

Romans 1

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Becoming More Christ-like Every Day

Paul is a Servant

Romans 1:1

“Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God . . .”

We begin our study in Romans 1 by discussing the background of the author, the apostle Paul, who begins the book with a long introductory sentence declaring that he is a bondservant of Christ Jesus. A bondservant is someone who was once a servant then set free from his master, and voluntarily entered the servant hood of another. Paul, like every other Christian, was first a slave to Satan (Romans 6:16–20). He was then set free by an act of God to be born again as a child of God, and then voluntarily became a slave to Jesus Christ. The fact that Paul called himself a bondservant means that he is a servant of Christ, just like we are, called to serve Christ as his chief function in life. Like Paul, we also are called to serve in the world. Our love for Jesus should manifest itself before our love for everything and everyone in the world, and thereby characterize us as Christians. Our service to Christ should be the chief aim or ambition of our lives.

The Bible describes two types of ambition: **worldly ambition** (or the wrong ambition) as explained in James 3 and **Christ-centered ambition** (or the correct ambition) as presented in 2 Corinthians. Note the difference between the two:

Worldly ambition:

James 3:14-17 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, and demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Christ-centered ambition:

2 Cor 5:9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

Just because someone seems to be serving Jesus does not prove his or her proper ambition. People can actually proclaim Christ out of the wrong ambition, as indicated by Paul in

his letter to the church at Philippi: “The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment” (Phil. 1:17).

We need to spend much time contemplating whether our chief ambition is to please Jesus Christ, everywhere, all the time. Dr. James Montgomery Boice (1) lists some important questions to ask ourselves to test our Christianity or our Christian maturity:

1. Do we love Jesus?
2. Are our thoughts constantly occupied with Him?
3. Is He at the forefront of our lives?
4. Is He the center of our being?
5. Is He the beginning and the end?
6. When we talk to one another, do we speak often of Him?
7. Are we content to let the honors of the world pass by, as long as we can be known as Christ’s servants?

These are excellent questions to ponder in our prayer closet. Members of modern churches can easily become caught up in social programs, plans, building programs, etc., but without answering “yes” to all of Boice’s questions, these labors may be in vain. Churchgoers certainly have some major problems if they are more interested in lifting up themselves and their programs than in lifting up Jesus. One might even question if these well-intentioned folks are truly born again. However, both 2 Corinthians 13:5 and 2 Corinthians 13:5 indicate that testing ourselves (not others) is the biblical mandate. So let us all take the test. But be careful, for Satan likes to condemn God’s people. God never condemns His people (Romans 8:1), but He does discipline them.

Looking at Paul’s life before his salvation is a valuable exercise and can reinforce our understanding of the sovereignty of God. Paul was born in Tarsus, one of the three great Greek centers in the old world (the other two being Athens and Alexandria), and many considered Tarsus the most important Greek city. Paul was raised amid discussions of the great Greek philosophers, and he studied at the university there under the renowned Jewish teacher, Gamaliel, to obtain the best Jewish education available in his time. Paul was born a Roman citizen, which became useful in his ministry, as recorded in the book of Acts. Some people state that Paul had the equivalent of three Ph.D. degrees, and even non-Christian leaders in the area thought of him as one of the world’s most brilliant philosophers. Being a Pharisee of great reputation, Paul was extremely goal-centered and zealous for his Jewish religion. In fact, he crusaded to rid the world of the “new religion,” known as “The Way,” and its followers, first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26), whom he viewed as apostates to be eliminated by any means. Fortunately for us, God had a different, better plan for Paul.

Did Paul choose his date and place of birth and the privileged circumstances in his life leading up to his conversion in order that God could mightily use him? Of course not! None of this was up to Paul, but rather, up to God. Before the formation of the universe, the Sovereign

God planned the birth of Paul and all the events that created such a gifted man to work in the proper environment to spread Christianity to the world (Eph 1:4). Praise God!

Paul is an Apostle

Paul also clearly states in this first verse that he is an apostle. Acts 1:15–26 defines an apostle as someone who saw Jesus Christ and was anointed by Him for service as a missionary to the world. Paul is the last apostle, because nobody since him has seen Jesus Christ except after physical death. Paul attests extensively to his right to apostleship in his letters to the church at Corinth, as well as in his letters to Timothy:

- 1 Cor. 9:1–2 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
- 1 Cor. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
- 2 Cor. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia.
- 1 Tim. 2:7 And for this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
- 2 Tim. 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim. 1:11 . . . for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

Paul Is Set Apart

Paul continues his self-evaluation in this first verse by stating that he is set apart (from the world) for the gospel of God. God uses people in all professions, some of whom He calls out of an earthly profession into full-time ministry. I earned a Ph.D. in Chemical Physics and started teaching academics in 1967. I was born again in 1970, and contemplated quitting my job as Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Physics at Mississippi State University to attend seminary. I soon realized, however, that God wanted me to stay in academics and serve Him there, which I did for forty years. For thirty-nine out of my forty-plus years in academia, I served the Lord in state universities, which limited me somewhat in what could be said and what I could do—a fairly common experience for any Christian in the secular workplace. Nonetheless, when I realized the truth about the absolute holiness of God, and the fact that God had chosen me, an insignificant and unworthy person, I wanted to serve Him wholly! Today, as I continue to learn about my sinfulness in the face of God's holiness, I am still utterly awestruck and grateful that God chose me.

Paul also says in the following Scriptures that after we are saved, we should stay in our own environments: “Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that” (1 Cor. 7:20–21). So, if you are a new Christian, pray carefully and open mindedly about how you are to serve the Creator, because He possibly wants you to stay in your worldly occupation to witness for him there. I spent a year as a Visiting Professor of Quantum Chemistry at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, one of the premier universities in the world. After I had been there awhile, a new friend and I walked over to a *konditori* for coffee and a pastry. As we were walking my friend said, “Leon, you are a missionary.”

“No, I am not a missionary,” I replied.

“Oh, yes you are,” he insisted. “If a pastor came to our group and tried to talk to us about God, we would not listen. But you come here and we work with you and learn to respect you as a scientist. Then we will listen to what you have to say about God.”

Even though my friend was a non-Christian then (God later changed him), he correctly analyzed my true role in life as a missionary!

Many of you can also be missionaries where you work or play. When people learn to respect you for what you are in their world, they will then be willing to listen to what you have to say about the spiritual world. Just remember, God is the one who first opens people’s ears and eyes so that they can truly comprehend His Kingdom.

The Promised Gospel

Romans 1:2

... which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures...

In this verse, Paul tells us that the gospel for which he is set apart was promised long ago through God’s prophets via the Holy Scriptures. The gospel is the theme of this great book, and that word appears six times in this opening chapter. Most of us have been taught that the word gospel means “good news” and we have learned the gospel message of salvation through faith alone, through Jesus alone, as told throughout Scripture. But is the gospel really good news to each of us in a very personal way? Apart from Christianity, the religions of the world are really “bad news,” for they all teach some sort of works-based salvation, and according to the Scriptures, no one can achieve the holiness of God by any human works (Rom 9:16). Thus, the requirements of all the other religions become burdens that are too great for anyone to fulfill. As a result, the lives of people from other faiths are filled with frustrations as they continually try to fulfill the requirements of their belief systems.

The term “Darwinism” was first coined by Thomas Henry Huxley¹ in 1860 and used in connection with concepts related to evolution from the book *On the Origin of Species* by Charles

¹ Huxley, T.H. ART. VII-“Darwin on the Origin of Species”, Westminster Review 17, 541-570 (April 1860).

Darwin² published in 1859. Since that time, the term has acquired various meanings, and a related term, “social Darwinism,” has appeared³, which refers to the application of Darwin-like evolution events to social concepts, which has led some to the conclusion that it really does not matter what we do, because there is no accountability to anyone after this life. Thus, according to this philosophy, there is no meaning to life aside from the temporary pleasures that can be achieved mainly in areas that Christians know are sins. This “no-religion” that our contemporary society embraces is seriously bad news, because the natural conclusion is that we have no more significance than the ants we kill in our front yards. The no-religion people talk about self-fulfillments, self-actualization, and other self-centered concepts, but none of these has any eternal meaning. If people are forced to look at themselves from an eternal perspective in this no-religion, they could find themselves in need of alcohol, drugs, and other means of escaping from the unpleasant realities of such self-analysis.

