

Romans Survey

David Gooding

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



MYRTLEFIELD
HOUSE

www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

Contents

1	General Overview	4
2	Salvation from the Wrath of God	15
3	Salvation from the Wreckage of Adam's Sin	27
4	Israel and the Sovereignty of God	39
5	Putting Right what Sin has Put Wrong	51
6	Question and Answer Sessions	63
7	Propitiation—Meeting Place between God and Man	73
	About the Author	82

David Gooding has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

Copyright © The Myrtlefield Trust, 2018

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the English Revised Version (1885), the *King James Version*, or are Dr Gooding's own translations or paraphrases.

This text has been edited from a transcript of talks given by David Gooding at Panton Hall, Cambridge, England from 11 to 13 February 1994.

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this document in its entirety, or in unaltered excerpts, for personal and church use only as long as you do not charge a fee. You must not reproduce it on any Internet site. Permission must be obtained if you wish to reproduce it in any other context, translate it, or publish it in any format.

Published by The Myrtlefield Trust

PO Box 2216

Belfast

BT1 9YR

w: www.myrtlefieldhouse.com

e: info@myrtlefieldhouse.com

Myrtlefield catalogue no: rom.023/dw

General Overview

It is very kind and generous of you to invite me along and to give me six whole sessions to lead your thoughts on the Epistle to the Romans. It is obvious that in six sessions we shall not be able even to begin to discuss the manifold detail of this glorious Epistle. We shall be obliged to select somewhat arbitrarily certain of its major themes. With an added generosity, you've allowed me to do the choosing of what those major themes shall be. I wish to start with an overview of this Epistle. The approach I propose to adopt is to begin somewhere near the beginning, select one of the major themes and to follow that major theme through until it reaches its natural climax. Then I'll start on the second theme and do likewise, and so on through the book. So without further ado, let's take our Bibles and turn to the Epistle to the Romans and chapter 1. Here Paul tells us at the very beginning exactly what his theme is going to be. He is going to write about the gospel, separated as he is unto the gospel of God. And then in his famous words, he says, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth' (v. 16).

The Gospel—salvation by faith

He is not ashamed of this gospel for it actually works. It does manage to save people, and for that reason he is not ashamed of it. It is the power of God unto salvation. And if we inquire what the secret of this gospel is, why it is that it manages actually to work and save people, Paul immediately gives us the answer:

For therein is revealed a righteousness of God by faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith. (1:17)

Therein lies its secret, says Paul. All those philosophies, all those gospels, if they can rightly be called so, that make man's salvation depend on his own effort, can fall down. Salvation by works does not work. What makes Paul so bold about this gospel is that it does work because it is founded on this altogether different principle. It is a gospel that shows us how to be right with God, not upon the basis of our strivings, but on the basis of faith. But with that I want to stop this eloquent apostle in his tracks. 'Paul, you are telling us so boldly that you're not ashamed of this gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation, and it works because it is founded on the principle of faith. But why do we need salvation anyway? Why do we need your gospel?'

The wrath of God

Paul will give a number of answers in the course of the ensuing chapters. Let us now notice the first of the reasons he lists. The answer is to be found in verse 18 as he continues his introduction, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness' (v. 18). There stands the number one reason why men and women need to be saved. Granted that for many years now it has not been a very popular thing to preach upon. It isn't, as they say, 'user-friendly'. To gather a whole congregation of people together and then tell them to their face that they are in danger of the wrath of God, isn't a way to get the congregation to come back again, so they say. But we're concerned with what Paul actually says. He's not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God unto salvation and we need to be saved because we stand under the wrath of God.

Notice how, having broached that topic of the wrath of God, Paul continues it in the chapters that follow. In verse 18 the verb is in the present tense, 'The wrath of God is revealed'. It is already being revealed. And when we come to study the detail, we shall see the evidence that Paul gives for the fact that that wrath is not only being revealed presently, but it will be revealed in a day to come.

Despise thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up for thyself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. (2:4-5)

Very solemn words with which to begin a letter to your friends, for that was what Paul was doing. Not only is the wrath of God being revealed from time to time in God's providential government of the universe, but there is coming the great day of his wrath when God will summon mankind before him and, as the verse puts it, subject them to his 'righteous judgment'. And then he reminds us of something exceedingly solemn—the penalties that will be pronounced on those that fail to pass his scrutiny:

But unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation. (2:8)

And that wrath, the Scriptures would give us to believe, is eternal. And Paul is not yet finished with the topic even with that. He raises a question with which doubtless he was faced in many a synagogue and in many a marketplace as he preached and allowed his audience to come back at him with their objections and questions. Here he envisages somebody saying:

But if our unrighteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteousness who visiteth with wrath? . . . God forbid. (3:5-6)

So Paul raises the whole question whether it is right or fair of God to exercise wrath against weak and feeble humankind. They are questions that still rise in our minds when we hear the topic raised. What is an almighty God doing getting angry with us little bits of clay

that appear on this planet for such a very short time in all our frailty, and then are gone? And the wicked and ungodly say, 'Why doesn't he take someone of his own size and get angry with them? Why with us?' These are questions that we must leave for the moment and press on with our topic, which is to gather the theme that is running through this section.

It occurs again in chapter 4 where Paul is discussing upon what terms believers are not only justified but promised a worldwide inheritance. And if somebody says, 'That becomes possible if we sinners really put our backs into it and make up our minds to keep God's law. Then perhaps we could persuade God to be less wrathful. In fact, we might even prevail upon him to give us this glorious inheritance that Scripture promises.' But that is a false hope. Paul says:

For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect: for the law worketh wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there transgression. (4:14-15)

Faced with the fact that as sinful human beings we stand under the wrath of God, the law cannot help us. The law merely increases the wrath as its effect is to show that we come short. The fact that God's holy law in the end demonstrates that we are sinners, and therefore aggravates the divine displeasure against us, is a lesson so important and so fundamental, and so easily overlooked, that God spent centuries demonstrating it.

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin. (3:19-20)

The law then cannot help us to escape God's wrath. Indeed, God has given his law in some sense, not that we should be saved by it, but to bring us to stand in thought and imagination before his judgement bar already, and face the fact that there's nothing we can say for ourselves. We have come short in the past, we have sinned, and we still do come short of the glory of God.

But there is a way of salvation, and the second half of chapter 3 and the whole of chapter 4 are geared and designed to tell us this joyful and glorious news. God has devised a way of saving us from the guilt of our sin and therefore from that wrath. That salvation is through Jesus Christ and through what is described as his propitiation, his appeasement of God's wrath. We shall say more on that in another session. But come now to this wonderful, joyful glorious, positive statement, radiant with hope and glory,

God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. (5:8-9)

And there is our theme coming now to its natural climax. Having shown us that all mankind stands under the wrath of God, and having announced to us and described to us

the wonderful salvation there is in Christ, here comes this heart-bursting glorious statement, positive with assurance. Every believer shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. We notice the tense of the verb. It is not that up to the moment we have been saved, but watch out how you behave lest you fall from that grace and incur God's wrath at the end. The verb is future. 'Much more we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him.' If we have been justified, and we are certain of that, then, says this climax of the Holy Spirit's argument, you can be much more sure of the next bit: you shall be saved from the wrath of God through him.

We can afford just a second or two to sit back and enjoy this climax, for it talks of our final salvation in utterly certain terms and then it hints to the wonderful glory that lies ahead. Look at chapter 5 and verse 2. Not only have we had access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, but we are to rejoice in the certain expectation and hope of the glory of God. That will warm your heart, surely. It's not merely that we have at last somehow, by some miracle of God's grace and condescension, escaped his wrath and come creeping nervously into the celestial palace in case anybody notices that we're there. No, not only saved from wrath, but we may be confident even now that one day we shall attain the very glory of God. If you ask me, what is the glory of God? I shall reply very briefly, it's that of which we come short now. 'We all have sinned and we still do come short of the glory of God' (3:23). One day we shall attain all the standard of his perfection. No wonder Paul was not ashamed of this gospel.

There is another point to this great climax. For the first time in this Epistle we have a magnificently spelt-out description of the love of God. We should for a moment revel in the magnificent wonders of the love of God. It says here that, 'hope puts us not to shame because the love of God'—meaning not our love for God, poor as that often is, but God's love for us—'is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us' (5:5). I like the metaphor. The Holy Spirit is a divine person, but sometimes the New Testament uses a metaphor as though he were some liquid. And it says here that the Holy Spirit gets the love of God and pours it out in our hearts like a man might spill a tumbler of water on the kitchen floor. And you know what water does if you watch it: it goes here and then appears to stop and presently it's found a cranny, and before you know, it has covered the whole floor. So does the Holy Spirit delight to take the love of God and pour it out in our cold, frozen, twisted, doubting, cynical, unbelieving hearts, full of their fears and doubts and neuroses. And he begins to pour out the love of God in those self-same hearts, little by little, as over the years he fills the nooks and the crannies, and gives us confidence that we are accepted with God. Why shouldn't we enjoy it unashamedly? Sit back and enjoy the love of God for us who were miserable sinners that once stood under his wrath.

The wreckage of Adam's sin

If you asked Paul why we need to be saved, certainly the first answer will be, 'Because of the wrath of God.' But then he has a second reason and he begins to develop it in chapter 5. I have put on it the general title of the wreckage of Adam's sin.

By one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so also death passed upon all men, because all have sinned. (5:12)

That's another reason, linked of course with the first but not exactly the same thing, as we shall presently see. First, we stood under the wrath of God and needed to be saved from that, and then we need to be saved from the wreckage of Adam's sin. For God could have forgiven us so that we were sure that we no longer stood under his wrath, and left us wrecks, and invented some place in his universe for old-time wrecks. Not so God. God has an answer too to the wreckage of Adam's sin and we sorely need to be saved from that.

Adam's sin has involved the human race in a number of serious, burdensome, wearisome, cruel tyrannies, bondages and slaveries. Look at chapter 5, verse 21 and catch that little phrase 'as sin reigned in death'. What a fascist dictator sin is! Why isn't there ever one woman or one man who manages to rise up and put their fist in the face of sin and say, 'I'm not going to yield'? Why isn't there one day in seven, one day a year, when you don't sin? Oh, the wreckage of Adam's sin and the tyranny of sin upon all his successors. And not only that, but the tyranny of death. Look at verse 17: 'For if, by the trespass of the one, death reigned'. You may try to resist its rolling on, like some great juggernaut, but you'll find it impossible. Death is the irresistible tyrant. He will deal with us one of these days, unless the Lord comes.

You say, 'We'd better hurry up and pull our spiritual socks up, and start keeping God's holy law.' Well, you could have a go if you like, but you mustn't suppose that is going to break the tyranny of sin, or death either. In fact, not to put too fine a point on it, God's holy law itself becomes a tyrant. Chapter 7 and verse 1 talks about the law of marriage. (There's no tyranny there, of course, so I am told. I haven't any first-hand knowledge!) But Paul is just making a point that the law of marriage has dominion. You can't, or you shouldn't, get out of it, so long as the other partner lives. That's how it is with God's law. You'll say you tried to keep God's law earnestly and genuinely, and you managed to keep three per cent of it, perhaps, one year, and next year you will improve perhaps to four and a half per cent. But by the time you get to middle age you have to admit that you haven't even got halfway, and some days it's like going backwards.

You say, 'Well, I get fed up with this law. I think I'll ditch it.' But you can't just walk out of the law like that, any more than you could the law of the land. If ever we're going to be set free from the law, it will require the most drastic method, which is the death of God's own Son. But more of that shortly. The three great tyrannies are sin and death and the law that push us ever further into the mud. And when we come to chapter 7, you'll see the depths of the anguish that it caused Paul and has caused many more people in the course of their lives. 'Oh, wretched man that I am; I don't want to do the horrible, nasty things. I despise myself for doing them. Why do I do them?' (7:24) It is a tyranny.

But God has taken notice of the fact that we need salvation not only from his wrath but from the wreckage of Adam's sin. And in chapter 8 Paul presses his message home. Creation herself was subject to futility, to vanity and frustration, always being thwarted. Even we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves, b-e it with arthritis or heart attacks or whatever it is, and then all these pressures and stresses of living in a society

marred by sin, we groan within ourselves, living in a creation that's blighted. But God has a salvation from that very wreckage and Paul describes the great climax in chapter 8. Not only shall we one day be delivered from death, the very Holy Spirit already within us will transform our mortal bodies. The blessed Lord Jesus will come. We wait for him from heaven to redeem us and to save our very bodies, and we're going to have bodies like unto the Lord Jesus.

Important as that is, more important are the people that will go inside those bodies. And chapter 8, as it comes to its climax of God's salvation from the wreckage of sin, talks about our one day being conformed to the very image of God's own Son. Then not only us, little us, but creation herself shall be delivered from her bondage to corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. Salvation from the wreckage! And while we allow ourselves to enjoy the prospect, and as Paul comes to this climax, once more he cannot forbear celebrating the love of God and the love of Christ.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (8:35, 38–39)

Nobody really minds Paul repeating himself like that. That's how he finished the first climax, with a tremendous statement of the love of God, poured out into hearts by the Holy Spirit. And now as he comes to this next major climax of his work, deliverance from the wreckage of sin, his heart bursts open with a flood of joy and gratitude and glory at the wonder of the love of God and the love of Christ. And not all the vast powers of the universe, nor all the disorderly intelligences and powers of the angelic and the demonic world, not even death itself, that dark funeral undertaker, shall be able to separate us from the love of God. Already we have a something that is rising out of the ruins and is going to last eternally.

Getting the right balance

So those are two reasons why we need to be saved: the wrath of God on the one side and the wreckage of Adam's sin on the other. It is of tremendous practical importance that we see those two reasons. It is important to us who try to explain the gospel to other people. It is important to those who have a pastoral care for people. It is important for us all because we need salvation, to make sure we've got it the right way around. At the beginning of this century the preachers mostly concentrated on the wrath of God; and in some quarters of the earth, and some provinces of the land, they did it to abundance, preaching the wrath of God solemnly and earnestly, and made people quake in their shoes—or as Scripture has it, flee for refuge (Heb 6:18).

In more recent times that has become a little old-fashioned, and people are nowadays more commonly preaching the second reason. That is understandable, because so many people's lives are wrecked anyway. And because they realise it, they don't mind it being

pointed out. Their marriage has gone on the rocks, teenagers and others involved in drugs, and businessmen caught out in shady deals. They'll admit in the end, so many of them, that their lives are damaged, wrecked. And so, it makes a very proper and right approach. What a glory and privilege it is to be able to come alongside people and tell them that there is a Saviour from the wreckage of sin. And, of course, there's nothing wrong if you're dealing in a personal way with people, or preaching the gospel, to begin with this reason rather than the other reason. Like our blessed Lord, in his conversations with individuals, he normally began at the place where they were. But in our modern day, we shall need to have care over this because if we concentrate altogether on this second reason for salvation, and forget this first one, then little by little the second reason, if we're not careful, will get out of focus. And then instead of helping people to come to the glorious assurance and experience of salvation, and of the love of God, we shall leave people still uncertain.

Why do we need to preach both? And when it comes to our doctrine, why do we need to put this matter of the wrath of God first, rather than the wreckage of sin first? Let me use a simple well-worn analogy. Here is a young gentleman who has this most beautiful Jaguar E-Type, or its modern equivalent. It is a magnificent machine but, to tell the truth, he's a bit of a stupid young gentleman and he takes no real care of it. He's doing seventy miles an hour on the motorway, and decides to put it in reverse just to see what happens. He doesn't pump the tyres up, and put oil in where it should go in. And one night, having had enough drink to make him over-confident, he smashes the thing into a concrete block, and just about shatters it to pieces. Managing to get out more or less unscathed, his head clears in the cool night air and he stands in the middle of the wreckage and begins to see what a fool he has been to destroy such a beautiful car. While he is trying to digest the reality that he's made a wreck of the thing, another thought suddenly strikes him: the Jaguar doesn't belong to him anyway. He was lent it by a senior friend.

Now what? Well, the first answer comes immediately—to keep clear of that friend for as long as you possibly can. Hush it up, don't let the press report it, and keep it from the friend that you've made a horrible mess of his Jaguar. And then, where can you find a good mechanic who's good at mending broken cars? How can you get it to him and persuade him to take the job on and to restore this Jaguar? Even if he can't get it one hundred per cent better, at least rebuilt enough so that when you meet the owner of the thing, you'd say, 'You know what? The other night I did a little spin in this and damaged the mud guard a bit. I know it's not perfect, but I've done my best to put it right.' And the owner will say, 'Well, yes, it isn't like it should be, but nevertheless you've done your best, old chap. Forget it.'

A lot of folks think of God like that. They wake up to realise they have wrecked their lives. They wake up because conscience tells them that there is a God: they didn't make themselves. One day they shall have to stand before God. And the next reaction is, let's put that off as long as we can. 'And what about this Jesus Christ? We've heard that he's good at patching up broken lives. I wonder whether Jesus Christ could do anything about patching up my life?' And their idea is this: that he's like the heavenly mechanic, and if they cooperate with him they can, little by little, mend their lives and put them right until, by the time they pass from this world and have to stand before God, perhaps they won't be perfect, but more or less near enough. And God will say, 'I've been watching you. You didn't know

I was watching you, did you, but you've done jolly well to put it right. You haven't quite succeeded, but you'll do.' But all the while, while they're trying to put it right, by the help of Jesus Christ indeed, they're never in their hearts certain that God will accept them, that they've done enough to put it right. And, therefore, the question of whether they will or will not ultimately be accepted in the heavenly garage has to remain uncertain.

Oh, what a tragedy that version of the gospel is. It isn't the gospel. How much better to face the gospel as Paul enunciates it, and before we start putting the wreckage right, let's face this matter of the wrath of the car owner. And the gospel is this: you don't have to wait to put the wreckage right. In God's great and almost incredible mercy, you can come as you are. You can bid God come and stand beside you as you stand amidst the wreckage of life, and God will never say it doesn't matter. But God will point you to Christ, and the first thing he did for you was not to try and put the wreckage right. He suffered for you the wrath of God against what you've done. And because he offered himself as the great propitiatory sacrifice, to bear the wrath of God in your place, you can be accepted here, now, at once, standing amidst the wreckage, and be forgiven and justified and at peace with God. Oh, what a gospel it is. And then you'll perceive that Christ will go on to put the wreckage right. But now it's not a question that you must put it right and wait to know whether you will ever be accepted by God; you can know that you are accepted by God and forgiven, and in that confidence and peace, you cooperate with Christ as he puts the wreckage right.

That is God's gospel. Not this mean little construction of the human mind that says we're all on probation as to whether God will eventually accept us or not, and we can't be sure. No, because Christ has suffered for us, we may be forgiven. We can be assured that we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him and, at peace with God, go about the long process of putting the wreckage right.

The problem of Israel's defection

We move on to finish our little survey of this Epistle. We come to the next section of the letter, which comprises chapters 9–11. It is not difficult to see what the major theme of those chapters is. Paul was burdened with a heart breaking with sorrow because the great majority of his fellow nationals, the Jews, having heard the gospel, were persisting in their rejection of it. And the burden weighed heavily on Paul's heart. They were his own loved ones, his own loved nationals. It can be a bitter thing to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, and come to the conclusion in your heart that it is true, if you have loved ones or relatives, and fellow nationals whom you love, and they reject it. And the gospel must teach you that to reject the gospel is eternal disaster. It's a very painful thing. How could you believe it without being solemn of heart for unconverted loved ones who reject the very gospel that brings us peace? But, of course, there were deeper reasons why Paul must face this problem. We can imagine two of them.

At the beginning of the Epistle, Paul tells us that the Christian gospel is about Jesus Christ who was born of the seed of David according to the Scriptures. This gospel is witnessed to by the Old Testament law and prophets. That's a very important feature of our Christian gospel. Our Christian gospel is not a philosophy. Anybody with sufficient sense

can invent a philosophy. Some men have managed to do it—the Platos and the Aristotles of this world, and a few others. But the Christian gospel isn't a philosophy. In that sense, you couldn't invent it. It is the culmination of a great, long, laborious process in history that began with a man called Abraham, and was seeded down the centuries as God revealed himself to Abraham and his successors, and made promise after promise, reaching David and the successive kings, and adding then the promises of the prophets. The gospel claims that Jesus Christ is the culmination of that great, long, Old Testament period of preparation, and that you can tell he is the Messiah because he fulfils the promises made in those prophets.

Indeed, it is the claim that the nation of Israel was specially chosen among the nations that it should witness in the first place to the one true God against all forms of idolatrous interpretations of the universe. And, secondly, that Israel should stand as a pointer, pointing to the coming promised one, God's great Messiah, his suffering Servant, the Redeemer and Saviour of the world. That is the Christian gospel. The embarrassing thing was that when the Lord Jesus came and claimed to be that Messiah and suffering Servant and Redeemer, the great majority of Israel rejected him and said he wasn't the Messiah. Now, that's easy enough for us to accept in our day but suppose you had been Paul in the prison at Caesarea, and Felix and Drusilla, having nothing better to do, decided to invite you out to dinner in the palace. It made a change from Felix coming down to the dungeon! And after the meal, Felix has some questions:

'Paul, tell me a bit about whatever this is that you believe. You say that there were a lot of prophecies about this Jesus in your holy book.'

'Yes, that's right, sir.'

'That's a very interesting thing, if it is true. Can you show me any of those prophecies and tell me a little about this?'

'Well, there's this one, governor, in Isaiah 53.'

'Very marvellous, but tell me, are there many rabbis in Israel who think like you do? What you say about this prophet Isaiah sounds good to me, but if I took the prophet to the rabbis in Jerusalem, would they agree with your interpretation of it?'

'Well, not exactly, sir,—well, not many of them.'

'Well, how many? How many of the rabbis agree with you that you've got the right interpretation and Jesus does fulfil these prophecies? How many rabbis?'

'Well now, let me think. There's Nicodemus.'

'Yes. He was quite a good theologian, wasn't he? Anybody else?'

'There was Joseph of Arimathea. Well, he wasn't a rabbi, actually. He was a member of the Sanhedrin.'

'Yes. How many more?'

'Well, there are quite a number of priests, governor.'

'Yes, but rabbis?'

'Well, actually, not many.'

'What would you say then? The majority is against you? Big majority—ninety per cent perhaps?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'So who are these people that agree with you?'

'Well, there's Peter.'

'Who's he?'

'Well, he was a fisherman, you know, before . . .'

'Oh, I see, yes. Well, do have some more olives.'

What would you have said if you had been talking to Felix? If you don't have an answer, your gospel isn't going to sound very credible, is it? There's another thing you could think about too. The second reason why we had to be saved is the wreckage of Adam's sin, because Adam was God's first human creature. He failed and sinned, and dragged down creation with him. Now we come to Israel who were the special nation chosen by God, beginning with Abraham, in the early stage of God's great redemption for the world. That's why Abraham was called out, so that in him and his seed all the nations of the world should be blessed. They were the great big move towards world redemption, and the eventual coming in of the Messiah. It's one thing for man to sin and break down, but the story is that God planned the redemption, and God started to prepare for it with Abraham and company, and Israel. So has the redemption bit broken down as well? If the great first part of the process of redemption has also broken down, who could have any faith in the gospel as being God's answer to the wreckage of sin?

And if we're honest to our history, and honest to the realities of life, we shall begin to perceive that these three chapters that deal with that question are not some irrelevant parenthesis. They are so important to the statement of the Christian gospel that if they can't give an adequate answer to the problems that Israel's defection raises, then our gospel is no longer credible. It will be good for us if we can, in our next session, to get a renewed grasp on the answer. We notice, however, that you can't depress Paul too long, and when he comes to the final chapter in this group, he is once more bursting full of praise and worship to God, announcing that in God's tremendous strategies, one day all Israel shall be saved. When will that be? When the Lord Jesus comes. Marvellous, isn't it?

