



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 50



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version, BBE=Bible in Basic English, DRA=Douay-Rheims KJV=King James Version, NKJV=New King James Version, NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible, NAU=New American Standard Bible 1995, NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version, NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version, RSV=Revised Standard Version, YLT=Young's Literal Translation.

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

HOW TO HANDLE DIVISION AND HERESY

16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹ For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet. ^{NKJV} (Romans 16:17-20)

INTRODUCTION

The book of Romans is like a vast mountain range, populated with several valleys. The mountain peaks rise high, extending into the heavenly realms. While standing upon them we are given to see Divine purposes, accomplishments, and promises. While beholding these things, a certain clarity is imparted to us, so that we are able to see life as it really is. **Faith and hope flourish in these high altitudes, and the grace of God becomes most prominent.** In setting the stage for the text before us, it will be good to rehearse some of these lofty mountain peaks, for they form a context for the proper understanding of our text.

MOUNTAIN PEAKS

- ▣ Peak #1 – The powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16-17).

- ▣ Peak #2 – The revelation of being made righteous by God (3:21-27).
- ▣ Peak #3 – The glory of justification by faith (4:1 - 5:11).
- ▣ Peak #4 – The effectiveness of Christ's obedience for all (5:12-21).
- ▣ Peak #5 – Our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ (6:1-23).
- ▣ Peak #6 – Our uncondemned state in Christ Jesus (8:1-4).
- ▣ Peak #7 – The ministry of hope under the administration of the Holy Spirit (8:13-27).
- ▣ Peak #8 – The security of those who live by faith (8:18-39).
- ▣ Peak #9 – The hope of Israel's restoration (11:11-34).

LOW VALLEYS

But there are also valleys, profound

teaching regarding the impact of transgression and the malignity of sin. It is essential that we perceive these also.

- ▣ Valley #1 – The depravity of the Gentile world (1:19-32).
- ▣ Valley #2 – The "fallen" state of the Jewish world (2:1-29).
- ▣ Valley #3 – The universality of the fall of humanity (3:1-20).
- ▣ Valley #4 – The war induced by the entrance of faith (7:1-24).
- ▣ Valley #5 – The fall of Israel, even though they had remarkable advantages (9:1-10:21).

IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

From a human point of view, this book has also faced us with some impossible situations. By that, I mean

Division and Heresy are Vile, and Cannot be Dignified, Nor are They to be Tolerated--by Given O. Blakely

OUTLINE

- < THERE ARE EVIL PEOPLE TO BE NOTED (16:17)
- < HERE IS WHAT THEY REALLY ARE (16:18)
- < SATAN'S FUTURE REGARDING US (16:20)

circumstances that are greater than the abilities of men. They are too challenging for human wisdom, and too strong for human strength.

- ▣ A Gentile world given over to its own base lusts (Rom 1:24-26). This was a Divine judgment, resulting from the Gentile world refusing to retain God in their knowledge (1:28-29), ascribing Divine attributes to the creation itself (1:23-24), being unthankful (1:21), and giving themselves over to unnatural desires (1:27-28). Their condition is vividly described as (1) being vain in their imaginations, (2) their foolish heart was darkened, (3) they became fools, (4) God gave them over to a reprobate mind, (5) they were filled with all unrighteousness, (6) they knew the judgment of God, yet sinned against him, and loved those who did the same.

Is it possible for such a condition to be rectified through human wisdom or power? Is not the Gentile world depicted as being in an utterly hopeless condition? **Only God can address such a dreadful dilemma!**

- ▣ The Jewish people degenerated into a state similar to that of the Gentiles. They did *"the same things"* for which the Gentiles were condemned, even though they had been Divinely tutored. The following benefits applied exclusively to them. (The adoption, (2) the glory, (3) the covenants, (4) the giving of the Law, (5) the service, or worship, of God, (6) the promises of God, (7) the fathers, to whom the promises were made (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), (8) the Lord Jesus Christ, who came from their nation, being

given first to them (9:4-5). Yet, in spite of these remarkable advantages, here is what is said of them. (1) They attained not to the Law of righteousness (9:31). (2) They stumbled at the stumbling stone (9:32). (3) All day long God held out His hand to them as a disobedience and gainsaying people (10:21). (4) God gave them a spirit of slumber (11:8). (5) Their eyes were darkened, and their back bowed down always (11:10). (6) They fell and were diminished (11:12). (7) They were cast off (11:15).

What element of human wisdom can recover a people from such a condition? Where is the wise man who can raise this people from the horrible pit into which they have fallen? **Only the Living God can resolve this quandary!**

- ▣ In order to show us the extensive impact of sin upon the offspring of Adam, the Spirit gathers Jew and Gentile together. Here is what He says of them all, with no one being excluded. (1) There is none righteous, not even one (3:10). (2) No one understands or seeks after God (3:11). (3) Everyone has gone out of the way and become unprofitable (3:12a). (4) No one does good, not even one (3:12b). (5) Their verbal expressions are like eruptions from a defiled tomb, and deceit and poison are in their words (3:13). (6) They are swift to take life (3:14). (7) Destruction and misery are in their ways (3:15). (8) They do not know the way of peace (3:16). (9) There is no fear of God before their eyes (3:17).

Now, who is the person who will resolve that situation? What wise man will step forward with an answer that will

please God and reclaim man for His glory To ask the question is to answer it!

When professed believers are not reminded of these things regularly, they become more vulnerable to the purveyors of spiritual corruption. Such overstate man's ability, and understate the working of the Lord. But you will find no such defilement in this Epistle!

STRONG REASONS

Throughout this Epistle, strong reasons are presented for embracing Jesus and fighting the good fight of faith. **Sin is always presented as unreasonable, and righteousness as reasonable.** All of this is done against the backdrop of these mountain peaks, valleys, and impossible situations. If these extreme highs and lows can be seen, sin will lose its attractiveness, and righteousness will be viewed as precious.

When corrupt doctrine is introduced to believers, it is nothing less than a Satanic lure to bring us back to the very state from which we had to be delivered in the first place. It was our humanity that necessitated our salvation, together with its wisdom and power. To move into that arena again is the epitome of ignorance, and fraught with unspeakable danger.

This is why the Spirit will briefly admonish us concerning how to react to those who divide, offend, and confuse the people of God. The very sight of those words should alarm us. This is no light matter, and you will sense that in the words the Spirit uses. He will summon us to proper action, and His summons is not to be ignored. In this text a most serious danger is addressed.

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THERE ARE EVIL PEOPLE TO BE NOTED

“16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.”

It should not surprise us that we contend with evil people. Cain and Abel were in the same house, with the same parents. Lot's wife was not in harmony with Lot in her attitude toward Sodom. Isaac and Ishmael were in the same house, with the same father. Jacob and Esau were in the same womb, and were raised up together. Moses had to contend with Korah and his rebels. Absalom was the son of David, the man after God's own heart. Judas was among the twelve. Certain men went out from John the Beloved and his company, yet were not of them, being imposters.

make a suggestion, or present some optional alternative. Ultimately, when seen properly, an area requiring urging is one in which great spiritual jeopardy exists. It is an area where our adversary the devil is at work, and where an assault is being made upon the faith of God's elect. It is imperative that men NOT rely upon human wisdom in such a matter.

A Divinely inspired appeal is not a summons to muster our natural energies, or rely upon natural wisdom. Urging awakens the new creation, calling it into dominating activity. It is a summons to put off the old man and put on the new man in a specific area. In order to confirm this, ponder the

(1 Thess 4:1).

- ☐ That we suffer, or allow, the word of exhortation among us (Heb 13:22).
- ☐ That we abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11).

Without being distracted by these various admonitions, it is important to note that none of them are insignificant, or allow for us to ignore them. There is a certain mind set that has penetrated the church that is to be put down in the power of the Spirit. It is one in which the safety of believers is assumed, and diligence is viewed as a trait of unusual brethren, or those who are leaders among them. Some may rely upon their initial faith, as though that secured them for eternity. Others rely on their baptism, as though once they were baptized, they were suddenly removed from the arena of activity and responsibility. **Whatever the reason, any persuasion that leads an individual to assume they can ignore the beseechments and urgings of Scripture is an open door to the devil.**

It is never in order to be tolerant of things that detract from Christ and distort the Gospel. Whatever and whoever moves the saints away from God and the truth of God are their enemies.

The knowledge of these things should move us away from naivety concerning dangerous preachers and teachers within the church. It is never in order to be tolerant of things that detract from Christ and distort the Gospel. Whatever and whoever moves the saints away from God and the truth of God are their enemies. They are not to be countenanced. All of this is strong language in a society that has grown indifferent about both truth and the lie, about the Gospel and perversions of the Gospel. However, the Spirit will not allow lethargy to exist without challenging it.

WHEN URGING IS IN ORDER

“Now I urge you, brethren . . .”
Other versions read, *“I beseech you,”* ^{KJV}
“I appeal to you,” ^{RSV} *“And I call upon you,”* ^{YLT} and *“And now I make one more appeal.”* ^{NLT}

As I have noted before, there is nothing casual about beseeching or urging. The Spirit is not moving Paul to

various times the saints are urged or besought.

