

# THE GOSPEL OF GOD: Propositions on the Book of Romans

by Ron Kangas

Although the book of Romans has sixteen chapters, believers rarely have all these chapters in their theology, practice, experience, and living. Instead, there is the widespread, almost universal, tendency to concentrate on selected portions of this book and to neglect or ignore other portions that embody crucial points of truth. The result is that, in actuality, theologians, preachers, and ordinary believers have a version of Romans that is truncated and incomplete. For some who fail to advance beyond chapter five, Romans is a book on justification by faith; for others, Romans is focused on sanctification (5:12—8:13) or on God's sovereignty and authority in His selection (9:1—11:36) or on the concept of the Body of Christ (12:1-21). Born out of a concern with such a deficiency, this article will attempt to set forth, in a series of propositions, a number of crucial points of the truth revealed in this Epistle. As each proposition is presented and concisely explained, the method used here will be simple exposition—perhaps, in a sense, even declaration—but not argumentation. The rationale for this approach is that the goal of this essay is not to “prove” anything to the reader but, more modestly, to set forth an array of crucial points in Romans for thoughtful consideration by the serious, open-minded reader.

## The Subject of Romans

*The subject of Romans is the gospel of God concerning His Son.* That this is in fact the subject is made evident by Paul's frequent use of the word *gospel*. He was “separated unto the gospel of God” (1:1); he served God “in the gospel of His Son” (v. 9); he was “ready to announce the gospel” to those who were in Rome (v. 15); he was “not ashamed of the gospel,” which is “the power of God unto salvation” (v. 16); “God judges the secrets of men according to my gospel” (2:16); “not all have obeyed the gospel” (10:16); “according to the gospel they [Israel] are enemies” (11:28); Paul was “a laboring priest of the gospel of God” (15:16); he “fully preached the gospel of Christ” (v. 9) as one “aspiring to announce the gospel” (v. 20); God is “able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the

proclamation of Jesus Christ” (16:25). From the mention of *gospel* in Romans we learn that, in Paul's view, the gospel is the proclamation of Jesus Christ, for “the gospel of God concerns the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. This wonderful person has two natures—the divine nature (1:4) and the human nature (v. 3), divinity and humanity” (Recovery Version, 1:3, note 1).

Since the gospel of God unfolded in Romans concerns the Son of God, we should expect that this Epistle will speak of the Son in a particular way, and this is surely the case. In 8:3 Paul says, “For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” If we consider this verse in light of John 3:14-16, we will realize that the Son is the only begotten Son in the eternal Godhead, the One who is in the bosom of the Father (1:18), who co-exists and coinheres as God with the Father and the Spirit, the One who had glory with the Father “before the world was” (17:5). In fulfillment of the prophecies in Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6, the Father gave the Son through the process of incarnation (John 1:14) in which something “of the Holy Spirit” was “begotten” in Mary (Matt. 1:20), and “the holy thing” born of her was called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). This is Jesus, the unique God-man, the mingling of divinity and humanity in one wonderful person. Eventually, this God-man, as the Lamb of God (John 1:29), died on the cross for our redemption. God “did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32) when He “was delivered for our offenses” (4:25).

God sent “His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin” (8:3). The Lord Jesus did not know sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and in Him there was no sin. Fallen humanity, however, is a flesh of sin, a constitution of sin as the evil nature of Satan which had been injected into humankind. Although the Word became flesh—a human being of flesh in the old creation—He did not become the flesh of sin. Rather, He was in *the likeness* of the flesh of

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sin, having the element of the flesh but not having the nature of sin in the flesh. Because He was in the likeness of the flesh of sin, He could fulfill the type of the bronze serpent, and, as our Substitute in His vicarious death, provide the means for God to condemn sin in the flesh. The gospel of God concerns the Son who came in the likeness of the flesh of sin and died a redemptive death. In essence, this is God becoming man for our redemption.

**I**n Romans 1:3-4 we see another aspect of the Son of God. The gospel of God is concerning His Son, “who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Son of God sent by God in 8:3 came, with respect to His humanity, out of the seed of David in 1:3. “*The seed of David* implies Christ’s human nature. By incarnation, the first step of Christ’s process, God was brought into humanity” (Recovery Version, v. 3, note 4). Whereas verse 3 refers to incarnation, verse 4 speaks of resurrection, for “out of the resurrection of the dead” Jesus Christ was designated the Son of God. This requires careful consideration. Christ already was the Son of God eternally in the Godhead, and He was the One sent by God through incarnation to be “the holy thing” which was called the Son of God. Since He was already the Son of God in the eternal, immutable God and also in His incarnation, what need was there for Him to be designated the Son of God out of resurrection? To answer this question accurately we need to realize that by incarnation Christ, the only begotten Son of God in His divinity, put on an element that was not the Son of God, and that element was humanity. In His resurrection (which, according to Acts 13:33 was a birth), He who always was the Son of God in His divinity became, in and with His humanity, the Son of God in another sense—the firstborn Son of God (Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6). As the only begotten Son, He is the Son of God only in His divinity; as the firstborn Son, He is the Son of God also in His humanity. The Son of God, therefore, is the Son in two aspects—the aspect of the only begotten Son sent as such by God through incarnation and the aspect of the Firstborn designated as such by God through resurrection. The gospel concerning the Son of God is focused on the Son who is both the only begotten Son and the firstborn Son. Only by seeing both aspects of Christ’s divine sonship can we know Him in full and also understand adequately what it means to say that the subject of Romans is the gospel concerning the Son of God:

Before His incarnation Christ, the divine One, already was the Son of God (John 1:18; Rom. 8:3). By incarnation He put on an element, the human flesh, which had nothing to do with divinity; that part of Him needed to

be sanctified and uplifted by passing through death and resurrection. By resurrection His human nature was sanctified, uplifted, and transformed. Hence, by resurrection He was designated the Son of God with His humanity (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5). His resurrection was His designation. Now, as the Son of God, He possesses humanity as well as divinity. By incarnation He brought God into man; by resurrection He brought man into God, that is, He brought His humanity into the divine sonship. In this way the only begotten Son of God was made the firstborn Son of God, possessing both divinity and humanity. God is using such a Christ, the firstborn Son, who possesses both divinity and humanity, as the producer and as the prototype, the model, to produce His many sons (8:29-30)—we who have believed in and received His Son. We too will be designated and revealed as the sons of God, as He was in the glory of His resurrection (8:19, 21), and with Him we will express God. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 1)

**A**s the last two sentences of this note indicate, the gospel of God concerning His Son implies God’s intention, His eternal purpose (8:28) to have the firstborn Son reproduced and multiplied (cf. John 12:24) as many sons for His corporate expression. “Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29). *His Son* in this verse denotes not the only begotten Son but the firstborn Son. As the only begotten Son in His eternal deity, Christ is unique—He is the very God (9:5)—and as such He cannot have brothers. God gave His only begotten Son through incarnation and crucifixion. Then in resurrection Christ was born in His humanity (Acts 13:33) with His divinity to be the firstborn Son, who can have, and does have, brothers. In John 20:17 He said to Mary, “Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.” We were brought forth, regenerated, in His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), and He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11). To Christ, we are the many brothers (Rom. 8:29); to God the Father, we are the many sons (Heb. 2:10). The only begotten Son became the firstborn Son to produce many sons:

He was the Father’s only Son, the Father’s individual expression. Through His death and resurrection the Father’s only begotten Son became the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). His many brothers are the many sons of God and are the church (Heb. 2:10-12), a corporate expression of God the Father in the Son. This is God’s ultimate intention. The many brothers are the propagation of the Father’s life and the multiplication of the Son in the divine life. Hence, in the Lord’s resurrection God’s eternal purpose is fulfilled. (Recovery Version, John 20:17, note 2)

Whereas Christ's incarnation was a matter of God becoming man for our redemption, Christ's resurrection was a matter of man—the seed of David according to the flesh—becoming God for God's expression. The many sons of God, the many brothers of Christ, are the same as God in life, in nature, and in expression but not, of course, in the Godhead or as objects of worship. This means that in a sense that does not imperil the unique Godhead or the unique, unrivalled position of the only begotten Son of God in the Godhead, redeemed human beings may become God in life and in nature. "Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One" (Heb. 2:11). He who sanctifies—Christ as the firstborn Son—and those who are being sanctified—the believers in Christ as the many sons—are all of (lit., out of) One, that is, out of one source, one Father. The gospel of God concerning the Son of God thus includes the only begotten Son, the firstborn Son, and the many sons.

### The Basic Thought of Romans

If we are clear regarding the subject of Romans, we will be able to understand the basic, or central, thought of Romans.