Christianity is indeed good news, for it tells us that there is a God who created everything and is still interested and involved in every aspect of His creation, especially the needs of His children. This brings up the second aspect of this good news, which is not only can we be righteous before the All Holy God, but He has also arranged events so that we can become His children. Thus, we can become holy before God and we will be co-inheritors of the universe with Jesus Christ. Man, talk about good news! We will delve deeper into this topic in detail later, but just think: we can rest from our self-work to become holy! Our future in the forever is to be at home with God Himself! And while we are here, we have the right to be His bondservants, doing His will and proving the gospel to the whole world, so that He might receive all the glory. Halleluia! The gospel is God’s gospel, not our gospel, and we should proclaim it as vigorously as Paul did.

The Gospel Concerns Jesus

Romans 1:3–4

. . . concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord . . .

In Romans 1:3, Paul says that the gospel concerns the Son of God, who was born physically as a descendent of David. The gospel cannot be separated from Jesus! The gospel is not only the good news, it’s the best news we could hear, because there finally has arrived in history a way—the only way—to be righteous before the almighty, holy God, the creator and sustainer of the universe.

Jesus has always been God (John 1:1), even though He assumed the form of a man for a period of time. Paul mentions these two forms of Jesus in Romans 1:3. First he says, “concerning

² Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*, Oxford University Press, 1998. Ed with intro by Gilliam Baer.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Darwinism.

His Son,” whom Jesus had always been, and second he says, “who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh,” which confirms the manhood of Jesus.

The world scoffs at and denies two vital aspects of Christian doctrine: (1) the virgin birth of Christ, and (2) the physical resurrection of Jesus. In Romans 1:3, however, Paul proclaims that the gospel (the Christian message of reconciliation with God) concerns the Son of God *who was born of the flesh*. We will explore the significance and implications of this event as well as the resurrection in considerable detail as we wade through Romans. Actually, no one can probe the entire depths of this book. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones uses 167 pages of his book (2) on Romans 1 to probe the first seven verses; Martin Luther’s commentary (3) is shorter but rich in his study of Romans, which led to the great Reformation.

Why is it necessary that we believe in the virgin birth of Jesus? In these verses, Paul just says that Jesus was born of the flesh. But it was absolutely necessary that Jesus be born of a virgin, because he had to be both fully God and fully man.

Because of the virgin conception, Jesus had the blood of His Father, God, coursing through His veins. He had to be fully man to be the new Adam, and in fact, he lived thirty-three years on Earth as fully man with absolutely no sin, which the first Adam did not accomplish. Jesus had to be fully God because He had to take to the cross all the sins of every called child of God, to fully pay for an infinite number of sins, in order to satisfy the Father that all sin had all been fully redeemed. Only God Himself could accomplish that atonement.

Certainly, it was not sexual intercourse between a married man and woman that necessitated a virgin birth, but the unavoidable state of sin into which every person is born. The Bible carefully traces the ancestry of Seth all the way to Noah and, of course, we are all descended from Noah. Every person born since the sin of Adam (that being everyone except Christ) has been born in sin, in the likeness and image of Adam rather than in the likeness and image of God (see Genesis 5:3).

Therefore the virgin birth, ensuring divine conception and fatherhood, is an absolute necessity as is the actual physical death and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Paul says, the resurrection proves that Jesus indeed was, and is, the Son of God. Without the virgin birth and the physical resurrection, we have nothing worth proclaiming.

How did God make Jesus a descendent of David? This is a really interesting study so a few details will be offered. The legal claim through Mary of Jesus is presented in Luke 3:23–38 and the royal claim through Joseph is presented in Matthew 1. One would normally think that His reigning lineage would come from King Solomon. The last true reigning king from Solomon’s line, however, was Jehoiachin, and God pronounced a fierce curse on him: “Thus says the Lord, “Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper Sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.” (Jer. 22:30)

According to this curse, no king descended from this line could have a legitimate rule. Solomon’s lineage continues until Joseph, but Jesus was not biologically descended from Joseph. However, Joseph took Mary under his protection after he discovered she was pregnant and thus

passed the right of royalty to Jesus, according to Jewish law. Jesus is, however, descended from Mary, who is a descendant of David through the line of Nathan, Solomon's older brother. Jesus then combined the claims to the Messianic throne through two lines and eliminated the possibility of there ever being another heir from David. Jesus had no human children and his brothers and sisters inherited the curse of Jehoiachin through Joseph, meaning neither they nor any of their descendants had any right to rule. Therefore, if Jesus is not the Messiah, there can never be a Messiah!

Jesus Christ our Lord

Paul ends Romans 1:4 stating that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Greek word for lord is *kyrios* and is thoroughly discussed in a book by Alan Chrisope⁵. By about 1959, a raging debate ensued about whether Jesus has to be both our Savior and Lord. This seems like a rather "left-field" question since Christianity is all about Jesus Christ (the Messiah) being our Lord. It is still rather popular to think that we can take Jesus as Savior now and maybe later take Him as Lord. In such a scenario, the person is heaven bound but does not have to make any changes in his or her life while living here. What a deal! Go to heaven when you die and live like the devil while you are here! Such a form of "Christianity" is not biblical in the least, and we will certainly see in our study of Romans that Paul talks against any such a possibility. Even in Romans 1:4, Paul says "Jesus Christ our Lord." Chrisope does an excellent job of showing the classical usage of the word *kyrios* and then leads the readers to a proper understanding of the word in Christianity (4).

Many people were martyred in the early church for refusing to refer to Caesar with the title "Lord Caesar." One of the most famous was Polycarp, who was about eighty-six years old when he was burned alive for refusing to make such a proclamation. There can only be one Lord, and if Polycarp had proclaimed Caesar as that Lord, then Jesus would not be his Lord, and thus Polycarp would not be a Christian. We must not take the title of "Lord" casually today, for it lies at the foundation of our faith. It is not enough to declare aloud that Jesus is Lord. Note the horrifying statement made by Jesus about some people who call Him Lord:

Matt. 7:21–23 "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

Even though these people called Jesus "Lord" and did great works, He declares that He will say that He *never* knew them. Also note that in Romans 1:4, Paul says Jesus Christ is *our* Lord.

John Stott (5) provides us with six implications of this statement, which are examined below in an effort to expose the fallacies of separating Christ's lordship from our salvation and

everyday lives. Compartmentalization is putting different areas of our life such as Christianity, politics, sports, hobbies, etc. in non-overlapping compartments so that each does not influence the others. Such a way of thinking is often stated by politicians and others, but this approach to life is not Christian. A Christian life must be integrated in all of its aspects.

1. An intellectual implication

Jesus is our teacher because He must be Lord of our minds. As John Wesley said, “We must be *homo unius libri* (a man of one book).” Only by immersing ourselves in the Word of God can we keep ourselves from being led astray into the philosophy of men. As we will study in more detail later, we must work to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

2. An ethical implication

Jesus must be Lord of our ethical standards as we constrain ourselves to obey the Word of God. The world must see a very different standard in our behavior than the average person. The following is an excellent standard for our ethics:

Psalm 15 (A Psalm of David.) O Lord, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the Lord; He swears to his own hurt, and does not change; He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

3. A vocational implication

Jesus is to be Lord of every second of every day of our lives. We cannot have a compartmentalized view of Christianity, as most worldviews have of their religious component. So whatever our vocation, we should serve Jesus there as our Lord: “With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free. (Eph. 6:7–8)

4. An ecclesiastical implication

Jesus is Lord of the Church (the body of Christ). No person or group of people is allowed to rule the true Church. Everyone is using his/her gifts for the glory of God and the proclamation of the name of Jesus Christ, not for the glory of any one person or group of people in the church: “Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:11)

5. A political implication

As servants of Jesus Christ in all areas of our lives, we must exercise our freedom of religion (in the United States) to try to make the place where we live reflect that lordship. This is difficult and must be done in a loving way, but again, there can be no compartmentalization of our faith and service to Jesus Christ:

- Matt. 22:21 They said to Him, “Caesar’s.” Then He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.”
- Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered and said, “We must obey God rather than men.”

6. A global implication

Because we love Him and serve Him, we are called to exercise the Great Commission:

Matt. 28:18–20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’

We need to take the gospel message to the whole world, and that includes Muslims, Jews, atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, etc. This is not an easy task, however, in our present culture of great tolerance for all religions except Christianity. Spain has now passed a law that says people cannot evangelize for Christ. Recent media reports that European countries are also considering such laws, and that the United States may also be considering them. Passing laws against evangelizing is a very serious matter.