- ☐ Present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (12:1).
- ☐ Strive together in prayer for Kingdom laborers (15:30).
- ☐ That believers speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among them, and that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10).
- ☐ Be followers of those with great faith (1 Cor 4:16).
- ☐ That we submit ourselves to those who have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints (1 Cor 16:15-16).
- ☐ That we receive not the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6:1).
- ☐ That believers confirm their love to those who have repented and been restored (2 Cor 2:6).
- ☐ To cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:1-5).
- ☐ That we ought to walk and please God

One of the great weaknesses in the average church is the absence of strong exhortations and admonitions. I do not speak of barking orders, or issuing a list of “do's and don'ts.” Rather, sound exhortations are those *“contained in the Scripture”* (1 Pet 2:6). Of course, a congregation that has made the conversion of sinners its priority sees little need for such urging. However, their view is so obviously wrong that it requires an unusual level of ignorance to even embrace it. In God's Word, there is not a solitary exhortation to any church or individual concerning “reaching the lost.” It is not that such a work is bad, for we are all the result of some effort in that matter. However, the winning of souls is **a product of the proper emphasis,** and not the emphasis itself.

This may appear to be an unnecessary diversion. However, I have made it because the condition of the average Western church is nothing more than the result of its emphasis. A misplaced accentuation simply does not require the urgings of Scripture. That is

precisely why they are neglected.

THE SACRED WORK OF NOTING

“ . . . note those . . . ” Other versions read, “*mark them,*”^{KJV} “*keep your eye on those,*”^{NASB} “*watch out for those,*”^{NIV} “*consider those,*”^{DBY} and “*be on guard against the people.*”^{NJB}

There are people and things that are to be noted, or carefully observed and accurately identified. For example, we are to take special **note** of those who are dominated by a quest to know Christ, and be found in Him with the righteousness that comes from God through faith. Such individuals are an example to be followed (Phil 3:10-17). Failing to take note of such people within the perimeter of our lives brings certain disadvantage. If this was not the case, we would not be urged to note such people.

In the text before us, we will be asked to “*mark,*” or make a note of, those causing disruption to the body of Christ. The admonition is to be considered within the context of issues mentioned in our introduction. **The salvation of men is wholly dependent upon the working of God. If He does not work, there can be no salvation, reconciliation, or hope of glory.** All of that may appear quite simple, but it is not. There are some environments in which the Lord cannot and will not work. This fact has been amply demonstrated, so there should be no doubt about it. A few examples will suffice to confirm this to be the truth.

- ▣ **The flood.** In this case, the entire world was dominated by wicked violent men. It finally came to a point where God’s Spirit no longer strove with men. God was moved to destroy “*all flesh*” with a flood. Had there been any hope of reclamation, the world would have been spared (Gen 6-8).
- ▣ **The tower of Babel.** Here is a situation that differed from the time of the flood. It was not a matter of violence, or the presence of profound immortality. In the land of Shinar, men were quite productive. They joined together in solid unity to make a name for themselves by building a city and a tower. The project was most displeasing to the Lord, for He had been totally left out. Although united

and enterprising, an environment was formed in which God could not work or be glorified. Hence, He brought the project to a grinding halt by confusing the language of the people (Gen 11:1-9).

- ▣ **Sodom and Gomorrah.** From these cities a cry rose into the heavens that greatly displeased the Lord. Their cry was “*great,*” and their sin “*grievous*” to the Lord. He could not work in such a setting, and thus overthrew those cities with a fiery holocaust (Gen 18:20; 19:28-29).
- ▣ **The country in which Jesus was raised.** When Jesus came into the very area where He was raised, it was dominated by a spirit of indifference and a lack of perception. Although they were astonished by His poignant speech, they were “*offended*” by Him

No person should think themselves strong enough to survive in such an environment, for where the working of God is absent, survival is not possible. Salvation is the work of God. In fact, He IS our salvation (Ex 15:2; Deut 32:15; 1 Chron 16:35; Phil 1:28; Tit 2:11; 1 Pet 1:5; Rev 7:10; 19:1). If men insist upon remaining in an environment where God does not work, they simply cannot be saved. It is no wonder that the Spirit fairly shouts to us, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Cor 6:17). And again, “*Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath*

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because of their familiarity with Jesus in the flesh. It is written, “*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him.*” The environment was so hostile and dominated by unbelief, that Jesus could not work there. Thus it is written, “*He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them*”^{NIV} (Mark 6:1-5). **There are settings in which the Lord Jesus can do nothing extraordinary.** At the very best, only a few token workings can be found in such places.

The individuals we are exhorted to “*note,*” or “*mark,*” create an environment in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not work. They introduce manners that are repugnant to God and summon forth His wrath and indignation.

remembered her iniquities” (Rev 18:4-5).

Therefore, let us view with intense interest and keen sensitivity those the Spirit admonishes us to note, or mark.

CAUSING DIVISIONS

“ . . . who cause divisions . . . ” Other versions read, “*cause dissensions,*”^{NASB} and “*who stir up disagreements.*”^{NJB} With great zeal, the devil promotes unity among sinners, as in Shinar, and division among believers.

Behind this admonition is the truth that “*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*”^{NKJV} (James 3:18). Spiritual fruit does not grow in disturbed and disquieted hearts or congregations. The unsettling of the soul moves one further from the working of the Lord. The further peace is removed from us, the least apt God is to work among us. **The division under**

consideration separates the children of God from one another.

Not the Division Jesus Caused

There is a division that comes from being exposed to Jesus. Thus it is written, "So there was a division among the people because of Him" . . . "Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This Man is not of God, because He keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them" . . . "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings" (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). This is a division of flesh from Spirit, and sin from righteousness. In this case, Jesus came to bring such division. He said, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Lk 12:51). This is not sinful division, but division caused by sin.

city" (Gen 11:7-8). A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Division Between Brethren

It is a Divine principle that "every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt 12:25), and "a house divided against a house falleth" (Lk 11:17). Divided houses are destined to fall. They "CANNOT" stand! Even if they are churches, they "cannot stand!" Even if they are great religious movements, they "cannot stand!" When division intrudes among those who bear the name of Jesus, the process of deterioration begins, and the fabric of unity begins to shred.

Division has to do with **the way** people think, with their perceptions and persuasions. Therefore the Spirit admonishes believers "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the

seditions, heresies" (Gal 5:20). Other versions read, "contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies," ^{NKJV} and "selfishness, dissension, party spirit." ^{RSV}

Division is the injection of poison in the mainstream of spiritual life.

Whereas the Holy Spirit promotes unity (i.e., "the unity of the Spirit" – Eph 4:3), the devil, working through the flesh, promotes division. The Spirit promotes unity through the love of the brethren and the declaration of the truth. The devil promotes division by hatred and false doctrine.

The seriousness of division among the people of God cannot be overstated. We are living in a period of time the Scriptures call "a falling away" (2 Thess 2:3). It is a time when the love of many has "waxed cold" because of abounding and popular iniquity (Matt 24:12). The "Christian" world is dominated by a "form of godliness," while the very power of God is being denied and rejected (2 Tim 3:5). In such a climate, religious people have grown accustomed to division. Some even imagine that it is an advantage for the people, offering valid alternatives that more precisely meet their needs. However, this text will expose the foolishness of such an imagination.

The divisions in Corinth were caused by heresies, or factional teachings – teachings that divided the people. The condition had neutralized their influence, and set the stage for their demise.

The Division at Babel

We have the people involved in the tower of Babel for an example. They were perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. The work they undertook, however, was not a good one. They conspired to make a name for themselves by themselves, without any involvement with the Living God. Of them God said, "And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now **nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do**" (Gen 11:6). The Lord therefore came down and divided them, for "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

The action of the Lord is described in these words: "Go to, let us go down, and there **confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the**

same thing, **and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**" (1 Cor 1:10).

Evidence of Carnality

Division among the people of God is evidence of carnality and worldly-mindedness. Thus it is written, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, **and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?**" (1 Cor 3:3). The divisions in Corinth were caused by heresies, or factional teachings – teachings that divided the people. The condition had neutralized their influence, and set the stage for their demise.

The Work of the Flesh

Division is evidence of the "works of the flesh," for which men will be condemned. In a remarkable catalog of the works of the flesh, the Spirit paints different views of division. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest . . . variance, emulations, wrath, strife,

Them that Cause Divisions!

Here is a word to all believers. It is not addressed to the leaders, or the more advanced, but to all of the saints. "Mark them which **cause divisions.**" There are people whose presence and teaching put brethren against each other. These are purveyors of poison and hawkers of heresy. They "CAUSE divisions."

Solomon referred to such people as those who "sow discord among brethren." He added that God "hates" such people (Prov 6:16-19). Often this is done by attempting to mingle human opinion with the truth of God, or declaring a purely human thought as though God was the author of it. Others take things God has said, perhaps in a former dispensation or circumstance, and bind it upon the people of God today. An example is the Jews who taught, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Others sought to bind upon

believers Old Covenant distinctions of meat and drink, holy days, new moons, and sabbath days (Col 2:16). Still others influenced believers to worship angels. Such men major on visions they claim to have seen, and thus depart from the Lord Jesus (Col 2:17). Still others press human disciplines upon believers which *“have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence”*^{NIV} (Col 2:23).

All such things *“cause divisions,”* and those who teach them are to be marked, or noted. From the gossip and talebearer to the false teacher, we are to keep our eye upon those who set brethren against one another. Such are enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, who seek their own betterment, and not that of the saints.