*The basic thought of Romans is that God, in His complete salvation (5:10), is making sinners sons of God to constitute the Body of Christ, which is expressed as local churches.*

After giving a remarkable exposure of and issuing a devastating indictment on fallen humankind, Paul indicates that "all the world" is "under the judgment of God" (3:19). "Out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him" (v. 20). However, through the justification afforded by God in His grace, sinners can be justified, approved, by God in Christ and then, with righteousness as the foundation, can be born of God to become children of God (5:18; 8:16). The more the children of God are saved in Christ's life (5:10), the more they grow and develop into mature sons of God. These sons, mentioned in chapter eight, become the members, the components, of the organic Body of Christ unveiled in chapter twelve. The Body of Christ is expressed as the local churches described in chapter sixteen. In sum, Romans begins with sinners and ends with churches. How marvelous! The sinners are redeemed, justified, and regenerated to become children of God; the children of God grow into sons of God to be members of the Body; and the Body is expressed as local churches. This is the central thought woven into the fabric of the book of Romans.

Three significant components of this basic thought are

sons, the Body, and local churches. Through regeneration we, the believers in Christ, have become children of God (John 3:6; 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2), and "the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). However, the members of the Body of Christ are not children of God but sons of God. Although the Father has begotten many children through regeneration, His goal is to have sons who are the duplication and reproduction of Christ, the firstborn Son of God. In order for God to reach this goal for the fulfillment of His purpose, the children of God must grow and develop into sons of God. This growth and development require God's organic salvation, salvation in the life of God (5:10), which includes sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification (6:19; 12:2; 8:29-30). As we experience each stage of God's salvation in life, we gradually grow in the divine life and develop into mature sons, "eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body" (8:23).

The process of growing from children into sons—the process of sonship—began with the regeneration of our

spirit, and it continues with the transformation of our soul through the renewing of the mind (12:2). Eventually, the process of becoming sons will culminate with the redemption, or transfiguration, of our body. Therefore, with transfiguration the process of becoming sons—a process we may designate by the term "son-izing"—will be complet-

ed. At that time, in practicality and reality Christ will be the Firstborn among many glorified sons of God (Heb. 2:10), who, as the reproduction and multiplication of the firstborn Son, are the same as He in life, nature, and expression.

The sons of God in Romans 8 become the members of the Body of Christ in Romans 12. The expression *the Body of Christ* is not a metaphor—it denotes an organic reality. God's goal in His economy is to have the Body for Christ as His corporate expression; this is the peak of the divine revelation in Romans. It is not God's intention to populate heaven with millions of redeemed human beings, with each one living in a magnificent mansion which the Lord, according to traditional religious notions, is preparing in heaven. Also, it is not God's intention simply to produce a multitude of redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and glorified sons who live independently of one another. God's goal is a corporate entity. In the present age, this corporate entity is the Body of Christ; in eternity, this entity will be the New Jerusalem, the consummation of the Body of Christ. With this goal in view,

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we may, rightly, point out that, according to the unfolding of the divine thought in Romans, redemption is for the imparting of life through regeneration to produce children of God; organic salvation with its various stages is for the children of God to become the sons of God; the sons of God are the members of the Body of Christ; and the Body of Christ is the corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ, the firstborn Son with the believers as the many sons. Thus, we were redeemed and we are being saved in life not for our individual spirituality but for the Body of Christ:

This book tells us that God's full salvation is to make sinners (3:23), even His enemies (5:10), the sons of God (8:14). Through resurrection God designated Christ, who became flesh to be the seed of David, as His Son, that His Son, who is the mingling of divinity and humanity, might be the base and pattern for His making sinners His many sons. It is in the resurrection of His Son, i.e., in the resurrected Son, that God is producing many sons (1 Pet. 1:3) as the many brothers of the Firstborn (8:29), who was resurrected from the dead, and as the members of His Firstborn to constitute the Body of His Firstborn (12:5), which is His fullness (Eph. 1:23), His corporate expression. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:4, note 2)

The Body of Christ is not a mere doctrine; it is a reality in the sight of God. The Body, however, must have its practical expression, and this expression is the local churches. As we compare chapters twelve and sixteen of Romans, we may say with assurance that the Body in chapter twelve is expressed in the local churches in chapter sixteen. However, *expressed in* is not as deep, profound, and significant as *expressed as*. The Body, which is expressed in the local churches, is actually expressed as the local churches. The universal Body of Christ is manifested in a locality as the church of God in that place. All genuine churches are therefore the Body of Christ in its concrete local expression (1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27). Redemption is the procedure, salvation in life is the process, the Body of Christ is the goal, and the local churches are the expressions of the Body. The fact that Romans ends not with a discourse on the Body but with a description of actual local churches indicates that, according to Romans, God desires to bring us all the way from sinners to churches, which are expressions of the Body of Christ. God is making sinners His sons, and these sons are the members of the Body expressed as local churches. This, we say again with deliberate repetition, is the basic thought of the book of Romans.

### **The Power and Characteristics of God Manifested in His Creation**

*God's eternal power and His divine characteristics are manifested in His creation.*

Because that which is known of God is manifest within them, for God manifested it to them. For the invisible things of Him, both His eternal power and divine characteristics, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being perceived by the things made, so that they would be without excuse. (1:19-20)

Concerning the knowledge of God's power and characteristics, humankind is without excuse, for we all can perceive the invisible things of God by observing the visible things created by Him. By looking at the universe and considering it thoughtfully, even scientifically, we can realize that the very existence of the universe bespeaks some kind of extraordinary power, the power upon which the universe is dependent for its existence and continuation. This is the eternal, mighty, unlimited power of God, the Creator, who "calls the things not being as being" (4:17).

The universe manifests not only the eternal power of God but also His personal characteristics. The "divine characteristics," which express God's intrinsic nature, are manifested in God's creation. The Greek word rendered *divine characteristics* is

*theiotes*, denoting God's attributes, which are the special features, the characteristics, as the outward manifestations of God's nature or substance. It is different from *theotes* in Col. 2:9, which denotes God's Godhead and person. The characteristics of God's nature can be verified through the created things; however, the created things cannot manifest God's Godhead and person. Only the living person of Jesus Christ, the Word who is God and who declares God (John 1:1, 18), can express God's Godhead and person, that is, the very God, God Himself. Here, in this chapter, the apostle Paul speaks of the created things verifying God's existence, but what is verified are only the attributes and characteristics of God. In Col. 2:9 he speaks of Christ as the embodiment of God, and what is expressed is the Godhead and God's person, that is, God Himself. (Recovery Version, 1:20, note 1)

### **The Christ Unveiled in Romans**

*The Christ unveiled in Romans is not merely the objective Christ—the Christ who is in the heavens—but also the subjective Christ—the Christ who dwells in us.* Failure to embrace both aspects of Christ leads to an unbalanced theology and a distorted spirituality.

We have seen that God "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (8:32). Now "Christ Jesus who died" and "who was raised" is "at the right hand of God" interceding for us (v. 34). Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension are all objective, accomplished facts. The objective Christ, the Christ who exists apart

from us, is transcendent, for He is far above all, higher than the heavens. This fact, which is consonant with the portrait of Christ in Hebrews and Revelation, we affirm without hesitation and without reservation. The objective Christ is at the right hand of God in the heavens.

**H**owever, we hasten to add that the same chapter which reveals the objective, transcendent Christ, also reveals the subjective, indwelling Christ. “But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness” (v. 10). On the one hand, objectively, Christ is at the right hand of God; on the other hand, subjectively, Christ is in us, even in our spirit. Christ Himself, actually and personally, dwells in the believers. Christ is in us! Surely there is no wonder greater than this, and no truth in Romans that is more important. “‘Christ...in you’ is the crucial point of the book of Romans. In ch. 3 Christ is on the cross, shedding His blood for our redemption; in ch. 4 He is in resurrection; in ch. 6 we are in Him; now, in ch. 8 He is the Spirit in us” (Recovery Version, 8:10, note 2).

The remarkable statement—“He is the Spirit in us”—requires attention. As we ponder this remark, we need to be mindful of other verses which speak clearly and unequivocally of Christ’s dwelling in the believers. In Colossians 1:27 Paul refers to “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” In 2 Corinthians 13:5 he questions the believers in the church at Corinth, saying, “Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?” If we take at face value a verse which asserts that Christ is at the right hand of God, we should also accept those verses which speak of Christ in us.

But how can Christ be both in the heavens and in us at the same time? This is possible because, in resurrection and according to God’s economy, Christ is the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). “As the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), He is omnipresent, being both at the right hand of God and in our spirit, both in heaven and on earth” (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:34, note 2). To be sure, Christ was resurrected with a body of flesh and bones, and with such a resurrected body He could eat fish (Luke 24:39, 41-42). As the One with a resurrected body, He said to Thomas, who had refused to believe apart from visible and tangible evidence, “Bring your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side” (John 20:27). Yes, the resurrected Christ still has a body, yet He is in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), seeking the opportunity to make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). Then how can

He be in us? Christ can be, and actually is, in us because He is the Spirit, another Comforter, and as this Spirit, this Comforter, He dwells in us (John 14:16-20). Objectively, Christ in His glorified body is in the heavens; subjectively, Christ as the life-giving Spirit dwells in our spirit. The Bible reveals both aspects of Christ, the book of Romans presents both aspects, and we must be faithful to believe and affirm both the objective Christ and the subjective Christ.