The Apostles Receive to Give

Romans 1:5–7

... through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name’s sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

None of us receives revelations just to keep them to ourselves. By “revelations,” I am not referring to new revelations apart from the Bible, for those times ended with the last chapter of Revelation. What is meant by “revelations” is wisdom revealing the meaning and application of the Bible to us in our lives today. We are not to “get all we can, use all we get, sit on the lid, and poison the rest,” as the world teaches (a quotation from a sermon by Reverend Adrian Rogers).

We all receive so we can give, since we are simply stewards of all that God gives us, including knowledge and wisdom.

We know that the apostles received direct revelations from God for the purpose of giving such truths to the world. Because of their diligence and faithfulness, we are blessed to have the Bible that we have today. But what are we going to do with what the Holy Spirit teaches *us* about the applications of the Bible in our daily lives? We *must* also give, either as a formal teacher or as a friend to fellow Christians in informal meetings, what we have received.

We Are Also Among the Called!

Romans 1:6 is written to the church at Rome, but it applies to all of the called as will be seen clearly in chapter 8:

Romans 8:29–30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

What an awesome, inconceivable concept that before the creation of the world, God foreknew us to be His children!

Eph. 1:3–6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

We Are Saints and Have Access to Grace and Peace!

Paul refers to the recipients in verse 7 as saints. The word “saint” has a meaning in the church today that was not intended at all in the writings of the apostles. A saint today is someone who has supposedly lived a life judged to be without fault, and the Roman Catholic Church has a very exhaustive method of determining who can be called a saint. When we hear people say, “Well, I am not a saint, but I am a pretty good person,” the word “saint” typically means a person who is very holy. Biblically speaking, the word saint means “separated to God and to His work,” as Paul wrote in Romans 1:1. All true Christians, therefore, are saints. When we are born again, we are at that very second “set apart for the gospel of God.” Regardless of the sins we committed, as of that moment, we will be saints for the rest of our lives, even though we will commit more sins. And the reason we have been made holy before Almighty Holy God since

that second is because of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Biblically, we are no more holy before God now than we were at the moment of regeneration, but hopefully we become a bit more holy toward the world. In actuality, our holiness before God was fixed before the foundation of the world and became an event in time when we were born again. (Much of this discussion is in my treatise on Ephesians and is available from my website:

<http://LivingTheology.com/EphesiansOne.htm>)

Can you say, “I am a saint”? Can you say it without reservation in your mind? Remember that when you say it, being a saint has absolutely nothing to do with any of your works. Note the correct cause and effect. We are not called because we are saints. We are saints because we were called. Now can you say it? Many Christians cannot say they are saints, but they are IF they are real Christians. It is false modesty to say, “I am not a saint,” because such a statement denies the effective work of Jesus Christ in our lives. Thanks to the Sovereign God of the universe and outside the universe, we are saints and have access to His grace and peace: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6–7)

Grace and Peace

Paul closes his introduction in verse 7 with a wonderful blessing to all the saints: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Paul often quotes “grace and peace” to the saints in his writings. Certainly, we cannot have peace without grace. It is only through the grace of God to His children that we can have peace in our lives—peace with God that leads to peace in our being: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8)

Of course, the “it” in Ephesians 2:8 refers to “faith” that is a gift God gives to His children by grace. Grace is often stated as “God’s riches at Christ’s expense,” and that is indeed biblical: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9). An excellent definition also is “God’s sovereign dispensation to show favor”. Furthermore:

- Grace from God is found only through Jesus Christ: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.” (John 1:17)
- Grace is involved in our justification: “Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 3:24)
- Grace is also involved in our sanctification: “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

- Grace is also involved in determining which gifts we are given to edify the body of Christ: “And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith.” (Rom. 12:6).

Grace is not only involved in our justification, sanctification, and the gifts God has given us, but grace is also available to all of God’s children any time we have needs in our lives: “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16)

So if we feel a lack of peace, we need to go to the throne of grace with confidence.

Praise for the Christians in Rome

Romans 1:8

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Reason for Thankfulness

Paul says that he first wants to thank God through Jesus Christ (our access to the Father) for the Roman Christians because their faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. Of course, Paul would not be thankful for their faith if it were not real. Many people do not understand the Christian meaning of the word “faith.” Please see my article on faith that can be read at <http://www.livingtheology.com/Faith.htm> for a more complete discussion of faith. In the world’s view, “faith” generally connotes something that someone developed, such as confidence that the airplane will take off and land safely, or confidence that we can sit in a chair without it crashing under our weight. But in the Christian world, faith is not developed by a person through his or her experience, study, reasoning, etc. Rather, faith is a gift from God as noted in several Scripture verses:

- Heb. 12:2 “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
- Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.
- Rom. 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

Faith is the cause and the effects are trust, believe, obey, etc. As previously stated, Paul is thankful that the faith of these Roman Christians is being proclaimed throughout the entire world. We will study this proclamation later, but how wonderful it must have been for Paul to witness the spreading of the faith of a church he did not start. It is so encouraging to a missionary to find people he did not disciple spreading the gospel message. As noted previously in the text, we receive so that we might give. And even though Paul certainly understood the sovereignty of God, it must have been incredibly uplifting to him to hear about this other church doing the same work he was doing. God has faithfully been spreading the gospel throughout the world for thousands of years now, and He will continue to do so through His children until the end of time.

Paul's Unceasing Prayer for the Christians

Romans 1:9–12

For God, whom I serve in my spirit in the preaching of the gospel of His Son, is my witness as to how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine.

Once someone becomes a Christian, life is viewed through the lens of his or her new faith. One driving desire is to get to know as many Christians as possible and to learn about the work of Christ in their lives. If a believer is appointed as a teacher, he or she is additionally compelled to share what is learned as a disciple of Jesus Christ. As teachers, we still care very much about the people in our Sunday School classes and we may even keep in at least occasional contact with them. We may lose touch with some and long to see them again in the same way Paul longed to see the Roman Christians, even though he had not previously met them face to face. We could no doubt tell many stories about lives we have seen changed and works done by those people. Many reading this commentary can no doubt relate such stories. Certainly one mark of a true Christian is that he or she loves other Christians and wants to worship God with them (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom 12:10; 13:8; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:2; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 5:13; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11; 2 John 1:5).

Of course, Paul is not just a Christian teacher. He is an apostle. He sees the church at Rome still needing the teaching, warnings, and instruction as to spiritual gifts. All of Paul's writings talk about maturing the Christians. Even today, we all still need the maturing Paul's writings can help us attain through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells the Roman Christians that God can witness to the fact that Paul indeed mentions them in his prayers unceasingly. Did Paul really pray all the time? This would seem to be the case, especially since he mentions this action in other places also, such as Ephesians 6:18:

“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”

How different our lives would be if we prayed in the Spirit at all times! We should always have the following prayer on our lips: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts.” (Ps. 139:23). Anxiety is a tremendous tool of Satan. Please read the paper on anxiety that can be found at: <http://LivingTheology/Anxiety.com>. We should never be anxious, according to Philippians 4:6: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Also read Matthew 6:25–34, as Jesus warns us not to be anxious. Having the Psalm 139 quote as part of our prayers asks God to search us so that we can remove the harmful things in our lives that can cause anxiety.

Another rather scary Scripture appears in Jeremiah 17:10, which clearly explains the consequences of failing to obey the Word of God and to be in constant prayer: “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.”

We should all pray constantly and always have Psalm 139:23 in our prayers so that God can help us mold ourselves as closely as possible to the image of Jesus Christ while we are living here on Earth. In our glorification, we will be as Christ, but we should be striving now to be more like Him in all that we do. What a great teacher Paul was! His words still teach us today—praise the Lord! We should use these few verses to see how they can apply right now in our lives. Do you know a Christian in need? Do you need to visit a Christian so you can be strengthened? Do you need or can you offer encouragement to a struggling Christian? It is not difficult to think of people in this context if we just open our minds to God’s Word.

We are studying Romans so that we can become more like Christ. Stop for a few minutes now and ask the Lord to search your heart and show you Christians that you need to spend time with for whatever reason.

Unanswered Prayer

Romans 1:13

And I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented thus far) in order that I might obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles.

Have you ever been bothered by what seems like unanswered prayer? If we were all honest with ourselves, we would all say yes. To be perfectly honest with this text, note that Paul does not say that he has prayed to visit them. The previous verses, however, certainly indicate that the visit was in his prayers (specifically verse 10).