Why Is Division So Serious

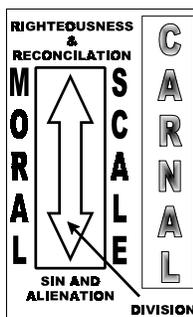
The seriousness of division is seen in this: **it reproduces the circumstances from which we had to be delivered in the first place.**

On the moral scale, sin and alienation are at the low extreme, and righteousness and reconciliation are at the high extreme. Division pushes men toward sin and alienation, thereby enabling Satan to work more freely. Division causes men to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit of God. It moves them to elevate the teachings of men above the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It promotes a disregard for the work of God in His people. Division makes the flesh so bold that it asserts itself against those to whom the Holy Spirit and holy angels minister, and for whom Jesus died and now intercedes. Do not begin to imagine that division is not a serious matter!

CAUSING OFFENSES

“ . . . who cause . . . offenses . . . ”

Offenses are stumbling blocks, when people *“put obstacles in your way.”*^{NIV} These are things that make it more difficult to run the race, perfect holiness, and prepare for the coming of the Lord.



While it is a grievous thing to have to acknowledge, there are some people from whom we must recover. Like the Canaanite, they are pricks in our eyes and thorns in our side

They are *“hindrances”*^{NASB} in the race, obstructions in the way, and barriers that inhibit spiritual growth.

Earlier, the Spirit mentioned those who ate *“with offense,”* causing a weaker brother act contrary to his conscience. Such conduct was said to *“destroy the work of God”* (14:20). Jesus declared that it was inevitable that offenses would come, *“but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh”* (Matt 15:7). There are professing Christians who make it more difficult for us to be faithful. In the presence of such people, we tend to ignore our conscience, placing a higher value on the influence of the offender than on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. **While it is a grievous thing to have to acknowledge, there are some people from whom we must recover.** Like the Canaanite, they are pricks in our eyes and thorns in our side (Num 33:55).

THINGS THAT ARE CONTRARY

“ . . . contrary to the doctrine which you learned . . . ” How are we to measure such people? What is the means by which we know who they are? This is not a carnal evaluation. The test is not whether or not we are attracted to, or turned away from, them in the flesh. We must rise above mere emotion in this judgment.

The division and offenses in question are *“contrary to the teaching you have learned.”*^{NIV} The divisions caused by these people are not the divisions Jesus caused. They do not reflect the teaching of the Gospel of Christ. Those whom God unites, these people divide. Those, of course, who have no regard for *“doctrine”* will be hard pressed to fulfill this admonition. Some treat *“sound doctrine”* as though it divided people. Because of their simplicity, they even compare doctrine with Jesus, saying they hold no doctrine, but stand for Jesus alone. That

position itself is divisive, for Jesus was noted for *“His doctrine”* (Matt 7:28; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 4:2; 11:18; 12:38). He referred to *“My doctrine”* (John 7:16).

Doctrinal Direction

There was a certain direction to the teaching of our Lord, as well as that of His Apostles. He made people more aware of His Father and His coming. He had a high regard for pleasing God at all cost, and seeking first His Kingdom and righteousness. When you listened to Jesus, He did not leave your head pinned to the earth. He left you thinking about God, heaven, hell, and the day of judgment. You sensed there was another world, and a point in time when you would be ushered into the presence of the Lord.

Paul wrote of *“the doctrine that is according to godliness,”* or that *“conforms to godliness”*^{NASB} (1 Tim 6:3). John wrote of *“the doctrine of Christ,”* in which **He** was preeminent (2 John 1:98). Such doctrine is *“adorned,”* or made attractive, by godly living and *“good fidelity”* (Tit 2:10).

Divisions and offenses that are *“contrary to the doctrine which you have learned”* do not promote godliness. Christ is not at the heart of such things. Both division and offenses move you closer to the earth, and further from heaven.

Dividing Over Private Persuasions

The people of God are not to divide over their private persuasions. These are matters in which there is a strong conviction, yet which is not Divinely sanctioned as an area in which to withdraw from a brother. In such matters the word is, *“So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God”* (Rom 14:22). These are views that intrude into the thinking of fellow believers, causing disruption and offense. It is assumed they have been formed out of a consciousness for God, yet they

cannot be imposed upon other brethren.

The Spirit can be specific about who we are to avoid, or people from whom we are to separate.

- ▶ We are to avoid those who **cause** divisions and offenses. *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them”* (Rom 16:17).
- ▶ We are to *“turn away”* from those having a *“form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”* (2 Tim 3:5).
- ▶ After a first and second admonition, we

man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess 3:11-14).

These are areas in which our association with believers can be impacted. Those who *“cause . . . offenses,”* in such cases, are the offenders that are mentioned.

Concerning other matters, any teaching that tends to be disruptive among those who have demonstrated a love for the truth, faith in Christ, and a love for the brethren, is to be treated like a coal of fire. It should

Zealously he pursued the things for which Christ had “apprehended” him. He forgot the things that were behind him, stretching forward to the things that were before him. He pressed toward the mark with unrelenting fervor.

The Example of Paul

Paul shared with us the spiritual motivation that compelled how he lived. He had counted everything *“loss,”* turning his back on a dedicated religious career. He not only suffered the loss of those things, but considered them but *“dung”* to be left behind. Zealously he pursued the things for which Christ had *“apprehended”* him. He forgot the things that were behind him, stretching forward to the things that were before him. He pressed toward the mark with unrelenting fervor. According to his own testimony, he did this in order to *“win Christ,”* being *“found in Him”* with an acceptable righteousness, in order that He might *“know Him,”* realize the *“power of His resurrection,”* and the *“fellowship of His sufferings.”* His aim was to *“attain to the resurrection of the dead,”* and obtain the *“prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* Noble ambitions, indeed!

After sharing these profound things, the Spirit moved Paul to call others into the same kind of life. Note, however, the manner in which he did this. *“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained”* NIV (Phil 3:7-16). Each person was to live according to the understanding they had, or had *“already attained.”* Because the approach Paul took to life was valid, those who could not see it because of his testimony, would be shown it by God Himself. Paul was willing to rely on this Kingdom procedure, if I may refer to it in this manner. If, on such a critical matter, Paul did not make such an issue, so as to divide the saints of God, what person is willing to disrupt the congregation of God over even lesser matters? This is an area where a great deficiency exists in not a few believers.

AVOID THEM!

“. . . and avoid them.” What is our response to be to those who *“cause divisions and offences?”* Are we to tolerate them, explain them, attempt to dissuade them from spreading their venom? Should our hearts be moved with great sympathy for them? Here is the mandate of the Spirit, and we are to take it seriously. **“AVOID THEM!”** Other

are to *“reject”* a man who is a heretic, insisting on dotting about inconsequential matters. *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject”* (Tit 3:9-10).

- ▶ Fellowship is to be withdrawn from professing believers who are caught up in immoral practices. *“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat”* (1 Cor 5:11).
- ▶ Those who refuse to work, becoming disorderly are busybodies, are to be duly noted, and fellowship withdrawn from them. *“For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that*

not be handled long, for it will have a damaging effect upon the saints of God. It may involve a very strong personal persuasion, but it cannot be used to disrupt the unity of believers.

Apart from the malicious doctrines that crafty men seek to perpetrate, I have found that divisive teaching almost always has to do with procedures and human relationships. Those who hold to certain views in such matters are not to be despised, and they are certainly free to hold their views. But they must keep them to themselves, not seeking to bind them on those who, even though they are trusting in the Lord, do not see things with the same perspective.

I say these things fully aware that it will appear on the surface to leave a door open for the wicked one. However, nothing could be further from the truth. A single example will suffice to confirm this to be the case.

versions read, “turn away from them,”^{NASB} “Keep away from them,”^{NIV} and “stay away from them.”^{NLT} We are told to do the same when confronting those “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5).

The word “avoid” is especially strong. It means to shun and stay aloof from. This is more than a mere physical reaction, although that is involved. To

“avoid” those causing divisions and offenses is to refuse to hear them or follow them. It is to decline to give them our ears or our attention. We are not to grant such people access to our hearts and minds, allowing them to impact our thinking.

When speaking of the path of the wicked, Solomon said, “Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away” (Prov 4:15). The people of God are to “avoid

fornication” (1 Cor 7:2). “Foolish and unlearned questions” are to be “avoided,” for they “gender strifes” (2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9). Does anyone imagine that this is only a casual word, to be treated as though no danger was imminent when we are near those who “cause divisions and offenses?” Forever thrust such folly from your mind. The Spirit does not admonish us so strongly when there are no dangers, no jeopardies, or no liabilities!

HERE IS WHAT THEY REALLY ARE

“¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” It is the manner of the Spirit to speak of adversaries according to their character, not their appearance. Thus, our chief adversary, Satan, is referred to as “the old serpent” (Rev 12:9), “the dragon” (Rev 20:2), the “tempter” (1 Thess 3:5), “the Devil” (slanderer, Jude 1:9), “Satan” (accuser, Rev 2:13) “Abaddon” and “Apollyn” (destroyer, Rev 9:11). It should not surprise us that his “ministers” (2 Cor 11:15) are also referred to according to their character. The Spirit refers to them in a variety of ways, the magnitude of which is staggering.