**A**lthough we embrace both aspects of the truth concerning Christ as objective and subjective to us, we nevertheless need to realize that, as far as Romans is concerned, the subjective aspect bears a special and vital significance:

The gospel of God, as the subject of this book, concerns Christ as the Spirit living within the believers after His resurrection. This is higher and more subjective than what was presented in the Gospels, which concern Christ only in the flesh as He lived among His disciples after His incarnation but before His death and resurrection. This

book, however, reveals that Christ has resurrected and has become the life-giving Spirit (8:9-10). He is no longer merely the Christ outside the believers, but He is now the Christ within them. Hence, the gospel in this book is the gospel of the One who is now indwelling His believers as their subjective Savior. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:1, note 9)

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### **The Righteousness of God Revealed in the Gospel**

*The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel of God.* The key verses regarding this proposition are 1:16-17. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes, both to Jew first and to Greek. For the righteousness of God is revealed in it out of faith to faith, as it is written, ‘But the righteous shall have life and live by faith.’” Because the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. God is righteous in His actions, and it is impossible for Him to be unrighteous. His righteousness is manifested in the gospel. As fallen sinners, we were debtors to God under the demands of His righteousness. As we had no way to pay our debt and to become righteous in the sight of God, God in His mercy and grace provided a way through the gospel. Christ, the righteous One (Acts 3:14) died on our behalf, “the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous” that He might bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18):

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On the cross He was our Substitute and bore our sins; He, the righteous One, was judged on behalf of us, the unrighteous, by the righteous God according to His righteousness, that He might remove the barrier of our sins and bring us to God. This was to redeem us from our sins back to God, from our unrighteous manner of life back to the righteous God. (Recovery Version, 1 Pet. 3:18, note 2)

**T**his means that, as our Substitute dying a vicarious death for our redemption according to God's righteousness, Christ fulfilled the demands of God's righteousness, demands that we were powerless to fulfill. In righteousness He paid our debt, and in righteousness the righteous God accepted His death as payment in full and gave evidence of His acceptance by raising Christ from the dead. Christ "was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25):

The death of Christ has fulfilled and fully satisfied God's righteous requirements; hence, we are justified by God through His death (3:24). His resurrection proves that God's requirements were satisfied by His death for us, that we are justified by God because of His death, and that in Him, the resurrected One, we are accepted before God. (Recovery Version, v. 25, note 1)

In the preaching of the gospel, the righteousness of God is proclaimed and testified. According to His righteousness, God has accepted Christ's death to clear our indebtedness, and He cannot, righteously, require us to pay the debt again:

Redemption full the Lord has made,  
And all my debts has fully paid,  
From law to set me free.  
  
For me forgiveness He has gained,  
And full acquittal was obtained,  
All debts of sin are paid;  
God would not have His claim on two,  
First on His Son, my Surety true,  
And then upon me laid. (*Hymns*, #1003)

It would be contrary to God's righteousness to require double payment of the debt, both from Christ and from us. As the glad tidings, the gospel tells us the good news that if we believe in Christ, who died for us and was raised from the dead, God must, for the sake of His righteousness, forgive us all our sins. He is bound by His righteousness to justify us and to forgive us. This is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel:

In John 3:16 God's love is the source and motive of God's salvation. In Eph. 2:5, 8 God's grace is the means of God's salvation. Here [Rom. 1:16-17] God's righteousness is the power of God's salvation. God's righteousness, which is solid and steadfast, is the foundation of His

throne (Psa. 89:14) and the base on which His kingdom is built (Rom. 14:17). Legally, both love and grace can fluctuate, but righteousness cannot. It is even more so with God's righteousness. It is God's righteousness, not ours, that is revealed in the gospel of God. Hence, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. (Recovery Version, Rom. 1:17, note 1)

### Propitiation

*God has set forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation place through faith in His blood.* Romans 3:24-26 says,

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth as a propitiation place through faith in His blood, for the demonstrating of His righteousness...so that He might be righteous and the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus.

If we would know what it means for Christ to be a propitiation place, we need to understand the meaning of propitiation, the need of propitiation, the sacrifice of propitiation, the action of propitiation, and the place of propitiation.

**T**he meaning of propitiation is to appease the situation between us and God and to reconcile us to God by satisfying His righteous demands. Formerly, there was a separation between us and God, but propitiation makes us one with God. Propitiation accomplishes this by solving the problem between us and God—our sins—which kept us away from God's presence and hindered God from coming to us.

Regarding our need of propitiation, we need to realize that propitiation involves two parties, one of which has wronged the other, has become indebted to the other, and must act to satisfy the demands of the other. When two such parties have been separated and seek to be in oneness, there is the need for propitiation. This was our situation before God before we heard the gospel, believed into Christ, and were justified by faith and regenerated. As sinners, we needed propitiation to appease our situation before God and to satisfy His demands.

Our pitiful situation is aptly illustrated by the case of the tax collector in Luke 18:13. "Standing at a distance, [he] would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!" This humbled person realized that he was nothing but a sinner, and his prayer implied the need both of a Redeemer and of propitiation. As he prayed, he was actually saying, "O God, propitiate for me. I am sinful in Your eyes. I need propitiation." He implored God to be propitiated, to be

appeared toward him by a propitiatory sacrifice for sins, that God might be merciful and gracious to him. He realized that he had offended God and that he needed something to be his offering of propitiation so that God would be appeased. Because he offered a prayer that was based upon God's propitiation, he "went down to his house justified" (v. 14).

**T**he sacrifice of propitiation is Christ Himself. "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). In 4:10 we learn that the providing of this sacrifice was motivated by love. "Herein is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins." In these verses the Greek word for *propitiation* is *hilasmos*, which means "that which propitiates." Christ Himself is the propitiation for our sins, the sacrifice for our propitiation before God. He offered Himself to God as a sacrifice for our sins, not only for our redemption but also for satisfying God's demand (Heb. 9:28).

The action of propitiation is recounted in Hebrews 2:17. "Hence He should have been made like His brothers in all things that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." The Greek word translated "make propitiation" is *hilaskomai*, the verbal form of the noun *hilasmos*. *Hilaskomai* means "to propitiate," that is, "to appease," to reconcile one by satisfying the other's demand. On the cross Christ propitiated for us and brought us back to God, making us one with God. The Lord Jesus made propitiation for our sins, thereby satisfying the demand of God's righteousness and appeasing the relationship between God and us, that God may be peacefully gracious to us.

In Romans 3:25 the Greek word translated "propitiation place" is *hilasterion*, which denotes the place where propitiation was made. In Hebrews 9:5 *hilasterion* is used for the lid of the ark, the place where God met with His people. In Romans 3:25 *hilasterion* is used to show that the lid of the ark signifies Christ as the propitiation place set forth by God. Christ Himself is the propitiatory sacrifice; He made propitiation for our sins, and He is the place where we enjoy propitiation before God and where God gives grace to us. Upon Christ as our place of propitiation, we have a standing to fellowship with God in glory, as He makes His will known to us and infuses us with His glory for His corporate expression.

## "Faith in His Blood"

If the propitiation which is Christ and which has been accomplished by Christ is to be applied to us, we must exercise "faith in His blood." God's setting forth Christ Jesus as a propitiation place is "through faith in His blood" (3:25).

Acts 20:28 speaks of "the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood." The Greek word translated "obtained" also means "acquired," or "purchased." God obtained, acquired, purchased, the church by paying the price of "His own blood." But how could God, who is Spirit (John 4:24), possibly have blood? Through incarnation our God, the Creator, the eternal One, put on human nature and became mingled with man. As a result, He was no longer only God—He was a God-man, who had human blood and thus was able to die on the cross for us. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross as the God-man, He died not only as man but also as God.

The blood that has redeemed fallen human beings and the blood in which we have faith is the blood of Jesus, the Son of God (1 John 1:7). As fallen human beings, we needed genuine human blood for our redemption, and as a man, the Lord Jesus shed human blood to redeem us. Because the Lord is the Son of God, even God Himself, with His blood there is the element of divinity, and this divine element ensures the eternal efficacy of His redemptive blood. Therefore, as a man He had genuine human blood, and as God He has the element that gives His blood eternal efficacy.

**N**ow in our Christian spiritual experience, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). The name *Jesus* denotes the Lord's humanity, which was needed for the shedding of the redeeming blood. The title *His Son* denotes the Lord's divinity, which was needed for the eternal efficacy of the redeeming blood. *The blood of Jesus His Son* indicates that this blood is the proper blood of a genuine man for redeeming God's fallen creatures with the divine surety for its eternal efficacy. This eternal efficacy is not limited either in space or in time; rather, this efficacy is all-prevailing in space and everlasting in time. For this reason, the redemption accomplished by the God-man is eternal (Heb. 9:12).