See how the pattern is repeating itself. The first section ended up with the promise of glory—the hope of the glory of God. The second one ends with the promise of the glory of God, described in greater detail. In this third one there is the tremendous problem with Israel but in the end God's wisdom shall prevail. God is not going to write off history as a failure. God is going to win and all Israel shall be saved. And so at the end there is a great doxology to the wisdom of God. It was the love of God in the first two sections. In this section, it is the wisdom of God.

Repairing the wreckage

We come to the final section, which is what they call the practical things. All Paul's epistles are like that. The doctrine, they say, comes first, and when you hear the doctrine, then come the practical things. You know, be kind to your mother and your dad, treat the servant well, and that kind of thing. And, depending on your temperament, you hate the one and cleave to the other! When I first went to live in that next-to-paradise where I now live, and attended

the study groups of my fellow believers, they happened to be going through Romans, and we managed to guide the ship of state through the doctrinal passages. At last we came to chapter 12, and the first night those chapters were discussed the united opinion of all and sundry, to my amazement, was, 'Now we're really getting at it: practical Christianity, that's the thing.' They were very godly folks, I must say. I have to confess in my heart of hearts, I prefer the doctrine things. I'm an armchair theorist, and I like the doctrine bit!

When it comes down to the practical things, we tend to take them as read, so to speak. Everybody knows what they mean and should do them, and accept them. But Paul has five whole chapters here. Yes, they are practical, and they're going to tell us about the practical effects of the gospel. But Paul has another purpose. When we examine the details of chapters 12–16, the final quarter of the book, and put it against some details from the first quarter of the book, we find clear parallels. For example, we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice, says the practical section as it begins. Now remember that chapter 1 told us that when men didn't like to retain God in their knowledge, one of the early results was their dishonouring of their bodies. So these chapters at the end are showing us in what practical ways salvation cures the trouble. This is salvation working out.

To take another example, the motivation behind man's original defection was this: knowing God, they didn't like to retain God in their knowledge and were neither thankful. Gross ingratitude, refusal of that feeling of dependence and always having to be grateful to God, and a determination to be independent and not necessarily have to be grateful to anything or anybody. In contrast the great motivation behind Christian practical behaviour is that profound gratitude to God that wells up in the heart of every believer who's experienced salvation by the sacrifice of God's Son. And so it goes on. These worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator. We are to offer ourselves a living sacrifice which is our spiritual, or logical, or rational, service. And, similarly, topics repeat themselves. God's wrath here, God's wrath at the hand of the magistrate there; God's final wrath and God's present temporal wrath. The question of strength of faith and what we're to do with those that are weak in faith; the question of God's judgment and the different aspects of the death of Christ. 'He died for us while we were yet sinners', says the first part of the book. Now, the last part of the book reminds us that he died for us with a determination that he should be Lord of our lives. It doesn't intend that we go on sinning.

Why do I call your attention to these things? To show the significance and the way that the last section is related to what has gone before. It's not just a few practical pieces of advice tacked on to the end but a very serious description of how the gospel of Christ works itself out to undo the damage of man's rebellion and sin, even now here on earth while we are on our way to glory.

What it shall be when at last we get home to him and see the final climax of God's word, of God's work in his gospel, climaxing over man's foolish independence and sin, over the sorry wreckage, over the heartbreak of Israel's defection, over the pains and weariness of our mortal bodies, and the frustration of human relationships. Oh, what it shall be when the Lord comes and we see the final climax of his way of grace. Then I tell you, we shall sing. And here on earth we may begin to learn the lines of the music that sings to the love of God against the wrath of God, the triumph of his love, the love of God triumphing over the

wreckage of sin, the wisdom of God triumphing over the waywardness and defection of his people, Israel. And finally, that old cause of so much of our misery, who started his foul work in the garden of Eden, tempting our foremother, Eve, to whom was promised the glorious promise that one day shall be put into effect. The day is at hand, our salvation is nearer than when we believed, and God will one day fulfil that majestic promise—Satan's head shall be bruised beneath your feet, one day soon.

Salvation from the Wrath of God

In our previous session we surveyed, or attempted to survey, the general territory of this Epistle to the Romans. We selected from the early chapters of the book one of its leading themes, and we followed it through the successive verses until we reached what we imagined was the climax of that theme for the time being within the book. Then we repeated the process, starting in the following chapters and selecting a theme and following that likewise to what we thought to be its natural climax within the book, and so on and so forth, to the end. We started in the first chapter and when Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to salvation, we asked him why we should need to be saved anyway. Let the gospel be the biggest power it can be to save people. It is irrelevant unless we need to be saved. And we found the first reason mentioned in that first chapter is that we need to be saved from the wrath of God. So we proceeded to trace Paul's references to the wrath of God throughout chapters 1–4, until we came to what seemed to us the climax of that particular theme for the time being, in the glorious and exultant statement of chapter 5, 'We shall be saved from the wrath of God through Jesus Christ our Lord' (v. 9).

And along with that we noticed Paul pointing out that not only shall we be saved from the wrath of God but, on the basis of the work of our blessed Lord Jesus, we have certain assurance that we shall attain to the glory of God. And then we noticed Paul's great emphasis at that particular juncture on the love of God. The delightful ministry of the Holy Spirit as he takes the love of God and, as a man would pour a tumbler of water on the ground until the rivulets of water trickled everywhere, so does the Holy Spirit take God's love for his people and pours it out into our hearts until it trickles everywhere—through and underneath the doubt and the difficulty, the pain and the sorrow, and the neuroses; building into our hearts that assurance that only the love of God can give. The assurance not only that God so loved us that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, but the logical implication that if he loved us when we were sinners, he will certainly not abandon us now we have become his people and his saints. And, therefore, we may be even the more sure that, if we have been justified, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In that glorious passage, as I say, we felt we found a climax for the time being of that particular theme. Thereafter, we moved on to the next part of the Epistle and found a second answer to the question why we need to be saved. We need to be saved from the wreckage caused by Adam's sin and those terrible slaveries and servitudes that Adam's sin has brought upon us, the dominion of sin itself and the irresistible rule of death as a consequence. And just when we thought we could improve ourselves and perhaps liberate

ourselves by keeping God's law, we discovered that, good as it is indeed in itself, the law becomes a further tyrant exerting its dominion upon us, demanding the impossible and, instead of curing matters, making them ten thousand times worse and provoking us to yet further rebellion against God. So that we need to be delivered not only from the bondage of sin and the bondage of death, but in the end we have to be set free from the dominion of the law. And we thought further, as we came to chapter 8, about the wretched results and the wreckage that have accrued through Adam's sin—the whole creation around us groaning with frustration, groaning in pain, to be delivered.

And then once more we saw how, through the work of Christ, God will complete the glorious work of redemption and deliverance from the wreckage caused by Adam's sin. Already the process is at work within us, and one day shall come to its triumphant conclusion, for we wait for the redemption of our bodies—the time when the Lord shall come and our bodies are conformed to his glorious body. And more important, the people that will go inside those bodies shall be conformed to the image of God's Son. Creation herself shall be delivered from the bondage to corruption into the liberty of the now grown-up sons of God, schooled by Christ, to take over the government of the whole universe as Christ, in his great grace, shares his coming kingdom with his redeemed people. And when we got there, we felt we had found another climax—God's answer to the wreckage caused by Adam's sin. And we found Paul once more emphasising the matter of hope. We are saved by hope. What a man sees, what does he yet hope for? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait patiently for it, and hope becomes, in its turn, a saving element in life's trials, tribulations, pains and depressions. The fact that we have that realistic hope serves both as an anchor of the soul and a power to keep us going when otherwise the wreckage of sin would drive us into the dust of despair.

And this climax too is marked by a further glorious statement of the love of God and the love of Christ. 'I am persuaded,' says Paul, 'in spite of all the tribulation and persecution that comes our way, in spite of all the groanings of our decaying physical frame, that neither life nor death, neither things natural or supernatural, not all the great hosts of demonic powers that have rebelled against God and taken their part too in provoking our rebellion; none of them, all combined or singly, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Two magnificent climaxes, then, about the love of God here in this Epistle.

Then we moved on to the third major flow of thought in the Epistle, dealing with the topic of Israel in chapters 9–11. We asked ourselves why Paul should bother to put this long discussion of Israel into this Epistle at this juncture. We found there were several answers to that question. The original work of creation: Adam went wrong in a very big way and ruined the whole creation. So God had a scheme of redemption and, at one juncture in history, God called an old Gentile by the name of Abraham and turned him into a Hebrew. And from him he built a special elect race to witness to the reality of the true God, and eventually point the way to the coming of God's great redeemer King and Messiah.

By the time Paul was writing the Epistle to the Romans, the vast majority of that nation were saying that Jesus wasn't the King, Messiah, Redeemer or Saviour. So what are we to conclude now? Paul has told us at the beginning of his letter that the gospel is based on

those Old Testament prophets. And if the nation who gave us the prophets says that our Christian interpretations are wrong, it's a very serious criticism of Christianity. And even from our point of view, we who believe that Israel was elected to point the way to the coming Messiah who was Jesus Christ, what shall we say if the whole scheme has gone wrong? It were bad enough if Adam went wrong and the whole creation had to be redeemed, but if the initial stages of God's plan of redemption have gone wrong, what hope is there for the rest of the plan of redemption to be fulfilled? If you haven't got an answer to Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, then your gospel is holed below the water line and would be in danger of sinking.

We came to the final section from chapter 12 onward, and decided that that was about practical things. We saw a number of links between that section and section one that made us think that here Paul is pointing out how the gospel puts right what, according to section one of the Epistle, sin has put wrong. There's one little detail just worth noticing before we proceed. As Paul, in the initial verses of chapter 1, describes the historic role of the nation of Israel, he mentions the fact that, to them, God gave special privileges: the covenant; the revelation of the law at Sinai; the glory that is the presence of God among them in a unique fashion in their tabernacle and then in their temple, and with it the service, Greek word *latreia*—the service of God. In those far off days, if you wanted to know what God was like you would be well advised to go and visit Jerusalem and see the tabernacle or the temple of God and watch how Israel, under God's instructions, served God. Not with the ludicrous superstitions of paganism, nor yet with the cruelties of child sacrifice, nor yet with the indulgence of sex under the guise of religion. Here was the service of God, a testimony to the world of what God was like.

It is a most appalling heart-breaking tragedy that Israel, to whom that sacred service was given, failed in its chiefest point. Bear that in mind when you come to the opening exhortations of chapter 12: 'I beseech you, brethren, you who now are Christians and believe in the Messiah. I beseech you by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice which is your reasonable, your logical, your spiritual service,' says Paul. It won't do for us Christians to throw stones at Judaism for its failure in its service of God if we are not being careful to show by our self-sacrificial lives and our vigorous pursuit of the service of God what the true service of God is, and what that God is like whom we profess to serve. Israel had a solemn responsibility given along with her unique privilege. Here she was exposed to the whole world in her service of God, and the Gentiles could make up their mind what they thought of God as they watched the way Israel served her God. What would be the effect if this assembly were held up thus to the world? You say, 'We would not do too bad, Mr Visiting Preacher, we should score at least eight out of ten.' Oh, thank the Lord for that, I believe you would. But some of us mightn't make eight out of ten.

The gospel of God

But now we must move on to begin a more detailed consideration of the first section of the book. And before we do that, just let me turn aside a moment to point out the frame of reference in which the Epistle stands. In chapter 1, as Paul announces his theme, he describes

his gospel in this fashion: 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God'. You will notice it is not the gospel of Jesus Christ, not here: it is the gospel of God. For Paul the Jew the term 'God' would be in very deliberate contrast to all the multitudinous gods of the pagan world. Paul is a Jew. He stands in Judaism's great tradition, their unique testimony historically to the one true God of the universe. So when he talks about the gospel, it is first not the gospel of Jesus Christ—that might give some people the impression that Jesus Christ was just one prophet among many other prophets. But God himself was bigger than the lot of them, so the gospel that Paul preaches is God's gospel. And since it is the gospel initiated by, and commanded by, and originating in, and flowing from, God, it follows it is the gospel for the whole of mankind without exception.

That is a thing to be noted, not least in our present day when people are inclined to talk about the Christian gospel as insights that Jesus Christ had, and compare them with the insights that somebody else had—the Buddha or whoever. That will not do. The gospel is the gospel of God and therefore it was made known for all the nations without exception. This is not narrow-mindedness. The universal claim of the gospel for the obedience of all nations is based in this: that the gospel comes from the one true God. He tells us again that this gospel 'was promised afore by his prophets in the holy Scriptures' (1:2). The gospel is not some Johnny-come-lately philosophy. It is based on that historic revelation going back centuries, and now we have it enshrined in the Old Testament Scriptures. That is exceedingly important because, while those Old Testament Scriptures were not in their first place designed to announce the Messiah, Jesus Christ, they were designed to correct the world's thinking on the nature of God. It's no good telling people that Jesus is the Son of God unless they are clear what you mean by the term 'God'. Who is God and what is God like?

It was for that purpose that God raised up Abraham and his seed to be a protest to the grotesque and also the sophisticated idolatry of the ancient world. In that respect Israel and its temples stood unique in the surrounding Middle East for centuries. We need sometimes in our modern world to get back to that part of God's revelation that is the Old Testament, and talk to our modern contemporaries about God, the one true God. In the ancient world, the surrounding Gentile nations believed in a creator in some sense, but when you examine them further, for most of them their gods were part of the stuff of the universe itself. Behind them lay some vague but frightening power called Fate or Chance, but the gods themselves were in the cruder instances deifications of the powers of nature. The sun god, the moon god, the storm god, the god of fertility, and so on—deifications of the great powers of nature. And Israel stood out in her protest that it was false to interpret the universe that way round. She stood out in her unique testimony to the one true God, transcendent, not part of the universe but the creator of the universe and its upholder.

That lesson is a lesson that we'd do well to preach to our modern contemporaries. Given an opportunity to talk to the erstwhile atheists of Russia these days, I find it a very valuable approach. For if you ask a modern atheist and agnostic what are the ultimate powers that control us human beings, that brought us here, and will eventually destroy us and our planet together, the atheist won't employ the term 'gods' because he professes not to believe in them, but he will have to admit that we humans didn't create the universe. That's

self-evident. So what does control us? What did control our beginning? What will control our demise? And your atheist will answer basically the same as the old idolatrous nations of the ancient world, that the ultimate powers that control us are the physical forces of the universe: basic energy, whatever that is, and the weak atomic power and the strong atomic power, and electromagnetism, and gravity, and anti-gravity, if there be such a thing. Plus all the mysterious forces of biology and so forth. All of them mindless, all of them purposeless. And one day, according to current theory, those same mindless powers that created man, will one day destroy him. And the final irony is that, having destroyed humans along with their intelligence, the humans will know they're being destroyed or about to be destroyed. The great powers that destroy them won't even know what they've done. And the implication is that, without God, as Paul puts it in his letter to his Christian friends at Ephesus, there is no hope. Men and women are hope-less. The honest atheist will admit it, and shrug his shoulders and say, 'So what?' But you see the glory of the Christian gospel. It's not merely the gospel of Jesus. It's the gospel of God. And here springs hope for all created humankind, and the animal, and the inanimate creation together.

The gospel concerning Jesus Christ

Paul adds, of course, that the gospel is concerning Jesus Christ, God's Son. But notice the terms in which he describes him. He was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh. I would like to invite all preachers present, all Sunday School teachers present, and all others, when did you last preach a gospel sermon that hammered home to your neighbours, or whoever it was that was listening, that Jesus Christ is the Son of David? You say, 'We did it at Christmas time—"Once in Royal David's City".' Yes, it is an integral part of the gospel and it has immediate connotations because David was Israel's greatest king who extended their empire geographically. In Israel's prophetic literature, David becomes the model of the coming Messiah, for he shall not only be Saviour, he shall be King. And God will raise up in the House of David, that is in that royal line, an ensign, and to him all the nations of the earth shall flock. Not some narrow kingdom of Judah and Israel, but all the nations of the earth shall eventually bow to the ensign of Jesus Christ and acknowledge him as Lord and King. 'This gospel of mine,' says Paul, 'is made known by God for the obedience of faith of all mankind.'

When Paul eventually sat in a Roman prison about to appear before Nero, who eventually ordered him to be executed as a trouble to the Roman Empire, he wrote to Timothy saying, 'Remember Jesus Christ of the seed of David according to my gospel' (2 Tim 2:8). He's the royal king. He will outlast the Caesars. He shall have universal dominion. He was not a political king in the sense that some of his Jewish contemporaries tried to make out, trying to overthrow the Roman occupation and lead a military coup. But he was a king, and when he came to the great confession before Pontius Pilate, our Lord drew the issues very plainly when he said, 'My kingdom is not of this world, Pilate' (John 18:36). Earth's issues cannot be solved within the mere context of earth. Take the basic matter of human justice. Is there such a thing? If earth is all the history there is, if it's a closed shop, then the answer must be that justice has been a very poor and fragile thing: for

many people, just a rope of sand. Multi-millions have suffered injustice in the course of the ages, and died unrequited. If earth's history is bounded by this little planet, you may save your breath talking too much about supposed justice. That's why kingdoms based on this world will never solve the problem. 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Jesus Christ, let Paul remind you, is of the seed of David, according to the flesh, declared to be God's Son by the resurrection from the dead, and that puts the whole concern in its properly big frame of reference.

Secondly, when Pilate said, 'But you know, Jesus, you'll have to start talking because I have to tell you that I do have power' (19:10). How the politicians do rejoice in it: they like to feel that power is the ultimate thing that controls affairs. That's false, actually, as far as God is concerned. The question of the power of the Almighty was never at stake. Not even his satanic majesty thinks he will overcome God's almighty power. But the ultimate question of the universe is not who has the biggest power, it's another question: who is true? 'I am a king. For this end, I came into the world,' said Jesus, 'that I might bear witness to the truth.' 'What on earth is the truth?' said Pilate. He wasn't at that stage too bothered, and went off. And what is truth? What's the truth about you? You say, 'I'm young, and I'm pretty, and I have good prospects of marriage and a fine family, and a good home, and my husband might even get a Mercedes Benz, or a bit higher than that even, and grandchildren.'

But what else is there about you? What is the truth about you? Are you the product of mindless chances, and bits of stuff doomed to be spilled on the floor like a pot of jam, and trampled underfoot, and eaten by worms? What's the truth about you? 'I've come,' says Jesus Christ, 'to tell you the truth.' 'You've got precious little time to do it,' said Pilate. 'I must sentence you to be crucified.' Do you want to know the truth about you? You'll see it in Jesus Christ crucified upon a cross. That's the truth. Not only is there an all-powerful, omnipotent Creator who made you, but this is the truth about him. He's no tyrant with all his absolute power, but he loves you and rather than have you perish, he would give himself for you. That is the truth. Its corollary is too horrendous to contemplate. To reject the love of that God is, by definition, perdition. That's why you will find Paul coming to his great climaxes in the early part of his book, dwelling on and glorying in that tremendous exhibition and demonstration of the love of God that was given to us in the death of Jesus Christ his Son.

Paul in Corinth

Now as we begin our consideration of the first section of the book, it will help us to remember that as Paul was writing this Epistle, he was sitting in Corinth. We do well from time to time to remember what some of these ancient cities were like. It is a little easy for us who are surrounded by computers and things to get a little stuck up as though we are especially intelligent. There's no evidence that human intelligence has increased. Knowledge, yes, but it's very doubtful whether intelligence has increased. And as for building cities, the city of Corinth was tall, dazzling with its marble-paved main road, and its statuary, and its classically designed temples. They wouldn't necessarily please modern architects, but Corinth would have made many a modern city look like a slum. You shouldn't forget that

Greece produced philosophers who influence this world yet, that Greeks invented almost every genre of literature we have today, and that Greeks invented the atomic theory in its earlier form. They weren't all that lacking in intelligence.

But as Paul sat in the city, he knew that Corinth, and so many of those brilliantly civilised cities, had another side to them—their extreme moral corruption, their sexual perversions, their injustices, their moral confusion. When Paul writes about God's judgment on human sin, it's not because he was brought in the Victorian age when sex was taboo and you mustn't speak of it, and nobody knew of anything, or if they did, they kept it quiet. So it's not that if he had had the advantage of living through our modern age, he would have been far more broad-minded. He lived in an age back to which our modern post-Christian world is returning. He knew all the permissiveness we now have. And as he pronounces God's verdict on it, it is not from the narrow-minded viewpoint of people that have not met the modern world, but of someone who's seen where all our modern permissiveness actually leads, as earlier generations have found it to lead when it was practised ad lib.

The justification of God's wrath

So as we come to the first major part of his Epistle, I have called the verses from 1:8–3:20 not merely a statement of God's wrath against sin, but the justification of God's wrath. Where do I get that idea from? I pick up a phrase from chapter 3:

For what if some were without faith? shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God? God forbid: yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy words, And mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment. (vv. 3–4)

Ponder that. It is perhaps an extreme thing to say, but it bothers God what you think about him. He is not a tyrant. And when he pronounces his judgment, God is sensitive to the possible objections, to the complaints that it is unjust. God is not concerned to act the tyrant and say, 'Well, I don't care what people think. I can be unjust if I like.' God is concerned to demonstrate his judgment is true, his wrath justified. That is why, as you come down chapter 1, for instance, you will meet this verse:

The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse. (v. 20)

Meaning that they may be utterly without defence—a defendant in a law court that can say nothing to defend himself against the charge. And again in 2:1: 'Wherefore thou art without excuse, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest.' And in 3:19: 'Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped,' with nothing to say, either in defence or to dispute the justice of God's judgment. Our blessed Lord announced when he was here on earth that he it is that's going to be the final judge. So we should note certain things that the judge himself said

when he was here on earth, showing this same concern that God's judgment will be just and fair.

In the Gospel of John, for instance, our Lord said to his apostles:

If I had not come and spoken unto them [that is, his contemporaries] they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin. (John 15:22)

And again:

If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father . . . They hated me without a cause. (15:24-25)

These are important statements of principle. When our Lord said, 'If I had not come and spoken unto them words that none other spoke, they had not had sin', he is not saying that they would have been sinlessly perfect. All men have sinned. The term 'to have sin' means to be guilty and to be blame-worthy. And these will be blame-worthy because, 'I have come, and I have spoken, and I have shown them the Father, and they have heard, and they have seen. In rejecting my words, in hating both me and my Father, they now are left without excuse, for they knew and they heard.'

Similarly, at the end of his miracle in John 9, when he had given a blind man sight—which was tantamount to forgiving his sin in the Pharisaic mind—the Pharisees presently remarked, 'So we're blind too, are we? Is that what you're saying? Just like this fellow couldn't see anything, we can't see anything either?' And our Lord replied, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin.' Meaning, not that you would be sinlessly perfect, but you would be without blame. Nobody can be blamed for not seeing what they don't have the eyesight to see. Imagine a sinner standing before Jesus Christ, our Lord, at the judgment, and the judge has to say, 'I must consign you to eternal perdition.'

And the man says, 'May I ask why am I being condemned?'

'For not seeing the book here in my hand.'

'What book? I can't see any book.'

'Don't be stupid, of course you can't see it. You haven't got any eyes to see it with, but you're going to be condemned nonetheless for not seeing it.'

If that ever happened, the whole universe would grow dark with injustice. 'It won't happen,' says the judge, 'men will never be blamed for not seeing if they didn't have the faculty of sight so they could see.' And men will never be blamed for not seeing what wasn't there to be seen. 'If I hadn't come and talked to them, they couldn't be blamed for not believing what I said because they never heard it.' And now, in telling us about the wrath of God, Paul points out how God will be justified in his judgment. Men shall have no defence. There was evidence that they could see if they wished, and he lists the evidence of creation—pointing, not to God's love but to his existence and his almighty power and Godhead. Men can see it by direct intuition, as others can see a tulip is beautiful. It takes no intricate philosophical reasoning. It can be seen directly by any creature. And God has designed it that way in order that men shall be without excuse if they reject the Creator.