The Spirit Refers to False Teachers

- ▶ Called “blind guides” (Matt 23:24).
- ▶ They are called “dogs” (Phil 3:2).
- ▶ They are called “ravening wolves” (Matt 7:15).
- ▶ They are “wolves” (Matt 10:16).
- ▶ They are “grievous wolves” (Acts 20:29).
- ▶ Jesus referred to them as “fools and blind” (Matt 23:19).
- ▶ Like their father, they are “serpents” (Matt 23:33).
- ▶ They are a “generation of vipers” (Matt 23:33).
- ▶ They are “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13).
- ▶ They are “deceitful workers” (2 Cor 11:13).
- ▶ The Spirit refers to them as those who “corrupt the Word of God” (2 Cor 2:17).
- ▶ They are “false brethren” (Gal 2:4).

- ▶ They are referred as those who “desire to make a fair show in the flesh” (Gal 6:12).
- ▶ They “lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14).
- ▶ They are those who “beguile you with enticing words” (Col 2:4).
- ▶ They have “turned aside unto vain jangling” (1 Tim 1:6).

- ▶ *truth*” (2 Tim 3:7).
- ▶ Such are “false prophets” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They are “false teachers” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They “bring in damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ They have “pernicious ways” (2 Pet 2:1).
- ▶ Described as those who “with feigned words make merchandise of you” (2

Do not imagine that the presence of false teachers is without consequence. Their presence is not to be viewed casually. Nor, indeed, are the saints to suppose such individuals can be confronted with the wisdom of this world, or with natural resources. As lofty as some consider academics and the speculative approaches of men, they are insufficient to confront such despots.

- ▶ They are described as “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).
- ▶ Those who are “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmising” (1 Tim 6:4).
- ▶ They are “men of corrupt minds” (1 Tim 6:5).
- ▶ Men who are “destitute of the truth” (1 Tim 6:5).
- ▶ Those who “creep into houses” (2 Tim 3:5).
- ▶ They are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the

- ▶ Pet 2:3).
- ▶ They are “antichrists” (1 John 2:18).
- ▶ They are “deceivers” (2 John 1:7).
- ▶ They are “ungodly men” (Jude 1:4).
- ▶ Think of them as “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers” (Tit 1:10).
- ▶ They “speak evil of those things which they know not” (Jude 1:10).
- ▶ They are like “brute beasts” (Jude 1:10).
- ▶ They are “as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12).
- ▶ Those who “speak evil of the things that they understand not” (2 Pet 2:12).

This is not an exhaustive list. It

does provide us with a Divine perspective of such individuals – those who impose themselves upon the flock of God as though they were proper representatives of the Lord, and faithful proclaimers of His Word.

Do not imagine that the presence of false teachers is without consequence. Their presence is not to be viewed casually. Nor, indeed, are the saints to suppose such individuals can be confronted with the wisdom of this world, or with natural resources. As lofty as some consider academics and the speculative approaches of men, they are insufficient to confront such despots.

With great care, therefore, the Holy Spirit more precisely identifies these intruders. He will not move us to think kindly of them, or treat them as naive and

Whatever may be said of those who “*cause divisions and offenses*,” they are NOT serving Christ. His purposes are not being advanced by them. They do not bring advantages to the saints. They are not guided by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is neither directing or blessing them. Their ministry is outside the circumference of Divine commission and blessing. They do not make Jesus more plain, or His will more clear.

Does anyone imagine this is not a serious matter? Are there not only two masters? If Jesus is not being served, there is only one other personality that can be served, for “*no man can serve two masters*” (Matt 6:24). Jesus 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). If, then,

It is the inmost part of the natural man. A similar statement is made of false prophets in Philippians 3:19. “*Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*” Such are serving purely earthly, or fleshly, interests. They are wrapped up in the temporal, and neither live nor teach with eternity in mind. Their ministry is wholly unrelated to that of the Lord Jesus Christ. At no point does their earthly agenda intersect with the purpose of God Almighty.

The message delivered by such intruders, who cause divisions and offenses, is completely related to life in this world. Their false gospel concerns the flesh, and life in the flesh. They offer no remedy for sin, and do not hold before men the eternal inheritance reserved in heaven for those who are in Christ Jesus.

To reaffirm the truth here declared, those who cause “divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” are not serving Christ. Consequently, they are of no value to the people of God. They are obstacles to spiritual progress.

Isaiah spoke of such imposters as “*greedy dogs which can never have enough*” (Isa 56:11). Their appetites are larger than what they have received, and thus they even preach and teach to fatten their coffers and satisfy their flesh. Of such, Solomon said, “*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase*” (Eccl 5:10). To them, their possessions, recognition by their peers, and stability in this world are everything.

sincere. It is imperative that we give heed to the spirit of this text, as well as to the information it conveys. You simply cannot consider these words soberly, and come away with a casual attitude about those who cause division, and offenses.

THEY DO NOT SERVE CHRIST

“*For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ . . .*” Other versions read, “*For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites,*”^{NASB} “*For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,*”^{NIV} “*Such people are not serving Christ our Lord; they are serving their own personal interests,*”^{NLT} and “*people of that sort are servants not of our Lord Christ, but of their own greed.*”^{NJB}

They Are Not Serving Christ

these men are not serving Christ, it is because they are not following Him. They are **not** on the narrow road that leads to life, and thus the Father will not honor their labors. Unless they are changed, Jesus will repudiate them in the day of judgment as “*workers of iniquity*” (Lk 13:27). What we are dealing with here, is that serious!

To reaffirm the truth here declared, those who cause “*divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine*” are **not** serving Christ. Consequently, they are of no value to the people of God. They are obstacles to spiritual progress.

THEY SERVE THEIR OWN BELLY

“*. . . but their own belly . . .*” The word “*belly*” denotes the earthly, or temporal, appetites of a person.

They bear remarkable resemblance to the ancient Cretians, of whom it is said, “*The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies*” (Tit 1:12). Other versions read “*lazy gluttons*” instead of “*slow bellies.*” The idea is of people with no initiative, who live only to gratify their fleshly appetites. That is precisely what serving ones own “*belly*” means. Such do not intend to please God, but to gratify self. They are slaves to the flesh, and the appetites that gratify it. That proclivity is reflected in what they preach and teach. It shapes their presentation of the Gospel, and determines their doctrinal emphasis.

THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY DECEIVE

“*. . . and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive . . .*” Other versions read, “*smooth and flattering speech,*”^{NASB} “*pleasing speeches and good words,*”^{DRA} “*smooth and well-said words,*”

^{BBE} “smooth talk and glowing words,”^{NLT} and “talk that sounds smooth and reasonable.”^{NJB}

Those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine are unabrasive **to the flesh** in their speech. Using flattery, they leave men comfortable in, at the very best, a state of spiritual infancy. At the worse, they make men comfortable in vice and deliberate transgression.

Speaking of this kind of approach, Paul is more detailed in Second Corinthians. There he declares true ministers have “renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor 4:2). Those using “smooth words and flattering speech” distort the Word of God to serve their own purposes. Because they give great emphasis to the flesh, they cause divisions and offenses, for both are products of the flesh, having no place in God’s Kingdom.

THE HEARTS OF THE SIMPLE

“ . . . the hearts of the simple.” Other versions read, “the hearts of the unsuspecting,”^{NASB} “the minds of naive people,”^{NIV} “the hearts of the innocent,”^{DRA} and “the hearts of those who have no knowledge of evil.”^{BBE} The word “simple” does not refer to a state of intellectual inferiority, or to those lacking normal mental capacities. This condition refers to those who are not yet acquainted with the aggressiveness of the devil. Hence, they cannot imagine someone coming in the name of the Lord bringing a message that is not true.

Those who “cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine” direct their teaching to such souls. They have no ministry for the mature, and thus can never say with Paul, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). Nor, indeed, will they ever be heard to say, “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect” (1 Cor 2:6). The teacher sent from God appeals to the spiritually mature to confirm the truth of what he speaks. **Those who “cause divisions and offenses” appeal to the immature,**

who are closer to the flesh than to the Spirit, and have not yet had their “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

The Danger of Spiritual Simplicity

There is a very real danger associated with being “simple,” or spiritually immature. In order to ensure that this state is only brief, and associated with the beginning of our life in Christ, the Lord has ordered His Kingdom in a certain manner. That manner is described, among other places, in the fourth chapter of Ephesians. There, “Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” are declared to have been given to the church “for the perfecting of the saints.” The aim of the perfection, or maturing, of the saints is this: “That we henceforth **be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about**

peace” are multiplied to us “*through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord*” (2 Pet 1:2). The “spirit of wisdom and revelation,” or the ability to handle the truth, comes “*in the knowledge of Him*” (Eph 1:17). Even the appropriation of “*all things that pertain to life and godliness*” comes “*through the knowledge of Him*” (2 Pet 1:3). **When our knowledge of God is limited, we receive limited measures of grace and peace – because that very knowledge is the conduit through which grace and peace are received.** When our knowledge and understanding of God and His ways is restricted, our appropriation of all things pertaining to life and godliness is also restricted.

The Point of the Text

The point of the text is that those causing “divisions and offenses” focus

Those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine are unabrasive to the flesh in their speech. Using flattery, they leave men comfortable in, at the very best, a state of spiritual infancy.

with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:8-14).