There certainly are some, perhaps many, examples in Scripture of unanswered prayers:

- John 9:31 “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him.”
- Isa. 59:2 But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.
- 1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, And His ears attend to their prayer, But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

From the above Scriptures we understand that the prayers of people who are not children of God are not even heard, much less answered! Yet there are people in this world who say, “I will pray for you,” who show absolutely no outward signs of being a Christian. They may mean well, but if indeed they do try to pray, they are most likely talking to the wind.

So what is the purpose of prayer? Some people think they are changing God’s mind about something. The only two reasons a person changes his or her mind: (1) if he or she made a mistake or (2) if some new information were brought to the person’s attention. Now, humanly speaking, both of these events certainly happen often, but neither of them can ever happen to God. God is omniscient and omnipresent, so there is no way something is happening that is unknown to Him. God also never makes a mistake. Therefore, our prayers can never change the mind of God. Our prayers can, however, change **our** minds. Let’s look at a few Scriptures:

Matt. 21:18–22 “Now in the morning, when He returned to the city, He became hungry. And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, “No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered. And seeing this, the disciples marveled, saying, “How did the fig tree wither at once?” And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”

People have used these verses to preach that we can do anything if we just believe. But look carefully at what Jesus says, and also note other Scriptures that we will look at in a minute. Jesus said, “If you have faith, and do not doubt.” Remember what we have already said about faith in this study and in a study on Ephesians that can be found on my web site <http://LivingTheology.com/Commentaries.htm>, and in the paper on “Faith” that can be found at the site: <http://LivingTheology/Faith.htm>. What is the origin of Christian faith? Yes, it is God. God allots to each of us a measure of faith, and Jesus is the author and perfecter of that faith. Faith is “the enabling power of God,” not our human self-confidence. So, in the context of this faith, what does He mean by “do not doubt”? Whatever we receive by faith from God, such as our salvation, we should not doubt, because we know it is a sure thing from the Sovereign God.

We should hope that God does not give us faith to curse our fig trees unless they become items of worship! Where would such faith come from?

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Rom10:17)

Exodus 20:4 instructs us not to have an idol of any kind, so if the fig tree becomes an idol, then we must destroy it or otherwise deal with our idolatry problem. We should have no doubt about this, because the Word of God is clear. The same logic holds true for golf, tennis, money, personal ambition, etc. We should judge all of our requests to God by the Word of God.

Jesus also said “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” So would you expect to receive a new Jaguar just because you ask for it in prayer and believe that God should give it to you? Perhaps He will give it to you only to show you that it is a snake as stated in the following verse. But it is more likely God will teach you that it was not a proper request:

Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? (Luke 11:11)

Many of us over the years have requested what we thought were fish, only for God to show us we really asked for a snake. Suppose, for example, you ask for what you think is a wonderful promotion, but do not get it. Then later, the person who did get the job is fired because the company eliminates that division. You could have been that person! Maybe when we get to heaven God will show us these places where He protected us by not giving us what we asked for in prayer.

So what did Jesus mean by “And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive”? Our belief in our prayers being proper must be based upon the character of God as revealed in His Word. Until we are certain by faith that our prayers are proper, we cannot believe that our prayers are proper! If we have a friend dying of cancer, for example, and pray for his healing every day, do we believe God will heal that person? In actuality, we cannot, because only God knows if it is proper for him to get well. We continue to pray, nonetheless, because we are told to pray (more on this later) and God can get the glory for any answer.

Let us look at one more Scripture, remembering that all Scripture must be consistent. “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” (1 John 3:22) Here again we see the connection between what we ask, the character of God, and our relationship to Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). By keeping all His commandments and doing all things that are pleasing to Jesus our mindset will be such that our prayers are in perfect alignment with the will of God. As a result, we will receive those requests to the glory of God.

We could spend a year studying prayer, but instead, the reference section contains a number of good books already written on the subject (7, 8, and 9). Prayer primarily changes people; therefore, it needs to change us so we can make proper requests. Boice (1) points out some of the things prayer may need to change in us:

- According to Isaiah 50:1, 2, and others, unconfessed sin can certainly hinder an effective prayer life.
- James 4:3 says wrong motives, as discussed previously, can lead to wrong requests of God.
- Laziness, meaning that we are not truly sincere and long suffering in our prayers, can also interfere with our prayer life. We prayed for fifteen years for an answer to a prayer request before it was God's time for such to happen. We knew the prayer was biblical, but the answer had to be in God's time. We never quit praying.
- We may be too busy with worldly things to pray earnestly with longsuffering.
- Ezekiel 14:3 indicates that idols in our hearts may be interfering with an effective prayer from us.
- Proverbs 21:13 and Luke 6:38 say that stinginess in giving shows we are not dedicated to God, and He may not hear our requests.
- Unbelief is probably the greatest hindrance to our prayers, and we have discussed that previously.
- Failing to honor our wives can hinder our prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

We also know from Daniel 10:1–14 that spiritual warfare may apparently hinder a prompt response to prayer. We say “apparently” here because God is also in control of the spiritual warfare. I discuss some of this spiritual warfare in my study of Ephesians, although Deuteronomy 29:29 says much of it is still a mystery to us. So, let us move on with our study of Romans, but please remember that the primary purpose of prayer is to change us into being more like Christ.

The Whole Gospel for the Whole World

Rom 1:14–15

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

These two verses show that Paul had a God-like attitude concerning the application of the gospel. The gospel is for everyone chosen by God: the rich, the poor, the wise, the foolish, men, women, all races, Greeks, non-Greeks, etc. We need to always remember these verses as we witness to people. It is also interesting to look at the word “debtor” in the KJV or “under obligation” in the NAS Bible. How does Paul want this word or phrase to be interpreted? He truly understood that he had died to his old life and that he now lives a new life totally dedicated to serving the Lord Jesus Christ, as should all of us. Paul has been given the understanding of the gospel, as have all of us, and now he is obliged to share it with everyone. This is a very old analogy, but if you had a friend who was physically dying and you had the only medicine to cure her, would you give it to her? Of course, the answer is yes. But there are people all over the

world who are dying right now under the wrath of God, according to Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." We should feel the same obligation that Peter felt to carry the gospel message to all people, and we should always be able to defend our faith: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).

Paul also had a compulsion to preach the gospel message as he noted in the following:

2 Cor. 5:10–11 (NAS) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

Or as stated in the KJV of the Bible:

2 Cor. 5:10–11 KJV For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

This KJV translation is actually clearer than the NASB, for it translates the Greek word as "terror" and that brings a much different picture in our mind. Can we love and yet have terror toward God? Yes, we can. This concept is easier to grasp if you had a good father you knew loved you very much but you also knew would discipline you if you broke his rules. So, while you loved your father, you were terrified of his discipline. If this was the case for you, then you know that such a terror was very good, for it kept you out of a lot of trouble. Does God discipline His children? Let Scripture answer this question:

Heb. 12:6–13 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are

feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

This should clarify what Paul meant about being under obligation to all people, including those in Rome, to preach the gospel. He meant that we should always be ready to preach the one and only true gospel to all people living under the wrath of God. Remember the analogy with the dying friend? You know the secret to eternal life, and it is in the work of Jesus Christ. How can we possibly keep that a secret?

The Theme of the Epistle

Rom 1:16–17

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’

This is indeed the theme of Paul’s epistle. The word “for” refers to the previous discussion of verses 14 and 15. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel. Have we ever demonstrated a shame of the gospel? Have we ever been with a friend who is acting very worldly and yet been ashamed to talk to him or her about the gospel? We know that Timothy was warned about not being ashamed of the gospel: “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:7–8). The translation of “timidity” here, rather than “fear,” is correct. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and His power will allow our part in God’s plan of redemption to be successful. The power comes with discipline so we use it with self-control, reverence, and restraint as well as with discernment in each application.

Because we have God’s power, love, and discipline, we need not ever be ashamed of the gospel or of God’s ministers. Instead, we are to join Paul and others in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God. The people of the United States are becoming more open in their criticism of Christians, and the ridiculing is becoming more and more severe. But, having the power, love, and discipline of the Lord, we should never be timid nor even give the appearance of being ashamed of the gospel. Hear what Jesus says about someone being ashamed of the gospel: “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:39).