In the wrath of God that is already revealed in life, Paul—or rather God’s Holy Spirit through him—stays to give us the reasons:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. (1:22–23)

So the judgment on that is what? Well, if they will thus deface the knowledge of God, and the glory of God, and demote the Creator to think of him as simply a creature, then, by a kind of poetic justice, God gave them up to dishonour their bodies. The perversions that we see around us are not just things that one day God will judge for being perversions. Some of them are the result that God has judged already. For if men dishonour the Creator, it will lead to them dishonouring themselves. That follows almost logically, doesn’t it? If instead of being the deliberate creation of a personal God, responsible to God, made in his image, you demote the idea of God to a mere animal, you will eventually behave like one. If you demote the idea of a Creator to a bit of mindless stuff, you must not be surprised if it leads to a gross devaluation of the human personality. If Stalin had believed that men and women were made in the image of God, I somehow think he wouldn’t have slaughtered sixty million of them.

Moreover, when men do not like to retain God in their knowledge, they shouldn’t be surprised if their judgments begin to go astray. We are not some self-made containers of self-made wisdom. We are dependent creatures, and ultimately dependent for the health of our outlook upon our Creator. And if we refuse to take God into our concept and retain him there, says the verses, God gives them up to a reprobate mind, to agree with these perversions. I repeat, it is not that the perversions will one day merit the judgment of God. It is an alarming evidence of the judgment of God that people begin to defend the perversions and say they’re alright. That shows a mental state gone wrong. It is part of the providential government of God. I do not wish now to say more than that on these verses that are telling us about the wrath of God, and the justification of God’s wrath. They come to their climax in chapter 3. When the whole world, Jew and Gentile, pagan or Hebrew, are brought before God’s judgment, their mouths are shut. They become guilty before God.

Salvation by faith

The next paragraph, 3:21–3:31, is Paul’s claim that salvation is by faith. How is that related to the argument? We recur to chapter 1 where Paul said, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God to salvation.’ And when we inquired why it is the power to salvation; why does the gospel have this uncanny power to save people, Paul immediately answers, ‘Because it proceeds on the principle of faith.’ That’s why it works. Methods of salvation that depend on men’s own works and efforts are, in the end, doomed to fail. The gospel works because it doesn’t proceed on the principle of man’s effort. It proceeds on the principle of faith. That is a difficult thing to get hold of in our minds. It seems to most people so self-evident that if ever we’re going to be saved and please God, the obvious thing we’ve got to do is to keep God’s law. ‘No,’ says Paul:

We know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world be brought under the judgment of God. (3:19)

That was the purpose of God's law. God's law is like a thermometer in some senses. It shows us how serious our illness is, but the thermometer can't cure your illness. Suppose one of these days you come to visit me and find me propped up in bed with my nightcap on, and plenty of Lemsip by my side. You say, 'What's wrong with you?'

'Well,' I say, 'I'm ill, very ill.'

'I heard you were rather ill. That's why I thought I'd come to see you. But what are you doing sitting there sucking that thermometer so vigorously?'

'Don't be stupid, I'm ill. When the doctor came the other day and showed me how ill I was he got this thing and he put it in my mouth, and he read it off and said I was, I don't know how many degrees, above what's safe to be. And the only hope for me was if I could get the thermometer reading down. So I've been sitting here this last hour, sucking the thermometer to get the reading down, and then I shall be well. Can't you see that, you stupid man? I'm ill.'

'Yes, you are ill. You're more ill than you thought you were!'

The thermometer shows how ill you are. It can't cure you.

The law can show you, and show us all, how ill we are. It can't cure us. Read the thermometer right and it will send you to the doctor for help. If you read God's law right, it will send you to the only help there is—to Jesus Christ, our Lord. Not our effort, but his sacrifice, can appease the wrath of the holy God against our sin, and bring us peace with God. And all the benefit of that great salvation comes through faith. We will speak more on that in a later session.

But we come to this next bit, which is chapter 4. Paul has here got to answer some of his critics. Paul says that salvation is by faith. He also makes the claim that the Christian gospel is based on the Old Testament prophets. Really? Does the Old Testament then give us any ground for thinking that justification is by faith? If the gospel is a new invention, you needn't bother with your Old Testament. But if the gospel is based on the Old Testament prophets, promised by them, witnessed to by them, then it will be a matter of urgent concern that you should be able to show that the Old Testament does lay down as a precedent that a man is justified by faith and not by works.

Abraham—precedent and analogy

And so Paul appeals to the legal precedent of Abraham and his experience; how Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. That covers the law, the first five books, and then he quotes David from the former prophets, and then from the Psalms, to show that a man is forgiven by God's grace through faith. He then enters the great argument to show that Abraham, though he was father of the Jews, was justified before he was circumcised and not afterwards. That makes clear that if Abraham could be justified without first being circumcised, then justification does not depend on circumcision which has rebound to us Gentiles. We can be justified too without the Jewish rite of circumcision.

When we come to the end of chapter 4 Paul cites Abraham still, but applies the lesson not now as a precedent but as an analogy, to show us not only that Abraham was justified by faith—and therefore we must be justified by faith—but to show us exactly what is meant by the term ‘faith’. What is meant by it? Did you ever have the experience of telling your friend when a suitable opportunity arose that you were sure of salvation? And your friend said, ‘You’re doubtless a good living person, but should you actually make such a big claim? How can you say it? Isn’t that a little bit presumptuous?’ And you have explained, ‘But salvation is by faith: that’s why I’m sure.’ And your friend replied, ‘You must be someone of very strong faith. I wish I had your faith.’

It’s a common notion that when the Bible says salvation is by faith, people think, ‘Of course it’s by faith, but you’d have to have a colossal faith, a faith that could move mountains or something, to be saved.’ And people tell you, ‘But my faith isn’t all that strong so that’s why I’m not sure of salvation.’ It would be very important at this juncture in the argument to get this issue settled. What do you mean by faith when you say that justification is by faith? So Abraham’s case is quoted: how that God, in his case, promised him he would have a son. Sarah was already barren and Abraham was allowed to get old so he was absolutely decrepit and physically there was no hope of having any son. It wasn’t a question now of, ‘You do your best and God will help.’ It was a question of just believing God and his word, a God who could bring life out of death. And Abraham persevered in that kind of faith. Some years it was a bit wobbly, but I haven’t got time to tell you about the wobbly bit. In the end, the old faith won through and he dared to believe God who would bring life out of death.

How does that help us to know what our faith is? God doesn’t promise us that we’re going to have a son by the time we’re ninety-nine and a half, or anything like that, so how does Abraham’s faith become an example to us? ‘By way of analogy,’ says Paul. Abraham had to believe in a God that could bring life out of death, a son out of Sarah’s barren and decaying body. We believe in a God who, for our salvation’s sake, not only delivered his Son to death for our sins and trespasses, but raised him from the dead. Come with me, if you may, and come reverently, as I shall try to. Suppose we were standing round the very grave of the blessed Lord Jesus when he was buried. And suppose at that stage we had become aware that our whole salvation depended on this—that the body of Jesus Christ should come out of the grave. And you said, ‘My brother, I’ve perceived it is written in the prophets that it is implied the Messiah will rise from the dead and that, through him, we shall have salvation. And if he doesn’t raise, we shan’t be saved.’ So what shall we do about it?

You say, ‘We’ve got to believe.’

‘Right,’ I say, ‘let’s start believing then. Let’s stand round the grave and we’ll all join hands, and we’ll start believing. Now believe, my dear sister. Believe.’

‘He isn’t risen yet.’

‘You’re not believing hard enough. Believe.’

Do you suppose all our believing will bring the body of Jesus Christ out of the grave? Of course not. Bringing the body of Christ out of the grave was the action of a God who brings life out of death, and does the whole thing. And faith is the bankrupt’s hand, taking the gift

of pardon and new life in Christ. Faith does not contribute to the great work of our redemption.

I have tried to show how chapter 4 fits into the flow of the argument, and why the two topics it discusses must be discussed at that particular point. Then we come to the climax, the results and implications of justification. There are some great commentators who will tell you that this last bit doesn't belong to the first section but to the beginning of the next section. That's how these Bible commentators are. They each have their scheme and most of them disagree. They can't all be right, but they could all be wrong! I would go to the stake for my belief that the Bible is the word of God. I very much doubt if I would go to the stake for my analysis of the word of God. I would readily believe the other chap would be right, and I wrong, if I had to go to the stake for it. It might be that both are true! We shall have to see that when we come to our next session.

Salvation from the Wreckage of Adam's Sin

The clock and also the calendar tell us that it is time we moved on, and from considering the answer of the gospel to the solemn fact that mankind stands under the wrath of God, we now ought to move on to consider what the gospel can do about the question of the wreckage resulting from Adam's sin. But as you will remember, before we can do that, we have some unfinished business to consider, and that is the final paragraph in what I have called this first movement. I have suggested that the first eleven verses of chapter 5 form the final climax to the topic that has been developed from chapter 1, about the wrath of God and how we can be saved from it. As part of my evidence, I have cited the verse in chapter 5 that assures us with triumphant joy that if we have been justified by faith, and justified by Christ's blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him. Others there are who will tell us that this particular paragraph does not belong here logically, but should begin the next major section of Paul's Epistle. We needn't try to decide that question now because, if we read the Epistle in a straight line, we shall come to this particular paragraph before we can reach the next section of the book that deals with the wreckage of Adam's sin.

Sanctification

When we have spent a minute or two considering those first eleven verses of chapter 5, we shall see that they not only sum up what has gone before, but they prepare us for what we next have to consider, which is the matter of our sanctification. And it will appear to us quite clearly why it is important that we should grasp very firmly and clearly in our hearts what these first eleven verses are saying and make sure we have understood them if we are going to make progress in the great spiritual adventure of sanctification. So let us proceed without further ado to consider some of the detail of chapter 5. 'Being justified by faith,' says Paul, 'we have peace with God' (v. 1). And as the old theologians have pointed out, the terminology is deliberately exact—not peace with ourselves. As far as we ourselves are concerned, as we embark on the process of sanctification, we shall find peace with ourselves a very rare commodity. There will be times when we shall feel the anguish that Paul describes in chapter 7, 'O wretched man that I am.' There will be times when it will seem to us that we are making little or no progress at all in the journey towards holiness and, indeed, times when it will seem to us that, instead of progressing, we are going further back. When those times arise, it will be of fundamental importance that we have clearly understood from the beginning what it is that our acceptance with God depends on.

For if ever we should have it in our head that our acceptance with God depends on our spiritual progress, not only shall we become very troubled in our hearts when the progress is not what we wish it to be, but if that lack of progress, the many frustrations, the anguish of heart, question within us whether we are accepted with God, then the whole foundation of our sanctification will start to rock and we shall lose that basic spiritual strength that comes from the confidence that we are accepted with God. It is only in that acceptance with God that we shall find the strength to face our ugly selves, and the courage to be honest with ourselves. And instead of desperately trying to believe that we are better than we are, to find the courage to face ourselves, and the unexpected depth of our sinfulness even as believers. Facing ourselves is the first step towards repentance, and repentance is the big first step towards holiness. So let us look with that double interest in these first eleven verses—the climax to what has gone before and preparation for what shall follow.

We have peace with God—upon what ground? Simply being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And not only have we peace with God, but access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and surely the term ‘grace’ must be allowed here its full theological meaning. We stand upon what ground? We stand before God now as ever it shall be, solely on the ground of his grace. My dear brother and sister, let me remind you that, having striven all your life to make progress with Christ, and great progress by his grace you will make, when you come to ninety-nine and a half, just before you are ready to go home to God, and you ask yourself upon what ground do you stand before God, you most certainly will not answer upon the ground of your progress. You’ll say, ‘I stand on the grace of God.’ There we stand firm, and only there can we stand firm. Moreover, and here comes the exultant news, let us rejoice. The word for ‘rejoice’ doesn’t necessarily mean singing all day long, though you are allowed to do it if you wish! It is that kind of fierce, almost, exultant joy that comes through confidence—confidence in God that we have peace with God, confidence in the work of Christ. And therefore we are permitted, indeed encouraged, says the verse, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And, biblically speaking, hope is to be understood, not in our modern sense when you say, ‘I hope it’s going to be fine weather when I’m on holiday.’ If you are British, your expression, ‘I hope it will be fine weather on holiday’, means, ‘I rather fear it won’t!’ When here it says, ‘We rejoice in hope’, it is the strong and sure hope like an anchor of the soul that we shall attain the glory of God. Get hold of it, my brother, my sister, as you start the road of holiness. Here is God telling you the ground of the confidence you may have that one day you shall attain the glory of the Lord. What marvellous courage and energy it puts into us in our pursuit of holiness when we know that at the end we shall be conformed to the image of Christ.

Tribulation

‘And not only so, but let us also rejoice in our tribulations’ (Rom 5:3). Here you will see quite obviously it doesn’t mean the happy clappy kind of rejoicing, at least if you are at all sensible. For who, faced with tribulation, will say it is a lovely merry-go-round and I’m enjoying this immensely? The kind of tribulation that Paul refers to is not just the tribulation of an

occasional toothache. It is that much more serious kind of tribulation and testing of which our blessed Lord spoke when he gave us the parable of the sower. According to Luke's version in chapter 8, he said, 'These are they who, sown upon a rock, who receive the word, and for a time, believe', (v. 13) and if our blessed Lord says they do believe for a time, it's not for me to contradict him and say they didn't believe. But the belief is no good for when persecution, tribulation and testing arises, they fall away because they have no root in themselves, never did have. There was never any hope of any fruit. They had no root. And here we are facing tribulation. This is such an important part of our Christian experience that not only Paul speaks of it, but James speaks of it, and Peter himself likewise in his way. Because the early gospel preached the story quite clearly that, in a sense, if you preach salvation by faith, the weak link in that chain is the faith business. If my eternal salvation depends on my faith, what happens if tribulation arises so severe that it breaks my faith?

It's no good talking glibly then of the eternal security of the believer, for if my faith is destroyed I'm no longer a believer, am I? Certainly, the believer shall be eternally safe; we have our Lord's word upon it. 'He that believeth hath everlasting life' (John 6:47). There is no verse in Scripture known to me that says, 'The person that has once believed has eternal life and if they thereafter cease to be believers, and throw away their faith completely, it doesn't matter because they once believed. They're saved nonetheless.' I don't know of such a verse. What about this weak link in the chain then if I'm saved by faith? How dare I face life's trials? I vividly remember from my youth an ex-atheist, recently brought to faith, confiding in me that he felt sure of his salvation. 'Except this,' he said, 'David, if one day my two young girls ran out in the road and were knocked down and killed by a lorry, I don't think I could still trust in God.' What would that mean? How could you be confident in the face of tribulation like that?

It has been my—I wouldn't call it a pleasure, it was kind of a cruel sport!—all down the years to have to invigilate at examinations. One would go down through the examination hall early in the morning, generally a very grey morning and there would be three or four hundred people outside the door. Some were managing to laugh nervously, but others were very tense, as you could see. Understandably, because it's their finals, and if they failed, the thing was ruined. I saw remarkably few down the years that came rejoicing: all the more so when they were allowed in and sat down at the desks and turned the paper over and saw the questions! Then the study of the faces was interesting, to say the least. How can you, in all reality and sanity, rejoice in the face of tribulation that's going to test whether you are a true believer or not? Oh, for the wonder of the divine secret that Paul gives us here.

Endurance

Paul says we are to rejoice 'knowing':

And not only so, but let us also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh endurance; and endurance, probation; and probation, hope: and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Ghost which was given unto us. (5:3–5)

There are some things that are not built simply on experience, important as experience is. There are times in life when it will be our veritable life-line to know certain of God's declared and absolutely reliable facts. We are to know that, come the worst, tribulation works endurance. Now, some of you may have old translations, venerable and much beloved, and rightly so. And they, at this point, tell us that tribulation works patience, which in our modern language stands opposite impatience. It gave rise to that quip at one stage when two brothers met and brother A said to brother B, 'Pray for me, please, brother B, that God would give me patience.' And brother B got down on his knees and prayed that the Lord would give him tribulation. And brother A protested: he wasn't asking for tribulation, he was asking for patience. And brother B wisely responded, 'But that's the way to get patience.' I suppose there's some modicum of truth in it, but it isn't patience as distinct from impatience.

In the old Latin language 'patience' meant endurance or persistence. This is what the tribulation is going to test, whether our faith can persevere and survive. We are to know it because God says it, that where there is faith to start with, tribulation produces endurance. And the same word is used in the gospels, in that same parable of our Lord, the parable of a sower. Those on the good soil are those that receive the word in an honest and true heart, and bring forth fruit with endurance. There is no other way in the botanical world of a plant bringing forth fruit. It has to endure. If it doesn't, there's no fruit. There is no other way of producing godliness, but by endurance.

Endurance in its turn will work probation, meaning it will demonstrate that we are genuine and, being demonstrated genuine, will give us what you now notice is a second ground for hope. Probation works hope, and that is true to experience, isn't it? We begin our spiritual life by faith, justified by faith, and that gives rise to the certain hope at once that we shall attain the glory of God. As the years bring their waves of tribulation and our faith is demonstrated to be genuine, that gives rise for a second ground of hope, necessarily. When we have grasped that, let us pose ourselves once more the question: on which of those two grounds rests my peace with God? I ask that for this very practical reason. The mark of a true believer is that he endures, and brings forth fruit. Some have said to themselves, 'There must be evidences in my life that I'm a true believer.' That's very good and proper. But then, imperceptibly perhaps, they have drifted into thinking that, unless the practical evidence is there that they're a true believer, perhaps they're not a true believer. So they begin doubting whether they are saved, and whether they shall be ultimately accepted with God.

And so they come to make acceptance and peace with God dependent upon the evidences that they are a believer, and land themselves in all kinds of quagmires. They who are of a tender conscience will never feel that the evidence is good enough. They will feel perhaps sometimes it's a happy thing to doubt, as they put it. At least the doubting might be evidence that they are true believers. Those who are proud and worldly might too easily be content with the evidence when it isn't good enough, and so they might be living in a fool's paradise. But if peace with God depends on that second stage of the evidences, how shall we ever retain basic peace with God? We get peace with God, let this paragraph tell us, right from the very start on the basis of being justified by faith. How else do you suppose the dying thief went home to paradise with the Lord that day, and had the assurance in his

heart that he would end in paradise? For there weren't many hours to show evidence that he was genuine. No, the peace with God, as you see in the course of the argument, depends on that initial faith. And hope puts not to shame, it doesn't let us down, for the reason that the Holy Spirit argues within us the nature and character of the love of God.

The love of God

We are sometimes inclined to read the love of God in the delicious feelings that steal across us when such is our sense of the love and grace of God that our hearts are filled with bursting joyous emotion, and it seems to us our heads nearly touch heaven. We would be wise to balance that with the logic of the love of God. For when the Holy Spirit pours out the love of God in our hearts, he urges us to take hold of it by exercising a divine logic about the love of God. The logic is simple enough, but exceedingly powerful. The argument goes like this. When did God first start to love you? Not surely when you were that rotten, disgraceful, nasty, mean, little original sinner? God's love said to you, 'Now, look here, if you were to consider improving substantially, if you got to a certain degree of attainment, then I would consider beginning to love you. As for giving my Son for you, you would have to make enormous improvement before I ever consider giving my Son for you.' Was it so? No, God loved me while I was still a sinner, ungodly, enemy of God indeed, and kicking God in the shins. Then he loved me.

What is the biggest thing that God will ever do for you? You say, 'I hope when I get home to heaven I'm going to have one of those mansions, and possibly a galaxy or two to play with. How marvellous it would be if God were to give me one of those. I would then be convinced of his love.' You would? It wouldn't cost God a lot to give you a galaxy—he has rather a lot of them! More than enough to go round for one each, so to speak. The biggest gift God ever gave you was when he gave his Son to die for you. Don't expect anything bigger than that in heaven, will you? And when did he give him to die for you? When we were yet sinners, ungodly and enemies. Then he loved us. Then he gave his Son. Tell me, if you think about it, is God's love consistent? I may be a poor specimen of a saint, but I'm not the enemy of God I once was. Shall it be that God would love me when I was an enemy, and now that I have become a child of God he will get tired of me and throw me over the battlements of heaven onto the scrapheap of eternity? God's love is not like that. God's love is utterly consistent. If he loved me then when I was an enemy, how much more, argues the Holy Spirit, will he love me now that I'm reconciled, justified, at peace with God, and a child of God?

That being so, I may notice the climax of the whole thing—rejoice in God; meaning once more that same basic confidence. At the very centre of any human personality and being, must be this core confidence. If, psychologically, people lose their confidence, they disintegrate. When it comes to our existence in this universe, the plain facts are we are not self-made, we are dependent creatures. The secret of our integrity as personalities depends on that core confidence being in God. That's what the devil tampered with in the garden of Eden, to undermine and to destroy it. That's why the gospel has to be, not by works, but by faith, restoring that basic confidence in God. That is the basis of all else. If men and women

are not brought in that fundamental sense to justification by faith, and place their confidence in God, they will, says the Bible, disintegrate. They will perish.

I trust we now begin to see how this is a pivotal passage. It is the summary of what's gone before but it prepares us for what follows. Here is God's answer, the gospel's answer, to the wreckage of human sin—what we commonly call 'sanctification'. Let us say again, for most of us it's going to be a long, drawn-out process. We shall not wake up one of these Monday mornings after an unusually good Sunday and say to ourselves, 'You know, I feel extraordinarily different this morning. What could have happened? Oh, I think I know; I've become holy.' No, it doesn't normally happen like that. It's going to be a long process. Some of it will be enjoyable; some of it will be distinctly unpleasant, because what God has got to do is to face us with our sins.

You know, we're not the nice people we imagine we are, and when we first get converted we think we're marvellously good and almost triumphant. We have yet to discover what God has known all the way along the line; that we're not the nice, beautiful bundles of perfumed personality that we think we are. As the old puritan had it, there's even dirt at the very bottom of our tears. God will face us with it, like he faced the Israelites with their own perversity in the wilderness. So God will face us with our sinfulness, and that will be distinctly unpleasant. Oh, how wonderful to know before it happens that our acceptance with God and our peace with God remains the same. For he who loved us and gave his Son foresaw and knew what we were like, loved us in spite of it, and will love us all the way through.

The wreckage of Adam's sin

So now we come to the second major section, and once more we are to notice simply the major component parts. When you look at the contents of both section one and section two, you will notice that there is a certain similarity in the subject matter, what I have called the diagnosis of our trouble: things about the death of Christ, things about the law of God, and finally, the implications of justification by faith; the implications of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. They are similar and yet they are different. It is real progress when we wake up to the fact that in Scripture there are similarities in adjoining passages. But when we've noticed the similarities, then even more important are the differences. It allows us to do a little bit of what the medics call in their rather sophisticated language 'differential diagnosis'. That's a big term for a very simple matter.

Here come three men to the doctor on a Monday morning, and they each have a sore throat. The doctor bids the first man open his mouth, looks inside, and says, 'Your trouble is you shouted too much at the football match on Saturday. Go home and shut up and you'll be better.' He looks down the second cavern and says, 'Yes, sore throat, but the cause is different this time. You've got laryngitis, my man. You'd better have some Penicillin.' And he looks down the next one, shakes his head and says, 'I shall need to take a little specimen from you and we shall send that away to the hospital, and we will see what they say when it comes back.' He fears cancer of the throat. All three are the same in the fact that they're sore throats, but it's the differences that are more important than the similarities.

So it is with these two adjoining passages of holy Scripture when it comes to the diagnosis of our trouble. If we're going to be sanctified truly, we shall first have to begin with a proper and adequate diagnosis of what is wrong with us. I know you could very well get impatient with me and say, 'Look here, Gooding, do pull up your spiritual socks.' Well, I know that the spiritual socks do fall down sometimes, but you shouldn't suppose that's all that's wrong with me. The trouble goes deeper, and unless we have a realistic diagnosis of what is wrong with us, then all hopes of putting it right are going to be disappointed. Why don't I behave? What is wrong with me? And the answer to that, according to the New Testament, is much more radical than many people allow. What is wrong with me is that I was, so to speak, ruined before ever I was born. 'By the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners' (Rom 5:19). I was ruined before I was born. Unless you are prepared to acknowledge that, putting me right will become impossible and impractical. You must have a remedy big enough to deal with that.