It is certainly right to minister to the spiritually undeveloped and novices, in order that they might “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). In fact, it is imperative that this be done. However, this is neither the core nor the thrust of the ministry of the truth of God. All such teaching and guidance is intended to bring the saints to a place where they can ponder and profit from “the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

The Role of the Knowledge of God

The reason for this arrangement should be apparent to us. It is by “**increasing in the knowledge of God,**” or acquaintance with Him and His ways, that we are more precisely conformed to the image of Christ (Col 1:10). “Grace and

their attention upon those who are unacquainted with the ways of the Lord. They have nothing for those who are “rooted and grounded,” have the “full assurance of faith,” or are “walking in the Spirit” (Eph 3:17; Heb 10:22; Gal 5:25). What is even more, they do not focus on the immature in order to bring advantages to them, or assist them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they are actually seeking to satisfy themselves and fulfill their own agenda.

Their subtle message arouses the remnants of the flesh, thus causing “divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.” It is clothed in smooth and flattering words, but brings no advantage to the “new man.” It pulls men down into the arena of flesh and blood rather than up into the heavenly places.

Those who are truly from God

declare a message that edifies both the mature and the novice. It feeds the sheep and carries the lambs, so to speak. That is precisely why the truth of Christ produces unity among those who embrace it. When the truth is ministered in the power of the Spirit, the elder and the novice can sit at the same table and receive nourishment. It is the nature of truth as it is in Jesus, to provide food for every level of discipleship, with none being neglected.

One Final Word

The seriousness of the text before us cannot be overemphasized. An approach to preaching and teaching that is limited to spiritually elementary things, actually opens the door for imposters and

intruders. **Unless teaching lifts men upward, the seeds of division and offense will eventually be sown.** The closer we are to the earth, the more imminent sinful divisions and offenses become. Such *"divisions and offenses"* can only grow in certain kinds of soil. That soil is directly related to the teachings of men who *"have not the Spirit"* (Jude 1:19).

It is to be understood that a proper doctrinal emphasis will also produce division – a division of the flesh from the Spirit. Those with no appetite for the truth will soon turn away, like certain who heard the Lord Jesus (John 6:66). However, for those who have received *"the love of the truth,"* such growth can

be realized as will constrain the individual to hate sin, make war against it within their own members, and consistently resist the devil. Those who teach unto edification will produce these results among those who receive their word. They will never cause divisions and offenses.

If *"It is an honor for a man to cease from strife"* (Prov 20:3), then it is most dishonorable to be the cause of strife, contention, division, and offenses. If the blessing of the Lord is pronounced upon *"peacemakers"* (Matt 5:9), and *the "fruit of righteousness"* is sown by those who *"make peace"* (James 3:18), what must be said of those who disrupt that peace? Zealously avoid such people!

GOING ON FROM OBEDIENCE

"¹⁹ For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil." Here Paul expresses his confidence in the brethren responding favorably to his exhortation. His warning concerning those who caused *"divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine"* was not given because of a hesitating spirit among the brethren at

mentioned that the faith of the brethren in Rome was *"spoken of throughout the whole world"* (Rom 1:8). Now he speaks of their obedience, because it was constrained by their faith (Rom 1:5).

OBEDIENCE THAT IS KNOWN

"For your obedience has become known to all . . ." Other versions read, *"For the report of your obedience has reached to all,"*^{NASB} *"Everyone has heard*

see in this text. He does not commend the brethren for responding to the personal promptings of the Lord, although that is, indeed a commendable quality. However, the perception of such prompting is highly subjective, depending upon the condition and understanding of the one so moved. There are persuasions that are *"not from the Lord,"* yet can be treated as though they were (Gal 5:8). It is also possible for a challenging occasion to arise from the Lord, and the individual be totally unaware this is the case (Judges 14:4).

I know of no place in the Apostolic doctrine where people are asked to interpret their personal inclinations independently of the Word of God.

While the Lord does direct His people in very personal ways, under the New Covenant, the accent of obedience is always a response to the Gospel of Christ, and truth that is common to all saints (Rom 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:26; Gal 3:1; 5:7; 2 Thess 1:8; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Pet 3:1; 1 Pet 4:17). **I know of no place in the Apostolic doctrine where people are asked to interpret their personal inclinations independently of the Word of God.** This is not to be construed as meaning the Lord does not move His people to do "this or that." It does mean, however, that so far as the revelation is concerned, that moving is always in strict concert with the Gospel of Christ and the revealed purpose of God. For God to otherwise deal with His children would require personal interests to be elevated too highly, placing the revealed purpose of

Rome. Rather, he was at liberty to speak in this manner because of their forwardness to obey. **When the saints respond favorably to the truth that is given to them, they will be given more.** Thus Jesus said, *"For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance"* (Matt 13:12). Again our Lord said, *"Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given"* (Mark 4:24).

about your obedience,"^{NIV} *"For your obedience is published in every place,"*^{DRA} *"For all have knowledge of how you do what you are ordered,"*^{BBE} and *"But everyone knows that you are obedient to the Lord."*^{NLT} How marvelous to be noted for obedience! This trait was also found among the Philippians, of whom Paul said, *"ye have always obeyed"* (Phil 2:12). Such people are noted for taking hold of the truth and conforming their lives to it.

AN IMPORTANT DISTINCTION

There is an important distinction to

Early in this Epistle, Paul

God into the background.

So far as I know, no one in Scripture is commended for being obedient in buying a piece of land, building a house, marrying a wife, or some other matter relating to social and domestic circumstances. The obedience commended in Scripture always relates to the “*common salvation*” (Jude 1:3) and the “*common faith*” (Tit 1:4). Wherever obedience, or a failure to obey, is sited, there was always an articulated word from God. **If it was a personal word, such as the one directed to Abraham, it eventually became public, and became a basis for sound spiritual reasoning. It also had to do with benefits that extended beyond the individual to whom God spoke.** This reasoning may also be applied to the dreams of young Joseph (Gen 37:5-10), Gideon (Judges 7:13), Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5), and Joseph the husband of Mary (Matt 2:12-13).

True Excellence

True excellence must be traced back to men’s response to the word of the Gospel. It should be evident why this is true. **Other areas of moral excellence, making right choices, etc., do not require immediate involvement with God, faith in His Son, or the belief of the Gospel.**

The “*obedience*,” therefore, for which the brethren in Rome were noted, specifically related to how they responded to the Gospel. What others had rejected, they had received. While some thrust the Word of God from themselves (Acts 13:46), they took it to themselves, obeying it. They had become noted for their obedience. What a marvelous reputation, and it is to be greatly desired among us.

Now Paul appeals to that obedience in regard to their response to those causing divisions and offenses. While this may appear to be a rather technical point, it is critical that we understand how God regards obedience. As with all of life, obedience is never the result of leaning to our own understanding (Prov 3:5-6).

GLAD ON YOUR BEHALF

“*Therefore I am glad on your behalf* . . . ” Other versions read, “*therefore I am*

rejoicing over you,”^{NASB} “*so I am full of joy over you*,”^{NIV} and “*I am very pleased with you for it*.”^{NJB}

The idea is that Paul rejoiced that an obedient spirit was evident in the brethren. In this, they were like the Lord Jesus who “*learned obedience by the things that He suffered*” (Heb 5:8). Amidst the difficulties brought on by his own faithfulness to the Lord, the recollection of the obedient spirit of the brethren brought joy to Paul’s heart. That, of course, was but a faint reflection of the joy it brought to the Lord of hosts.

The effect of obedience upon the Lord of glory is found throughout the

Prior to Christ’s entrance into the world, He is never said to have been “*obedient*” to the Father. His “*obedience*” relates exclusively to His entrance into the world, His holy life of preparation, and His death and resurrection (Matt 3:15; Matt 26:39-42; John 4:34; 5:30,36; 6:38; 15:10; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8; 10:7-9).

The Holy Angels

The holy angels are said to “*do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His Word*” (Psa 103:20), but are never said to be “*obedient*.” They carry out the Word of the Lord swiftly, apparently without confronting any tendency to resist, or without having to extend themselves to respond to the honor and

Amidst the difficulties brought on by his own faithfulness to the Lord, the recollection of the obedient spirit of the brethren brought joy to Paul’s heart. That, of course, was but a faint reflection of the joy it brought to the Lord of hosts.

Word of God. Great men and women of faith have been placed in the Scriptures because of their obedience (Gen 22:18; Josh 22:2; 2 Chron 11:4; Hag 1:12; Rom 6:17; Phil 2:12; Heb 11:8). Those whom the Lord does not commend are noted as those who “*obeyed not*” (Josh 5:6; 2 Kgs 18:12; Jer 11:8; Dan 9:14; Zeph 3:2; 2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17).

Why It Is This Way

There is a reason why such a high value is placed upon “*obedience*.” This is a word and an activity that applies to men in this world. “*Obedience*” assumes the presence of opposing influences. It involves an assertion of the will and the putting down of contrary thoughts.

Perfected Spirits

Those who are “*with the Lord*” in glory are never said to be obedient. They “*follow the Lamb whosoever He goeth*,” but once out of the body, they are never said to “*obey*” Him.

The Lord Jesus

glory of God.

An Area Where Men Can Excel

While the word “*obedience*” etymologically involves compliance and submission, and might technically appear to apply to angels, the Holy Spirit uses the word exclusively in regard to mankind. Even the Lord Himself is never said to have obeyed God until He took upon Himself the form of a man. **Obedience is an area of response to God in which men can excel and bring honor and glory to the Lord.** Thus, obedient men and obedience itself are always commended in Scripture.