This verse should make us tremble in our boots. The world wants to keep us Christians on our reservation, and many church members are compliant with that worldly desire. The world embraces compartmentalization, but a true Christian is an integrated person with the faith of Jesus filling all of his thoughts and actions. We cannot leave our faith on the reservation, for if someone thinks he can do that, then he had better do a spiritual check according to 2 Corinthians

13:5. Lloyd-Jones (260-269) states that if we have never been ashamed to speak gospel, then our understanding of that gospel message is not very clear. The gospel is not a philosophy; rather, it is a fact about the life of a carpenter who was nailed to the cross for it. This fact is foolishness to the world and a stumbling block to the Jew (1 Cor 1:23). The gospel is always foolish to the natural man who loves philosophy. A natural man reading the Sermon on the Mount or some of the statements of Jesus might say it is wonderful and something toward which he aspires, as did a well-known man recently. But to a Christian the words bring tears as he understands what it means to be poor in spirit.

I can think of a few times when I have been ashamed of the gospel, and such memories still make me blush. I recall one particular good moment, however. One time the president of a chapter of a national honorary society asked me to pray at the yearly banquet, but told me that I could not mention the name “Jesus Christ.” I told the president of this chapter that it was impossible for me to pray without praying in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only through Him that we have access to God the Father. So someone else was asked to “pray.” I knew the person who prayed and was ashamed of him for agreeing to such a “prayer.” Three excellent books on prayer are listed in the reference section by the authors: Morgan (6), Hand (7), Spear (8).

Persecutions against Christians will become more and more frequent and more and more blatant, so we may as well be prepared to suffer also. To help us meet such challenges, let us remember the reasons we are not ashamed of the gospel. Lloyd-Jones (2) and Boice (1) mention the following eight reasons, which provide a good start. If we keep these reasons paramount in our minds, enduring tough times without showing shame for the gospel will be easier.

1. The Gospel is “Good News”

People can be ashamed of a cousin, who is a thrice-convicted burglar, and of an aunt, who is a prostitute in New Orleans, but the gospel is indeed “Good News” to those separated from God by sin. To the person cursing at us or gossiping about our neighbor, this can be the best news he or she ever heard. Why should we be ashamed of sharing a concept that can free people from their sin and put them in a right relationship with God? I think a good way to think of the gospel is that it is God’s Only Salvation Promise Executed Lovingly.

2. The Gospel is the Way of Salvation

This interacts with point number 1. Without the gospel, there is no hope for anyone today or in the future. People often ask us, “How are you doing?” and we might reply, “I’m not feeling too well today.” Then they often will say, “Beats the alternative!” and we may say to the contrary, “Not for me!” That brief interplay can lead into a meaningful discussion, because we should really rather be dead and with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), even though we know that God has work for us to do here.

What does salvation mean? It means being saved from the wrath of God. John 3:36 says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Without the gospel being applied to the life of any person, that person will die and face the wrath of Almighty, Holy God. That very wrath of a vengeful God is what they can be saved from!

3. The Gospel is God’s Way of Salvation

This is really good news! If we were to depend upon man’s way of salvation, which methods of which man would they be? Will good works or a brilliant mind working out some way to please God save us? Paul tells us the answer later in this great book: “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

The “man who wills” would be the brilliant thinking of someone and “the man who runs” would be the person doing works. We see that none of these methods will save us from the wrath of God. Only Jesus Christ can save us from the wrath of God: “. . . and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thes. 1:10).

4. The Gospel is the Power of God

Note that in Romans 1:16 Paul says “it is the power of God for salvation,” and “it” is the gospel. He does not say that it is *about* the power of God for salvation, but that it *is* the power of God for salvation. That means that wherever the gospel is spread, God is at work bringing people into His kingdom. The gospel is, of course, the word of the cross, and Paul tells us elsewhere about this power of God: “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

This same power of God, which raised us from being spiritually dead, is also protecting us forever as we wait for the last time:

1 Pet. 1:3–5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

5. The Gospel is for Everyone Who Believes

Paul said “everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The gospel is not just for the elite, or just for men, or just for white people, or just for the wise, etc. As stated in

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” [emphasis added].

Of course, as we have discussed many times, the only people who will believe and be saved are those who have been born again and given faith (the enabling power of God) so that they can believe. Faith is not synonymous with belief or trust. Faith is the cause, and belief and trust are the effects. None of us can possibly know whom God has chosen to be born again at some particular moment in time, so we should always be ready to unleash the power of the gospel to anyone and anywhere!

6. The Gospel is Salvation Revealed to Sinners

The gospel is God’s revelation to His children. This wonderful salvation *has* to be revealed. Remember, we do not go to a mountaintop searching for wisdom from some earthly guru. This plan of salvation for everyone is a revealed salvation from Holy God Himself. We read about this in the Gospel of John:

John 1:9–13 There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John really nailed it with verse 13! Note in John 1:13 that we see three possibilities that **do not** lead to someone being a child of God: **family history** (born not of blood), **works** (the will of the flesh), and **some man-developed plan of salvation** (nor of the will of man). Children of God are born again only by the power of God.

The gospel was first clearly revealed in Jesus about 2000 years ago, and today it is still being revealed to people because “God has no grandchildren.” One being born into a Christian family does not guarantee the person will become a child of God. Each child of God still has to be born again individually. This plan continues until God calls it to an end.

7. The Gospel is Righteousness from God

This statement is given by Paul in Romans 1:17: “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” Note this revelation is “the” righteousness from God. In ourselves, we have absolutely no righteousness, as Paul is going to make very clear soon in Romans chapter 3, so any righteousness we obtain has to be “from” God.

8. The Gospel is from Faith to Faith

There are many interpretations of what Paul meant by this phrase. To be consistent with the true meaning of faith, however, Paul would have to mean that the gospel is passed from each person receiving faith to others for whom God intends to have “a measure of faith.” It thus behooves us to never be ashamed of the gospel, but to always be ready to defend our faith to an unbelieving world, for we cannot know the cascading result that can occur from our obedience.

9. The Gospel Produces Righteous People Living by Faith

Permit someone of much less eminence than either Jim Boice or Lloyd-Jones to add one more reason for us not to be ashamed of the gospel. Paul said in Romans 1:17: “But the righteous man shall live by faith,” and this is a very important for us to remember as we live and are not ashamed of the gospel. The gospel is the center of our worldview, and it affects every aspect of our integrated life, so we certainly should not be ashamed of what is the very core of our existence.

As we walk in a sinful world, let us keep all nine of these reasons in our minds so that when situations occur that might result in a shameful response, we will not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 1:17 became the foundation of all the doctrines Martin Luther taught: “The righteous man shall live by faith.” This verse states that the only way to righteousness before Holy God is by faith, and that is a gift of God. Luther later stood before a tribunal and was asked to recant his writings based upon this verse. He said his famous words that became the foundation of The Protestant Reformation⁴: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning—unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted—and unless they thus render by conscience bound by the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience.” Then, looking around at the ones who held his life in their hands, he said, “Here I stand. I can do no other. May God help me. Amen.” These thrilling words still cheer our hearts four-and-a-half centuries later. May God help us all to never, in any way, be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Human Race in Ruin

Now we begin to look at the state of humanity before the totally holy God, and the picture is not pretty. This proclamation by God will continue until Romans 4. For quite a few pages, we are going to learn more about human history and human nature from God’s perspective that is called noumenological as opposed to a phenomenological perspective. Paul reveals this lesson to us in three parts:

- God’s case against the Pagan Man: Romans 1:18–32
- God’s case against the Moral Man: Romans 2:1–16

⁴ See http://inonom.com.ar/task/html/7_-_luther_before_the_diet.html for this famous statement.

- God’s case against the Religious Man: Romans 2:17–3:8

The bottom line is that all who have not been born again and given faith so that they can believe in Jesus Christ are in sin and under the wrath of God. Such people are totally helpless and hopeless unless God acts first in regeneration according to John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

The Angry God

Romans 1:18–20

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

In these verses, we are reminded of John 3:36 quoted above. People do not like to hear about the wrath of God because they would much rather hear about the love of God. Certainly God is love; but God is also holy, holy, holy, and the holiness of God demands justice before His court because, ultimately, all sin is against God as stated by David: “Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge” (Ps. 51:4).

We need to tell people that God’s wrath is abiding on those who are not yet His children. That wrath is revealed from heaven, yet in many churches the leaders are trying to hide that wrath from visitors and members alike. After all, talking about the wrath of God may make people feel uncomfortable, and they might not come back to the church. Instead, the leaders talk about how God loves everyone and wants everyone to have a wonderful life filled with happiness and prosperity. Paul also told us that a time will come, and it certainly seems to be here in the United States, when people will not want to hear the truth: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

But God reveals His wrath from heaven. God’s wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. The word “wrath” is used 184 times in the Bible. It is used 147 times in the Old Testament and 37 times in the New Testament. Perhaps because the word is used less in the New Testament, people rationalize that the Old Testament reveals God in His wrath and the New Testament reveals God in His love.