So let us notice the difference. The diagnosis in chapter 1 is that people are without excuse, it's their fault. The judge will hold them responsible for their individual sins. They are without excuse. But when we come to chapter 5, the diagnosis says it isn't altogether your fault. You were constituted a sinner by what someone else did. I realise as I speak now I speak under the shadow of great theologians, and I'm not a theologian. So perhaps I'm wrong because many theologians say I'm wrong! They say, 'Look what the text says, "So death passed upon all men for that all sinned" (5:12). In the Greek that is an aorist tense, not a perfect tense. It should be translated "all sinned", not "all have sinned".' From which they deduce that the verse is saying that when Adam sinned, each one of us sinned because we were in Adam and therefore, to that extent, are guilty of Adam's sin. I must say honestly, I find that difficult to accept, to the point of impossibility. You certainly can't found it upon the Greek. The Greek verb is an aorist, but let me quote you some other aorists of that same Greek verb. 'For all sinned' (3:23); the Greek is aorist, but what does Paul mean? All sinned when Adam sinned? No, surely not. All sinned, have sinned, individually sinned, and come short of the glory of God. 'For as many as have sinned without the law shall also perish without the law: and as many as have sinned under law shall be judged by law' (2:12); aorist tenses. It is talking of our individual behaviour.

The fact of Greek grammar is that you cannot always translate a Greek aorist by an English aorist. Sometimes the appropriate translation has to be an English perfect. The people described here in chapter 5, over whom death reigns, are people who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression (see v. 14). Adam sinned deliberately; deliberately breaking an explicit prohibition laid down by God. He died as a consequence. Many more died before God ever gave them any further laws. They died because they were sinners, but they had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression. They were not disobeying a revealed law, but if we all sinned when Adam sinned, we must have sinned in the same way. The verses are saying there have been many people, sinners, yes, but they didn't sin after the similitude of Adam's sin. I say that in all due humility, but for the moment I leave the discussion. You may like to raise it in question time.

I come back to this great thing that, by the disobedience of one, we were constituted sinners, by what somebody else did. How can I be put right? Oh, listen to the lovely news. It

is not by my obedience, but by the obedience of Christ that the many shall be constituted righteous. Oh, glorious thing. And let me recur to our problem. If you're going to tell me that when Adam sinned, I sinned, and I must be credited with the guilt of that sin because I was in Adam, will you tell me that when Christ obeyed, I am now to be credited with having obeyed as well? That couldn't be true. Not by his obedience plus mine am I saved, but by his one great act of obedience at Calvary for me, the disobedient, am I constituted righteous.

The legal basis of our sanctification

We move on now to some of the remaining detail, and time dictates that we shall merely have to follow just the logical progression of thought. The first paragraphs talk to us about the diagnosis of our trouble, the root of our ruin, and tell us then of a recovery that is matched to the trouble—the trouble brought on by Adam, the recovery brought to us by Christ. Then we have the famous paragraph, 6:1–14. I want to sum that up by saying that these verses tell us of the legal basis of our sanctification—he who has died has been justified from sin. Many translators are moved to query that translation. They say we had justification in the first five chapters, but not here. We're talking about sanctification now so the word 'justify' here must be given a different connotation. I'm going to suggest to you that that is not so. Paul is still using it in its legal connotation.

Look to verse 14 where Paul comes to the secret. How is it that sin shall not have dominion over you? What is the secret of that glorious fact? Don't look at your Bible now, but tell me, what is the secret that sin shall not have dominion over you? You say, 'Mr Preacher, it's because God has given us the Holy Spirit within. He shall give us dominion over sin.' Well, you're telling me the truth, of course, but that isn't what Romans 6 is saying. That's what Romans 8 is saying. You'll notice 6:14 doesn't say, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you because the Holy Spirit living within will give you power over it.' It doesn't say anything of the sort. The secret of breaking the dominion of sin, says Paul, is this: 'Sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under law, but under grace.' So how does the fact I'm not under law, but under grace, free me from sin's domination?

Well, I'm tempted to give a very practical answer to that. God's law is not just advice. It is true that the Hebrew word *torah* means instruction, and God's law is instruction; but God's law is more than instruction. God's law says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, and your neighbour as yourself.' 'And if you don't, I shall curse you.' They held a great ceremony in Israel when they first entered the land, to bring that home to everybody—that breaking God's law put them under a curse. Now, imagine me as a believer, waking up on a Monday morning, and there is God's law standing by my side, personified, if I may for a moment imagine such a thing without being unduly irreverent. And the law says to me, 'Gooding, you shall now get up, and from now on this Monday morning, right through noon to the closing hours of the day, you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, your neighbour as yourself, and if you fail I shall have to curse you.' What do you suppose Gooding would do? Oh, I know what you would do; you'd get up and have a go, wouldn't you, full of hope?

I know what I would do. With the advantage of years of experience, I would say, 'If that is the condition I'm under, I shall stay in bed.' I might as well face it now, and then the law would curse me for staying in bed! And suppose I got up and managed to do more or less what I was told to do until 10:30am, and then I came short in one particular part, James would support the law and would say, 'Well, you've broken one point, you're guilty of the lot.' No good saying, 'Well, I'm sorry about that.' So where, then, is the basis of my sanctification? When I fall and sin, let my heart be contrite and sorry, and confess it to the Lord, but the wonderful thing is, sin no longer has the power to keep me down. I can get up again, not by saying sin doesn't matter, but in the full realisation that the cost of that mistake, the cost of that sin, has already been borne. And that is marvellous to know.

When I went to school, it was a very old-fashioned place, and they had what was thought to be a Chemistry laboratory. For any pupil of the school that wanted to read Chemistry, his parents had to pay out a great wallop of money, cautionary money, in case the aforesaid student blew the place up! So the school wanted to be guaranteed the cost of the education of this unfortunate wretch before he started the lesson. And God, who knows the cost of bringing us to glory, and the cost of all the mistakes we shall make, and the errors and failures in the course of our training, my brother, my sister, has paid the cost in advance. How else could he take us seriously? Our mistakes, as believers, are as serious as they were before we were believers, and they had to be paid for, and were by the death of Christ. 'Your old man,' says Paul, 'was crucified with Christ' (Rom 6:6). That raises a question: who is this old man, so to speak? And here we should be aware of that popular fallacy. So many of us like to think of ourselves as composed of two bits: there's the nice bit, which is really me, and there's the other bit, that isn't really me—that's the bit that misbehaves. And we like to think that the old man bit was the bad bit, and that was crucified with Christ, and that left the nice bit. But that's an illusion, isn't it? The old man is not the nasty bit. The old man, I'm afraid, is the whole thing from birth to death.

You can see why that is so if you will think for the moment of the picture language of your baptism. When you were baptised (I hope you were), which part of you did they bury symbolically under the water? The nasty bit, and left the nice bit standing? 'No,' you say, 'when they baptised me, they baptised the whole lot.' It's a good job it wasn't a real burial, because you'd have ceased to be. But the symbolic burial was saying the same thing—not getting rid of the nasty bit but getting rid of the whole lot. That was God's verdict on you, sir, and you, madam. From start to finish, in your own self, and it will still be true when you are ninety-nine and a half. You'll have to say it, 'I have sinned. I still come short of God's glory.' Will it matter? Yes, it matters. That's why Christ died. And when you were baptised, you were confessing that sad state of affairs that you were so rotten that all God could do was to have you executed, dead and buried, and got out of the way. And that satisfied God's law.

Of course, your baptism was not only a burial; it was a symbolic resurrection. And when you rose, it wasn't simply to give vent to a pious hope that you might perhaps walk in newness of life if you tried very hard. It was symbolising the other great part of our salvation. We died with Christ, and when he rose, we rose with him. The conditions for salvation are that we receive him. Thus, in God's great mercy, it makes it possible for God to

regard his death as our death, thus satisfying the law. And his resurrection, now free with the authority from God himself to give to us his eternal life, authority over all flesh to impart the very life of God to us, that new life which Christ gives. It's like putting an acorn into the coffin of a corpse, isn't it? It doesn't necessarily clean up the corpse, but it begins to grow a new life. That life is given unconditionally to those who have faith in Jesus.

For failure to see this, there are many men and women in their middle life who have turned cynical. They believed when they were young, and scarce knew the complications of the world's sin. They grew through the tangle of business and life experience, and compromised here and compromised there, until they come to a point of saying, 'It's no good my going on pretending. I can't live as a true Christian should.' And they tend to give up the whole thing in cynicism. Oh, my brother and sister, if I speak to any like that, you needn't give up. Sin has got you down on the very ground maybe, but it hasn't surprised God. He knew it from the start, and he's paid the cost of it. And sin doesn't need to keep you down. You can get up again, thank God, not saying the past didn't matter, but saying it mattered so much that God himself paid the bill, and you're free to move on and restart the journey.

Penalty and consequences

Does that mean, therefore, that in the end sin doesn't matter? No, here comes this next paragraph, 6:15–7:6. And what is the point of that? Well, briefly put, to make what is now a very necessary consideration that, while there is no penalty because we're not under law, there are consequences. That is something that, as evangelicals, we sometimes forget. We are so given to emphasising that for those that are in Christ, there's no penalty, we forget that there are consequences. So what are the differences between penalty and consequences? Suppose you're a farmer and God tells you to sow wheat in your field. In a moment of stupidity, because the market's the other way round, you sow barley. When it comes up, the stuff is barley, of course, not wheat. You repent thereof, and go to the Lord and say you're sorry that you disobeyed him. And the Lord forgives you and assures you there is no penalty to them that are in Christ. The penalty has been paid. Does that change the stuff that comes up now because you've repented and confessed it to the Lord? Does the stuff turn miraculously overnight from barley into wheat? Of course not. There's no penalty but there are consequences. Whatsoever a man sows, he reaps. If you sow to the flesh you will of the flesh reap corruption, believer or not believer (see Gal 6:7–8).

If you yield yourself to somebody continually, you become his servant. You were the servants of sin, you yielded your members to sin and they formed in you inveterate habits like chains around you. Thank God now you have believed from the heart the doctrine to which you were committed. But don't take advantage of the fact that there's no penalty, to be irresponsible and constantly yield your members to what you know to be sin. Because if you constantly yield your members to practise sinful things, they will enslave you, and they will yield their ugly harvest: the clammy, decaying results of death, the corruption of the flesh. Whereas if you yield yourself to God, you will reap the harvest of eternal life.

You say, 'I've got that already.' I hadn't forgotten. You have eternal life, of course you do. But can I ask where you keep this eternal life you have? Have you lodged it in the safe of the bank in a nice little box? And when the Lord comes you'll say, 'Half a minute, Lord. I'm just going down to the bank to collect my eternal life, and then I'll be with you.' I hope not. You've got eternal life, but life is a life, isn't it? Like physical life, you could have life, but instead of developing your talents you waste them on goodness knows what. You've got the life, but you're not developing it and not reaping the benefits of it. And if, as believers, we have eternal life, but we waste our time on this tomfoolery or the next, and the passing innocent trivialities of this world, and its sinful things, we shall not be developing the potential of eternal life. Instead of the fruits of eternal life we shall be reaping the bitter apples, the crab apples, of sin. So then, the legal basis: no penalty. It sets us free from the dominion of sin. But consequences? Don't sin because you are under grace and not under law.

'O wretched man that I am'

Now to the great and famous passage in Romans 7. Well known to all believers and particularly to those that strive for holiness. And doubtless you wait with expectation—it's a good time in the lecture to wake up because soon come the questions!¹ You're saying, 'This is what we came to hear. Does this man think that this experience, "oh wretched man that I am", is the experience that Paul had before he was converted, or after he was converted? Or maybe he didn't have it at all, but was using himself as a whipping post to illustrate what other people go through?' Well, I'm not going to tell you. Perhaps it isn't there for either. Perhaps he's doing it to show us what we now need to learn as a very important thing. As Paul has just indicated, the secret of true sanctification is to yield ourselves to the Lord. The metaphor he uses is of a woman yielding herself to her husband. It's an affair of the heart. Not now under law, but under our blessed Lord Jesus, and yielding ourselves to him, that by his power and grace and life working through us, we might bring forth fruit to God. It's as simple as that.

So why don't I do it? You've got a right to ask me. 'Gooding, you've outlined it well enough that the scheme is simple. All you have to do, Gooding, is to yield yourself to Christ, and Christ lives his life through you.' Well, you've a right to ask me, and I'll turn the question back on you, 'Why don't you do it either?' I'll tell you why. Because when you begin to try to live a life with Christ, and yield yourself to Christ, you'll find that sin has damaged you more than you might have suspected. 'You see,' says Paul, 'with my emotions, I delight in the law of God after the inward man' (v. 22). I'm sure you do too, don't you? When you read the aesthetical passage of holy Scripture and you read about the life of the Lord Jesus, you delight in it with your emotions and aesthetic judgment. And then, with your intelligence, with your mind, you say, 'It's daft losing my temper like that and making such a fool of myself, and injuring other people.' Your intelligence agrees here.

And then comes your will to back home the both of them. You say, 'I'm going to stop all this nonsense and behave properly.' And you bring your will to bear upon it. Will, emotion,

¹ For Question and Answer Sessions see [chapter 6](#).

intellect. The actual experience of life will prove to you that all combined are not enough. You have been ruined. It's not that God's law was bad. It's like medicine, for instance. You go to the doctor for your complaint, and the doctor says, 'Now take this medicine', and you take the medicine, and it kills you. Why? Because, having taken the medicine, you went and drank a lot of alcohol, and the two are incompatible. It wasn't that the medicine was bad, but you were stupid to mix it with alcohol. There is nothing wrong with God's law. 'But you administer God's law to me,' says Paul, 'and instead of making me more holy, it provoked the old rebel within me and made me worse than ever.' It's not the law's fault. So was it unwise of God to set the law anyway if the law is liable to have wrong effects upon us because of our stupidity? Was it stupid of God to set the law?

Beef steaks are good things, but if you meet a man that has been starved nearly to death for the last two years, don't give him a beef steak the first time you set eyes on him. The beef steak is good in itself, but if you give it to him in that state, it's liable to kill him as well. It would be unwise to give it to him then, but you could give it to him later on. Is that how it is with God's law? It's a jolly good thing, but was it unwise of God to set it to me? No, that's not so either. The law exposes the damage I have suffered, and until I come to see it and admit it, I shall make little progress. I'm ruined, such that my very best and strongest will, my intellect and emotion combined, are not enough to get me to yield to Christ as I should, and so bring forth the fruit I should. What can do it? The answer now is to be found in that delightful last chapter in our present series, chapter 8—the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, working within me, to empower me, to guide me, to intercede for me, to lead me home to God, to see that God's great eternal will for me is finally fulfilled and I'm conformed to the image of God's Son. And then, by his gracious power, that Holy Spirit living within me shall change my very mortal body and fashion it like the body of our Lord Jesus.

That is God's programme for our sanctification: realistically having diagnosed our need, he provided a salvation adequate to do its task. And I have treated it disgracefully by running through it at such a reckless speed, but then I'm convinced that many of you know it off by heart already. It is good for us perhaps to have taken some trouble to sketch in the flow of thought throughout, and to see why you will need all those component parts of that particular section of the Epistle adequately to cover all the practical needs of the process of our sanctification.

Israel and the Sovereignty of God

We come now to another section that is among the most difficult parts of Scripture, generally speaking. But let us come to it in the conviction that this too is the word of God. As we approach now chapters 9–11 of the Epistle to the Romans, it is the word of God in such sense that if God opened heaven and spoke to us, he would say, amongst other things, these very words. And because God has caused them to be written, it is important that we should understand them. Let us not be tempted to think that these are such theoretical theology that they have no immediate relevance to us.

They are passages that have given rise to difference of opinion and considerable argument amongst good and godly men and women. It is therefore understandable if you should disagree with some of the interpretations I shall be putting forward. On the other hand, let it not escape us that the proper reading of these chapters should lead to the effect that they produced on Paul when he penned them. For, as we have now noticed several times, whereas in the first section he comes to the great climax with a statement of the love of God, and at the end of the second major thought flow of his work, he comes once more to a delightful outburst of expression of the love of God and, when he comes to the end of chapters 9–11, it leads him, not so much to praise of the love of God, as to profound worship of the wisdom of God. Here is how he ends his discourse:

O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and unto him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen. (11:33–36)

What a noble, profound expression of worship of the wisdom of God. And that is not coming from a man who has taken flight from the realities of life. Twice over, in the course of these chapters, he bares his heart to us, and lets us know the profound daily burden he bore, overwhelming in its anguish. For when he has preached his heart out, his own countrymen—the very people you might have expected to have been saved, gladly to receive the Messiah, and be reconciled to God—rejected the gospel, rejected Paul, rejected Jesus, bringing themselves under the judgment of God. The pain of it was immense, so great he says that he could have wished himself accursed from Christ for his fellow nationals' sake.

Israel in the purposes of God

It was out of that pain that these chapters grew. How could you explain God's working in it all? It is not with any pretence that he comes in the end to this great expression of worship, that God's ways—past finding out as they may be—when they are seen in their ultimate intention and effect, will induce the heart to worship and to daring to trust the wisdom of God. Even though all our problems are not solved in all their details, yet confidence arises in God's intentions, in the wisdom of his tactics and his overall strategies that one day when we see the final result, we shall praise him. If that be so, let us have the faith to praise him and start praising him now.

The first thing we ask is, what is the relevance to the gospel? We have talked of it now several times. Why does this long description of Israel's refusal to believe the gospel occur here? Because the gospel, as chapter 1 puts it, is witnessed to by the law and the prophets. That was Israel's function, amongst many other things, and if now Israel deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah, then that naturally presents a problem for the gospel. If the very nation that was raised up by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, and point to him, denies him, how will you Christians explain that fact and still say that Jesus is the Messiah? You will have to have some answer to why Israel, God's specially chosen nation, deny that Jesus is the Christ. And, secondly, we noticed in the second great movement of thought, Paul deals with the reason why we need to be saved because of Adam's sin. Adam was God's creature. Yes, he disobeyed, he fell, he went astray, and ruined the race. The comforting news comes that God has a salvation to recover us from the wreck. Marvellous thought. Perceive the early stages of that redemption when God called out Abraham and, from him, began to build a special nation, the early stages of the great plan of redemption.

'But wait a minute,' says someone, 'the plan has come unstuck, hasn't it?' Well if it has, I don't know what faith you can salvage in the rest of the scheme for salvation. It was one thing for Adam to go astray, and then to have a salvation provided to put him right. But if the early stages of the process of redemption have gone wrong, what faith can you have in the rest of the plan for redemption? Perhaps that would go wrong as well. We must have an answer to it, mustn't we? So let us begin by taking our Bibles in our hand and looking first at the description Paul gives of Israel in chapter 9 and noticing what it is that Paul is saying about Israel. Verses 3–4: 'I could wish myself anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen, according to the flesh, who are the Israelites, whose is the adoption'—the placing of sons. The book of Deuteronomy is heard to proclaim that Israel were God's sons. That was true of all Israel, but we must not confuse our terms. Deuteronomy is using the term 'sonship' in a very different sense from what the New Testament will use it on occasions.

Nicodemus was a good and godly son of Israel yet our Lord said that he would need to be born again and thus, by implication, to become a child of God. Israel was God's son in the sense that Moses was told to tell Pharaoh in the name of God, 'Israel is my firstborn'. The honoured nation, given firstborn status among all the other nations, Israel was a latecomer in history as a nation. There were many gigantic, very powerful and civilised nations before the Hebrews appeared on the scene. Though they were latecomers, they were God's

specially chosen: his elect, his firstborn; they were given the prominence above all the others. What for and in what sense? Well, he proceeds to tell us—'whose is the adoption and the glory', that is to say, the glory of God's immediate presence. In Israel's tabernacle and then in the temple at Jerusalem, the transcendent Lord dwelled in a unique sense. That is an historical fact to be got hold of.

When God came and his glory descended upon the tabernacle, that didn't express the truth of God's omnipresence, that God is everywhere so he's in this tabernacle as well as he is in your backyard, and at the North Pole, and the South. No, the tabernacle didn't proclaim God's omnipresence, it claimed the very opposite, that here you will meet God in a sense that you will meet God nowhere else. The tabernacle and the temple in Israel were, so to speak, a prototype of what our blessed Lord Jesus became, when the word became flesh and tabernacled amongst us. And the glory of God dwelt in Jesus Christ, our Lord. That wasn't an expression of God's omnipresence. It was expressing the presence of God in an utterly unique sense. In Jesus Christ, God was present in a sense he was not present anywhere else on earth whatsoever.

To Israel, then, this distinguishing privilege was given, that they had in this unique sense the living God among them, the Shekinah glory of his presence in their temple and tabernacle. With them, God made the covenants with the fathers like Abraham, covenants of grace; at Sinai, covenant of law; with David, their king, another covenant, the covenants and the giving of the law. The giving of the law too was a landmark in human history. As God himself came down to Sinai and wrote the law with his divine finger, it was a vivid metaphor saying that the Ten Commandments and the law they summarised were not the product of Moses' mind because he was jolly good at religion and he managed to think up these moderately decent laws. His laws were given by direct intervention of almighty God, written with the finger of God.

And there too they had the service of God in their tabernacle and in their temple. God laid down how Israel would serve him, that Israel might be an object lesson to all the other nations. Consider what it meant. If you had gone to the temples in Athens or Corinth to see what kind of gods they served, on the Acrocorinth you would have found a temple with one thousand priestesses. They were cult prostitutes. Their prostitution was practised in honour of the god; it was a religious exercise. In the ancient world, Phoenicians and others offered their children to their gods and watched them sizzle in their sacrificial fires. And from that you perceive the nature of God as they conceived it. Israel was chosen that, by its very temple sacrifices and services of God, God might make himself known as to what he is really. And, as you might expect, God took tremendous exception against Israelites who compromised with the pagan civilisations around, and offered their children in sacrifice to gods.

They had the fathers, the patriarchs, in the past and the promises of the future. And among those promises notably was that one day God's servant would come, God's great Messiah, the redeemer of the world. Israel was raised up for these things. That was her special privilege. Now let us ask immediately the practical question, when God chose Abraham and set up Israel for these special tasks, does that mean that he chose them for salvation and nobody else? Is that what we're talking about, that anybody who wasn't the

descendant of Abraham was automatically lost because they weren't elect and Israel were? And the answer is obviously not. Melchizedek was not an Englishman, nor even an Irishman, and he was neither Jew nor Christian. Was he a true priest of God? Well, obviously so—such a true priest of the most high God, in fact, that he becomes a prototype of Jesus Christ, our Lord. But he wasn't one of the elect nation of Israel. God's election of Israel for this unique role in history is not to be confused with the question of personal salvation. Salvation will become involved as we move onwards, as we shall presently see, but let's not introduce it too early or else we shall make our thinking about it difficult.

Elect to this special privileged position of representing God, being a testimony for God. Among the nations to be the nation that pointed the way to Christ, not only through its prophecies and promises, but the nation through whom, after the flesh, the Messiah should come. And now the problem. They have, as a nation, rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Does it mean that because the majority in Israel have rejected Jesus as Messiah, that God's whole purpose in raising up Israel has been ruined? No, it doesn't. And Paul is going to proceed now to give us a series of arguments why God's purpose and plan, in the first place, has not been ruined by the defection of the majority in Israel. The answer is that God's election has always secured, down through the centuries and right until the present, the maintenance of Israel's God-given role.

That's Paul's number one argument. Let's concentrate on that for a moment. Here is where Paul preaches the sovereignty of God's election. This witness to God has been maintained, not always by a majority in Israel, but right down to the present, says Paul, it has been maintained through a minority at least in Israel. You say, 'It's unfair to quote a minority if the majority of Israel have rejected it. How can you salvage anything by saying there's a minority of Israel that has preserved this role?' That minority included people like Martha and Mary, Peter, James and John, and Paul and company. 'It's nothing to be surprised at,' says Paul, 'because all down history God has not chosen all Abraham's seed for this particular role in history.'