Traits of Obedience

Obedience reveals a tender heart. It confirms the presence of faith, and relates to the works that faith produces. Where obedience to God takes place, there has been “*reverence and godly fear*” before Him (Heb 12:28). **It is not so much the obedience itself that causes rejoicing, but what is confirmed by that obedience.** Those who fail to obey

confirm they have thrust the Word of God away, judging themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46). Just that surely, those who obey substantiate they have taken the Word of God into their hearts, desiring the eternal life that He freely offers to them. That circumstance brings joy to those who are working together with God.

Thus John the beloved confessed, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). Paul also “rejoiced” when the Corinthians “sorrowed to repentance” over a matter that had caused him great concern (2 Cor 7:9). **The measure of a true teacher**

10:16). That is, while confronting those who would hurt and devour them, or cause divisions and offenses, His disciples were to so conduct themselves as always be beneficial. They were never to be carried away with the contentious and harmful doctrines of those who spoke out of the reservoir of human wisdom. Wherever such people exist, there is danger.

The point is that “good” is to be done, not merely recognize. **Jesus has not called us to be mere spiritual analysts, but to be able to recognize, and involve ourselves in, “good.”** That takes wisdom, and wisdom comes

LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” All of this, he was apprised, would come after he had died. However, Hezekiah was wise concerning that was good. This message did not cause him to despair. Thus he answered, “*Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?*” (2 Kings 20:17-20). **Being wise concerning what is good is exceedingly practical, yielding great benefits.**

SIMPLE CONCERNING EVIL

“ . . . and simple concerning evil.” Other versions read, “innocent in what is evil,”^{NASB} “guileless in what is evil,”^{NRSV} “and without knowledge of evil,”^{BBE} “harmless as to the evil,”^{YLT} and “unsophisticated about all that is evil.”^{NJB}

The idea here is not that Paul wanted the brethren to be simply-minded about evil, unable to perceive it, and ignorant concerning its effects. There is no advantage in such a frame of mind. Nor, indeed, is he referring to the mere detection of evil, such as being able to “discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

The Manner of False Teachers

Here the Spirit leads us to consider the manner in which those who cause divisions and offenses operate. **The field of their expertise is found in deception and guile.** Of them it is said, “*by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (Eph 4:14). **Like their father the devil, they are expert in making evil appear as though it was good.** They are better at making the wrong appear right than in shining the jewel of redemption, and throwing the light upon the Lord Jesus. They know how to take what brings hurt to the body of Christ, and move men to embrace it, thinking they are gaining an advantage. The saints cannot afford to be ignorant of such devices!

Legion is the name of those perpetrating doctrines that have been foisted upon the church as though they were true, yet which caused divisions and offenses. The only way this can happen is for the proponents of such dogmas to be

The measure of a true teacher or preacher can be seen in his ability to rejoice in the obedience of the people to the truth of God.

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WISE IN WHAT IS GOOD

“ . . . *but I want you to be wise in what is good . . .*” Other versions read, “*but I want you to be wise about what is good,*”^{NIV} “*but yet I would have you wise to that which is good,*”^{WEB} and “*I want you to see clearly what is right.*”^{NLT}

The words “*but yet,*”^{KJV} or “*but I want,*” indicate that **obedience must lead us to the point where we are discerning.** Obedience is greatly limited if we cannot detect what is right, or are not wise enough to decipher what is good and without corruption. Things that are “good” promote God-honoring results, bringing everlasting benefits to the children of God.

Concerning wisdom and good, Jesus said, “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*” (Matt

with spiritual maturity.

More Specifically

There is an even more specific reason for this word. The brethren in Rome had a reputation for being obedient. Of itself, that is a good thing. It must not be forgotten, however, that “*the wicked one*” will attempt to exploit such a tendency. His “*ministers*” (2 Cor 11:15) are also looking for people who will quickly obey what they say. The people of God are to develop a wisdom that is able to instantly recognize the good, to which they are to give themselves fully. Thus, even when a message is delivered that sounds bad on the surface, yet if it is good, they will be quickly able to detect and conform to it.

An Example of Wisdom in Good

King Hezekiah is a sterling example of this. Isaiah brought him a word that did not sound good. “*Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the*

cunning concerning evil – to be able to so thoroughly misrepresent the lie, that men think it to be truth. **Just as surely as Satan used wit to deceive Eve into doing what was evil, so His ministers use cunning craftiness to put pressure on the saints to accept what causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of Christ.**

It is comely when the people of God gain wisdom to recognize and do what is good, possessing no adeptness at presenting or doing evil. They know what evil is, but they are unlearned in executing it. They cannot put God into the background of their thinking in order to do evil. For this reason, evil becomes especially offensive to them. It is abrasive

to their spirits and loathsome to their hearts. When a purveyor of spiritually damaging doctrines confronts them, they become expert in avoiding that person, unable and unwilling to carry out his bidding, or embrace his teaching. There is certainly room for a great deal of this wisdom in our day. Knowing how and when to do good is found in such wisdom.

SATAN'S FUTURE REGARDING US

“²⁰ And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” Here is one of the grand promises of Scripture. For centuries it has ministered great hope to the saints while they were under attack from the powers of darkness. We do well to frequently recall this word, for it is a Divine commitment. **It teaches us not to assess our situation according to appearance, nor to imagine that our current circumstances will never change.** Faith can look beyond today and this time. Unlike our fleshly senses, it is not limited to time and space. Those who *“live by faith”* are noted for their vision – for being able to peer into the future, beyond *“this present evil world.”* The secret to their overcoming lives is that they live in view of what is coming. This is of particular relevance when it comes to our adversary, the devil.

THE DIVINE MANNER

As is the Divine manner, a wonderful promise is placed before the saints. The promises are the appointed means through which we *“participate in the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4). The promises of God have a strong drawing power to those who believe. **They assist us in gaining a proper spiritual focus, and reduce the weight of suffering.** It is no wonder they are called *“exceeding great and precious promises.”*

This promise is designed to encourage them in the good fight of faith. It is quite true that they will have *“tribulation”* in the world (John 16:33). Their adversary, the devil, does walk about as a roaring lion, *“seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). They will surely confront subtle teachers who will *“cause*

divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine.” However, those difficulties and confrontations are not all there is to life. There are also Divine commitments that are given to us along the way, and they are good and effective. The Spirit places

to the poor saints in Jerusalem will be received, and that God would bring him to them in joy. The *“God of peace”* will superintend these things.

☐ **Philippians 4:9.** The saints of God are urged to *“do”* what they have

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just such a promise before us now. It is of sufficient weight to engage our whole heart and mind, and will serve the mitigate the hardships we must face en route to glory.

THE GOD OF PEACE

“And the God of peace . . .” This is the second time this phrase has been used in Romans, the other being in the thirty-third verse of chapter fifteen. It is also used in Philippians 4:9 and Hebrews 13:20. The Lord is also referred to as *“the God of love and peace”* (2 Cor 13:11), and *“the very God of peace”* (1 Thess 5:23). In each of these cases, a significant work is set before the saints.

☐ **Romans 15:33.** Here the brethren are urged to pray that Paul might be delivered from those who do not believe, that the offering he is bringing

learned, received, heard, and seen in Paul. In this effort, *“the God of peace”* will be with them.

☐ **2 Corinthians 13:11.** Believers are admonished to be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, and to live in peace. *“The God of love and peace”* will be with them in this work.

☐ **1 Thessalonians 5:23.** It is *“the very God of peace”* who will sanctify believers in their *“whole spirit, soul, and body.”*

☐ **Hebrews 13:20-21.** Here the perfection of the people of God is mentioned, in which God works to do His own will, working in them *“that which is well pleasing in His sight.”* This staggering work is depicted as being accomplished by *“the God of peace.”*

In each of these texts, peace provides the environment in which

the work and will of the Lord is accomplished. This is a vital aspect of Kingdom life, and must be seen more clearly by each believer. Many of God's children are unable to make significant progress in the faith because they are continually in hostile and adversarial circumstances. Their hearts are disquieted, and turmoil and agitation plague them. **No child of God is capable of controlling such environments.** For many, this proves to be a source of frustration and despair. It is good when the concept of "the God of peace" breaks upon us. He, and He alone, can quiet our troubled seas, and bring calmness to the soul.

In this particular text, the Spirit mentions the ultimate

In His death, the Lord Jesus fulfilled the statement God made to Satan in the garden: *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Gen 3:15). Other versions read, *"He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel."*^{NIV} The picture is that of Jesus stomping on Satan's head with His heel, and Satan lashing back by striking Christ's heel. Satan's strike was administered in Christ's suffering and death, and was to Christ's "heel," or His humanity. Jesus made Himself vulnerable in no other area, confessing that Satan had "nothing" IN Him (John 14:30).

In the Apostolic elaboration of the promise in Genesis, the Spirit said,

Through Christ's vicarious death Satan was "destroyed" in the heavenly places, and rendered powerless in the domain of faith. He remains invincible in the earth. He cannot be resisted or overcome apart from faith.

adversarial circumstance, and the consummate enemy. If those matters are to be resolved by our Lord, we have no reason to be overcome by lesser circumstances and inferior foes!

THE CRUSHING OF SATAN

"... will crush Satan..." Other versions read, "will **bruise** Satan,"^{KJV} and "will be **crushing** Satan."^{BBE} This promise clarifies the nature of our present battle, and dispels the confusion caused by spiritual simplicity. It provides a very needful perspective, and will assist us in formulating proper views of the life of faith. In order to set the stage for the exposition of this promise, it is essential that we consider some of the proclamations concerning the overthrow of Satan and his hosts. In the consideration of these proclamations, we want to cast down spiritual simplicity.