This may help us to understand the expression "His [God's] own blood" in Acts 20:28. The Lord Jesus died on the cross as the God-man. The blood He shed was the

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blood not only of the man Jesus but also the blood of the God-man. Therefore, His blood, through which we have been redeemed and through which God obtained the church, is God's own blood.

The faith through which we believe in Christ and in His blood is not of human origin; it is not something that originates from ourselves. Christ Himself is the Author and the Perfecter of our faith. Just as Abraham, our father in faith, believed in God as a response to an infusion from the divine glory that imparted to him both the believing element and the capacity to believe, so we believe in Christ "through the faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22):

This faith refers to the faith of Jesus Christ in us, which has become the faith by which we believe in Him, as in v. 26; Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; Eph. 3:12; and Phil. 3:9.

Faith has an object, and it issues from its object. This object is Jesus, who is God incarnate. When man hears Him, knows Him, appreciates Him, and treasures Him, He causes faith to be generated in man, enabling man to believe in Him. Thus, He becomes the faith in man by which man believes in Him. Hence, this faith becomes the faith in Him, and it is also the faith that belongs to Him.

In God's New Testament economy, God desires that man believe in Jesus, who is God incarnate. If man does not believe in Him, he commits the unique sin before God (John 16:9). However, if man believes in Him, he is righteous to the uttermost before God, and God reckons this faith as his righteousness. At the same time, this faith brings its object, that is, this One who is God incarnate, into those who believe in Him. He is God's righteousness, and God has given Him as righteousness to those who are indwelt by Him (Jer. 23:6). All this is out of, and depends on, the faith that is in Him and of Him (Heb. 12:2). (Recovery Version, Rom. 3:22, note 1)

### **Justification unto Life**

*In Romans justification by faith is justification unto life.* The book of Romans is especially rich in truth regarding justification. In 5:16 Paul says, "The gracious gift is out of many offenses unto justification." In verse 18 he goes on to say, "So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men." We are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24). "For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (v. 28). On the one hand, God is righteous; on the other hand, He is "the One who justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus" (v. 26). Abraham is an example of a person who was justified not out of works (4:2) but by believing "on Him who justifies the ungodly" (v. 5). "Therefore having

been justified out of faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:1).

By definition, justification involves God's exercise of His righteousness. The righteousness of God is what God is with respect to justice and righteousness. Hence, whatever God is in His justice and rightness constitutes His righteousness. The righteousness of God, however, is not merely a divine attribute; righteousness is actually God Himself.

Because we are fallen, God must deal with us according to His righteousness. As the righteous God, He cannot forgive sinful people without meeting the demands of His righteousness. God loves us, but He cannot forgive us on the basis of love alone. God is also merciful toward us, but He cannot forgive us on the basis of mercy alone. If God were to neglect His righteousness and forgive us solely on the basis of love and mercy, He would act contrary to His righteousness (an impossibility), and this would jeopardize God's throne, which is established upon the foundation of righteousness (Psa. 89:14). Even God's love and mercy cannot be exercised upon us apart from God's righteousness.

**J**ustification is God's action in approving us according to His standard of righteousness. If we vindicate ourselves and find fault with God and His ways, we will remain in a hopeless condition. Although it may initially strike us as strange, perhaps even as erroneous, before God can justify us, we must first justify Him, declaring that He is just and righteous. "But let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written, 'That You may be declared righteous in Your words and may overcome when You are judged'" (3:4). This indicates that "God must first convince us of His righteousness before we can repent and believe into Him. Thus, He is declared righteous by us before we are declared righteous by Him" (Recovery Version, note 2). We justify God, and He justifies us; we approve God, and He approves us. Whereas unbelievers judge Him, we vindicate Him, and whereas the ungodly find fault with Him, we vindicate Him. On Christ as our propitiation place, we and God approve each other and justify each other, enjoying mutual justification. Because we have been justified, approved by God according to His righteousness, we have Christ as righteousness to us from God (1 Cor. 1:30).

Justification is related to propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation. As we have noted, propitiation is to appease the situation between us and God and to make us one with God by satisfying His righteous demands—something that is possible only with Christ, through Christ, and on Christ. Redemption is the basis of justification. The word *redeem* means to purchase back something which was once ours but which has become lost. Although we were lost and had many problems with God regarding

His righteousness, holiness, and glory, God paid the price for us, repossessing us at a tremendous cost. When this accomplished redemption is applied to us, we are justified. Reconciliation is based upon Christ's redemption and was accomplished through God's justification. Reconciliation deals with our most serious problem with God—our being enemies of God. Reconciliation includes propitiation. Sinners need propitiation, but enemies need reconciliation. Whereas propitiation is for sins, reconciliation is for both sins and enmity.

Justification means that the righteousness of God has been revealed or manifested (1:17; 3:21). When the righteousness of God is revealed, it is manifested. According to 3:21-22, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law through the faith of Jesus Christ. The fact that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law means that it has nothing to do with the law. For us who have been justified by faith, the righteousness of God is not based on our doing; it is not based on our keeping the law. On the contrary, the righteousness of God is manifested in our justification "through the faith of Jesus Christ" (v. 22).

*Through the faith of Christ* indicates that genuine believing is to believe in the Lord Jesus by His faith, which has been dispensed into us to become our ability to believe in Him for our justification. Because we believe in Jesus Christ through His faith, the righteousness of God is revealed, manifested, to us.

The proof of God's justification of us is the resurrection of Christ (4:22-25). The resurrected Christ who sits at God's right hand is the evidence that we have been justified. The redeeming death of Christ as the ground for God to justify us has been fully accepted by God, and Christ has been resurrected as a proof of this. The resurrection of Christ is the proof that God is satisfied with the death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf:

Father God, Thou hast accepted  
Jesus as our Substitute;  
Judged the Just One for the unjust,  
Couldst Thou change Thy attitude?  
As a proof of perfect justice,  
At Thine own right hand He sits;  
He, as Thy full satisfaction,  
Righteously Thy need befits. (*Hymns, #20*)

Now that Christ has died and has been raised from among the dead, it is impossible for God to change His mind about forgiving us; He is bound by His righteousness to

forgive us. By forgiving us based upon the redemption accomplished by Christ and accepted by God the Father, God shows forth His righteousness; He declares to the whole universe that He is righteous. Such a declaration in the gospel causes it to become the power of God unto salvation.

**R**omans 5:18 shows us that justification by faith is not an end in itself but is of life, for life, and unto life. "So then as it was through one offense unto condemnation to all men, so also it was through one righteous act unto justification of life to all men." God's eternal purpose to have a corporate man to express Him and to represent Him with His authority to deal with His enemy (Gen. 1:26) can be accomplished only through God's own life—the eternal, divine, uncreated, indestructible life. Because the way to the tree of life was closed due to man's fall, God could not dispense Himself as life into the human vessels created by Him for this purpose. Now that Christ has accomplished redemption for us and that we, by God's grace and according to His righteousness, have been justified by faith, God is able, without any violation of His

righteous government, to impart His life into the ones justified by Him. Thus, justification, instead of being an end in itself, is a procedure for God, in compliance with His righteousness, to give us eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Because justification is the procedure and life is the goal, justification is "of life":

**Now that we, by God's grace  
and according to His righteousness,  
have been justified by faith,  
God is able, without any violation  
of His righteous government,  
to impart His life into  
the ones justified by Him.**

Justification is not an end in itself; it is for life. Through justification we have come up to the standard of God's righteousness and correspond with it, so that now He can impart His life to us. Justification changes our outward position; life changes our inward disposition. (Recovery Version, 5:18, note 2)

### The Two Divine Transfers

*In Romans 5—8 we have two divine transfers—a factual and positional transfer and a practical and experiential transfer.* The factual and positional transfer is a transfer out of Adam and into Christ (5:12-21). In our natural birth, we were born in Adam with all his involvements. In Adam we were born of the old creation and were already fallen. We were sinners before God with sin in our nature (3:23; 7:17); we were dead in our spirit because of sin in our flesh (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13); and we were enemies of God as the result of following God's enemy, Satan (Rom. 5:10; 8:7; Eph. 2:2). Furthermore, as those in Adam, we were in the kingdom of Satan, held in thrall under his authority of darkness (Matt. 12:26; Col. 1:13;

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Acts 26:18). We loved the world, a system which lies in the evil one and of which Satan, the enemy of God, is the ruler (1 John 2:15-16; 5:19; John 12:31). By virtue of the fact that we were in Adam, we had become flesh, and thus were not subject to the law of God, were unable to please God, and had no possibility of being justified by God (Gen. 6:3; Rom. 8:7-8; Gal. 2:16b). In addition, we walked according to the age of this world and were according to the ruler of the authority of the air, doing the desires of the flesh and being children of wrath by nature (Eph. 2:2-3). Our condition was worsened by the fact that we were condemned by God under His wrath (John 3:18, 36), and we were sentenced to die, to perish in the lake of fire forever (Heb. 9:27; John 3:16; Rev. 21:8).