There is some truth in that statement if we realize God is immutable, and the total revelation of God is that He is absolutely holy and also the absolute definition of love, as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. But this total revelation of God is not what has been generally shown to the entire world, according to Paul.

There are two distinct revelations of God. One is called **general revelation** and the other is called **special revelation**. In these verses, Paul is referring to the general revelation of God—the one for all people everywhere.

Certainly, the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness has been clearly revealed in the history of the Old Testament; also revealed is the suppression of the truth by people in their unrighteousness. There is a great similarity between the verses in Romans and those in the Old Testament in Psalm 19:

Ps. 19:1–6 (For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.

This revelation in creation is also general revelation, so that nobody anywhere has any right to say that he or she did not know about God, as Paul says in Romans 1:19–20. But people generally do not want to follow this revelation to its obvious conclusion: that there is indeed a Creator, because then they will have to contemplate the attributes of this Creator and be accountable for their sins.

God has given – only to His people – His *special* revelation: that He is indeed the Creator, that He is also holy, and that we are absolutely unholy. Then God especially reveals to His chosen people the fact that He has prepared the only way His holy justice can be exercised *and* through which we can obtain forgiveness and the holiness of God. The process of the wrath of God for our sins being endured by Jesus, and the righteousness of Jesus being placed into our account before God, is called double imputation, and that is part of the special revelation that perhaps not all readers of this article have yet obtained.

Instead of trying to follow the path where general revelation leads, people will suppress the truth in their unrighteousness, not in their ignorance, as we are going to see clearly in the verses that follow. But remember, on Judgment Day, nobody will have an excuse, because God has clearly revealed Himself by His creation, which also includes each human being created with a conscience. God's wrath is revealed in the consequences of the sinful acts of man and in the destructive forces of nature that He allows to rage seemingly uncontrolled in the world. God is sovereign over all events, even though this is often very difficult for us to understand. God's

wrath will also be clearly revealed in the last Day of Judgment as stated in the book of Revelation.

One other point needs to be made here. The people of Rome in Paul's day had no excuse, but compare them to the people of today—especially the people in the United States. Here we have thousands of churches, TV, radio, Web sites, books, and numerous other ways God reveals Himself to people. We can point to the Billy Graham Crusades, where the gospel message was presented in a very simple form to millions. Yet very few seem to respond to the many ways in which God is revealed to people in this country.

Note also from John 3:36 that not all religions lead to the same God as some people teach. God has revealed Himself in many ways to all people through general revelation, but not all religious paths lead to God, for there is only one God. This exclusive nature of Christianity is an abomination to those who are not Christians. The people of the United States and other places where the gospel has been presented so clearly in so many different ways will be under very strict judgment.

Heb. 2:2–4 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

Consequences of Unbelief

Romans 1:21

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Atheists

Verses 19, 20, and 21 of Romans are rather remarkable. Why, with the presence of God clearly revealed to the entire world, would we still have atheists among us? There are several reasons we can readily understand:

- God is holy, holy, holy. Holiness is God's major attribute, and to come close to holiness makes an unholy person miserable. Unholy people hate God because being around His holiness reveals their unholiness, and there is nothing they can do about it. Atheists hate God.
- God is Omniscient. God is the absolute "know it all"! People do not like know-it-all types, and God is the ultimate example of such an entity. Being around such a person reveals other people's lack of knowledge, and God knows everything. Our puny theories

about the universe will one day be revealed for what they are: pitiful attempts by finite people trying to explain the infinite. Atheists hate God.

- God is Omnipresent. They cannot hide from God. Their sins committed in the most far-off places are all seen by Him. They cannot sin without God seeing what they are doing. How would a thief feel if the same police officer showed up everywhere the thief tried to steal something? He would hate the police officer. Atheists hate God.
- God is Sovereign. This characteristic of God is particularly problematic to the non-Christian, and especially to atheists. People inherently resist authority. They speed because they do not think they have to obey laws. They start when young pushing the authority of parents, and some get worse as they get older. But God is absolutely sovereign over everything. Nothing can harm a child of God without God permitting it. Such thoughts of an absolutely sovereign God are very comforting to His children, but absolutely resisted by others. Atheists hate God.
- God is Immutable or unchanging and cannot be persuaded to change. God does not need us to help Him understand anything, because He will always be omniscient. Humankind is useless to God, and non-believers hate that! They want to have a part in deciding, understanding, and developing their universe. Atheists hate God!

Because they hate God so much, even though a lot of their reasons may be subconscious, they create their own versions of reality and refuse to allow God into that reality. They probably make up some other kind of god, but they certainly want no part of the real God. All Christians have felt that hate seemingly directed at us. But remember, their hate is really directed at God. We believers do well to get out of the way and let God deal with it.

Fools

Romans 1:22

Professing to be wise, they became fools

Nobody likes to use the word “fool,” but God uses it several times in the Bible to refer to people who have openly rejected Him. There are basically three failures of mankind in dealing with God. First, they have suppressed the truth about God; second, they have refused to glorify or worship God; and third, they have forgotten to be thankful. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (9) said of man, “If he is not stupid, he is monstrously ungrateful! He is phenomenally ungrateful. If in fact, I believe that the best definition of man is the ungrateful biped.”

Boice (2) points out that these three actions are actually linked together. Having rejected the truth about God, there is no need to show the true worth of God (worship) and certainly no need to be thankful. Man has taken the attributes that belong to God and ascribed them to various man-made idols. .

From the beginning of time, God has openly revealed Himself to the entire world (general revelation). However, sinful man has suppressed this truth about God and substituted his vain theories as a substitute god as Scripture teaches: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

This deception to which Paul refers is the substitute that “dead people” (those who have not been born again and hence are spiritually dead) have created in their minds. The vain theories they develop are indeed “according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ,” indicating a vain substitution. Our school systems are full of such vain substitutions, as the Darwinian theories of evolution have led to Darwinian biology, Darwinian sociology, and Darwinian psychology. Such substitutions have led our country to the conclusion that there are no evil people, only sick people. Christians who insist that homosexuality is a sin against God are considered judgmental, because the world says homosexuality is just an alternate lifestyle. We hear “everybody is basically good,” and any actions deemed unlawful are caused by their surroundings. They say if we can just create a perfect environment, then there would be no need for laws. Of course, we respond that there once *was* a perfect environment—the garden of Eden—but they say that it was just a legendary place.

There is a rather new categorization of people called “secularists.” This word is defined by www.thefreedictionary.com as “an advocate of secularism, which advocates that religion should be excluded from government and education.” Why do we often hear secularists say, “Everybody is basically good”? Seemingly, such a statement is made because people of the world do not want to face the fact that there is a righteous God and they cannot measure up to His standards. By saying that “everybody is basically good,” they also say they are good, and such a conclusion gives them “peace,” although it is not a lasting peace. They really hate God, even though they cannot admit His existence, and they hate Christians.

Adam and Eve were in a perfect environment, however, and they were determined to be autonomous beings. They sinned against God by disobeying His only law. We would have done the same thing, which is why we speak of Adam as our representative. He acted very foolishly, as we would have also. We still act foolishly every day. We Christians are considered by many to be unstable because we actually believe in the Bible as the Word of God and that Jesus was and is God. In some countries, if a physician makes such a claim, his or her license to practice medicine may be revoked, for he may be judged to be mentally unstable.

The word “fool” in the Greek language not only means to act with intellectual folly, but also to be guilty of moral folly or wickedness. This is why “folly” is so often used in the Bible in connection with rejecting God. For references, check out Psalm 14:1 and Romans 1:22. Thus, the word “folly” refers to a willful rejection of whichever finite aspects of God we are capable of knowing. Thus, the person who rejects God is not only guilty of great sin, but that person is also a hypocrite as he or she exalts ridiculous claims of great wisdom in understanding the universe. Robert Brow (10) studied the popular idea of the evolution of religion and came to the conclusion that what we observe in anthropology is not an evolution, but rather a “de-evolution.”

He said we started out as monotheists and then progressed to polytheists. People started out worshiping the awesome Creator of the universe and then created many lower gods they could come to without such fear, and this ushered in the era of priests. We Christians worship the awesome Creator of the universe through our one High Priest, Jesus Christ. But those who have rejected this truth have created such a maze of half-truths that even they are not capable of correctly following their own logic to some sort of meaningful conclusion.

