” (Mark 11:22). Make it your aim to appropriate the righteousness of God, and to do so at any cost! You will not regret it.

Chapter 36

CONCLUSION

The passage we have considered is a foundational one. It introduces us to the nature of man, the nature God, and the nature of the salvation He has provided. It has confirmed that there are no external advantages that can make men righteous – even God-conferred ones. Further, fleshly distinctions cannot compensate for the lack of God’s righteousness. The apex of such notabilities was found in Israel, and still they remained fundamentally sinful and in need of a righteousness from God.

There is another thing to be seen here that is of special significance. Abraham, the father of those who believe (Rom 1:12; James 2:21), was the “friend of God” (James 2:23). He towered above others, and remains a giant among men until this day. Yet, he could not pass righteousness to his posterity. Although a whole nation was blessed because of him, yet that very nation still stood in need of a Savior, and a righteousness from God.

If this is the case with Abraham, whom God identified as “the father of us all,” what can be said of the “church fathers,” or “restoration fathers,” or some other cluster of godly men? How is it that anyone would think their religious heritage made them acceptable before God, or gave them the edge over other peoples? The same may be said of religious movements, or groups of churches claiming some sort of uniqueness before God.

I come from a background that placed a significant emphasis on recent religious history, and particular movements that had embraced some facet or facets of the truth. In such an environment, little, if any, emphasis was ever placed on a righteousness from God.

Correct procedures, patterns, and external observance seemed to lull people into spiritual sleep. It is not that the people were particularly sinful. Many of them were commendable in many ways. However, it is the nature of an outward emphasis to produce a spiritually lethargic people. It did in Israel, and it still does.

There is no advantage in precision – God-ordained precision – if men are still at variance with God in their hearts. If men do not have the righteousness of God, revealed through the Gospel, it makes no difference what else they may have.

There looms on the horizon of time a coming day, when the secrets of men will be judged by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16). At that time, we will see clearly that those who sought first the kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS will have the advantage over all others. There will be people whose candlestick was removed, even though they held to all of the right doctrines, and opposed the ones that were wrong (Rev 2:4). There will also be those who have done “many wonderful works,” prophesying in Christ’s name, and even casting out demons. Yet, Jesus will say to them that He “never knew” them, commanding them to depart from His presence (Matt 7:22).

It is imperative that professed believers take seriously the appropriation of the “righteousness of God.” This is not something that is achieved automatically. It comes “by faith” – it is a righteousness “which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith” (Phil 3:9). The believer must fight to maintain his faith (1 Tim 6:12). Faith must be nourished, fed, and bolstered by the Word of God (1 Tim 4:6; Jude 20; Col 2:7). If this is not done, righteousness will not stay with us. That is precisely why the Galatians were warned, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:4-5). That price is too great to pay!