God has always chosen between the various seeds, so to speak, of Abraham. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, but he chose Isaac not Ishmael, though Ishmael was Abraham's seed. Likewise, Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. They were both descendants of Abraham and descendants of Isaac. God only chose one of them.

Physical descent from Abraham doesn't of itself secure a part in this great role. If that is so, if God has chosen some of Abraham's seed for this role and not others, on what principle has he proceeded? Paul answers it by calling our attention to those cases I have mentioned. The fact that Israel as a whole have defected doesn't make the word of God of no effect—verse 6: 'It is not as though the word of God has come to nought.' For it never was all the physical descendants of Abraham who were intended by God to carry this special role. God has always been selective. On what principle did God select? Verse 8: 'That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God; but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed.' What do you mean? Do you mean that the bad living ones were rejected and the good living ones were accepted for this role? It is not that. What it means to be a child of the promise is explained in verse 9: 'For this is a word of promise', and the emphasis in Paul's original language is on that noun 'promise'. This is a promise when God

said to Abraham and Sarah, 'Sarah, you're going to have a son.' Paul now remarks that that was a promise of God, and God always keeps his promise. And the keeping of God's promise doesn't depend on man's own efforts. To be a child of the flesh is to be a child of man's own effort. To be a child of promise is to be the product of God's intervention.

Thus it happened with the first pair, Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was young enough to have a son, but the problem was that Sarah was barren. God had promised that they were going to have seed, and so forth. One day Sarah said, 'Abraham dear, I've been thinking about that promise—God saying he is going to give us a son.'

'Yes, that's marvellous, isn't it, my dear?'

'Well, I suppose it is marvellous in a way, but God has overlooked the fact that I'm barren. I can't have a son. And what is more, he's being a little bit contradictory, because one minute he says you're going to have a son and the next minute, the Lord has shut up my womb so I can't have one.'

'I hadn't thought of that. What do you propose we do, my dear?'

'Well, I've been thinking that when God made that promise he didn't mean that he was going to give us a son just like that. It was God suggesting that we do our best. God helps those that help themselves. It doesn't mean that we just sit around here, we've got to use our resources and thus what God says will be fulfilled.'

'That's all very fine,' said Abraham, 'but we haven't got any resources.'

'Oh, we have. There's Hagar. There are a lot of people in the world who do that kind of thing. The old Babylonians do it, and there's no reason why we shouldn't either. I think God means us to use our intelligence and our initiative. Now, you take Hagar and you beget a child, and God will be pleased with that. That'll be what he meant when he promised to give us a child for this great work.'

So that's what Abraham did, and Ishmael was born. And God said, 'Well, he's a nice fellow, nice curly-haired chap but, no, I didn't mean him. And thank you, dear Sarah, but when I promised I was going to give you a child, I meant I was going to give *you* a child. And I wasn't tacitly inviting your efforts.'

I have a certain sympathy with God at that stage because I don't know what you would feel if you had been in Abraham's tent when Sarah was making these proposals. God has made the promise of giving them this child, and all the promises of God and the purposes in history, right down to the bringing in of the Messiah are dependent on this. And what is Sarah saying? 'God has this good scheme, but he hasn't thought out the details, and I've got a suggestion that could get God off the hook, and make it work.' You'd hope Sarah was wrong, wouldn't you? I mean, she's a nice enough girl, but you'd hope she was wrong. Did all the promises of God and the purposes in history, and the nation raised up to bring in the Messiah, depend on Sarah? That can't be! 'It isn't so,' says God. 'When I said "promise" it meant "promise", not man's effort.' And Ishmael was put aside, nice chap though he was. He was a child of the flesh, man's effort. The great role of being a special privileged witness for God in the earth was given by God's sovereign gift and not man's effort. It has to be, doesn't it? Because the best scheme Sarah could have thought up would have gone wrong anyway.

And when it came to the next couple, it had to be on the same terms. There was dear old Isaac, and his wife had twins. And she went to inquire of the Lord, and the Lord said, 'Two nations are in your womb'. Notice that God is talking about nations, not particular individuals. 'The older shall serve the younger' (Gen 25:23). Esau never served Jacob. The nation that came of him, the Edomites, served the Israelites at certain stages in history. God is talking about nations. On what principle did God choose the Israelites then, and not the Edomites? Paul points out that the choice was made when the children were not yet born. The children, not having done anything good or bad, that the thing might proceed by God's sovereign choice. It had to be that way, didn't it? We're not talking of salvation, we're talking of people being raised up for this tremendous task of being God's unique witness in the world. Will that depend on man's qualification? Suppose God was putting an advert in the Daily Times of the day, 'Wanted: applicants to be the unique witness for me in the earth. State qualifications required.' How could it be so? It had to be made independent of what they did, good or bad, else God would have chosen nobody. Isn't that so? For all have sinned. The choice had to be independent of man's own qualifications.

So far then, God's choice of witness to himself. I might add, at our little level, we who hope to be witnesses of the Lord—on what ground were you chosen, my dear brother or sister, to be a witness for the Lord? Your spectacular holiness? Was it that you were better than I am, that you were chosen and I wasn't, to be a witness for the Lord? It's never like that: his choice is always in spite of our bad, isn't it? Does then the question of salvation not enter into this whole business of witness for God? Yes, it does. And now we begin to talk in terms, and think in terms, of salvation and forgiveness. When we come to verse 15 onwards, God contrasts Israel's experience with that of Pharaoh:

For he [God] saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy. For the Scripture says unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth. So then he hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou made me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (vv. 15–21)

Vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy

Let's pause there for a moment. These great remarks that God made to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy' (Rom 9:15; cf. Exod 33:19), when were they made? Well, not when God was calling Israel out of Egypt. Not then. But when Israel had been given its privileged role to be a witness for God, and God had proposed that they build him a sanctuary so that he would come and dwell among them. And Moses had gone up the mountain to get the detailed plans of this aforesaid sanctuary. Then Israel, in Moses' absence and within a few days, had turned to gross idolatry and built the golden calf. And God was

so angered by that direct slap in the divine face that he threatened to destroy the whole lot there and then, and would have done but for Moses' intercession. Relenting to Moses' intercession, God said, 'Moses, alright, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.' It was when Israel had deserved no better than the Egyptians. It was when Israel had, by their sins, sinned more luridly than the Egyptians that God acted sovereignly to have mercy on some of them, and spared them. That is an act of his sovereign decision. It's a question of God having mercy on people who deserved to die. You can't deserve mercy. If you could deserve mercy it wouldn't be mercy, would it?

Israel is contrasted with Pharaoh. They were of the same lump. They were both abominable sinners. Why did God have mercy on some in Israel and not have mercy on Pharaoh, but hardened him? That too is in the sovereign choice of God, 'whom he will he hardens' (9:18). But just wait a moment, when did God harden Pharaoh? We should pay very close attention to that ancient text before we answer that too hastily. God knew that Pharaoh would harden his heart all the way along, and that he himself would eventually harden Pharaoh's heart—God told Moses in advance. But in actual fact, it happened this way: Moses came to Pharaoh one bright morning and said to Pharaoh, 'I've come in the name of God, let my people go that they may worship me. The God of our fathers has appeared to us and he made a promise in the covenant to our fathers that he was going to give us a land of our inheritance out there, on the other side of the desert. So now I command you, in the name of God, to let the people go.'

'You don't really believe that stuff,' said Pharaoh. 'I mean, was it about your fathers or something? That's old-fashioned nowadays. Nobody around here believes that.'

'I'll do a miracle,' says Moses.

'You will? Oh, that'll be nice. Do a miracle, Moses. I'd like to see a miracle.'

So Moses threw down his rod and it became a serpent.

'What's that meant to be?' said Pharaoh. 'That's no miracle; my scientists could do the same in the laboratory. I'll call them in if you like.'

He rang the bell and all the scientists came. He said, 'This chap, Moses, thinks he's done a miracle. Just show him that we can do things like that.'

So they threw down their rods, and they became serpents.

'You'll have to do better than that,' said Pharaoh to Moses, 'if you're going to convince me and give me enough evidence to let the people go.'

What would you have done if you had been God? Slaughtered him forthwith for his impertinence? Well, God didn't. 'So, my evidence wasn't good enough? Well, have some more evidence.' Moses was told to get up in the morning, and he came and he used his rod and turned the river to blood. 'My men can do that as well,' said Pharaoh. So they did. And then Moses produced a lot of frogs. 'My men can do that,' said Pharaoh.

'I see,' said Moses, 'the evidence still isn't good enough. You would really like some overwhelming evidence, and then you would repent and believe, would you? Well, what about this then?'

Moses used his rod again, and there came up a lot of lice. This time the old Egyptian scientists couldn't do it, and they said to Pharaoh, 'We have to tell your majesty that we can't do it. This is the finger of God, your majesty.' So Pharaoh repented and said, 'Well,

now you've given me the evidence, that's okay', did he? 'No,' said Pharaoh, 'I haven't got the evidence I asked for.' He wouldn't have it. Like a good many more today, they'll tell you they'll become Christians if you can solve their difficulties, and when you've answered their questions, they don't want to become Christians anyway. What would you have done to Pharaoh then? You say, 'Destroyed him, completely.' Well, God didn't. He had another two pieces of evidence, getting increasingly uncomfortable. And when Pharaoh, in spite of it, still refused to repent, then it was, according to the text, that God hardened him, hardened him in the stance that he himself had taken. That's what it means. Pharaoh refusing to repent, God hardens him in that stance that he finds he can't repent. God himself has said, 'Have it your way.'

Who decides how long a sinner gets before he crosses the point from which there's no return? That remains, as ever, in the sovereign choice of God. How could it be anything else? But the potter has the right over the clay to make a vessel to honour and a vessel to dishonour. So it is said:

What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles? (9:22–24)

From the same lot of clay—in other words from the mass of sinful humanity, deserving God's wrath, their only hope of salvation being God's mercy—out of that same clay, God makes some vessels of mercy, some vessels of wrath. What does that mean? What is a vessel of mercy, should you meet one? A vessel of mercy is not just somebody to whom God has shown mercy. A vessel of mercy is someone whom God makes, and chooses to be, an advertisement for the mercy of God. Let me read you the testimony of the very man who wrote this letter to the Romans:

I thank him [God] that enabled me, even Jesus Christ our Lord, for that he counted me faithful, appointing me to his service; though I was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: howbeit I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord abounded exceedingly with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me as chief might Jesus Christ show forth all his longsuffering, for an example of them which should hereafter believe on him unto eternal life. (1 Tim 1:12–16)

Do you grasp what Paul is saying? First he says, 'I obtained mercy'. Why? Because, 'What I did, even persecuting Jesus Christ, I did it in genuine ignorance. I had not yet been illuminated by God's Holy Spirit.' Therefore, God had mercy. Secondly, 'He had mercy on me that he might use me as an advertisement of his mercy to everybody else.' The argument was simple. 'Here am I, the very chief of sinners, blasphemer, persecutor, torturer and I don't know what else, and God has had mercy on me. Well, if he'd have mercy on me, he'd have mercy on anybody, would he not?' That's why God chose the chief of sinners, to have

mercy on him as an example of what God is prepared to do for others. How do you become a vessel of mercy? 'I did it ignorantly,' says Paul. 'I had not been illuminated by God's Spirit. I was not, in that sense, sinning against the light. And when God illumined me, then I received and accepted his mercy through faith in Jesus Christ, and accepted it on the grounds solely of mercy, not of my merit. I've become an advertisement to the world of God's mercy.'

Why didn't Pharaoh become a vessel of mercy? Why did he become a vessel of wrath? We've just seen the answer. He wouldn't have the mercy, would he? And when he wouldn't have the mercy, and persisted in his deliberate rejection of God and his evidence, many times given, God did the only thing he could do; he called down his judgment on Pharaoh. But not just that. In his very judgment on Pharaoh, he made Pharaoh a vessel of wrath. What does it mean to be a vessel of wrath? It means, not only to suffer wrath yourself, but to be made an object lesson and an advertisement for the whole world. This is what happens when men and women, in spite of God's mercy, harden their heart against him, and pass beyond the point of possible repentance. And why does God do it? He does it that other people, being warned, might repent while there's yet time.

Pharaoh became a vessel of wrath and as a result dear old Rahab got converted. For when the spies came to Rahab's house, she said, 'We know your God is the true God. For we heard what God did to Pharaoh in Egypt.' Isn't God magnificent? He used his very wrath on hardened sinners that refuse his mercy to warn other folks, and bring other folks to repentance and salvation. You can't beat God, you know. He'll use his very wrath to achieve that other people get saved.

Why was it then that the majority in Israel became vessels of wrath and not vessels of mercy? Because God didn't choose them? No, it isn't so. The one thing you have to do if you're going to be in a vessel of mercy is to accept mercy, and that is precisely what Israel would not do. Paul explains it as he comes to the end of chapter 9. Going about to establish their own righteousness, they would not humble themselves as bankrupt sinners, and receive salvation as bankrupt sinners through Christ and his cross and sacrifice, and would insist on trying to earn their salvation through the keeping of God's law. Set out to keep God's law, make yourself a tremendous exhibition of what can be done if you really put your back into it and are serious in your intention. What will you be then? You won't be a vessel of mercy, obviously. You'll be a vessel of your good achievement, won't you? And what will that show the world? Well, you'll drive the likes of me to despair, as I haven't got a chance of being as good as you. Oh, thank God for people like Paul who were prepared to say goodbye to all their supposed religious attainment and accept mercy, and show the world what God was prepared to do for bankrupt sinners. There, in a nutshell, is the sorry story. Why couldn't Israel be made vessels of mercy in Paul's time? They wouldn't have the mercy.

Whose fault was that? When we come to chapter 10, its burden is that Israel are not saved. Paul breaks his heart for them, but if you ask him why they are not saved, the answer will come back, 'It is their fault that they are not saved.' Zealous religiously, but they would not submit to God's way of making a man righteous. Whose fault was that? It was their fault. You say, 'Well, it wasn't really because if salvation is by faith, this business of

believing is very difficult.' But Paul says it isn't difficult: 'The word is nigh you, in your mouth, in your very heart' (10:8). You've only got to close on it, believe it, and confess the Lord Jesus, and you'll be saved. It isn't difficult. You're no different from anybody else. No difference in this that you have sinned, be you Jew or Greek. No difference in this that the Lord has reached out to all that call upon him, be they Jew or Greek. What do you have to do then to be saved? What conditions have to be fulfilled? Well, you have to call on the name of the Lord. That's all you have to do. 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (10:13). But wait a minute:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they've not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? (10:14-15)

If anyone is going to be saved, both things will have to be fulfilled. If you've got to call on the Lord to be saved, how will you call on him in whom you haven't believed? What has got to happen if you're going to believe? You can't believe unless you have heard Christ, not just heard about him; not just heard somebody preach about him. You won't believe in the biblical sense unless you hear Christ himself talking to your heart through his word. It is hearing in that profound sense that provokes the faith. If people have got to hear like that, how shall they hear without a preacher? You say that a lot of volunteers are going around doing the preaching. Yes, but you've got to do the kind of preaching in which, as you preach, God himself, the risen Lord Jesus himself, speaks to people and they hear and notice the voice of Christ. If you're going to preach like that, you'll have to be sent by God.

Is it that God hasn't done any of these things and so somewhere along the line the conditions haven't been fulfilled and Israel didn't have a chance to be saved? Is it, for instance, that Israel have not heard in that profound sense? They may have heard bits and pieces about the gospel, but in that profound sense, they've never heard? 'No,' says Paul, 'it's not that.' Notice that. There are some who say that, because they are unregenerate, they're as deaf as a doorpost and can't hear anything. Unless God opens their ears, they'll never hear, so they'll never be saved. They are inclined to say, therefore, that the Israelites who weren't saved were not meant to be saved. Why? Because God didn't open their ears and they never did hear. That's not true. We're talking about those that have rejected Christ. Did they hear? 'Yes,' says Paul, 'of course, they have heard.' Is it that, hearing, they didn't know and can claim ignorance? That isn't true either. They did know. Their prophets are witness to it. And what is more, they'll never say they didn't know: 'For,' says God through his servant, 'all day long, I stretched out my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people' (10:21).

The picture is of a parent, stooping to a little child, stretching out their hands, bidding the child take his stumbling first step, to come and fall into the arms of his parent. And God has stretched out his hands as far as God can stretch them. When mankind crucified his Son, tell me, how much did God stretch to reach sinners? Oh, it should only take that they would fall into the hands of God, and he would save them. But they stood back, and they argued, and they disobeyed, and they weren't saved; and whose fault was it? Their fault, obviously. What does that mean then, finally? They have fallen. Does that mean then that God has

finally and forever cast away the people that he chose in Old Testament times? 'No,' says Paul, equally certainly, 'that is not what it means. God has not cast away the people he foreknew.' And how can you say that, Paul? How do you know that? 'Because I'm one of them,' he says. 'I am an Israelite. He didn't cast them all away, did he? I can tell you a few others as well, if you give me the time. There's Martha down the street, then Mary. I could take you to the house she lives in, and there's Peter, and there's John and Matthew, and old Theudas and company. Yes, there is still a remnant at this time.'

Why do you suppose God leaves a remnant? The very fact he leaves a remnant is indication of his intention one day to save the lot. If he had decided to destroy the nation forthwith and completely, he wouldn't have left any remnant. The very fact that there is a remnant—some Israelites who believe in the Lord Jesus—is God's way of indicating that one day all Israel shall be saved. How will God do it? Here we touch great mysteries, do we not? But as Paul pondered it, he had himself experienced in many a synagogue, in many a town, a very interesting, and a very painful thing. The Gentiles would come to the synagogue, scores of them, some of the leading citizens of the town, and notably the women. And when Paul came and opened the Old Testament prophets and preached them, multitudes of these people came to see that Jesus is the Messiah, and they believed in the Jewish Messiah. You would have thought the Jews would have been glad, but no, they weren't. When they saw Paul making Christian converts, they were exceedingly jealous, and hunted Paul from pillar to post. That was painful for Paul. But he saw a ray of hope in that jealousy rising in the hearts of his fellow Jews that Gentiles were getting converted. Why? Because, in the end, God will use that jealousy to provoke them to heed the gospel.

If Paul believed in God, why wasn't he saved? Did he really believe in God? Because when God became incarnate, Paul joined in with persecuting him, and consented with those that crucified him. Do you call that belief in God? Before Saul of Tarsus could get saved, the man who thought he was a believer, had to be brought to the point where he saw, in the only sense that mattered, that he wasn't a believer at all. There's many a religious person in Christendom that imagines he or she is a believer. If you ask them, 'Are you saved?' they don't know whether they're saved. Why don't they know? Because, in the sense that really matters, they're not yet believers. And Israel, with her tremendous tradition, so easily fell into that trap of thinking they were believers. They'll never be saved until God can bring them to the point where they wake up to the fact that, in the sense that matters, they have not been believers. They are lost like any old Gentile is lost, and their only hope of salvation is in Jesus Christ, and God is working behind the scenes to bring it about. I cannot explain to you why it takes God so long. But I can reaffirm what Paul says here because I believe that when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, then God's plans shall be brought to fruition and all Israel shall be saved.

The wisdom of God

And even as he penned it, the joy came up in his heart, persecuted by the synagogue as he had been in Corinth. Oh, the depth of God's wisdom. For the God he served, the God who gave Jesus Christ to die, will save every possible person he can save. Let none say anything

else. And if it takes centuries for God to save that nation, Israel, then he'll take the centuries and bring them to the point where, in their confession of unbelief, they may be brought to repentance and trust God's Son and be saved. And it began to lift the pain in Paul's heart, and soothe the anguish when he thought of the wisdom of God. And tonight, let us depart as we have listened to God's word over many, many things, and thought of these difficult chapters in Romans, and understood some things, heard many things, and forgotten most. But let us go away with this spirit-formed impression within. We have a God who gave his Son. It follows that he will save as many people as he can possibly save. He will engineer the affairs of nations and centuries to that end, by wisdom, strategies and tactics that go beyond our understanding, but are gloriously successful in their result. Let us, therefore, go home with this profound conviction in our hearts of admiration for God's wisdom, and a determination to trust him in our personal circumstances, for our loved ones that are not yet saved, for the nations for whom we work and pray, and let us rejoice in hope that the Lord is coming.

And if the scattering of Israel has led to the enrichment of the nations, what shall it be when Israel, as a whole, get converted? Oh, get ready to dance with joy and dance the way home tonight. What shall it be like? Can you imagine it, my sister, my brother? Do you allow yourself the luxury of trying to imagine it? Just imagine it, and answer the question that Paul asks, 'What shall it be when they're restored, when multi-millions have been brought to trust the gospel through their defection? It shall be veritable life from the dead.' Oh, shout hallelujah! Trust the wisdom of God and look forward, brim full of hope, for the execution and the success of his divinely-planned strategies.

You have done well. Thank you for your patience, and may God bless your investment of time and energy in the study of his word.

Putting Right what Sin has Put Wrong

In this brief session I shall be attempting to explain the Christian technical term: the propitiation of our sins. In this last of our major sessions, we come to the final section of the book. In each movement, we have tried to pick one prominent theme and traced it through until it came to its own proper climax. So we dealt, in the first two sections first of all, with why we need to be saved. And the first answer that the Epistle to the Romans gives is that we need to be saved and delivered from the wrath of God. The second answer it gives to that same question is that we need to be saved from the wreckage of Adam's sin. As the apostle works through those double themes, he brings each to its own proper climax and glories in the fact that we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Christ. He takes the occasion to point us in hope to the future of glory that awaits us, and ends in climactic fashion with a statement of the wonders of the love of God. He does that in the first great movement of thought, and again in the second.

Then in the third movement of thought, he deals with a problem that any serious expounder of the Christian gospel must face—the claim that God raised up Israel as his special people, to be a witness for him in the centuries preceding the birth of Christ, and also to be a signpost for God of the coming of the great world Saviour and Deliverer. That is the Christian belief, and that is the claim of the Old Testament. The historical fact is that when Jesus our Lord came, the majority of the nation of Israel said he wasn't the Messiah and engineered his crucifixion. That places a very big problem of explanation before any thoughtful Christian. How do you reconcile the fact that your belief is that God raised up Israel of old time to be a witness to and an identifier of the coming Messiah, then claim that Jesus is that Messiah even though the majority of the nation of Israel have rejected him and say he isn't? That is a burning theological question that the apostle necessarily faces for the sake of the credibility of his own gospel that he preaches, and he expounds the answer to that problem as God gave him to understand it.

He ends that movement of thought with a similar outburst of praise, this time not so much for the love of God as for the wisdom of God. In spite of the defection of the nation of Israel, Paul encourages his own heart and assuages its sorrow in the certainty that the wisdom of God's strategies will bring it about that one day the nation of Israel, as a whole, shall be saved. And God's purpose in that nation shall be seen not to have been permanently defeated. God will bring it to a successful and triumphant conclusion at the last.

Now, this afternoon we come to the fourth major movement, if you will allow me to call it so. It is what we otherwise call the practical section of the Epistle. I personally am a little wary of that term 'practical'. I'm an impossible theorist and I enjoy the theory more than the

practice! You are all very good Christians, and enjoy the practice more than the theory, doubtless! But I'm one of these theorists, so the term 'practical' isn't always welcome. When we take the term 'practical', that good and godly term, and apply it to exhortations—'Now that you are a Christian, you mustn't steal'—that's thought to be very practical, and so it is. We mustn't forget that other parts of the Epistle are practical too. Actually, there isn't a comma in the word of God that isn't devoted to the purpose of our salvation. Every comma has to work, and we were finding that the second session was exceedingly practical, telling us what is the power behind the school of holiness that God puts before us in Christ. It's no good announcing a series on sanctification unless those theories are based in a power that works. Let that not escape our attention as now we turn to this final movement which is practical in that narrower sense, maybe, for some of its parts are full of proper and healthy exhortations to do this, and full of serious warnings not to do the other.