The correct conclusion of evolutionism is that man is only a bug and whatever the bug does is all right because there is no ultimate truth. The fact that one bug can destroy another bug is of no ultimate importance. The correct conclusion is then total chaos and the people we call sociopaths are actually the correct product of evolutionism. Our legal definition of insanity (the inability to determine right from wrong) is also actually a product of evolutionism, because that theory leads logically to the conclusion that there is no absolute right and wrong, only what one may determine in one's own mind. We certainly live in a fallen world, and if anyone ever actually understands the logical conclusion of evolutionism, it will be clear that we also live in an insane world as taught in Scripture: "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead" (Eccl. 9:3).

Psychologists study the sequence of events that occurs following a person's encounter with a trauma: repression and substitution. This is exactly what Paul is describing in Romans 1:21–32. The actual existence of God as proclaimed by the universe and all it contains is a huge traumatic event whenever a person lets such an actuality penetrate his or her conscience. The believer reacts to this revelation by coming to God through accepting the works of our mediator, Jesus Christ. The heathen reacts to this trauma by repressing it and substituting other religions. The existence of many religions throughout the world is not evidence that everyone is seeking God; it is actually evidence that many are running from God. Take a few minutes to think about that last sentence.

People talk about seeking the truth through nature, but they are actually substituting a worship of nature for worshiping the Creator of nature. This is most assuredly the act of a fool.

False Glory

Romans 1:23

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Verse 23 is very interesting. It addresses what we consider holy and especially how we observe holy days (holidays). Someone told me a few years ago that the corruptible man could be Santa Claus, the birds could be the turkey at Thanksgiving, the four-footed creature could be the Easter bunny, and crawling creatures could represent Halloween! I like those analogies. The point being, of course, that these substitutes have corrupted our worship at Christmas, our

thanking God for giving us this country, our worship of Jesus on Resurrection Sunday, and our time for praising God and “all saints” at Halloween. Organizations no longer speak of Christmas, but rather refer to the holiday as the Winter Break. Many Christians participate in all of these corruptions with eyes wide open. Our sinning is particularly ominous since we should know better. Instead, we need to give our celebrations some deep thought, Scripture searching, and prayer, and we need to do it right now! Churches participate in Easter egg hunts, facilitating the substitution of the Easter bunny for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. At Halloween, some churches have children dress as one of the Reformers and call it Reformation Night. It is good to have our children know more about the Reformers, but is it proper to have such as a substitution for dressing as witches? Halloween should be totally rejected by the church; we need no substitution for it.

In the United States, sharing a turkey at Thanksgiving with family and friends is not wrong, but how about all the trappings that go with it as a secular celebration? We Christians should be praising the Lord all the time for the fact that we were born in the United States, and having a day of special thanksgiving and praise of the Lord for our country is not a bad idea. However, we spend the time we should be honoring God watching football games played on that day. People have said that football is the national religion of America, and considering the crowds that watch and rave over the football games, there may be a lot of truth in that statement.

God Giving Them Up

Romans 1:24–28

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

In Romans 1:24–28, we begin to see how God has released His wrath upon humanity in its sinful state. “God gave them over” occurs in verses 24, 26, and 28. Ironically, God’s wrath is, in essence, His giving man exactly what he wants. Mankind has rejected the existence of God and wants to live totally absent from God, and that is what God allows to happen. The consequences of God’s absence are awful, and if God did not continue to work in a general way to some extent, mankind would totally be extinct by now. We see the consequences of man without God every day in our newspapers and on TV. Christians also suffer from the

consequences of the sinful lives of those who have rejected God. Praise God that He is sovereign over all things and that we can absolutely trust in the following verses:

Rom. 8:28–29 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.

God allows the evil in the hearts of men to go forth in the world, to accomplish His good, and He is still sovereign. We are told this many times in Scripture (the account of Joseph in the Old Testament is an excellent example). The history of the world is a study of how mankind has fallen further and further as God has been rejected and, consequently, He has allowed mankind to follow such a downward path. We are not evolving into some perfect, benevolent, loving, and totally unselfish being. We are falling into the logical conclusion of atheism or evolutionism. Today we see much of this in sins being exposed among people who were assumed to be religious, political, and industrial leaders.

The Bible clearly communicates the source of evil to us, and we can see this in the following verses:

- Matt. 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.
- Matt. 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.
- Luke 6:45 The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

God has indeed given these people over, but His love and protection of His people remains. It is hard for us to imagine how bad the world could be, as it once was, as stated in the following: “Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Such a time will come again:

Luke 17:26–27 And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.

Why is there suddenly such an outcry against our corrupt leaders? Certainly there should be an outcry from Christians because God’s laws have been broken and people have been hurt. But the world is also very indignant about most of these cases. It is not that the world has

suddenly developed a love for God's law; their anger often stems from a personal impact such as losing money. Certainly industrial corruption goes on now and has been going on for some time, but as long as none of the investors are losing money, we do not hear much about such corruption. In addition, the primary reason people are so upset about the Catholic priests caught in serious sin is that the world loves to see the church acting in a hypocritical manner; otherwise, sinful people feel judged. Now with so much church hypocrisy revealed, the world can say, "They are not any better than we are, so we do not have to think about their criticism of us." So often, the people of the world believe that we Christians are prideful and think we are so much better than they are, and they love to see a Christian fall into sin.

Romans 1:32 concludes that not only did man know what he was doing was wrong, he even approved of others who practiced these sins. Why is there such a fight to get the Ten Commandments out of the public place? (By the way, for the Christian, there are eleven commandments if we maintain the Sabbath and add Jesus' commandment found in John 13:34. Can you name them all?) The world wants evidence for God repressed and replaced. Many people in the United States now approve of the right for anyone to have any sort of sexual lifestyle he or she desires. People parade their sins in the streets. Some churches allow the ordination of homosexual priests and pastors. The world does not want a large document in a public place that states the basic laws of God. The Ten Commandments are a horrifying indictment to the lifestyles these people have chosen, and they are fighting to get them out of public places. They do not want a document publicly displayed that condemns their actions. We have returned to a time spoken of in the Old Testament: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

How terrifying this situation has become! The world has rejected Jesus as King, and men are doing what is right in their eyes. But this "right" is not based upon any external, unchanging basis of right and wrong. Rather what is "right" to one person may be "wrong" to another, and such a situation is judged acceptable since there is no worldly absolute standard for right and wrong. Since the world rejects such an external judgment, people do whatever they want to do and call it right. The only time something is "wrong" is when someone gets caught doing what that person's society has determined to be "wrong." But in a few years, society will probably change its collective mind about some particular act being wrong, because it becomes a commonplace act and brings personal pleasure. This is referred to as morality on "shifting sand." Remember that morality is what some particular societal group decides is acceptable personal behavior, and what is morally wrong today could become morally right tomorrow. We have seen this change happening for some time in our country.

Instead of moral behavior, we need ethical behavior, not based upon the preferences of a particular group of people, but based instead upon an external standard, such as the Word of God. But the fallen world rejects these ethics and substitutes their moral rules that change routinely. The world also substitutes the word "ethics" for the word "morality." Universities have Centers for Ethics, but they are really trying to apply current morality to situations, resulting in what is known as situational morality. There is no such thing as situational ethics,

because ethical standards are fixed and not dependent upon situations. It must be terribly frustrating to work in a field that has no fixed foundation! Can we imagine working in physics without any fixed laws? Such situations are further evidence for the fact that we live in an insane world—a world that acknowledges no fixed definition for right and wrong, but one which allows for an insanity plea in legal cases when someone is judged unable to differentiate between right and wrong! I can only say “Maranatha (come Lord Jesus)!”

A Catalog of Vices

Romans 1:29–31

... being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

We will conclude our study of Romans 1 by looking at the above verses where Paul catalogs the vices of the people who have rejected God and whom God has given over to this way of life. John Gerstner calls these verses “lifting the lid on hell.” (11). This is the world we live in, and we should be compelled daily to repeat the following verses to help us cope with our surroundings:

James 4:7–10 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

We will follow Paul’s outline of these vices and add some comments. He categorizes these sins into twenty-one types. In verse 29, we find the first four listed as follows:

1. All unrighteousness

Of course, God defines righteousness, so this term encompasses all that is against God. The items below are particular aspects of this unrighteousness.

2. Wickedness

Here again is a word that encompasses all that is against God. The people in question are totally depraved, which does not mean they are as sinful as they could possibly be, but rather that all aspects of their being are evil. Praise God, the human race is not as depraved as it could possibly be.