**I**n Christ and through Christ we have experienced a permanent, irreversible factual and positional transfer. We were regenerated in Christ in resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), and in this rebirth we were transferred out of Adam into Christ. In Christ we have been judicially redeemed, forgiven, justified, and reconciled to God (Eph. 1:7; Rom. 3:24; 5:10). In Christ we have been delivered out of the evil kingdom of Satan, the authority of darkness (Col. 1:13), freed from the warring, subduing, and killing power of sin (Rom. 6:7; 7:11, 17-23), freed from the yoke of slavery of the law (Gal. 5:1), and freed from the vanity of the old creation and the slavery of corruption (Rom. 8:20-21). In Christ we have been regenerated organically to be the children of God growing and developing into the many sons of God, the many brothers of Christ, for the constitution of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 8:16, 14, 29; 12:5; Eph. 1:22-23). Now in Christ we are sanctified by the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) with God's holiness, the element of the divine nature (15:16); we are renewed from the oldness of the old man by the renewing Spirit of life (12:2; Titus 3:5); we are transformed by the Lord Spirit with the life element of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18); we are being conformed through transformation in life to the image of the firstborn Son of God, a process that makes us the many God-men, the mass reproduction of Christ, the prototypical God-man (Rom. 8:29); and we will be glorified to be completely redeemed in our body for the full enjoyment of the divine sonship (vv. 21, 23).

The significance of the divine transfer out of Adam into Christ cannot be overemphasized. In Adam we inherited sin that constitutes us sinners (5:12, 19), death that both weakens us in doing things to please God and also reigns over us (vv. 12, 14, 17), and condemnation under the law unto death (v. 16). In Christ we have been gifted with righteousness, life, and justification under grace unto life, in which we reign with grace over all things (vv. 17-18, 21).

Whereas the factual and positional transfer is out of Adam into Christ, the practical and experiential transfer

is out of the flesh into the Spirit. We are transferred out of the flesh—the practical and experiential Adam—through our being crucified with Christ (7:1-6). We are transferred into the Spirit—the practical and experiential Christ—through our union with the Spirit (8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). In actuality, this transfer out of the flesh into the Spirit is effected by setting our mind not on the flesh but on the mingled spirit unto life and peace (8:5-6), by walking and having our being not according to the flesh but according to the mingled spirit unto the fulfillment of the righteous requirement of the law (v. 4), and by reigning in life with grace over all things unto eternal life (5:17, 21). The factual and positional transfer is an objective fact accomplished once for all, but the practical and experiential transfer is a daily, hourly, and even moment-by-moment experience. We cannot say, and we dare not say, that we are no longer in the flesh or that we are always in the Spirit; this transfer takes place again and again and day after day. Based upon the objective transfer out of Adam into Christ, we may have the subjective transfer out of the flesh and into the Spirit. As believers in Christ, this is our need today.

### God's Complete Salvation

*God's complete salvation has two aspects—the judicial aspect and the organic aspect.* The judicial aspect is according to the righteousness of God (1:17; 3:21-26; 9:30-31), and it is a procedure through which God fulfills all the requirements of His righteous law for sinners according to His righteousness. This is for sinners to be forgiven before God (Luke 24:47), washed (Heb. 1:3), justified (Rom. 3:24-25), reconciled to God (5:10), and sanctified unto God positionally (1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 13:12). As a result, sinners may enter into the grace of God (Rom. 5:2) for the accomplishment of the purpose of God.

**T**he organic aspect of God's salvation is through the life of God (Rom. 1:17; Acts 11:18; Rom. 5:10, 17-18, 21), and it includes regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. Whereas the judicial aspect is the procedure, the organic aspect is the purpose of God's salvation because it accomplishes the purpose that God desires to achieve in His economy through His divine life, that is, to obtain a corporate man to express Him in life and to represent Him by life.

A crucial verse pertaining to God's complete salvation is 5:10: "For if we, being enemies were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." Reconciliation to God through the death of His Son is part of God's judicial redemption related to propitiation and redemption. Reconciliation is an accomplished fact, but "saved in His life," the organic aspect of God's salvation, is a daily

matter. Regrettably, many believers have in their theology and experience only half of this verse—objective reconciliation; they seem oblivious to the other half of the verse—subjective salvation in life, concerning which Paul says “much more.” Believers today need much more of this “much more.” It is this “much more” that enables us to have, theologically and experientially, a book of Romans containing all sixteen chapters:

Verse 10 of this chapter points out that God’s full salvation revealed in this book consists of two sections: one section is the redemption accomplished for us by Christ’s death, and the other section is the saving afforded us by Christ’s life. The first four chapters of this book discourse comprehensively regarding the redemption accomplished by Christ’s death, whereas the last twelve chapters speak in detail concerning the saving afforded by Christ’s life. Before 5:11, Paul shows us that we are saved because we have been redeemed, justified, and reconciled to God. However, we have not yet been saved to the extent of being sanctified, transformed, and conformed to the image of God’s Son. Redemption, justification, and reconciliation, which are accomplished outside of us by the death of Christ, redeem us objectively; sanctification, transformation, and conformation, which are accomplished within us by the working of Christ’s life, save us subjectively. Objective redemption redeems us positionally from condemnation and eternal punishment; subjective salvation saves us dispositionally from our old man, our self, and our natural life. (Recovery Version, 5:10, note 2)

### Reigning in Life

*It is a normal experience for the believers in Christ to reign in life.* Paul speaks of this in 5:17: “For if by the offense of the one death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” There is nothing in Paul’s word to suggest that this experience is reserved for a special category of believers; on the contrary, this is an experience for every believer. We should not believe that reigning in life is not for us, that it is beyond us, or that it is only for the future. Instead, we need to realize that we have been regenerated with a divine, spiritual, heavenly, kingly, and royal life, and we need to see that this life enthrones us to reign as kings and that even now we can reign as kings over all kinds of insubordination in our fallen, natural being.

In practice, to reign in life is to be under the inner ruling of the divine life (14:17) and walk according to the life restriction and limitation in the divine life (Matt. 7:14). If we practice reigning in life in this way, we will not be controlled by anything other than the divine life, and we will not be ruled by the authority of darkness in any way. The more we are under the inner ruling of the divine life, the more we are saved from rebellion, disobedience, and insubordination and the more we are restricted and ruled in the sweetness of love because, in an experiential way, we are living in the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Col. 1:13). Then, under the ruling of the divine life, we will gradually have the sense that we are enthroned as kings to reign over all things and that we more than conquer the environmental hardships and sufferings (Rom. 8:37).

Reigning in life is not the product of self-effort; it is the spontaneous issue of receiving “the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness,” both of which are Christ Himself in our experience. The base for reigning in life is Christ as our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). First, Christ is

righteousness to us objectively and judicially, and then, as He is expressed from within us through our living of Him (Phil. 1:21), He becomes our subjective and experiential righteousness (3:9). Grace comes from objective righteousness—Christ as righteousness covering us in the sight of God that we may be justified, approved, by Him.

Subjective righteousness (Rom. 4:25)—Christ Himself lived out of us—comes from grace. Through this twofold gift of righteousness, we can reign in life.

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that we are enthroned as kings  
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the environmental hardships  
and sufferings.**

With righteousness as the foundation of our spiritual experience, we should open ourselves to receive not only grace but the abundance of grace. *Abundance* is crucial here. Sin abounds, but grace superabounds (5:20) and then grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life (v. 21). This superabounding, reigning grace is not merely “unmerited favor.” According to the complete truth concerning grace unveiled in the New Testament, grace is the Triune God in Christ as the Spirit dispensed into us as our supply for our enjoyment. We have two evil reigning things in us—sin (v. 21) and death (v. 14). Who can overcome them? Who can reign over them? The answer is the Lord’s superabounding grace. Grace can never be defeated or subdued because grace is God’s dispensing Himself into us, saturating us, empowering us, strengthening us, and energizing us. As grace reigns unto eternal life, we reign in this life, not through ourselves but through the unique One, Jesus Christ.

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## The Human Spirit

*The book of Romans emphasizes the regenerated human spirit—an organ distinct from our soul.* “For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son” (1:9). The spirit here is Paul’s regenerated spirit, not the Spirit of God. “Paul served God in his regenerated spirit by the indwelling Christ, the life-giving Spirit, not in his soul by the power and ability of the soul” (Recovery Version, v. 9, note 2).

In 2:29 Paul speaks of the spirit in the context of God’s judgment upon the religious ones (2:17—3:8). “He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God.” If we attempt to serve God and please God apart from our regenerated spirit, we will be in the vanity of religion:

Whatever we are, whatever we do, and whatever we have must be in spirit. This will keep us from the vanity of religion....The reality of all spiritual things depends on the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is in our spirit. Hence, the reality of all spiritual matters depends on our spirit, not on anything apart from our spirit. Whatever is in us is vanity unless it is in our spirit. Everything that God is to us is in our spirit. (Recovery Version, 2:29, note 2)

Referring once again to the regenerated human spirit, in which Christ as the Spirit dwells, Paul continues in 7:6, “Now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.” Whereas newness of life is related to our being identified with Christ in His resurrection, newness of spirit issues from our union with the resurrected Christ. Newness, therefore, is a matter in, and of, our regenerated spirit: “Everything that is related to our regenerated spirit is new, and everything that comes out of our spirit is new. Our regenerated spirit is a source of newness because the Lord, the life of God, and the Holy Spirit are there” (Recovery Version, v. 6, note 4).