I want, as we begin, to remind us of what we saw in our first session: that these lists of practical exhortations are not sort of stuck on in the last five minutes of Paul's treatise but are an integral part of what he has to say. We noticed briefly in that first session that some of the leading ideas in this final section of the book closely echo some of the leading ideas in the first movement of the book. For example, chapter 12 begins with the appeal to us, 'By the mercies of God to yield our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto the Lord'. And it vividly reminds us of Paul's great exposure of the sin of paganism; how that when they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over and they began the sad business of dishonouring and degrading their bodies.

Similarly, it appeals to us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, vividly recalling what Paul had to say in the opening chapter of his work: how that, when people refused to retain God in their knowledge, God intervened in his judgment, and the judgment took the form of delivering them over to a degraded and reprobate mind. God's judgment was not merely on the things they did. God's judgment showed itself by the fact that when they wouldn't any longer retain God in their thinking, their thinking went wonky. And their thinking now began to approve things that, objectively looked at, are hideous and degrading, but which they now approved and advertised and advocated, and maintained—just like the expression of modern freedom, where a man from Mars could see at once that it was degrading the human body and demoting it almost to animal status.

So we can trace in this last part the echoes of what Paul said in the first bit. I shall not stay to go through the whole list. I want to make the simple point that, in studying a sophisticated exposition of God's truth as is the Epistle to the Romans, it is often good to make a table of contents. It is even better to try and understand the functional relationship between the different parts of any one book of Scripture. What do I mean by 'functional relationship'? Well, suppose I was trying to describe what a human hand is to someone who had never seen one. I could try to list its contents. How will this do? 'It's a bit more or less square, flesh and bones, and muscles and things. It's got four things sticking out at the top, and one at the side.' How will that do for a table of contents that describes the hand? But just describing the component parts of a hand hasn't told anybody what a hand is. You must also show how those component parts are functionally related. Why is this thumb sticking

out at the side instead of joining its fellows on the top? You'd explain that's because you need it sticking out the side so that you can grasp things. And once you've understood why the thing is out at the side, you are beginning to see its function. And when you understand why one finger is longer than the other, and what their summary functions are, you begin to understand what a hand is. You have understood what it is in itself, as old Aristotle would have said and you've understood the functional relationships of the component parts.

It is good sometimes, in a sophisticated work like the Epistle to the Romans, not only to make out a table of contents of the movements, but to begin to appreciate what the functional relationship is. This last movement, that we call the practical part; what is its functional relationship to the rest of the Epistle? It's not just tacked on the end—'You Christians be good, and be kinder to your maiden aunts than you used to be.' It's not like that. This is an integral part of God's gospel. The gospel takes people who are like those described in the first couple of chapters and, by its power, transforms them into people like those we now read about in these closing chapters.

We see, for instance, that chapter 1 talks to us of the death of Christ, and shows us how we can be justified by faith and not by works through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. But that doesn't constitute the last we shall hear of the death of Christ in the epistle. There is another complementary side to the death of Christ that isn't a little bit attached to the side, or added on as an afterthought either; it is an integral part of what our Lord was doing on Calvary's cross. He died and lived again, that he might be Lord. That is also an integral part of the gospel. That is why we have to take these practical things so seriously. They are the outworking of the gospel that changes our lives and attitudes and behaviour.

I want this afternoon not to preach sermons. I'll try to resist the temptation and just make some remarks here and there on some of the leading ideas of this final section. Let us notice to start with the initial appeal:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (12:1)

We notice at once the motivation of Christian ethics. The mainspring of motivation for living a life of Christian ethical behaviour is the mercies of God. It is our response to God's astounding mercy in the giving of his Son for the pardoning of us rebel sinners. It is that profound motivation that is the mainspring behind Christian ethics.

A living sacrifice

The world outside often doesn't understand that. In the work that some of us try to do in Russia these days, the schools will tell us, 'We welcome very strongly your help to instruct our teachers to teach ethics and a value system. Our empire is at sixes and sevens: we are left without any values. We don't know what to teach the children. We used to teach them ethics based on Marxism. Now we can't do that. We've still got to teach them how to behave as decent citizens, but on what basis do we teach them? We welcome your help to teach them values. We're not particularly asking you to convert the children. That's what the church is to do.' There is a temptation for people to think that you can have Christian ethics without the

Christian gospel. But the mainspring of Christian ethics lies here, in the mercies of God who gave his Son to die for us rebels at Calvary. It is in response to that infinite mercy that we, in our turn, are called upon to offer our bodies a living and vigorous sacrifice in gratitude to the one who gave his body as a sacrifice for us.

That reminds us how practical the doctrinal teaching about the death of Christ is in the earlier chapters. And in the Old Testament there is an example of a living sacrifice, namely, the whole body of the Levites. They had to be offered to God, not cut up to pieces on an altar, of course, but standing beside the altar, they were a wave offering to God. They were a sacrifice, a living sacrifice to God. They had been chosen to look after the tabernacle and to do all the routine work of carting the laver here, putting the poles in place there, and seeing after the curtains. When they first did it, it was bordering on fun—a brand new tabernacle with beautiful golden frames and curtains, and things that were all so new and novel. I daresay there was some competition among the junior Levites as to who should do what.

But when you have put up the tabernacle 5,672 times, and taken it down 5,672 times, and now you come to put it up again, the novelty has worn off. ‘Why do I have to stand here and do this when all the others have left and gone off playing football?’ But you’ve never felt like that, I know, of course not; you run to your Christian duties with alacrity and joy always, don’t you? But God knew how Levites might feel eventually, and before they were allowed to begin they had a public ceremony. They were going to be offered as living sacrifices, so what should be done to help them? He had the nation assembled. There was the brand new altar. First, the altar was dedicated as the princes and heads of each tribe were invited to come and show their estimation of the altar and the wonder of its sanctity, by offering their gifts. And there they came with their costly gifts of silver platters and silver bowls, and what not. And as they come forward, before the wondering crowd, they laid their gifts at the base of that altar for its dedication, showing their estimate of its worth.

I can imagine the kids nudging their fathers and saying, ‘Where did they get all that silver from?’

‘Oh, my son, they got that silver when God redeemed us out of Egypt, and the Egyptians were moved to give us of their wealth. That’s what they got through redemption.’

‘And they’re giving it away, Dad?’

‘Yes, but you see, my son, we owe everything to the redemption that God provided.’

They were showing their gratitude and what they thought of the altar that focussed the nation’s attention on God’s redemption. When the nation’s attention had been thus gathered, the Levites were called to yield their bodies a living sacrifice. Beware of what you are prepared to describe as practical. There is no greater practicality than to sit in church, around the emblems of the body and blood of Christ, and to remember that we owe all we have to that ransoming payment. And we sing, meaning it:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my heart, my life, my all.²

That's practical. That is what will be the mainspring that will keep you going at that difficult Sunday School, or in that difficult situation in the factory and office, to stand firmly for righteousness and for God; and keep you patient at your pastoral work, my dear elder, with awkward and difficult believers.

'I beseech you, by the mercies of God'. Let the wealth of his sacrifice so capture not only our rational minds, but our imagination and hearts that the wealth of it will sustain us as we give our little sacrifice back to God. Yield your bodies and then your minds. It is interesting to notice the order, is it not? Not minds first, and then bodies. You've heard of the centipede who fell into a ditch, and thought about getting up and walking again. But he'd forgotten which foot to put forward first. So he meditated. Was it the first foot on the left or the other one on the right, or did you begin with the middle foot? He was still there weeks afterwards. He hadn't come to his rational and logical conclusions as to which came first. Stupid centipede. The better thing would have been to get up and walk and then he'd have found out.

We can sometimes spend so long a time deliberating that we never get round to doing anything. 'First, give your bodies,' says Paul, and that done, of course, God will expect us to use these bodies for his glory intelligently. For that, we shall need our mind; and we need a mind that does not conform to this world's value system, but a mind that is truly liberated by the grace and power of God, to think in God's way, by God's standards, and by his system of values, that we may direct our bodies. God wants sacrifice. He doesn't want suicide. And sometimes the youthful, don't I know it from my own experience, can go to an extreme of zeal that takes the form nearer to suicide than to sacrifice. The soldier in the army must be prepared to get shot in battle and he must be prepared to sleep in a wet trench, but he isn't there so as he can get killed or to kill himself. His duty is to keep alive as long as he can. So are we, by our minds, redeemed, sanctified and transformed to control and order the bodies that we sacrifice to God.

A right attitude to spiritual gifts

Let's move on now as Paul enumerates some of the gifts that are given, and I wish to pick out a phrase from his general exhortation:

For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but so to think as to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith. (12:3)

Those last words, as you will know, have been the subject of much debate. What is this measure of faith? I shall not tire you by rehearsing all the possible translations and interpretations, but confess that I myself am attracted to the suggestion that Professor Cranfield made. He's not saying, 'Look, think about yourself. If your faith is ever so strong

² Isaac Watts (1674–1748), 'When I survey the wondrous cross'.

and God has given you a lot of faith, you are at liberty to think a lot of yourself. But if God has only given you a little faith, well then you shouldn't get round to thinking much about yourself; you'd think very little about yourself.' That would make nonsense of the thing, wouldn't it, to have men and women that are highly spiritual, gifted, getting bloated heads because they've got a tremendous amount of faith and thinking a lot about themselves? That would be a disaster in its way. Sadly, some fall into the temptation.

I take it rather to be that our Christian faith in the gospel comes to us as a measuring line, a tape measure if you like, by which we can assess our attitude and measure things up, and come to our decisions about all kinds of practical questions. So allow me, even if you don't agree with it, taking that as what the thing probably means. Let's get out our tape measures. I'll put it over you, if you don't mind. How are you to think of yourself, my good Christian lady? What do you believe about yourself? What does the gospel demand you believe about yourself, sir? I can tell you, it won't be very flattering. It tells me that you are an absolutely wretched sinner. So impossibly bankrupt, corrupt, perverse that not the most diligent effort on your part to keep God's law could possibly save you. All God could do with his disgust at your sin, was to sentence you to be executed, dead and buried. Did I hear you say, 'I hope you keep that dark opinion to yourself, Mr Preacher, and not blab that around the town'? I'm sorry but the news is out, and you're partly responsible. You sat there, singing those saintly hymns, advertising it to the world just what God thinks about you—'vile and full of sin I am'. I hope that wasn't just formal language. Everybody knows it. It ill befits me, strutting round as though I was someone, when everybody knows what God thinks of me. What a fool I should be, giving myself airs and graces.

But that's only part of the measurement. Let me measure you the other way round—how faith in the gospel becomes a measure of what you are. I discover, as I measure you, that you are so valuable that the price God has put on you could never be exaggerated. Am I to believe that, in God's sight, you were worth the giving of his Son to die for you? If that be so, how must I treat you? And, incidentally, how must you treat me? Practice it, based on what we really believe about the gospel. And sometimes I get the impression that we Christians would be less fierce in our accusations and our criticisms of other Christians if we returned to the old tape measure more often and asked ourselves, what does the gospel oblige me to believe about this man, this woman, about whom I talk?

So it is likewise about our gifts, whatever they are. It would be stupid of me, wouldn't it, if I had a gift to start with, to parade myself as though I were someone very important when everybody knows it's not to my credit I got a gift. Can't you hear what the word is saying? It is a gift. It's like somebody receiving a marvellous Christmas present from his mum and saying, 'Aren't I clever to get a gift like this?' Of course, not. Your mother was very kind to give you a gift like that. It's no credit to you that you got it. How stupid we can be, not only in spiritual gifts, but in other things. You hear some people talking of their country. An Italian says he's got mountains in his country. An Englishman isn't going to be down at that. 'We've got mountains.' Oh, yes, as though it was to our credit we've got a mountain or two, or a lake, or the biggest canyon in the world, or something. Well, there it is. Thank God for the lot of them, but it's not to our credit that we've got them. We are but bankrupt sinners who don't deserve to have anything, actually. What we have is by the grace of God.

Vengeance

Then he comes to another matter, a very practical matter: the matter of vengeance.

Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men. Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord. But if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink: for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (12:17–21)

Those verses have proved difficult advice for many Christians. What is Paul saying—that it is not Christian to avenge yourself or to seek avenging? Now, here we must be careful of our terms. Avenging is one thing, revenge is another. We're not talking about revenge, we're talking about avenging. That means simply seeing justice is done: that evil and suffering, unjustly applied, is removed and justice is done.

What is the Christian attitude to that? You say, 'The Christian attitude is that we should never seek to be avenged. Jesus didn't, did he? When he suffered he threatened not. Did he not pray, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"?' He did, yes, but do notice what he said, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do.' It would have been a very different thing if they had known what they were doing. And as to our Lord's attitude to these things, Peter himself tells us that when our Lord suffered, he didn't retaliate. He didn't even threaten. But he committed himself to him who judges rightly, and went to the cross in the conviction that God cares about justice. And into the hands of a God who cares about justice, our blessed Lord committed himself and his cause. The gospel does not ask us to believe that God isn't interested in justice or that it is wrong to hope that one day justice shall be done. Justice shall be done. And in the confidence that one day it will be done, our Lord committed himself in his sufferings to him that judges rightly, and we may follow his example.

We are not of the modern sort who say, when people have committed atrocious crimes, 'I forgive them', even before they've repented. That is to condone what they've done. The gospel calls on us to copy Christ, and to commit the whole thing to God who judges righteously in the certain knowledge that in a day to come there would be a judgment. He left the whole matter to God and himself concentrated on mercy, even to those who crucified him; mercy to sinners. He bore our sins in his body on the tree, and took that as his deliberate tactics, to have the effect of leading us to confession and repentance, and thus to salvation before the day of judgment comes. Because there is a God of justice who will one day avenge his elect, we can afford to copy Christ and show that same mercy, and take the suffering and insult, and bear it in the hope that it may be used of God to bring people to confession and repentance while there's still time to repent.

And what about our attitude to the government and what the Bible calls its powers of wrath and retribution? Retribution has grown to be a very unpopular thing in the theory of criminology these days. Criminals are to be dealt with so that the strong measures meted out to them improve them, and act as a warning to other people. But they're not to be punished

as a retribution, simply because they have done something bad. But God's word seems to say otherwise. You say, 'Wait a minute, you've forgotten your measuring tape.' Oh, yes, so I have. Let me get out the measuring tape. What do I believe about the gospel? What does the gospel ask me to believe?

Tell me, what was happening at Calvary? Was it simply that Christ was suffering innocently at the hands of men? Or did he suffer at the hands of God? And if he did suffer at the hands of God—why? Sometimes we are told we mustn't use the crude term that Jesus was punished for us. Well, if that's a wrong term, let us cease using it, and let's use a biblical term, 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him; he put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin' (Is 53:10). We must be careful about our social thinking and our criminological thinking, lest we bow to the soft options of a world that scarce takes sin seriously any more and favours the criminal more than his victim, and lest we adopt theories that, if they were taken to their logical conclusion, would undermine the very doctrine of the cross.

Fulfilling the law

And thus Paul proceeds, and time tells me I mustn't carry on using my measuring tape much longer! I am, of course, to love my neighbour as myself. In so doing, I am to fulfil the law of God. I remind myself, and you, how certain themes run right through every section of the epistle, and one of those major themes is the law. From each movement I have selected some of the references. There are many more in most of the movements. In the first, the righteousness is apart from the law. In the second, the righteous requirement of the law, nonetheless, has to be fulfilled. Notice the balance of Christian truth. Justified apart from the law, that when the Holy Spirit works God's salvation within us, it leads to the fulfilment of the law. Similarly, we're reminded that the Jew made a desperate mistake and thought salvation was by his effort to keep the law, whereas Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

Whereas that is so, this last section, amidst all its practical exhortations, will remind us of our duty to love our neighbour, and in loving our neighbour we do fulfil the law. For the law can be summed up in this, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, mind, soul and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.' And though we cannot be saved or justified by our effort to do so, yet the magic and wonder of God's salvation is that it works in our hearts until we begin to fulfil that law by loving our neighbour more and more as ourselves, and loving God supremely.

And then the gospel tape measure can be applied to life's days. How much time do you have you to develop your career? Sometimes, when we are young, the temptation is to say that I will take Christianity seriously one of these days, but not just now. I've got to get through my exams. I see, you'll get through your exams and then you'll take Christianity seriously? The trouble is, when you're through your exams, most people by that time will have found some charming valiant husband or beautiful wife, and they'll get married and have a family. Marvellous. Thank God for that. And then they'll say, 'I must take my Christianity seriously but I can't do it just now. I've got a wife and a family. I will, when

they're grown up.' But when the kids have grown up, they've now reached a portly fifty and they're managing director of some enormously complicated firm. And they say, 'Well, actually, I can't take my Christianity too seriously. I'm so pressured in business. When I retire, I'll take it.' And they retire at sixty-five, and die at sixty-six.

We need to get the tape measure out on our life, don't we, in the light of the gospel, before we are fifty-six. And what will the gospel tell us about that? That Christ died, that Christ is risen, that Christ is coming again. Our salvation, praise God, is nearer than when we believed. We shan't have another 'today' to spend. It's gone nearly now and will never come again. Our salvation is nearer. You say, 'I'm looking forward to the Lord's coming.' Well, so am I—on Tuesdays, Thursdays and some Friday afternoons. On other days I have a certain little niggling. Do you know, I thought I would have made so much more advance in my spiritual life by the time I've reached my present age; but life somehow ran by all too quickly, and if the Lord came tomorrow, I fear I would not have made all the progress I would like to have made. God help us to take out our tape measure of what we believe about the gospel—that Christ is coming and you don't know when. Let us get things in such proportion that when he comes there shall be no sense of regret that we've missed our opportunities.

Jew and Gentile relationships

But from that kind of detailed, practical consideration, we come now to the second half of this final section. We discussed last night the whole business of the story of Israel and the Jews, and their relations to Gentiles; and how in God's marvellous strategies and providences, the falling away of Israel has led to the enrichment of the Gentiles. One day, God is going to provoke Israel to jealousy through the gospel coming to the Gentiles, and all Israel will be saved. And on that basis, Paul reminds us, in his brotherly and fatherly fashion, we Gentiles are not to get stuck up and conceited. 'Be not high-minded, but fear: for if the natural branches, the Israelites, were broken off from the olive tree of witness for God in this earth, because they continued not in belief, don't you Gentiles be high-minded. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he won't spare you' (see Rom 11:20–22). If only Christendom had listened to it. The Old Testament is full, not of Christians with anti-Semitic fervour in their voices, denouncing Jews; it's full of Jewish prophets, Israelite prophets, denouncing Israel's persistent tendency to apostasy.

The great apostasy came when Israel disowned her true Messiah. We Gentiles will need to watch ourselves. We think of the hideous attitude that Christendom took to Israel down the centuries. My ex-colleague, Professor Smallwood, expert in the history of the Jews under the Romans, entitled her inaugural lecture 'From pagan protection to Christian persecution'. And that sums up the position. The Roman emperors, even from the time of Julius Caesar, protected the Jews in many fashions, and even Jewish members of the Roman army had allowance made for them and their scruples about the Sabbath. And special legislation was passed by a succession of Roman emperors, protecting Jews; not that the Romans liked Jews, but that was their magnanimity. When did the persecution of the Jews start? When Christendom joined hands with the state, and eventually restricted them, and then,

eventually, openly persecuted them. Some of the magisterial reformers weren't much better in that regard—the awful things and shameful things that they said about Israel. We need, as Gentiles, to watch it lest our theology become apostate too. Let Christendom beware that if God didn't spare apostate Israel, neither will he spare apostate Christendom. That also is practical. Nor must we think that Israel is gone and finished for ever. 'It has not,' says Paul, 'it will be restored.'

Jew and Gentile relationships come up again in this last section but it's a theme that's been going right from the very beginning. The first section argued that we're justified, not by works, but by faith, not by circumcision, but by faith. Jew and Gentile are both condemned as sinners. Jew and Gentile can both be saved on the same terms of faith. Knowing Christ, therefore, Jew and Gentile stand on the same platform. That is the gospel we preach. But showing that unity to the world at large, consistent to our gospel, is another story. And so, in the closing chapters of this Epistle, Paul turns to talk to the predominantly Gentile church in Rome, about the need for Christian Gentiles to be patient with Christian Jews, and respect their consciences. Nothing is here said about meats offered to idols and that complicated problem, but simply about dietary laws. Paul is concerned with the relation of Jews and Gentiles even to the matter of eating of meats and other such cultural things. It could have happened that the Gentiles and Jews could have failed to accept each other socially, and it might even have happened that they wouldn't accept each other in the church. It is marvellous ingenuity on the part of the people of God how many things they can invent for dividing the people of God. Their ingenuity has been exceedingly fertile, and minor things can be so exalted as though they were fundamentals of the faith, unnecessarily dividing the people of God and seeming to the world as a very peculiar advertisement for the Christian faith.

So Paul exhorts the Gentiles to be patient with the conscience of the Jew, never to override it; and that is not merely a little bit of prudence. It stems from the absolute basics of the gospel, for Christ died that he might be Lord. That perhaps is why there are many things in life where the New Testament itself does not pronounce upon what we may or may not do. There are certain things, many things, where the Bible is completely explicit. Christians are not to steal, nor commit adultery, nor lie, and all these other things there said. It's not left to our individual conscience in the matter. But there's a whole range of other things—should you drink tea or shouldn't you? German evangelicals felt people like me were terrible sinners in days gone by because I drank tea. I felt they were terrible sinners because they smoked cigars! There are many things where the New Testament doesn't explicitly lay down the rules and regulations. Is that by some oversight on God's part? I fancy not. It would have tired the managers of heaven, I imagine, to produce a detailed book containing a list of rules and regulations if you were to cover everything.

But there was another reason behind it. When there is no specific commandment and I must make up my mind, what it should do is to drive me back to the Lord Jesus, reminding me that I must stand one day before his judgment throne. And he'll want to know why I did this, and why I didn't do the other. That sense that I am personally answerable to the Saviour is an exceedingly valuable thing. If I simply had a book of rules, I could just carry out the rules without coming anywhere near the Saviour. Like I treat the garage man. I don't

go to my garage man more often than I have to—he's so exceedingly expensive anyway! He'll find trouble where there isn't any. So I have a book of rules at home. I don't take it to bed with me or anything like that, but when the old car goes wrong, I look in the book of rules and, if I can, I put the thing right. I don't go anywhere near the garage man unless I have to.

We could treat the Lord like that, couldn't we? 'No,' says Christ, 'Christian ethics is ultimately about your personal relationship to me.' So that life will oblige me, if I'm going to make my decisions and be ready one day to stand before Christ's judgment seat, constantly to have recourse to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I've read the word, I've listened to wise Christians, I've considered my circumstances but, Lord, now I have to take the decisions. Some say this, some say that. Lord, I've got to decide, I must decide, I can't leave it undecided. Lord, I'm going to decide and this is honestly what I think will please you.' Suppose I get it wrong. Well, at least when the Lord says, 'Gooding, why did you do so and so? That was wrong, do you know?' I want to be able to say, 'Lord, I'm sorry I did it, but you know my heart. You know at the time I thought long about it, and I prayed about it, and when I decided, I thought I was doing what pleased you. I'm sorry to discover it was wrong.' And the Lord will have mercy, will he not? But suppose I, with my fancy superior knowledge, overpower the conscience of my brother. He has a conscience about doing something. He feels it's wrong before the Lord. I know it is wrong—with my superior knowledge. But it isn't actually wrong. The Lord doesn't count it wrong, but my brother, he has a conscience about it. To him it is wrong. And he wouldn't do it left to himself, but I overpower him and embarrass him, and put him in the position where I almost compel him to do it though in his heart of hearts, he feels it's wrong.