3. Greed

This is the desire to improve oneself in the eyes of the world, at any expense to other people. Greedy people want to get all they can, with no concern for the welfare of others (like the character “Scrooge” in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*).

4. Evil

This word describes a person who takes pleasure in vicious actions against other people. He has no desire to follow any of God’s commands and even despises them. He is totally self-centered in all of his thoughts and actions.

5. Full of Envy

Envy is certainly related to greed and evil. Being full of envy means being consumed with desire to have more than others have. The object of the envy could be material possessions, power, or even wanting to be recognized as the most popular and successful pastor in the region. A person who is “full of envy” could be easily led into many evil and selfish actions.

6. Murder

This is what we would call first-degree murder—the premeditated killing another human being with no just cause. Murder often flows from envy. In Matthew 5:21–22, Jesus even showed us that murder also includes what is in one’s heart toward others.

7. Strife

This is related to “debate,” as it implies contention and quarreling, which also often results from envying someone or in prideful self-promotion.

8. Deceit

Unfortunately, much of the business of the world is carried out using this form of evil. People acting in deceit misrepresent something for the purpose of material gain. In 2002–2003 and again in 2009, we saw much of the deceit of business leaders unveiled to the unfortunate monetary loss of many other unsuspecting people. God hates lying (Proverbs 12:22).

9. Malice

People with this trait are customarily out to harm others. Malice often results when someone thinks someone else has harmed him or her in some way, and so he or she wants to “get back” at the person with the intent to cause harm. Christians are to forgive and know that revenge belongs only to God (Rom. 12:19).

10. Gossips

Gossips are involved in slanderous talk against others with the aim of destroying their reputation. This secretive talk is not based upon any evidence that the person has done

anything the gossip has said. It is so often the case to see people huddled about a water cooler or coffee center gossiping about their boss or some other worker. Gossip can ruin someone quickly. Christians are to control their speech (James 3:5-8).

11. Slanderers

Slander is done openly, as opposed to gossip, which is done silently. The slanderer is openly trying to defame someone, whereas the gossip is a bit of a coward in that the talk is not done openly.

12. Haters of God

More and more often, we hear the hyphenated word involving damning God. It is an awful word, but it expresses the deep-seated hate that all sinners have toward God. If it were not for God, there would be no one to judge their actions, and they could act with total disregard for any possibility of ever being accountable.

13. Insolent

Insolence means “pride,” but in a harmful way toward someone. Pride is at the root of all insolence. An insolent person often says, “That rule does not apply to me for I can do whatever I want to do,” or maybe, “I don’t care.” Such an attitude often leads to other openly sinful actions toward others.

14. Arrogant

An arrogant person is usually hiding a great inferiority complex. It manifests itself by “puffing up” oneself and not showing any desire to communicate with “lower” people. Arrogant people act as if they are vastly superior to everyone else and therefore deserve the very best of everything. Such a person could become insolent and a slanderer as he tries to boost his reputation.

15. Boastful

Pride is also at the root of boastfulness. Boastful people seek admiration from others by claiming to be someone they are not or by claiming to have something they do not have. Boasting demands admiration that is not deserved.

16. Inventors of Evil

Such people provoke God to anger by their inventions of evil, according to Psalm 106:29. It seems like there should be enough evil in the world to keep those who want to be evil plenty busy. But some people are not satisfied with “normal evil” and thus invent ways they can express their creativity in the ways of evil, such as those who create computer “worms” or “viruses” for the purpose of destroying another’s property. The media has invented all kinds of evil in recent years.

17. Disobedient to Parents

Obedying one's parents is the fifth of the Ten Commandments, and yet disobedience to parental authority seems rampant in our society today. Paul also repeated this command in several places:

- Eph. 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- Col. 3:20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

But we should also read the following fearfully:

2 Tim. 3:1–5 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

Note that 2 Timothy 3:2 says that being disobedient to parents is one of signs of the last days. Certainly, we must be in these “last days.” Some people refer to the “last days” as the time after Christ, and other people refer to them as the days immediately before Jesus returns. Whatever your eschatology, we are currently living in the days described by these verses. Note that many of these descriptions are also in the twenty-one evil descriptions we are now studying.

18. Without Understanding

Some translations use “senseless” for this phrase, which actually does not refer to a person with no knowledge of worldly understanding. A person can be one of the leading physicists in the world and be “without understanding” as is meant here, for the term actually means someone who is totally without any understanding of true spiritual knowledge. Paul warned people that they should know much about “real knowledge,” again referring to spiritual knowledge: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.” (Phil. 1:9)

Many people today who are quite knowledgeable about worldly affairs are also very ignorant of “real knowledge.” Many very bright and worldly knowledgeable people have gone to their grave rich in worldly knowledge but bankrupt in real knowledge. Such people will have a very rude awakening in the afterworld.

19. Untrustworthy

This is sometimes translated “faithless.” Such faithlessness is not referring to God-given faith, so we will use the translation “untrustworthy.” These people cannot be depended upon to keep their word in worldly affairs. They do not keep appointments. They break trusts by “stabbing someone in the back.” Christians have clear guidelines in this matter:

- Matt. 5:37 But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”; and anything beyond these is of evil.
- James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

20. Unloving

This word literally means “without any natural affection.” We see plenty of the results of unloving people in the world today as mothers desert their children, as fathers abandon their families, and as children leave safe homes for the evil of the world.

21. Unmerciful

This literally means a person who shows no mercy to others. We often see such manifestations of this as children kill other children in schools or on the playgrounds. We see such results in the actions of terrorists who show no mercy to anyone. We see such actions by corporate executives working out their greed.

What a horrible list! But we see it all today in the newspapers, magazines, on TV, on the web, and everywhere else. And much to our horror, we can even see these sinful traits in us! If it were not for the mercy of God, any human being could exhibit any or all of these sins. We often do not truly realize the holiness of God and the sinfulness of ourselves. It is only by the grace of God and the God-fearing actions of ourselves that we can grow in sanctification here on Earth while we are alive. We must always allow God to search our hearts and show us what we must do to grow in holiness.

- Ps. 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts.
- Jer. 17:10 “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.”

Also, remember that justification is totally an act of God. Before God we Christians are no more holy today than we were when we were saved (see the study on Ephesians) because when we were born again, God gave to us, the holiness of Jesus Christ. But since then, we have been cooperating with God to clean up our acts here and make us more like Jesus (sanctification).

Total sanctification—glorification—only occurs after Christians die, but all are commanded to work toward it here and now.

Unfortunately, when we look at the last verse of this first chapter, we understand something that makes the previous list even more horrible.

Practice of Sin

Romans 1:32

and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

These last few verses should make us want to hide in a closet somewhere! Recently, a religious denomination put the stamp of approval on homosexual priests; churches approve “gay marriages”; our courts approve of killing babies while they are still in the womb (over 1.5 million a year in the United States, mostly just for the convenience of the mothers); some states legalize suicide with a doctor’s help. The following quote from Judges, which we have looked at before, describes us very well today: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

The comparison of humanity today with the story of Nebuchadnezzar as expounded by Boice (12) is revealing. Nebuchadnezzar thought that he had achieved greatness: “The king reflected and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’” (Dan. 4:30).

Notice he did not give credit to God Almighty or to his pagan god, but only to himself. He did not realize that God used him as an instrument of judgment against His disobedient people. God then showed Nebuchadnezzar what he really was in Daniel 4:33 when He brought insanity to Nebuchadnezzar and caused him to act as a beast in the field. This shows us what really happens when man rejects God and follows his own ways. The evolutionists say man is just an animal, but God says man is only like an animal when he rejects God.

Is there a limit to what man will do? We certainly cannot see any. It seemed humanity reached a limit when it declared that pornography is okay but child pornography is not. Great markets exist, however, for such exploitation of children, and such horrible exploitation would not exist without a market. Thus, it seems there is no lower rung on the ladder except for hell itself.

“But for the grace of God go I” could be said by all of us regarding the seemingly endless evil in the world. As Christians, however, we do have the grace of God, which means for us the story is much different. At this point, we should be reminded of the following two verses:

Rom. 1:16–17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it

the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.

Praise the Lord! The question for all Christians is not “How low can we go?” but “How high can we go?” As we are obedient, and with the grace of God, we grow more like Christ in our daily walks and eventually, we all end in perfection: in heaven with Him. A great tape series by John Gerstner¹³ is highly recommended for an overview of some giants of the Christian faith.

Thus, we finally attain the title of this chapter: “Becoming More Christ-like Every Day.”