Other references to the regenerated human spirit include 8:4, which speaks of walking according to the spirit; 8:10, which says that our spirit is life itself; 8:15, which reveals the regenerated human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit to be a spirit of sonship; 8:16, which assures us that the Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God; and 12:11, where we are encouraged to be burning in spirit as we live and serve in the Body life.

Paul certainly was not a proponent of dichotomy—the theological notion that a human being consists only of body and soul; he realized that a human being is a composition of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23) and hence taught

and exemplified the truth that a human being consists of these three main parts, which form an organic, personal unity. In other words, Paul believed in trichotomy.

With respect to the economy of God, it is dangerous to deny the existence and function of the human spirit as an organ distinct from the soul. To deny the existence of the spirit is to deny and suppress a basic element of our God-created humanity (1 Cor. 2:11); to nullify the practical outworking of God’s economy (2 Tim. 4:22; Eph. 3:16-17); to remove the possibility of receiving revelation from God through the Word of God (3:5; 1:17); to foster an erroneous understanding of regeneration (John 3:6); to deny the organic union of the believers with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17); to disregard the kind of worship the Father is seeking (John 4:24); to render impossible the subjective experience and enjoyment of the grace of Christ (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23); and to hinder the building up of God’s house (Eph. 2:21-22) and, in effect, to cause God, who desires to dwell in our spirit (Isa. 57:15; 66:2), to be homeless. It is not heretical to reject the distinction, affirmed in the Scriptures, between the human spirit and the human soul, but such a rejection and denial lead one in the direction of the vanity of religion and thus away from the reality of the divine economy.

## Romans 8—The Most Crucial Chapter in Romans

*Romans 8 is the most crucial chapter in Romans, because it reveals the experience of the Triune God as life for the Body life.* To have the experience of all that is revealed in this portion is to live in the reality of the organic Body of Christ. It is worthwhile to point out and remark upon, albeit briefly, some of the vital elements in this chapter.

### The Law of Life

Verse 2 says, “For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.” A law denotes a natural power with certain inclinations and activities. Every kind of life has its own law, and as living beings, we live by definite organic laws. The human life has its law, and the divine life has its law. The law of the divine life—the law of the Spirit of life—is the automatic and spontaneous capacity of the Triune God as life in the believers. To see this is to realize that the Triune God is now operating in us according to law and not according to mere activity. The function of the law of life refers to its divine capacity, which is almighty. As the law of life functions within us, it regulates us with the shape of life, conforming us to the image of Christ (v. 29).

### Walking according to the Mingled Spirit

Romans 8:4 says, “That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to

the flesh but according to the spirit.” Here we have a number of important matters. The first is that the righteous requirement of God’s law—including the higher law of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5—7)—must be fulfilled. However, this requirement is not fulfilled by us—it is fulfilled in us; this implies that another person, the indwelling Christ, is living in us to carry out whatever God requires of us. The righteous requirement of God’s law cannot be fulfilled in us if we “walk according to the flesh.” To walk according to the flesh is not necessarily to sin and do evil, for it includes the efforts by the self with the natural life and will to obey what God commands. The righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in those, and only in those, who walk according to the spirit. *Spirit* here denotes neither the divine Spirit alone nor the human spirit itself but the mingled spirit—the regenerated human spirit indwelt by and mingled with the divine Spirit to become one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). If we walk according to the spirit by living and having our being according to the mingled spirit, then we will, in our daily living, experience the subjective and experiential divine transfer out of the flesh into the Spirit.

### *The Mind Set on the Spirit*

“For those who are according to the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but those who are according to the spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6).

Romans has much to say concerning the mind, beginning with the mind of the ungodly, the reprobate. “Even as they did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things which are not fitting” (1:28). Whereas the mind in this verse is disapproved, the mind in 7:25 is the independent mind. “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh, the law of sin.” *With the mind I myself*—this indicates that the mind, representing the self (*I=mind=myself*) is trying on its own, apart from God’s grace and the divine life, to do good to be well-pleasing to God. As we advance from chapter seven (“in the flesh”) to chapter eight (“in the Spirit”), we see “the mind set on the spirit,” the mind that is dependent upon the mingled spirit and one with the spirit, allowing the spirit to become the spirit of the mind (Eph. 4:23). The mind set on the spirit not only has life and peace; such a mind is life and peace. “When our mind is set on the spirit, our outward actions are in agreement with our inner man and there is no discrepancy between us and God. He and we are at peace, not at enmity (v. 7). The result is that we

feel peaceful within” (Recovery Version, Rom. 8:6, note 2). In 12:2 the mind is renewed for the sake of the Body life, and the one with a renewed mind does not “think more highly of himself than he ought to think” but thinks “so as to be sober-minded, as God has apportioned to each a measure of faith” (v. 3). This leads to being “of the same mind toward one another,” not setting the mind on the high things (v. 16), and to being “of the same mind toward one another according to Christ Jesus” (15:5).

### *The Divine Dispensing of the Triune God as Life*

The divine economy—God’s plan to work Himself into His chosen and redeemed people as their life and life supply—is carried out by the divine dispensing of the Triune God as life into the tripartite human beings, a dispensing that causes their entire being either to become the divine life or to be filled with the divine life. Romans 8:11 says, “If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.” Here we have the entire Triune God

in His economy: Christ Jesus (the Son), the One who raised Jesus from the dead (the Father, cf. 6:4), and the Spirit. Since the three of the Divine Trinity are inseparable, although distinct, all three are in us to carry out the divine dispensing indicated by the words *give life*. That this dispensing takes place not from the outside but from the

inside is indicated by *dwells in you* and *indwells you*.

The indwelling Triune God—according to the revelation in the Gospel of John, the Father in the Son as the Spirit—is now dispensing Himself into our entire tripartite being. “The spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom. 8:10)—this is the dispensing of the divine life into our spirit based upon God’s righteousness. “The mind set on the spirit is life” (v. 6)—this is the dispensing of the divine life into our soul, through the mind as the leading part, based upon the prior dispensing of life into our spirit. “Will also give life to your mortal bodies”—this is the dispensing of the divine life into our body from our mingled spirit (which is life) through our soul (which is becoming life) into our body (which is receiving life). This is the Triune God being life to tripartite human beings through the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity.

### *The Leading of the Spirit*

The children of God have the witness of the Spirit with their spirit (v. 16), but the sons of God are led by the

**The righteous requirement  
of the law is fulfilled in those,  
and only in those,  
who walk according to the spirit—  
the regenerated human spirit  
indwelt by and mingled with the  
divine Spirit to become one spirit.**

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Spirit. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (v. 14). Whereas the children of God have been born of God and thus possess the life and nature of God, they are not yet mature in life; hence, they need to grow and develop by giving the divine life the ground in their being to increase and spread. The sons of God, by contrast, have some measure of growth in life and thus are approaching spiritual maturity. As a sign of this growth and development, they are “led by the Spirit.” This leading “is not merely an action of the Spirit. It is the Triune God Himself becoming the leading in our spirit. If we would care for Him as a person who indwells us, we will spontaneously be led by Him” (Recovery Version, note 2). To be led by the Spirit, therefore, is to be led not by some force or impulse but to be led by a wonderful indwelling person—the Spirit, the third of the Divine Trinity, who is the Triune God Himself reaching us in our experience of Him. For the sons of God to be led by the Spirit in this way, according to the context of this chapter, involves life, the Spirit, and the law of the Spirit of life.

We should pay attention to the fact that verse 14 does not actually speak of the leading of the Spirit but of our being led by the Spirit:

[This indicates] that although the Spirit is ready to lead us, we must take the initiative to be led by Him. This means that we must take Him as our life and everything and that we must put to death everything of the old creation in us [v. 13]. We do not need to seek after the Spirit’s leading, since it is already present within us, dwelling in our regenerated spirit. If we live under this leading, we will walk and behave in a way that proves that we are God’s sons. (Recovery Version, v. 14, note 1)

### *Heirs of God*

In chapter eight Paul mentions not only the children of God and the sons of God but also the heirs of God. Verse 17 says, “And if children, heirs also; on the one hand, heirs of God; on the other, joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him.” Being children of God is our initial relationship, which begins from the moment of rebirth, regeneration. We may remain children without the growth of sons, or we may become sons. Also, we may become sons yet lack the qualification of heirs. First, we need to grow and develop in the divine life to become sons of God. Then we need further growth, development, and maturation in order to be heirs of God, those who inherit the Triune God as their divine inheritance. As verse 17 makes clear, becoming heirs has a particular requirement—suffering with Christ:

This shows that there is a condition for us to be heirs. It is not that we are heirs simply because we are children of

God. Rather, after being born as children, we must grow in life to become sons, and then we must pass through suffering that we may be glorified to become legal heirs. (Recovery Version, v. 17, note 1)

If we read Romans 8 carefully and without selectivity, we will see that genuine growth in life unto maturity requires suffering. Thus, the more we suffer with Christ in the carrying out of God’s economy to build up the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24), the more we grow and the faster we are matured to be joint heirs with Christ, the Heir of all things (Heb. 1:2).