Satan Has Been Destroyed

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). The word "destroy" does not mean annihilate, or rid the world once and for all of the devil. He is still walking about "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Neither, indeed, does it mean that Satan is rendered impotent or powerless, for he must be "resisted" by steadfastness in the faith (1 Pet 5:9). Such resistance is not required unless there is some kind of power resident in the foe. In fact, there is no such thing as a powerless foe.

Through Christ's vicarious death Satan was "destroyed" in the heavenly places, and rendered powerless in the domain of faith. He remains invincible in the earth. He cannot be resisted or overcome apart from faith.

From another perspective, in His death Jesus delivered a death blow to Satan – one from which he will eventually expire. The "old serpent" is presently in the death throes, but like a wounded beast, he remains vicious and dangerous.

Spoiled Principalities and Powers

Through the cross, Jesus also "spoiled," or plundered, principalities and powers that had dominated the world. Part of the Gospel includes this announcement: "... His cross; and having **spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it** [His cross]" (Col 2:15). Now these powers can hold no person or group of persons who believe on Christ, thereby receiving the salvation of God. Their only power is in the domain of unbelief. While they have, in a sense, been stripped of their power, they still retain a measure of it where faith is not present. They can only be overthrown when men wrestle against them in faith (Eph 6:12). The fact that we must "wrestle" against them confirms that when Jesus "spoiled" them, they were not rendered totally without influence or power.

Simplistic Views

There are simplistic views of Satan's bruising and the spoiling of principalities and powers that lead men to imagine they can be casually overcome. This view has come from the devil Himself. Using craftiness and subtlety, Satan has ensnared many a naive soul, taking them "captive at his will" (2 Tim 2:26). Such persons must "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil." This is such a difficult task that God must grant repentance to the one who has been snared in order that recovery can be realized (2 Tim 2:25).

A Warning to the Church

In the apocalyptic Gospel, the book of the Revelation, the Gospel is presented in a picture, or animated, form. The twelfth chapter makes this presentation. The birth of Christ through the Jewish nation is depicted as a woman traveling in birth, with the devil, as a dragon, positioning himself to devour the Child as soon as He was born. He also marshaled a great host of fallen spirits to join him in his intent (12:1-4). However, with one grand statement, the birth, life, death,

resurrection, and ascension of Christ is declared. *“And she brought forth a Man Child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her Child was caught up unto God, and to His throne”* (12:5). Thus, Satan’s intent was thoroughly and decisively frustrated.

As soon as this happened, the people of God fled to a place where spiritual sustenance could be ministered to them, even though they were seemingly vulnerable to the wicked one (12:6). At this point, Satan is pictured as being thrust out of the heavenly realms. Because Jesus had taken away the sins of the world, and there was no further basis for accusation before God, a place for him and his cohorts no longer existed in heaven (12:6-8).

Salvation Has Come

Satan, however, was not cast then into the lake of fire, which is his appointed destiny (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10). Instead, he was cast out *“into the earth.”* The casting of Satan and his angels out of heaven is equated with the coming of salvation, for a *“loud voice”* from heaven responded, ***“Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them”*** (12:10-12a).

Cast Into the Earth

However, this was not the end of the matter. Those dwelling *“in the heavens”* were rid of the *“old serpent,”* but those remaining upon the earth were not! A shout from heaven comes to the domain of earth. *“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time”* (12:12b). This is a great voice from heaven, and is not to be taken lightly. **While we are not to overestimate the power and influence of the devil, care must be taken not to underestimate it!**

Filled with Wrath, with a Short Time

The devil, our adversary, is acutely aware that his time is running out: *“knowing that he has only a short time.”*

^{NASB} God Almighty tells us that circumstance puts us into jeopardy. It makes living in this world a liability. In order that we may realize the extent of Satan’s opposition, the Spirit continues to paint a picture of his present activity. Realizing he has lost the battle with Jesus, being soundly and publicly defeated, he turns his attention to those who follow Jesus and keep His commandments. First, he seeks to wash away *“the woman,”* or the people of God, with a quick and devastating flood of persecution. But *“the earth helped the woman,”* absorbing the shock of Satan’s vicious attack (12:14-16). A remnant was preserved, the Gospel continued to be preached, and the saints were *“nourished from the face of the serpent.”*

armor of God” that they will be *“able to stand against the wiles of the devil”* (Eph 6:11).

- ☐ It is possible for believers, should they be lifted up with pride, to *“fall into the condemnation of the devil”* (1 Tim 3:6), and into the *“reproach and the snare of the devil”* (3:7).
- ☐ Our foe is so formidable that before we can effectively *“resist”* him, we must first *“submit”* ourselves to God (James 4:7).
- ☐ Married believers are reminded that Satan can *“tempt”* them because of their incontinency (1 Cor 7:5).
- ☐ All believers are warned that Satan can *“get an advantage”* of us, if we are *“ignorant of his devices”* (2 Cor 2:11).
- ☐ Transforming himself into an *“angel of light,”* he leads unwary souls into the night of sin and error (2 Cor 11:14).
- ☐ Time and again, Satan hindered the

As frustrating as this must have been for the devil, he did not throw down his weapons. Instead, he “went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”

Satan Initiates a War

As frustrating as this must have been for the devil, he did not throw down his weapons. Instead, he *“went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ”* (12:17). He continues in this *“war”* unto this very day, targeting all who refuse to let go of God’s commandments, and keep the *“testimony of Jesus”* in their possession.

In view of this war, the saints are frequently admonished concerning their view of and response to Satan’s advances. The Holy Spirit never paints a naive picture of the devil, or leads us to believe there is no danger or jeopardy when he works. Ponder some of these warnings.

- ☐ *“Do not give the devil an opportunity”* ^{NASB} (Eph 4:27).
- ☐ It is only as we *“put on the whole*

Apostle Paul (1 Thess 2:18).

- ☐ We are even warned of a spiritual despot *“whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved”* (2 Thess 2:9).
- ☐ Early in the history of the church, there were those who *“turned aside after Satan”* (1 Tim 5:15).

The Context of Our Text

All of this is the context of our text – the jewel-setting in which this precious promise is placed. If Satan is powerless, and can be dismissed with but a casual word, the promise will have no power at all. If the saints experience no setbacks, no seemingly effective opposition, and no hindering influences, this word will have no effect upon them!

This promise presumes the saints of God are experiencing trouble, perplexity, persecution, and being cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9). Behind the promise is the fact that in this world we experience dishonor, evil reports, being unknown, dying, chastening, sorrow, poverty, and sometimes possessing nothing (2 Cor 6:8-9). It speaks to those who have been subjected to perils, weariness, painfulness, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness (2 Cor 11:26). It holds forth promise to those who are pressed above their strength, being put to such a test they even “*despair of life*” (2 Cor 1:8).

Those who boast of total control in their life and only happiness and prosperity do not leap for joy when they hear this promise. The devil himself has deceived them, causing them to have no regard for the promise of God and the

where the devil is excluded. Then, and only then, will all of these experiences cease to exist (Rev 21:1-4).

Jesus has delivered the death blow to Satan! He Himself will never again be subjected to Satan’s devices. **He has passed into the domain where the devil cannot enter, and where adversity and sorrow cannot be experienced.** Now the Spirit assures us that we will experience the same thing!

UNDER YOUR FEET

“ . . . will crush Satan under your feet . . . ” Every version reads precisely the same – “*under your feet.*”

Here the Spirit makes a faint illusion to the fact that, as Jesus was, we also are “*seed.*” While we are not “*the seed of the woman,*” as Jesus exclusively

Behind the promise is the fact that in this world we experience dishonor, evil reports, being unknown, dying, chastening, sorrow, poverty, and sometimes possessing nothing (2 Cor 6:8-9). It speaks to those who have been subjected to perils, weariness, painfulness, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness

warnings of the Spirit. But for those who have their hand on the plow, this promise is a sweet and comforting elixir. Sometimes they are required to plow in the wind and rain. Other times they must plow in the midst of a noisome pestilence, or with the shout of the enemy all around them. God does not make this promise to those who are at “*ease in Zion*” (Amos 6:1).

No! This promise is for those who are in the thick of the battle. They know full well that as long as Satan is in our domain there is a tumultuous sea, tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain. They refuse to pretend these things are not present, or that they are not sometimes very prominent and extended. It is for this reason that they look forward to being

was, yet, by virtue of our union with Him, we will also experience the promise of Genesis 3:15. In principle, this truth is confirmed in the third chapter of Galatians. “*Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ . . . And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise*” (3:16,29). Thus, what Jesus is said to have already done, will also be done through us!

The Experience of Joshua

This language also reminds us of a certain occurrence in Israel’s history. Early in Israel’s occupation of Canaan, they encountered “*the five kings of the Amorites.*” These are identified as “*the*

king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Egon.” These kings “*joined forces*” ^{NIV} and moved up with troops against Gibeon, finally attacking the city. Gibeon was one of the royal cities of the Hitites, yet had formed an alliance with Joshua and the Israelites, agreeing to be their servants. As soon as they were attacked by the armies of “*the five kings of the Amorites,*” they sent a message to Joshua, pleading that he come and help them.