Think of the day when he stands before the Lord, and the Lord will say, 'And why did you do that, my child? It was alright to do it, but you thought it was wrong. And thinking it was wrong and would offend me, you went and did it. Why did you do something that you thought would offend me?' And the poor man replies, 'Well, Gooding made me do it.' Do you suppose the Lord will say, 'And who is Gooding? Look here, my man, I thought bigger things of you. I died so that I, not Gooding, might be Lord.' And so, as we take out the tape measure of what we believe, we must bring it to bear on our relations, Jew and Gentile, even to Englishmen and Irishmen, that our attitude reflect the gospel we preach. For there is no distinction, Jew or Greek; God loves them. They're saved on the same terms, and if they are saved, they are members of the body of Christ. We must get over our little nationalism, and love as Christ has loved, forbearing one another, ever remaining conscious of the fact that one day we shall stand before the Lord who died, to give account to him of what we did and why we did it.

'Incidentally,' says Paul to these Gentile Christians in Rome, 'I'm actually going up to Jerusalem soon. I've got a sizeable gift of money. The Gentile believers have collected it, and they wanted to send it as a token of their love and respect, and gratitude to Christ and to the gospel, and to the Jewish nation who produced the Messiah. And I'm charged with taking this gift of the Gentiles up to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Pray for me, won't you, that the gift may be acceptable to the Jews.' Oh dear, you see the possibility that lurks behind that remark, don't you? Paul is imagining himself with this gift of money, coming from the

Gentiles to the Jewish church. Oh what a disaster it would have been if the Jewish believers had turned round and said, 'We don't want their unclean money. They're Gentiles. They're not ceremonially pure. They're not circumcised. We shan't accept their stinking money.' Says Paul, 'Pray that this gesture of the Gentiles, reaching out halfway across the world to express their brotherly fellowship with the Jewish churches in Judea, that the gift may prove acceptable to the Jewish believers, and the garment of Christ be not rent, and the gospel be advertised in its practical effect.'

Question and Answer Sessions

Session 1

This originally followed on from the material in chapter 4.

Q 1: *We have, I'm sure, more than enough questions to keep us busy for the next thirteen minutes or thereabouts, and the first one is: could you briefly say whether a believer can be lost?*

DWG: And the brief answer is, certainly not. That is, I can say it briefly—a believer cannot and will not be lost. That is the brief answer. I suspect the question may have been provoked by certain things I said this afternoon that since salvation is by faith, what happens if someone, having believed, found that tribulation arose so severe that their faith was destroyed, so that they weren't a believer any more. Then if they weren't believers, they must be lost, and that may have provoked in your thinking this question. Am I saying, therefore, that a believer could be lost? And the answer to that still is, no. Why not? First we have the statement of the Lord Jesus: 'I give to my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. My Father that gave them me is greater than all, and none shall pluck them out of his hand either' (John 10:28–29). But, for the next reason still, a believer will not be lost because his faith will not be permanently broken.

How can you be sure of that? Because of the intercessions of our Lord. I cite the actual example of Peter when our Lord told Peter that he was about to deny him. Our Lord said to Peter, 'I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail.' Christ didn't pray that his godliness didn't fail. That failed miserably. Christ did not pray that his courage wouldn't fail. That failed disastrously. Christ did not pray that his testimony should not fail. It was ruined. Christ prayed for that fundamental thing, Peter's faith, and as a result, in spite of the fact that Peter denied the Lord, and that is serious indeed, yet underneath he remained a believer. When he said he didn't know the Lord and wasn't a believer, he was lying, in fact. And his faith did not fail. He remained a believer, and came through. He owed it, of course, completely to the intercessions of Christ. Peter was not a special favourite to receive this benefit from our Lord's intercessions. Christ has no favourites, and the Bible says, 'Therefore, he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him'. How? 'Because he ever lives to make intercession for them' (Heb 7:25). So where there is true faith, it will endure, and we are to know it will endure, that tribulation will work endurance. We are to know it. The way God is able to guarantee it is because of the intercessions of our Lord.

Q 2: *Thank you. Second question. Chapter 2, verse 7, and I'll read it just to save time: 'To those who by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.' Does this verse deal with those who have not heard the gospel? How do these verses fit in with the issues of God's wrath and the wreckage of Adam's sin?*

DWG: Well, there is great division of opinion amongst the Christian commentators on the point and purpose of these verses. Some say that they do apply to the vast millions that have never heard the gospel, never known even the law of God as enunciated on Sinai, and that, therefore, God looks at their hearts. And if he sees that, in their heart, like the Corneliuses of this world, they're genuinely trying to please God the best they can, then God will have mercy on them, and save them; not because of their perfection of behaviour, but because of the work of Christ. And he takes their genuine attempt to do the best they can and please God as an evidence of their faith that if they'd heard the gospel, they would have believed. So that's one interpretation. I personally think that that is not exactly what Paul is arguing here in this chapter. Here, the drift of chapter 2 is to show that it is not enough to know the law, like a Jew would. If you want to be without charge before God, you must keep it. Secondly, it's not enough to preach the law to others, and then break it yourself. To keep the externals of the law is not good enough. You can be circumcised as a Jew, but unless you keep the law, the circumcision counts for nothing. And in the course of his argument, it seems to me he brings in these other people to show that sometimes Gentiles have behaved better than Jews have done. For it's not merely having the law that counts, but actual practice that counts; but all that within this context of showing, as he comes to the conclusion in chapter 3, that all have sinned. There are none that haven't sinned and stand guilty before God. They can be saved, therefore, not by their works but only by their faith. And understanding it as such seems to me to better fit in with the flow of the argument.

Q 3: *If we didn't sin in Adam (Rom 5:12), in what way are we constituted sinners as a result of Adam's disobedience? And, again, if I did not sin in Adam, when did I become a sinner? When I committed my first sin? You also mentioned the point of the tense in 3:23, the Greek aorist tense should be translated into English as the perfect tense. Is it implied that we are as guilty of our own sin, of sinning, as of Adam's and, therefore, that we cannot only blame Adam for our sinful condition?*

DWG: That question was almost as long as the answer! To be fair, the question stems from some hasty remarks I made this afternoon on chapter 5 verse 12, which says, 'Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin: and so death passed unto all men for that all . . .'—and then came the crux of interpretation, how should the Greek there be translated?—'death passed upon all men on the grounds that all have sinned'? Or should you translate it as an aorist: 'Death passed upon all men because all sinned', meaning, as some say it means, that when Adam sinned, the whole human race, in toto and individually, sinned? Because they were all, so to speak, in Adam when he sinned and, therefore, when he sinned, the whole lot sinned, and were guilty of his sin.

Now that may seem to you a rather remote kind of question. It comes to practical consideration because people say, 'Well, what about this baby then, who was born and lived two days, and then died? Why did it die?' If you translate the verse, 'Death passed upon all men for that all have sinned', are you meaning to say that the baby in those two days

managed to get round to do some sinning? And if death is through sin, well, when did this unfortunate babe sin? If it didn't sin in the two days it lived outside the womb, then people say—and there's a large number of very serious theologians that say—that it sinned when Adam sinned because it was in the great forefather. And, therefore, in some real sense, the baby is guilty of the sin of Adam.

Now, with all due respect, I personally don't believe that. I made some hasty remarks on that this afternoon which were far from being clear and perhaps had better not have been said. But let me take an analogy. Analogies prove nothing, but they can help to enlighten us. In Malaysia, if you are caught drug peddling, there's a mandatory death sentence. You are executed. Well, let's consider the case of this good lady who was caught taking drugs herself, and drug peddling. The law condemns her to be executed, but she discovers she is pregnant. What do you suppose they should do? Execute her and with her, her unborn child? Will you argue, 'Well, the child was in its mother when the mother was guilty of drug peddling, so the child is equally guilty with the mother of drug peddling, so the child deserves to be executed along with the mother'? I daresay if I took a vote, there are very few that would say the child deserves to be executed because it was guilty of the mother's sin by being in the mother when she sinned. I think even in Malaya they'd wait until the child was born, and then after a suitable interval, execute the mother. Now, therefore, consider the child. It is altogether possible the child would be born with withdrawal symptoms, severely damaged in the womb by the mother's drug taking. While the child would not, in my understanding, be guilty of the mother's sin, it would have been wrecked by its mother's sin and be disposed, even if it survives, to taking drugs itself when the opportunity arose. If then the child is proved at birth to be defective and, in part, wrecked because of its mother's sin, the government wouldn't execute it for that reason. If the child thereafter engaged in drug pushing, it would then be executed. Of course it was given the impetus to start that life of actual sinning by being spoiled in its mother's womb.

And that, to me, is a little analogy of the situation we are considering. Adam sinned; he trespassed, he broke a prohibition. All his progeny die, not because they have sinned in the way Adam sinned, breaking an explicit prohibition or command. They die in spite of that. Firstly because, physically, they are ruined by what Adam did, born with a ruined, fallen human nature, and therefore subject to death. But also because, as far as God's judgment is concerned, as each have grown to an age of responsibility, without exception, apart from our Lord, they have all proceeded individually to sin. That is how I understand it. Why do we all sin without exception? Because we were ruined by what Adam did. We shall not be held accountable for what he did as though it were our fault. We shall be held accountable for our personal sins. But we've received a broken nature that is liable to physical death because of what he did. We should be held accountable for our own personal sinning. That, at least, is how I understand it.

Q 4: Chapter 6, verse 6: 'Our old man'. Does this refer to a single believer's old man, or does it refer to an old man which relates to that which all believers were when they were in Adam? And what, if anything, is the relationship with Romans 6:6 and Ephesians 4:22, briefly, please.

DWG: We'd better start, I think, by reading Ephesians 4:22. That says that 'you put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, which waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit.' If we have to put him away, he's still there, is he? Romans 6 appears to say that this old man was crucified with Christ. How do you reconcile those two things? Well, one way is to say that in Romans 6 Paul is looking on all human beings as belonging to the race of Adam, the race as created by God originally and gone astray and become corrupt. And the whole lot together is the old man as distinct from that new race, that new human race that God has commenced, starting all over afresh, with Christ our Lord, the second man, the Lord from heaven. So that God's way of redemption is not just to put right the old race, but to start a new race. And now, instead of starting from Adam, going wrong and being repaired, you start with Christ, and all who are joined to him and share his life that they derived from him. They're a new race. And in that light, the old lot, so to speak, were crucified with Christ. That's God's judgment on them. They were for execution because they were hopelessly wrecked, and sinful into the bargain. God's judgment on them is from start to finish, the whole thing. The only way to deal with it is to execute it and bury it, and you start again with Christ. And in that sense, when we receive Christ, then his death is counted ours. That's the old, whoever it was, Mr Smith or Mrs Jones, finished, and a new entity begins, which is the new life derived from Christ.

While that is so, if that is what it means, you still have the practical thing in Ephesians 4 that we are to put off the old man. So he's still around, then? And so here, people say, 'The old man is the old way of living, the way we used to behave, the kind of person we were before we were converted. That we have to put off, and put on the new way of living which is the life and behaviour of Christ.'

Q 5: Do you have any observations on E. P. Sanders' new prospective on Paul? For example, that Paul did not teach them it is impossible to keep the law of God. Shall we take that one first?

DWG: Well, I should like to comment, I think, on that. Professor Sanders is a most prolific writer; he's written a vast detailed study of these matters. To answer him in a three-minute answer would, in the nature of things, be manifestly unfair to his argument. But if you ask me for some kind of general comment, I'll answer as best I can within those limits. Could we have the question repeated?

Q 6: That Paul did not teach that it is impossible to keep the law of God.

DWG: Well, that depends how you look at it. In Galatians, and Romans 10, Paul makes the remark: 'For Moses writeth that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby' (Rom 10:5). If you take that as a general statement of practical fact, at the level of daily living, to keep the law is good and healthy. And if you refrain from sinning as the law talks about it, you will certainly lead a more healthy life than if you engage in a lot of sinning. If you take it absolutely, however, and you attempt in that sense to keep Moses' law perfectly and, thus to qualify in the absolute sense for life, then you will find it isn't possible. Paul emphasises that point again in Galatians, when he said, 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, then righteousness would have been by the law'

(3:21); but that is impossible. In the absolute sense, the verdict is that we all have sinned in the past and we do come short. It means that in my flesh there dwells no good thing, and the object of the law, therefore, is to bring us to the point when we acknowledge we have broken and cannot keep it, and our mouth is shut. In that absolute sense, yes, we cannot keep God's holy law.

Q 7: Example two. Within that, we make too much of justification as a legal concept. Professor Sanders seems to see it more as the restoration of a relationship.

DWG: I cannot say I fully understand Professor Sanders' point at this juncture. He gets himself involved, as many others have in these past years, on what the Hebrew term for justify and righteousness means. It is used, so they say, in the sense of delivering and serving God's righteousness as his saving activity, his being loyal to the covenant that he made with Israel. It is seen in his restoring Israel to their covenant relationship with him, and it's altogether a relational matter, and not so much a legal matter. And so far as that is true of the Old Testament, it isn't altogether true, of course, but let me leave it for the moment, to come to our Epistle to the Romans. It seems to me to be a quite inadequate explanation of what Paul is talking about in Romans. Just let me cite you Romans 3:4: 'Yea, let God be found true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy words, And mightest prevail when thou comest into judgment.' The question is, is God true or is he a liar? If God were found a liar, there would be something more to be said than to say that he hasn't been faithful to his covenant relationship. God himself would be proved a sinner.

The context, as you see, is the question of judgment. It is talking of God as judge when he comes to judge. If that isn't a legal thing, then I don't know quite what is. And when God judges, the question of the validity and legality of his judgment, its fairness and its justice, will be at stake. They, to my mind, are all legal concerns. And in this context, therefore, it seems to me that this is the likely meaning of justification throughout these passages of Scripture. And to take one that refers to us in chapter 8: 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies' (v. 33). Once more, the terminology is legal, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of . . .' That is accusation in legal terminology. And the answer to it is, no, none shall raise the charge; but even if they could, no verdict of condemnation can be secured because it is God that justified and there is none to accuse because the only one who has the right to accuse would be Jesus Christ, our Lord, and he will not accuse the believer. He is the one who died for them, and intercedes for them. Both those contexts are very heavily legal contexts, by the nature of their words, and I myself am more inclined to believe that that is the predominant meaning of the term 'justify' in the Epistle to the Romans.

Q 8: A question about 6:1–14, and the development of the argument there, death to sin, and then in verse 14 comes in this reference to the law: 'You are not under the law'. A little surprising as a sequel to verses 1–13. Would you like to comment on that?

DWG: Yes. The passage, Romans 6:1–14 is, of course, very famous, and famous for the many different opinions that have been held of it. In particular the exhortation that we are to reckon ourselves indeed to be dead unto sin but alive unto God. And many have felt that it means that, when sin knocks at the door, so to speak, we should say, ‘I’m dead to that, I’m dead to that, I’m dead to that’, and ignore the knocking of sin upon the door, and if we do that long enough, sin will give up and go away. Now, that may be in a practical sense a very good piece of advice: that when sin tempts us, don’t parley with it, just ignore it, and say, ‘I’m dead to that’, and get on with something else, and positively present yourself to Christ. I was arguing this afternoon, and I repeat it somewhat unrepentantly here, that that is not perhaps what it means. First of all, there is the model given to us in the context. Look at verses 9–11: ‘Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more has dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died unto sin once: but the life that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Even so reckon you also yourselves dead unto sin’. We are to reckon ourselves dead to sin in the same sense as Christ died to sin.

So we first have to decide in what sense did Christ die to sin? Was it that he was assailed by sin, like we are every day of the week, and had to keep on saying, ‘No, no, no’, until mercifully, he died on the cross and wasn’t assailed by sin any more? Is that what it means? Surely not. He died to sin—does that mean he was once upon a time alive to it and mercifully the cross came and cut his life short so he died to it? Surely not. In Christ’s case, what it means is that legally he died, bearing the penalty of sin, and having died in that sense he doesn’t need to die again. Death has no more dominion over him. That’s very important because when he died to sin in that legal sense, he was dying for our sins. Now that he’s in glory, it doesn’t happen that one afternoon he sees us sinning and says, ‘Oh, dear me, I didn’t die for that sin, I’d better go and die again.’ He died to sin once. That once was enough to cover the whole lot. He never needs to die again. The whole thing is legal in its conception. You see verse 7: ‘He that has died is justified from sin’; if you have committed murder in a country that executes murderers, capital punishment, and you were convicted of one murder and been executed, and after they have executed you they find you’ve done several other murders as well, they don’t normally raise you from the dead and execute you again. It’s enough that you died once, and you pass out from under the jurisdiction of the law.

So we, if we died with Christ, have died like he died. He died once, and that’s the finish of it. You should never have to die again. For, because we died when he died, his death is counted ours. We have passed out of the jurisdiction of the law. And to be sure, if you could go up to the great accounting rooms in heaven, where the record books are kept, I wonder whose name you’d look up first. You’d say, ‘I’d be interested to know about that preacher who came around, he made out he was such a tough guy spiritually. I wonder what the record says about him.’ Well, if you should open the book to the place where it is kept, you’ll find an enormous screed of page after page in brilliant red of the things that I’ve done. You would then see it all stroked through, with the comment, ‘Case closed. The accused has been executed.’ You say, ‘That’s odd. I saw him walking about here the other afternoon.’ So you may have done, but as far as God’s law is concerned, when Christ died, I died, and God’s

law is satisfied: the penalty has been paid, and that's the end of it. It is in that legal sense that chapter 6 starts off.

Now, many folks are a little bit unwilling to accept that, and I'll tell you why. It's for the very best of motives. They want to be holy, and what they want is not all this talk about legal things. They want some practical rules that help them on the aforesaid Monday morning, when sin comes around assailing them. 'If only it meant that this is good tactics when sin assails me on Monday. I say, "I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead", and reckon myself dead, then presently I shall die, or sin will go away or something. Now that is saying something helpful, whereas this legal stuff doesn't help.' But wait a moment, we mustn't be so impatient. There's plenty in these chapters about the practical side, and when you come to Romans 8, it will be more than just saying, 'I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead'. It will be the tremendous divine power of the Holy Spirit working within you. But this legal matter is important. Well, at least it is for people like me. I suspect for you as well. You were forgiven, you're justified, and you say, 'That's lovely, now I'm going to be holy.'

By all means, do go about it with all your heart and soul. How long do you propose to take about it? Are you proposing to be holy all at once?' You say, 'What's that got to do with it?' Well, it's a very important practical point. If you're going to be one hundred per cent holy tomorrow, that's okay, you needn't worry. But if you're going to take some time about it, in the process of your endeavouring to perfect holiness in the fear of God, you are going, in all realism, to make mistakes, come short, sin, blot your copybook, and all those other things. I must ask you, does it matter when, as a believer, you come short, and don't achieve total holiness all at once? Are you going to say your sins as a believer don't matter? Well, of course, they matter. Now we're back where we started, aren't we? What about the guilt of sin and the fact that it matters? If you were under law, that would be you finished. You'd only have to do one sin and that would spoil the lot. You would be finished. The law would clamour for your execution. It is because God is so practically minded and realistic in the course of holiness he sets before you, in which you are unfortunately going to make many mistakes and fall, and come short very often, that God has first to provide a solid, legal background so that he can continue with you in spite of the mistakes.

And the answer is, he's foreseen all the sins right to the last day, and Christ's one death has paid the whole expense. That shouldn't encourage us to abuse his grace and go on sinning. At the same time, it means that when, in the course of holiness I fail and come short, it's not the end and sin doesn't thus keep me down. I'm legally free to get up and, to put it crudely, have another go. That's why the legal side of it in Romans, the first half, is so tremendously important. It's God facing our struggles to be holy in a realistic fashion, and putting the whole business on a proper legal basis.

Session 2

This originally followed on from the material in chapter 5.

Q 9: *Thank you so much, again. We have a few questions here. Was Paul's experience in Romans 7 a reality at some point in his life or is he describing a 'hypothetical' position in the absence of the Spirit's ministry, which is then described in chapter 8?*

DWG: That's the part where Paul says, 'O wretched man that I am', isn't it? People debate about this, whether he is relating his own experience at some time or whether it's a hypothetical thing. My first reaction is to judge Paul by my own heart. That's a wicked thing to do! I might be very wrong, but it's no hypothetical situation with me. I presume it wasn't with Paul. Perhaps, however, it could be that the vexed old question—was this Paul before he was converted or after he was converted—is a little bit beside the point. What we should be asking is why does that chapter and the part about 'the good that I would do I don't do, and the evil that I wouldn't do, that I do', come here at this point in the Epistle? Remember the old analogy of the hand. We have to ask why that bit is there in the Epistle. If it were merely to expose sin to the unconverted, why isn't it in part one of the things where Paul is exposing the sins of the unconverted? Why has he left it until he's got nearly towards the end of his section on sanctification?

And my answer is that it is doing a tremendous function there. If we're going to be truly sanctified, we shall presently need to know the damage that sin has done to us. We hear about what we can do: yield ourselves to Christ that we may bring forth fruit to God through his gracious power. That's all we have to do. Any believer who takes it seriously will tell you the mysterious thing is that they sometimes don't do it. Why don't we? It is there that we have to face the damage that sin has done to us, and it is a very real lesson that all of us as believers have to learn. We're more damaged than we thought we were. Our intellect, our emotions, and our will are not by themselves able, either to lead us to salvation or, when we're saved, to produce our sanctification. You'll need more than a stiff upper lip and determination to be a sanctified believer. Our only hope of holiness is in the Holy Spirit's power. We shall only learn to rely on him when we come to take very seriously God's description of the damage that sin has done to us, and that is exposed by God's holy law, and our inability to keep it.

Q 10: *Thank you. Romans 8:20–21. Will a delivered creation subsequently be destroyed as in 2 Peter 3, or is that the means of creation's actual deliverance?*

DWG: Well, that is a very intricate question. Romans 8 says creation shall be delivered from her bondage to corruption (v. 21). In 2 Peter 3 it says the world and its works shall be burned up (v. 10). How do you reconcile the two statements? Well, I have a prejudice that I have to confess. If I had a cancer in my body and I was going to be delivered from this cancer, I hope it wouldn't mean that my own body would be destroyed as well as the cancer. That would be one way of getting rid of the cancer—to get rid of me. If creation is going to be delivered from her bondage to corruption in that sense, it surely doesn't mean, can't mean, that creation is going to be destroyed.

Now, when you come to our universe, and God's great promise of a new heavens and a new earth, then I think we've got to think more deeply, even if we take it at its physical level. You see, how you purify an earth, how you change it, might involve great fires, even at the physical level, might it not, and the constituent parts of earth be rearranged and new material made, and all that kind of thing. The mind boggles. We're not told. I'm looking forward to seeing it, and of being allowed some time off from the heavenly sing-song to go round and investigate what the new heavens and new earth are like! So I try to hold both things in my head simultaneously. Delivering creation may involve, probably surely will, a vast transformation. One kind of pattern I have in my mind is our Lord's body. It was never subject to corruption anyway. But not being subject to corruption, it went through death and now is a body, but a very different kind of body from what he had before. Yet is it the same body? Well, I tend to take Christ's body as the example and a prototype of what the promises of a new creation shall be.

Q 11: Thank you for that. The same chapter, Romans 8:13, talks about living after the flesh and dying. The question is, is this the experience of one who believed but stopped believing, or what is it?

DWG: Well, if you take it as an experience of one who believed then stopped believing and, therefore, died, you will have to remember that you're using a term 'believing' in the sense that our Lord used it in the parable of a sower—those that believed for a while, but when testing came, they fell away because they had no root. They never did have any root. They weren't, in that sense true, genuine believers. John, the evangelist, has one or two places in his gospel where he himself makes that distinction. In chapter 8, Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, 'If you continue, you shall be my disciples. You know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' Five minutes after that he was telling them that they were, in fact, with their father the devil, and they were picking up stones to stone him. They said they had believed. In some sense, they had believed, but when put to the test they were found not to be believers at all but unregenerate children of the very devil.