### *The Intercession of Christ and of the Spirit*

According to verse 34 Christ is at the right hand of God in the heavens interceding for us. However, according to verse 26, it is the Spirit who intercedes for us. “Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Verse 27 reveals more regarding the Spirit’s intercession. “But He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to God.” On the one hand, Christ intercedes for us (cf. Heb. 7:25); on the other hand, the Spirit is the One interceding:

These are not two Intercessors but one, the Lord Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18). He is interceding for us at two ends. At one end it is the Spirit in us, probably initiating the intercession for us; at the other end it is the Lord Christ at the right hand of God, probably completing the intercession for us, which must be mainly that we will be conformed to His image and brought into His glory. (Recovery Version, v. 34, note 3)

### *All Things*

The intercession by the Lord Spirit is related to the “all things” in verse 28. “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” In response to the Spirit’s intercession, the Father, in His wisdom and sovereignty, arranges all things, matters, and persons in our circumstances to work together for our good that His purpose to have sons for His corporate expression might be fulfilled:

According to the context, the good here is not related to physical persons, matters, or things. It refers to our gaining more of Christ, to our having Him wrought into our being, that we may be transformed metabolically and may eventually be conformed to His image, the image of the Son of God (v. 29), that is, that we may be brought into the full sonship. (Recovery Version, v. 28, note 3)

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## Conformation and Glorification

The law of life, the divine dispensing, being led by the Spirit, the growth in life to maturity, the intercession of Christ and the Spirit, all things—all these work together wonderfully, amazingly, to bring us to the climax of God's organic salvation. This culminating point involves conformation and glorification.

Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers; and those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified. (vv. 29-30)

**T**ransformation issues in conformation, which is higher than transformation. Transformation is inward and is a matter of essence; conformation is outward and is a matter of shape. Whereas transformation involves a change in form, conformation involves the shaping of this form into a certain image—the image of Christ as the firstborn Son of God. God has predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son, and this predestination will be accomplished through salvation in life, organic salvation. Ultimately, those who have been transformed and conformed will be glorified, when the element of the divine glory, which has been gradually permeating them under the sealing of the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) bursts forth in splendor, and they “shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

### God's Selection in His Mercy according to His Sovereignty

*In chapter nine we have an aspect of God which has not been revealed hitherto—God's selection in His mercy according to His sovereignty* (vv. 1-29). God's selection is of God who calls (vv. 1-13), and it is of God's mercy (vv. 14-18). God's sovereign authority, concerning which He is not accountable to anyone, allows Him to have mercy on whom He will have mercy according to His desire. Not only does God have mercy on whom He wills; He also hardens whom He wills, as in the case of Pharaoh (vv. 17-18). “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of Him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (v. 16). We did not will to seek God; He is the One who wills that we pursue Him. We did not choose to run to God; He is the One who drew us in His great mercy. God's selection of us is absolutely in the realm of His mercy, which He exercises according to His sovereignty (vv. 19-29).

## Vessels of Mercy to Honor and Glory

*It is of God's mercy and of His sovereignty that we, the believers in Christ, are vessels of mercy to honor and glory* (vv. 20-24). The thing formed has no right to question him who molded it, asking, “Why did you make me thus?” (v. 20). Paul goes on to say, “Or does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?” (v. 21). If it pleases God to do this—and it does so please Him—who are we to “answer back to God?” (v. 20). Having complete authority over all human clay, God is utterly sovereign in deciding who will be vessels of mercy unto honor and glory:

This indicates that God chose us that we might be vessels of honor to contain Him. God created man as a vessel to contain Him [Gen. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:7], and out of the many vessels He chose us to contain Him, the God of honor, that we might be vessels of honor. Finally, He makes known His glory upon us, the vessels, that we might become vessels of His glory (v. 23). All this is out of His

mercy and according to His mercy; it cannot be obtained by our efforts. For this reason we must worship Him, and we must worship Him for His mercy! (Recovery Version, v. 21, note 1)

The vessels of mercy in chapter nine are related to the divine dispensing in chapter eight and to the calling on the

**As the vessels of mercy  
unto honor are filled, permeated,  
and saturated with the dispensing  
Triune God, they are glorified in  
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name of the Lord in chapter ten. Vessels, by definition, need content, and this content is God Himself. But how can God, who dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16), become the content of frail human beings? The answer is that it is God in His economy, the processed and consummated Triune God in Christ as the Spirit, who can dwell in us as our content by dispensing Himself into us as our life. Thus, it is by the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity in chapter eight that God becomes the content of the vessels of mercy in chapter nine. In His sovereign mercy, God selected us to be vessels of honor to contain the God of honor dispensed into us as life. Eventually, as the vessels of mercy unto honor are filled, permeated, and saturated with the dispensing Triune God, they are glorified in and with the divine glory, and God makes known upon them the riches of His glory. This dispensing requires openness, exercise, and cooperation from the human vessels, and this we see in chapter ten. “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the death, you will be saved” (v. 9). This confessing and believing is our cooperation:

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Christ needs our participation in Him. Since we have been made vessels to contain Him, we need to believe with our heart to receive Him, and to call on Him continually with our mouth to take Him in, thus allowing His riches to fill our empty vessel (9:21-23). (Recovery Version, v. 9, note 1)

By calling upon the name of the Lord, we are saved (v. 13), and by continually calling on Him, He becomes rich to us in our experience according to His economy. “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him” (v. 12). Christ in Himself is unsearchably rich (Eph. 3:8), but as we open to Him and contact Him by calling upon His name, He becomes rich to us: “This shows that God selects us, redeems us, justifies us, sanctifies us, conforms us, and glorifies us in Christ in order that we may enjoy His unsearchable riches in Christ (Eph. 3:8). The secret to this enjoyment is to call on His name” (Recovery Version, Rom. 10:12, note 1). The truth revealed in Romans is profound (11:33-36), yet the way to contact the Lord is simple. To embrace the highest truth in this Epistle and to practice the simple way—the way of calling upon the name of the Lord—is surely to be blessed (15:29).

### The Kingdom of God

*Romans 14:17 proves that the church today is the kingdom of God.* “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom of God is the realm in which He exercises His authority and acts according to His will so that He may express His glory for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose (Matt. 6:9-10, 13). The context of this verse concerns the church life as the expression of the Body of Christ; this is our basis for saying that the kingdom of God in verse 17 is the church.

The New Testament first presents the kingdom and thereafter presents the church; the presence of the kingdom produces the church (Matt. 4:23; 16:18-19). The kingdom of God, which is actually the totality of the life of God and its activities, is the realm of the divine life for the divine life to move, rule, and govern so that life may accomplish its purpose. The gospel, as revealed in Romans, brings in the divine life, and this life has its realm, which is the kingdom. The divine life with its realm, the sphere of the ruling of life, produces the church. Because the kingdom is the reality of the church, apart from the kingdom life, we cannot live the church life (Matt. 5:3; 16:18-19. Rev. 1:4-6, 9). Without the kingdom as its reality, the church would be empty. The kingdom life issues in the church life; therefore, as we live corporately in the kingdom life, we spontaneously live the church life (Rom. 14:17). A believer who does not live the kingdom life cannot be built into the structure of the church (Eph. 2:22).

When the kingdom is able to assert the divine authority over a company of believers, those believers can be built up into the church (Col. 2:19; 4:15-16).

We need a clear vision of the fact that the genuine church is the kingdom of God in this age and that today, as Romans reveals, the believers should live the kingdom life in the church. Each time the Lord Jesus spoke of the church, He mentioned it in relation to the kingdom; this indicates that the kingdom and the church are intimately related (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-18). Other portions of the New Testament underscore this relationship. *The kingdom of God* in 1 Corinthians 4:20 refers to the church life (v. 17), implying that in the sense of authority, the church in this age is the kingdom of God. Likewise, the term *fellow citizens* in Ephesians indicates the kingdom of God, the sphere wherein God exercises His authority (2:19). Furthermore, what Paul and his fellow workers were doing in the gospel work for the establishing of the churches was for the kingdom of God (Col. 4:11). The word *kingdom* in Revelation 1:6 and 9 reveals that where the church is, there the kingdom of God is; the church represents the kingdom.