Gathering the people of war, and the mighty men of valor, Joshua went up from Gilgal to face these formidable foes. Along the way, the Lord said to him, “*Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee.*” Emboldened by this good word, Joshua and his troops marched all night, finally taking the foe by surprise. In the heat of the battle, “*the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Bethhoron, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah.*” As the enemy fled from the Israelites, “*the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.*” ^{NASB} It was during this battle that Joshua shouted out to the sun, “*Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies.*” Of that occasion it is written, “*And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel.*”

Joshua and his army then returned to the camp. However, he was not aware that the five kings who had conspired against Gibeon had “*hid themselves in a cave at Makkedah.*” In the finalization of the battle, some Israelites found the five kings and reported it to Joshua. He charged that large stones be rolled over the mouth of the cave, and watchmen be established to ensure the kings remained there. He then charged the army, “*but do not stay there yourselves; pursue your enemies and attack them in the rear. Do*

not allow them to enter their cities, for the LORD your God has delivered them into your hand.”

Following the **total** triumph over the foe, Joshua revisited the matter of those five kings of the Amorites. “Then said Joshua, Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave. And they did so, and brought forth those five kings unto him out of the cave, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Egon.” When these kings were brought out, Joshua summoned “all the men of Israel” to come to him. He then called the “captains of the men of war which went with him.” In a most solemn act of faith, he then charged those captains with words paralleling our text. “Come near, **put your feet upon the necks of these kings.** And they came near, and **put their feet upon the necks of them.** And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.” Afterward “Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening. And it came to pass at the time of the going down of the sun, that Joshua commanded, and they took them down off the trees, and cast them into the cave wherein they had been hid, and laid great stones” (Josh 10:5-26).

The Application

The bruising of Satan under our feet is much like the slaying of the kings of the Amorites while the feet of the army captains were on their necks. Those who have experienced the opposition of the devil will have a part in his final demise! Perhaps this is involved in the saints judging angels (1 Cor 6:3). At the time promised in our text, we will not need to “resist the devil.” Like the defeated kings of the

Amorites, his forces will no longer be with him, and he will be stripped of his power. The “Captain of our salvation” will call for our adversary to be brought before the redeemed. We will then be summoned to step forward, as it were, and place our feet upon the neck of the defeated foe. Those whom Satan has harassed, tempted, and hindered, will display before an assembled universe his inferiority, and the greatness of the Captain they chose to follow.

This is also involved in the promise spoken through Isaiah. “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 325:8). When Satan is bruised under our feet, it will spell an end to all death. Tears will be wiped off of the faces of all the elect, and the rebuke of

shall serve and obey him”^{NRSV} (Dan 7:27).

SHORTLY

“... will crush Satan under your feet **shortly.**” Other versions read “soon,”^{NASB} “speedily,”^{DRA} “before long,”^{BBE} and “quickly.”^{YLT} Once again, this word can only be grasped by faith. It is the language of faith, and is not intended to denote time. The people of God are to look forward to the bruising of Satan under their feet. But they are to do so in faith, for that is the only way it can be seen as occurring shortly. It is only as we “live by faith” that we can take delight in our lives being “even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). Only then will consolation be found in the consideration of life being like a “weaver’s shuttle” that moves quickly into the fabric of life in this world, then exits with the same swiftness (Job 7:6). “Shortly” is faith’s perspective of life

The bruising of Satan under our feet is much like the slaying of the kings of the Amorites while the feet of the army captains were on their necks. Those who have experienced the opposition of the devil will have a part in his final demise!

God’s people will be taken away. There will be no more chastening, no more correction, and no more exhortations and warnings! With joy we will shout in the words of Isaiah, “the year of my redeemed is come” (Isa 63:4). Then “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions

in this world. It makes life tolerable, trials bearable, and opposition brief.

The closer you are to the Lord, and the stronger your faith becomes, the more clear and desirable this wonderful promise appears to you. It helps to fire your devotion and stabilize your ministry. It is the truth, and you do well to ponder it often, and with great joy. It will surely come to pass!

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.” This is a common blessing pronounced upon the children of God – a strong desire that

insightful souls have for the body of Christ. Paul will say these same words in verse twenty-four: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” He

writes them to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:23), the Galatians (Gal 6:18), the Philippians (Phil 4:28), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess

3:18). He also wrote them to Philemon (Phile 1:25). In fact, these very words are the final words of the Scriptures – the last verse of the Bible. *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen”* (Rev 22:21). These words are the conclusion of what God has to say to us!

Nothing that has been provided for the saints can be possessed apart from the grace of God. Salvation in its entirety is *“by grace through faith”* (Eph 2:8). The righteousness of God conferred upon men, which is salvation in its essence, is nothing less than *“the gift by grace”* (Rom 5:15). Those who labor effectively for the Lord do so because of *“the grace of God”* (1 Cor:10). Whatever achievements for the

Lord Jesus Christ” is with us, everything we are exhorted to do becomes doable. We are thus equipped to fulfill our role in the body of Christ, and to minister effectively to the Lord’s own household. We will be able to successfully resist the devil, avoiding his devices, rejecting his ministers, and recognizing his presence.

Oh, the people of God must make much of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ! A theology that does not make much of the grace of God is very close to devil’s camp, if not in the very heart of it. If grace is the means through which salvation is brought to us (Tit 2:11), then the experience of salvation is minimized when grace is minimized, and maximized

for every man (Heb 2:9).

- ☐ We continue our spiritual life in the grace of God (Acts 13:43).
- ☐ The Gospel is the Gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).
- ☐ The grace of God can be known in truth (Col 1:6).
- ☐ The grace of God brings salvation (Tit 2:11).
- ☐ The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:12).
- ☐ The grace of God teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit 2:12b).
- ☐ We stand in the grace of God (1 Pet 5:12).
- ☐ We are justified freely by His grace (Rom 3:24).
- ☐ By faith we have access into this grace, wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).
- ☐ Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Rom 5:20).
- ☐ Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21).
- ☐ We are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14).
- ☐ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is made known in Him becoming poor, though He was rich, that we through His poverty might be rich (2 Cor 8:9).
- ☐ Christ’s grace is sufficient (2 Cor 12:9).
- ☐ We have been called into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6).
- ☐ We have the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace (Eph 1:7).
- ☐ The grace of our Lord is exceeding abundant with faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 1:14).
- ☐ God saved us and called us according to His own purpose and grace (2 Tim 1:9). We can be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 2:1).
- ☐ We can obtain grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).

When the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is neglected, or even opposed, men will gravitate to the Law and systems of legalism. Their religion will become lifeless, and spiritual impotence will descend upon and dominate them.

Lord may be realized, the laborer will confess, *“by the grace of God I am what I am”* (1 Cor 15:10).

When we are able to avoid sin and be godly, it is only because *“the grace of God”* has taught us to do so (Tit 2:11-12). The various ministries and capacities that we have been given are nothing less than a stewardship *“of the grace of God”* (1 Pet 4:10). Nothing that is required from the saints can be done apart from the grace of God. This grace is called *“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”* because He alone has qualified us to receive it. It is because of what He has done that it can be conferred upon us, and He Himself participates in that conferment.

When, therefore, *“the grace of our*

when grace is maximized.

When the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is neglected, or even opposed, men will gravitate to the Law and systems of legalism. Their religion will become lifeless, and spiritual impotence will descend upon and dominate them. It is refreshing to consider what God has said about His grace.

- ☐ We believe through grace (Acts 18:27).
- ☐ God has given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace (2 Thess 2:16).
- ☐ We are and shall be saved through grace (Acts 15:11).
- ☐ We are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10).
- ☐ We effectively live our lives in this world by the grace of God (1 Cor 1:12).
- ☐ By the grace of God, Jesus tasted death

What cause can possibly be adduced for despising the grace of God, neglecting to proclaim it, or being doubtful of its necessity?

CONCLUSION

The text we have just considered has brought us to think within a spiritual room with two great pillars. The first is a

solemn exhortation, and the second a wonderful promise. The first reminds us of where we are presently, the second

where we will be. The first tells us of the present attacks of the enemy, the second of our ultimate triumph over him. If we

take heed to the first word, the Lord will cause us to participate in the second one. If we refuse to yield to the encroachments of the devil, he will at last, openly and to the glory of Jesus, yield to us.

Our text began with a solemn word concerning noting those who “*cause divisions and offenses contrary to the*

doctrine” we have learned. Those causing such things do not serve Christ, but their own fleshly interests. Thus, they are aligned with the devil, who opposes the people of God, and has thus declared war upon them. The bruising of Satan under our feet demands that, until that time, we firmly resist his adversarial advances, insightfully noting all who do his work.

That is the reason for this text.

Those who take this word seriously will be among those who will put their feet upon the neck of the devil. Jesus will bring his work to an abrupt and eternal halt while we stand triumphantly over him. Let me assure you, that is a blessing that is worth fighting for!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/28/2001. Completing our overview of the book of Romans, we will conclude with verses 21-27 of the sixteenth chapter. The theme will be, “**A GRAND BENEDICTION.**” This will be a fitting conclusion to the great doctrinal treatise of this marvelous book. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

December 31st, New Year’s Eve, is on Monday this year. We will be having a service in our home to usher the old year out, and bring the new one in. There will be a time for praise, testimony, singing, and the preaching of the Word. Our service will begin at 8:00 PM. Plan to be with us.

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A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

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Division and Heresy are Vile, and Cannot be Dignified, Nor are They to be Tolerated--by Given O. Blakely