I think the words are to be addressed to us as believers. If we live after the spirit, we shall live. If we live after the flesh, we shall die. Similarly, Paul says to the believers in Galatia, 'If you sow to the spirit, you will of the spirit reap eternal life. If you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap corruption' (Gal 6:8). I take it, therefore, in that modified sense we all, as believers, have eternal life. It's one thing to have life, it's another thing to give your energies, time, thought, your will, and everything else, to the Holy Spirit; in which case you will develop your eternal life and reap the investment of your time and energy, in the blooming and harvesting that eternal life makes possible. Investing your time in his word this afternoon will surely, by God's promise, reap its harvest. If, as believers, however, we sow to the flesh, we shall reap it—if not in tears and broken hearts here—yet shall we eternally feel the result of wasted years, of works possibly that will not survive the criticism of Christ, and shall be burned up, leaving ourselves saved, but our works burned up. Saved, so as by fire (1 Cor 3:15). The restrained term of Scripture is that such people will suffer loss. There are consequences. There is no penalty for a believer of sinning, and there's no condemnation, but there are consequences. Thank God there are consequences on both sides. Sow to the spirit and you reap the benefits of your eternal life in its development and

harvest. Sow to the flesh and you'll reap, in that extended sense, death, corruption, loss and damage; and that loss could be eternal.

Q 12: And lastly, from yesterday's agenda, Romans 10:14 says, 'How then can they call on the one they have not believed in, and how can they believe in the one of whom they've not heard?' How do you explain the situation, for example, of a person in a sinking ship who is unsaved and calls out to God to save him or her? Will he or she be heard by God? And does verse 13 apply to that, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'? I think the questioner particularly has in mind, how can they call on the one they have not believed in, and does that relate to the crisis as illustrated?

DWG: I take it that the Scripture, 'Whosoever shall call on the name on the Lord shall be saved', stands as a basic principle of the gospel. We have an example at the physical level of the kingly man, the courtier, who came from Capernaum to Canaan, to our Lord, and asked him that he would come down and save his son. And our Lord replied, 'Except you see signs and wonders, you won't believe, will you?'

And the man said, 'Don't stand there talking theology; my son is desperately ill. Come down and heal him, please, if you wouldn't mind. We can talk theology afterwards.'

And our Lord said, 'You've misunderstood me, my good man. Your son is living.'

'My son is living?'

'Yes, you asked me to heal him, well, I've healed him. What I'm saying is, the trouble with you around here, unless you see signs and wonders, you won't believe, but he's healed. You asked me to heal him and I've done it. But, if you can't take my word for it, you're going to spend an uncomfortable twenty-four hours before you get home. That's all. But he's healed anyway.'

'Yes,' you say, 'but the man really believed, didn't he?' Well, yes, he did, and it was a faith that worked. He repented of all else, left his dying son, travelled to Canaan and asked the Lord. It was in complete sincerity of heart.

And if somebody on your hypothetical ship, going down, realises that all his or her life has been as an unbeliever and a sinner, that there is a God, and calls genuinely on the name of the Lord for God to have mercy, I could not find it in my heart to contradict the verse that says, 'They that call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' But you cannot treat God as a kind of an old grandfather with a beard, or a genie out of the lamp who, when you rub the lamp, appears and does what you tell him to. And if people are going to believe, says Paul, on the other side, then they have to hear, don't they? Whether it be in the Old Testament like Nahum and hearing of a prophet in Israel that could save, or a Jew in Christian times hearing of Jesus Christ. If a Jew says, 'No, I will not have Jesus, but I believe in God', of course the thing is false, isn't it? For Jesus is God incarnate. How will he come to believe on Jesus? He'll only believe that when he hears in that fundamental sense. It's not just a formal application, so to speak. It's a response to God's invitation. So perhaps I haven't resolved your question. The learned doctors and pastors themselves could do it better, but that's how I would view it.

Propitiation – Meeting Place between God and Man

This meeting is part of our series of studies that we have been engaged in on the Epistle to the Romans from the New Testament. But it is somewhat of an oddity in this sense that my brief tonight is to speak on one of the technical terms of the Christian gospel. Apparently, the church here is in process of a Sunday night, of examining the basic Christian technical terms. And the one they have given me tonight is an especially difficult one. I think they engineered it that way to test my understanding. I hope I shall pass their examination!

Technical terms can be bothersome things. So it is with me, when it comes to motorcars and computers, by which I am shown up to be an old stick-in-the-mud from pre-civilised days. So I scarce know what a byte is in a computer; it's more natural for me to think of dogs in that context! And it is amazing how the young take to technical terms when they want to. When it comes to Christianity somehow, we have the impression that it's one of those things that shouldn't be or can't be expressed in severely technical terms. Some of us are tempted to think that Christianity is a little bit fuzzy-wuzzy. That isn't so, of course. Christianity, likewise, has its technical terms. If you were learning needlepoint embroidery you would have to have your technical terms, and you wouldn't be against learning them.

So, in that spirit, let us come once more to the technical terms of the Christian gospel and consider the one that is arranged for us tonight. It is the one that, when you first see it, is most severely off-putting. It is the technical term 'propitiation'. It has long since gone out of the English language. It wasn't ever very much in it, but it's now gone out of it and it sounds awfully forbidding. Propitiation. It also gets itself involved in a debate among the really learned people who translate the New Testament from its original Greek into English, some of whom these days disagree over how the particular Greek word should be expressed. So you could read a modern translation of the Bible, for instance, and never come face-to-face with this long, difficult word and not even know it existed, which would be a shame, wouldn't it? You shouldn't be cheated like that. It does exist. Anyway, I'm about to read a passage in Romans that includes this term, and I'm reading it in a translation that will keep that old, long, technical term 'propitiation'. If you happen to have a text in front of you, and you care to read it with me, you may find that yours doesn't contain that term, but contains something else. The passage from Romans is in chapter 3, and for sake of context, we shall begin at verse 19:

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for through the

law comes the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God; for showing, I say, of his righteousness at this present season: that he might himself be just, and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus. Where then is the glorying? It is excluded. By what manner of law? Of works? Nay: but by a law of faith. We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yea, of Gentiles also: if so be that God is one, and he shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law. (vv. 19–31)

Expiation

So here then is our word ‘propitiation’, and let’s take the bull by the horns and meet first the objection that some have that the Greek word that Paul actually wrote with his own pen, or his secretary did for him, should not be translated ‘propitiation’. It should be translated something like ‘expiation’. You say, ‘What is the difference?’ Well, let’s start with the expiation possibility. That also is a big old technical term. We may paraphrase it near enough for tonight to say that expiation is a term you could use for blotting out somebody’s sins, expunging them from the record and from the memory of God, clearing the dirt of sin away and getting rid of it, and shovelling it into the dustbin. You say, ‘What’s wrong with that translation?’ Well, in itself it’s a good idea; I’m not going to argue against it tonight because that is a very valid concept that we find in holy Scripture and, indeed, a very wonderful concept—this idea of blotting out human sin from before the very face of God. Paul uses a very similar metaphor in another one of his letters. He talks like this: that God has forgiven us all our trespasses, having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us which was contrary to us, and hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (see Gal 2:13–14).

With my simple, naïve mind, I love those metaphors. Paul pictures God’s holy law as having kept, like a good accountant, all the long record of our shortcomings and our breakings of the law, and our sins and trespasses, and all the big, bad things we’ve done, and all the nasty, little, mean things we’ve done as well. God’s law has kept the record of them: the long bond, an awful record. They say when you’re about to drown, your life flashes up before you in remarkable detail. I don’t know, I’ve never been in the situation; but I don’t think we would enjoy it if tonight we had a flashback like that in our memories, and could read, set out before us, every sin, every nasty, little, mean thing, every uncleanness, every untruth that we have ever done. This word ‘expiation’ is not to be despised, for in itself it is true. Paul says here, ‘For those who trust God’s Son, in true repentance of sin, God does this marvellous thing.’ He takes the bond that is compiled by his law against us and, as

though he were an ancient scribe who wanted now to cross something out, he would take a sponge and obliterate the ink from the page. So God takes the record that is against us, and for everyone that trusts the Saviour, God himself sponges it out, blots it out, from the record against us.

And then the apostle adds a lovely twist to it, doesn't he? He says he's taking it out of his way, that bond that was against us, expunged, but he hasn't done it up some obscure corner. He's taken this thing and nailed it to the cross of Christ that heaven and earth may see that, through the death of Jesus, those who in true repentance trust him, may have their sins blotted out. Oh, I love in my imagination to listen to those hammer blows, to know that I needn't hide anything and I needn't try conveniently to forget anything. I may know that all the sins I can remember, and all those many more I can't, but God knows them, can be, and have been, nailed to the cross of Christ and the pardon there exposed for all to see. It's that kind of thing that lies behind a popular Christian hymn which you know:

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
 My sin, not in part but the whole,
 Is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more.
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!³

That, in simple form, is what many people take to be expiation: through the sacrifice of the blood of Christ, our sins blotted out.

Propitiation

Why then argue about the translation? Isn't it good enough for you to know your sins can be blotted out? Why drag in this other big, long, word 'propitiation'? Well, it's a question of being as honest as we can be with what Scripture is saying, and being as exact as we can. I'm about to say that the word here in Romans 3 should not be translated 'expiation'. I'm not arguing against the fact of expiation. I'm going to suggest that what Paul is saying here is something different, and that the Greek word he uses should better be translated here in this chapter by that old-fashioned term 'propitiation'. You say, 'What does that mean anyway?' Well, in the Greek language used by pagans who believed in pagan deities, they believed that when they sinned against their deities, their gods got angry with them. And, therefore, what had to be done was to appease the anger of their gods, which they did by offering various sacrifices and things. That is what the word predominantly means in its Greek usage outside the Bible. Therefore, the presumption is that it means that kind of thing too in the Bible.

That's just where some people begin to fight shy. They say, 'It can't mean that, surely? The true God never gets angry, does he? Surely, we don't have to try and appease his wrath.' I wonder how you feel about that matter. Does your God get angry? I might put it in more extreme form: would your God ever send anybody to hell? You say, 'Goodness me, sir, you don't believe in hell, do you, that old-fashioned antiquated idea, with a lot of demons in green livery and forked tails, and tridents stashing the people down into the flames like you

³ Horatio G. Spafford (1828–88), 'It is well with my soul'.

see in some Medieval churches? You don't believe in that, do you? Well, not in that gruesome depiction of it, of course not. But the question is, does God get angry? Sometimes we feel, no, God couldn't possibly get angry because what we know of anger by our personal experience very often is us losing our tempers and blowing our tops. And when it's all over we feel ashamed of ourselves, and our friends have to explain to others, 'Well, he's a nice chap really. Every now and again he blows his top, but it soon blows over, and he's not such a bad chap after all.' We can't think of the Almighty losing his temper. No, he never does. Let's get that out of our mind.

When the Bible speaks of God in wrath, it doesn't mean that God has lost his temper. But the Bible is insistent that God gets angry. How wouldn't he get angry? I believe you would sometimes, wouldn't you? When you hear that snipers around Sarajevo have, not accidentally but deliberately, shot little children, aiming at their heads, what kind of reaction do you feel in your heart? Of course, you don't lose your temper over it. But do you feel any reaction or are you so hard-boiled to this evil world that you can pass it off? I imagine if those children were your children, in fact I imagine even though they're not your children, when you hear of deliberate and repulsive evil like that, you feel indignation. Shouldn't you? Suppose I lived down your cul-de-sac and you have a fair child of seven years old, a lively little girl, and I'm one of these show-off drivers. You appeal to me vigorously, 'Please don't come roaring down here at sixty miles an hour. One of these days a little child will run out in front of you and you'll run them down.' I take no notice, and half-drunk one night, I come driving sixty miles an hour and I run over your child and kill her. What is your reaction? It's not a question of losing your temper. But I tell you this, if you don't feel a profound indignation against my folly and selfishness that has murdered your child, then I'm going to suggest to you, you never did love your child anyway. You will feel a surge of indignation against that utter folly of my selfishness, and the last thing you'll say is that it doesn't matter.

Love can never say that. I know that if the women next door saw what I'd done, they'd come out with their carving knives ready to carve me up. But in twenty years' time, the women will have forgotten all about it. I must tell you this, that in twenty years' time God will not have forgotten about it. And twenty million years from now God will not have forgotten about it, and if I have not repented, he will hold it against me. He will never say my sin didn't matter. Why? Because he loves the child. Therefore God is not only angry with the sin but, says the Bible, so long as sinners don't repent, God is angry with the wicked. It is the expression on the other side of the coin to his love. He is indignant and hates sin with all the hatred of the divine heart of love.

We must rid ourselves of the idea that God's wrath is something funereal. The Bible in its picture language has it otherwise. In the last book of the New Testament, when we read that God's final wrath is poured out upon sinful mankind, we have the picture given us of the angels coming with bowls full of the wrath of God, and they pour out these bowls of the wrath of God upon the earth. The interesting thing is the description of how they're dressed. How would you suppose they'd be dressed? You say, 'I'd imagine them dressed up in funereal black, with blood oozing out of their mouths and eyes like horrible old hags.' No, that's how the Greeks pictured the avenging furies. The Bible pictures them as dressed in white, brilliant white, magnificently pure white, like an alpine mountain with new-laid

snow, dazzling beautiful in its purity. That's God's wrath. And we may learn to thank God for his wrath against sin. It's the thing that's going to keep heaven clean. God's inveterate hatred of and opposition to sin, ultimately, is a beautiful thing.

So the Bible says that God gets angry and that raises this great question; if God is angry against my sin, how can I meet him? That's why I have called our topic tonight, 'Meeting place between God and man.' If we get convinced that God is angry against sin, and therefore sinners, I suppose we think the best policy is to keep clear of God as far as we can. We shan't be able always to do that. The Bible declares that we must one day meet him. We shall all stand before the throne of God. If God is angry against sin, and rightly so, how can we meet him? And that is where our verse comes in, that proclaims that there is this meeting place between God and man, through Jesus Christ whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith, through his blood. Because Christ, by dying on Calvary, and suffering the penalty of sin, has satisfied God and has assuaged his indignation so that God now is free to accept us without compromise. That is the difficulty, isn't it, when we come to think about forgiveness. What does forgiveness mean? Well, I must tell you what it doesn't mean. When the Bible says that God is prepared to forgive us, it doesn't mean that God eventually caves in and says, 'I was a bit bothered about that but now time has gone by and so let's agree to forget it.' God will never do that. He will never say the sin didn't matter. His anger that prescribes the penalty for that sin must be satisfied. As the Bible puts it, it's got to be righteous.

Just you imagine I have run over your daughter and killed her, and you were to arrive up in heaven and find me there. You say, 'Half a minute, God, is that Gooding there—the one that ran over my daughter?'

'Yes.'

'How does he come to be here?'

'I forgave him.'

'You did what? You mean you decided in the end that my child's death didn't matter?'

What kind of a heaven could be built on that—just saying it didn't matter? God won't. When God says that, if he's going to forgive us, first and foremost he must do it without compromise. The sense of justice in our hearts, let alone in his, must be satisfied. God has to express his disapproval of sin before the universe, and show that the forgiveness has been honourably made. That, says the Bible, is what Jesus Christ has done by dying on a cross, and bearing not merely human spite, but God's just wrath against our sin. What a wonderful thing it is because, having offered that sacrifice that appeases the divine wrath, Christ has made a way for us to come and to meet God and to be sure that we can be accepted.

Mercy seat

Now, if you were reading some old versions of the New Testament, you would not find the word 'propitiation' there, nor even the word 'expiation'. You will find the word 'mercy seat' and all of you who are over eighty-five will rejoice in that and say, 'At last, we haven't got one of these modern preachers. We've got a real, genuine, authentic, old-fashioned preacher,

and he's now using the right word—'whom God has set forth as a mercy seat, through faith in his blood' (3:25). It's a charming English word, possibly influenced by Luther's translation, *Gnadenstuhl*. Right or wrong, I can tell you the history of it. It's a little bit complicated and it will involve a little lesson in language, but put up with that; it'll soon be over and cost no more!

In the Old Testament days, God arranged for Israel to build him a sanctuary, and in that sanctuary there were two compartments. The second inner compartment was where rested the symbolic throne of God. It was called the ark. It was an oblong box made of wood, overlaid inside and outside with gold. On top of it was a cover made of a slab of pure gold. The term 'mercy seat', that some of your old translations use here in chapter 3, owes its origin to this particular piece of furniture. The King James Version, for instance, will call this piece of gold that formed the cover of the ark the 'mercy seat'. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the thing is called *kapporeth*, and when the Jews of Alexandria in the third century BC came to translate their Old Testament into Greek, they scratched their heads to decide how they should they translate it. So they hit upon a word in Greek. It is *epithema*, which means 'something placed on top'. It's a pretty bland word. You could use it for a cover or a lid. *Epithema* as a noun meant 'a cover'.

Then they decided that wasn't quite enough because it wasn't just a cover. This was the place where Israel was to meet God. The original instructions to Moses were, 'You build this ark. You put it in the holy place. You will put that cover on it with those cherubim coming out of the side, and there will I meet you.' It was the meeting place of God and men. One day a year, though only once, the nation's representative, their high priest, was allowed to come in and, drawing aside the final curtain that hitherto veiled the ark, he was allowed to stand before that ark and, so to speak, meet God face to face. On what terms could he come and meet God if God is a God who is angry against sin, and against sinners? How should he come? When the man came in to meet God, he stood before that ark, which was a symbol of God's earthly throne and contained, among other things, the two tables of God's law. I tell you one thing that priest didn't do. He didn't start to mumble to God, 'God, I know we've come short, but we've jolly well done our best, and we think we qualify for your mercy.' There was no silly talk like that. There wasn't any talk at all.

What the man was told to do was to come with his incense and then with a basin filled with blood that had been taken from the animal sacrifice that had been offered on the altar outside, as an offering for sin. As the nation's representative he came to meet God and stood before God's holy throne and the law it contained, and he said nothing. He took the blood and sprinkled it on that lid, and before the ark. That was not a pagan idea. That was an institution that God himself laid down. What was it saying? The man was saying, 'We have broken the law. We deserve its penalty but, by God's mercy, God has allowed us to use a substitute. We've been allowed to confess our sin above the head of the animal, and the innocent animal has died in our place.' You say, 'How did that help? That was only a symbol, wasn't it?' Yes, it was only a symbol, but it taught this, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin' (Heb 9:22). Sin can only be forgiven when the penalty has been paid. In those far off days, before Jesus Christ came to our world, God prepared people's minds for what Christ would do when he came to die on the cross. And so, early

on, he used these symbols and when people had sinned and sought God's forgiveness, they were allowed to confess their sin over the head of an animal, and the animal died in their place.

That didn't pay the cost of sin. What did an old animal know about sin? Cows don't go to bed at night with a bad conscience and have sleepless nights. Animals know nothing about it. It's human beings that get bad consciences and pass sleepless nights. Why then did God use those ancient ceremonies? That shedding of blood and those animal sacrifices were like toy money that parents sometimes give to children to teach them and prepare them for when they grow up and find the value of real money. They find that things really cost, and you have to pay. That was God speaking to the race in its childhood, getting across the basic principle that sin must be paid for. God's wrath against sin must be assuaged, the penalty paid in full. That was what Jesus did when he died for our sins and suffered the penalty of sin. 'All we like sheep have gone astray,' the Bible says, 'and turned each one to his own way. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa 53:6). That paid the penalty and satisfied God. And the way is open for us now to come and meet God. In the end it comes down to very practical things. One of these days, as sure as you can see that faint picture of that ancient symbol of the throne of God, one day we shall actually stand before the great reality. We must appear before the throne of God. That being so, we do need to know what will happen to us when we stand there. It is no good indulging in wishful thinking.

I remember in my youth, when I was no longer a member of your church here, some valiant souls strove to take the Christian gospel to some of the suburbs, and for that purpose they erected a big marquee. I was asked to help and had been going round doors giving out invitations. My good friend in those days had a friend in the city who was a business lady. One afternoon she invited both of us to tea. In the course of the tea, she said, 'Well, Bill, do tell me what do you preach to the people in that tent thing?' And Bill took the opportunity to tell her what the preachers preached. In the course of his remarks he happened to say they were preaching the great message of how you can be saved, and be sure of God's forgiveness, and sure of heaven; that we can meet God in peace.

When she got a word in at last, she said, 'Did you say you were sure of heaven, Bill?'

He replied, 'Yes, I am.'

'Oh no,' she said, 'you couldn't be sure of heaven.' And turning to me she said, 'Are you sure of heaven?'

'Yes, madam, I am indeed.'

'Oh no,' she said, 'that's impossible. I don't doubt you are a good-living young man. I'm sure you are. But you haven't lived very long yet, and what happens in later life if you do some desperate sin?'

'Well,' I said, 'madam, I hope I won't. But as I understand it, because my trust is in Christ, my sin is covered by his death and blood.'

'Oh no,' she said, 'that can't be so. You see, the way to be saved all depends on us striving to keep God's holy law.'

I said, 'Well, I didn't know that.' I was young and very rude and brash, and insensitive to people's feelings, and I said, 'Well, madam, what do you suppose God is going to say to you when you stand before his throne?'

That was an unfair question, hitting below the belt, wasn't it? And she was sort of startled and said, 'Well, I don't know. I think he'll say, "Well, you did go wrong there, my dear, and you did do something rather seriously wrong there but, you know, you were provoked to it really, and you couldn't help it." And on the whole, I think God would be merciful to me.'

I said, 'He won't, madam.' Oh, I was rude.

She said, 'How do you know?'

I said, 'The Bible tells us what God is going to say.'

'Where?' she said.

And I quoted her those words with which we began our reading this evening, 'We know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become liable to the judgment of God.' I think I see her face yet. It went chalk white because I was so rude.

She said, 'God will never damn me.'

People live in that fanciful hope, don't they? It's no good, ladies and gentlemen, we must face reality. We have sinned, and God tells us that if we come to him on the basis of our doing our best to keep his holy law, the verdict cannot be anything else than this, that we have sinned, we come short, we deserve its penalty, and must suffer it. The reason many people are so uncertain in their hearts of salvation, is that they haven't faced that prime reality. If we face it that we are sinners before God and liable to his wrath, then God has a wonderful salvation, right at your elbow. And you don't have to wait until you die and emerge into eternity. You can have this wonderful thing now. For God has set forth Jesus as a meeting place. Come to God through Jesus and the blood he shed at Calvary that paid the penalty of our sin, honoured God's law, and assuaged God's wrath. And if we come through Jesus, we may have God's kiss of welcome on our cheek forthwith; his arms of love around us and the guarantee that he will never, never cast us out. The matter settled now and settled eternally.

We began on such a glum note, didn't we, with the long word 'propitiation', and talked of solemn things like the wrath of God? But herein is the treasure and the joy hidden. Face it, let it drive you to Christ, and this very night you may have God's own assurance that the matter of sin and its penalty is all finished, and finished for ever. Since for those who trust Christ, there is now no longer any condemnation. They have passed from death unto life. They have eternal life and will never be rejected. Oh, friend, it is worth studying the technical terms of Christianity to get at that, isn't it?

May God help us all tonight to understand; and having understood what Christ can do, and has done for us, may we not just understand it, but like that priest who, in his way, was prepared to take courage in both hands and do what God said, and come and meet God on the basis of the blood of the sacrifice that God had ordained, let us take our courage in both hands. And if never before, then now, rise up and come and meet God this night And, through Jesus Christ, confess our sin, own that we deserve the penalty, plead the blood of Christ and God's own promise that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin, such that there is no wrath, there is no condemnation, nothing but the eternal welcome

and peace of God. Shall we pray that God will help us understand this and grasp it, and seek him until we find it?

Oh, God our Father, we thank thee for diagnosing our need realistically. We thank thee for thy divine honesty, that thou are not a God of pretence, but a healthy God who, facing the desserts of our sin, thou hast found a way of forgiving us honourably, justly, the penalty fully paid. And so tonight we bring our study to thee, authenticate thy word in our hearts, we pray, that we may have that conviction coming from thee that this is thy word to us, it is true. And grant, Lord, that we may then, if never before, take that step of personally rising up to come and meet thee; and to know, through Jesus Christ, thy pardon, thy welcome and thy peace, and the security of thine eternal love. So bless our study, and we in turn shall bless thee unceasingly for ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.