Although the church in the present age is the kingdom, we are in the kingdom in reality only when we live, walk, and have our being in the spirit, not in the natural man (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16, 25). In addition, as those who are under the dispensing of the Divine Trinity, we need to live a kingdom life in the church, growing and developing in the divine life until we reach maturity (2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

The church, which was brought in by the kingdom, brings in the kingdom (Matt. 6:10; 12:22-29; Rev. 11:15; 12:10). The church’s responsibility is to perpetuate Christ’s victory, and the church’s work is to bring in the kingdom of God. All the work of the church should be governed by the principle of the kingdom of God. The church should be exercised, especially in prayer, to bring heaven’s will down to earth and to carry this will out on earth (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50).

Ultimately, in the New Jerusalem, the kingdom and the church will become one entity (Rev. 21:2). The kingdom produces the church, the church brings in the kingdom, and the consummate issue of the kingdom and the church is the New Jerusalem, for it combines in itself the kingdom and the church. The New Jerusalem is the bride, which is the church (21:2, 9-10; Eph. 5:23-32). The New Jerusalem is also a city, which speaks of God’s government, and in the center of this city is the throne of God (22:1, 3-5).

In the church life as the kingdom of God today, we may live in the kingdom of the Son of God’s love (Col. 1:13). God has delivered us out of Satan’s authority of darkness and has brought us into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9),

and in so doing He transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. The kingdom of the Son is the authority of Christ. Since the Son of God is the embodiment and expression of the divine life, the kingdom of the Son is a realm of life (1 John 5:11-12). To be transferred into the kingdom of the Son of the Father's love is to be transferred into the Son, who is life to us (Col. 3:4). When we live by the Son as our life in resurrection (John 6:57), we are living in His kingdom, enjoying Him in the Father's love.

**T**hat we have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love indicates that this kingdom, this realm of life, is in love, not in fear. Thus, the kingdom in which we find ourselves today is a realm full of life, light, and love (1 John 1:1-2, 5, 7; 4:8, 16). The Son as the object of the divine love (Matt. 17:5) becomes to us the embodiment of the divine life in the divine love with the authority of resurrection; this is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, a realm where we are ruled in love with life. Here, under the heavenly ruling and restriction, we have genuine freedom in love, with life, and under light (7:13-14). Here in this kingdom we enjoy Christ and have the church life (Col. 1:12; 4:15-16).

#### Receiving the Believers in Light of the Judgment Seat of God

*In the church life as the kingdom of God on earth today, we should receive the believers in light of the judgment seat of God.* In Romans 14:1 Paul says, "Now him who is weak in faith receive, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his considerations" (v. 1):

To practice the Body life revealed in ch. 12, we must learn the practical lessons of receiving the believers, as revealed particularly in 14:1—15:13, that the church life may be all-inclusive, able to include all kinds of genuine Christians. Such receiving requires the transformation mentioned in ch. 12; if we remain natural, we will be unable to receive those whose views are different from ours in doctrine or in practice. (Recovery Version, 14:1, note 2)

*God has received him* (v. 3) is the basis on which we receive the believers that God has received. All those whom God has received, we also receive:

God receives people according to His Son. When a person receives God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, as his Savior, God receives that person immediately and ushers him into the enjoyment of the Triune God and of all He

has prepared and accomplished in Christ for us. We should receive people in the same way and should not be more narrow than God. Regardless of how much they differ from us in doctrinal concepts or religious practices, we must receive them. When we receive people according to God and not according to doctrine or practice, we demonstrate and maintain the oneness of the Body of Christ. (Recovery Version, v. 3, note 2)

**A**s examples of different practices among genuine believers, Paul refers to the matters of eating and of regarding days (vv. 4-6). The one who eats should not despise the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat should not judge the one who eats, for God has received them both (v. 3). Paul continues with a word about our living and dying not to ourselves but to the Lord (v. 7). Then he says, "For whether we live, we live to the Lord, and whether we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's" (v. 8), and He is "Lord both of the dead and of the living" (v. 9). This prepares the way for Paul to utter a sober and righteous word concerning the judgment seat. "For

we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (v. 10), and "each one of us will give an account concerning himself to God" (v. 12). In contrast to the judgment to be carried out at the great white throne to judge the dead unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15), which will be after the millennium,

**It may be that whether we receive a reward—reigning with Christ in the millennium—or punishment—suffering some kind of discipline during the kingdom age—will have much to do with our receiving of the believers.**

the judgment at the judgment seat of God, or the judgment seat of Christ, will be (1) before the millennium, immediately after Christ's coming back, (2) to judge all the resurrected and raptured believers, and (3) for reward or punishment in the millennial kingdom. This judgment will take account of the believers' life and work after they were saved. Since this judgment is very much related to the transformation of the believers, it is mentioned here in this section on transformation. (Recovery Version, Rom. 14:10, note 1)

The point that we would emphasize is that Paul speaks of this judgment in relation to the receiving of the believers, revealing thereby that one particular matter for which we may have to give an account to God is whether or not we received all genuine believers according to God's receiving of them. It may be that whether we receive a reward—reigning with Christ in the millennium—or punishment—suffering some kind of discipline during the kingdom age—will have much to do with our receiving of the believers. We would do well to consider this seriously and soberly before the Lord.

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## The God of Peace Crushing Satan Under the Feet of the Church

*Satan, the enemy of God, will be crushed under the feet of the church.* Paul writes about this in 16:20: “Now the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” At a time when multitudes of believers are fascinated with what they suppose is spiritual warfare, we need to realize that according to the New Testament, spiritual warfare is a matter not for individuals but for the Body of Christ. “The whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11, 13) is for the Body. The principle is the same in Romans 16:20:

Here God promises that He will crush Satan under the feet of those who live the church life, showing that the crushing of Satan is related to the church life. Dealing with Satan is a Body matter, not an individual matter. It is only when we have a proper local church as the practical expression of the Body that Satan is crushed under our feet. (Recovery Version, v. 20, note 1)

In fulfilling the negative aspect of God’s purpose in creating humankind—the aspect of representing God with His authority to deal with His enemy (Gen. 1:26)—the church bears the responsibility to engage in spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is necessary because Satan’s will is set against God’s will (Matt. 6:10; 7:21; Isa. 14:12-14). If we would know how the church can be God’s warrior to engage in spiritual warfare, we need to realize that in the universe there are three wills—the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will. Spiritual warfare has its origin in the conflict between the divine will and the satanic will, with the human will standing in between these two wills. God’s wants His creature *man* to deal with His fallen creature *Satan*; for this, the human will must stand with the divine will (Gen. 1:26; Matt. 26:39; 12:30; 7:21). As the church, our fighting is to subdue the satanic will and to defeat God’s enemy (Rev. 12:11).

The purpose of spiritual warfare is to bring in the kingdom of God (v. 10) and to cause Satan and his kingdom to suffer loss. Spiritual warfare is therefore the warfare between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26, 28). The kingdom of God is the exercise of the divine will and the overthrowing of the power of Satan by the power of God (6:10; 12:28). When the devil is unable to stand in a certain place, the kingdom has come to that place. Wherever the devil has been cast out and wherever the work of the enemy has been displaced by God’s power, the kingdom of God is there (Rev. 12:10; 11:15). In order for the kingdom of God to be established in this way, there is the need of spiritual fighting. The responsibility of the church is to continue the warfare Christ fought on earth; that is, the church must continue the victorious work that Christ carried out against Satan (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Col. 2:15; Ps. 149:5-9). If the church is

faithful to its responsibility by fighting against God’s enemy, the God of peace will crush Satan under the feet of the church. In the church life, we enjoy the grace of God (Rom. 16:20) and the God of peace, and the enemy is defeated.

In both chapter one and in chapter sixteen, Paul uses the word *establish*. Romans 1:11 says, “I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be established.” The context of this word, as part of the introductory section of this Epistle (1:1-17), is Paul’s initial discourse concerning the gospel of God (vv. 1, 9, 15-16). In 16:25 he exclaims, “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel, that is, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages.” The gospel here is the gospel of God, which had been entrusted to Paul and which had become his gospel. This is the full gospel, the complete gospel, including the entire revelation in Romans concerning sinners being made sons of God to be the components of the Body of Christ expressed as local churches. The gospel of God concerning His Son comprises not only the truth of God’s sending His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin but also the truth of Christ’s being designated the Son of God in resurrection to be the Firstborn among many brothers, the many sons who are the members of the Body of Christ. The gospel, therefore, includes the Son, the sons, the Body, and the local churches. Our need, at the end of the book of Romans, is to be established by God according to this gospel:

In ch. 16 our need is no longer to be saved or to be sanctified but to be established. Since everything has been accomplished, we need only to be established. This establishing is according to the pure and full gospel of God, that is, the proclaiming and ministering of the all-inclusive Christ, and according to the revelation of the mystery, which has been kept in silence in the times of the ages. Only the pure gospel, the living Christ, and God’s revealed mystery can establish us and keep us in oneness for the church life. (Recovery Version, v. 25, note 1)

May our God use the gospel of God revealed in the book of Romans to establish His people today so that, many, with one accord and with one mouth, may “glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:6). “To the only wise God through Jesus Christ, to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” **AFC**

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